

APPENDIX E-24 Stearns County Comprehensive Plan



STEARNS 2040 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

July 2020

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Steering Committee

The Steering Committee members played a key role in the development of the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan. Members worked closely with County staff and the project consultants in the development of the plan.

- » Tarryl Clark, County Commissioner-District 1
- » Leigh Lenzmeier, County Commissioner-District 2
- » Jeff Mergen, County Commissioner-District 3
- » Joe Perske, County Commissioner-District 4
- » Steve Notch, County Commissioner-District 5
- » Jason Weirnerman, Planning Commission-District 1
- » Shawn Blackburn, Planning Commission-District 2
- » Jason Kron, Planning Commission-District 3
- » Ken Massmann, Planning Commission-District 4
- » Mike Proell, Planning Commission-District 5
- » Richard Blenkush, Planning Commission-At Large
- » Jeff Bertram, Planning Commission-At Large
- » LeRoy Gondringer, Agriculture/Feedlot Operator
- » George Fiedler, Township Official- Brockway (metro)
- » Gerry Jennissen, Township Official-North Fork (rural)
- » Tom Schneider, City Administrator- City of Albany
- » Heidi Stalboerger, Township Zoning Administrator-Wakefield
- » Jim Bartelme, Coalition of Lake Association President

County Staff

- » Angie Berg | County Staff Lead | Land Use Division Supervisor
- » Chelle Benson | Environmental Services Director
- » Jennifer Buckentine | Senior Environmental Specialist
- » Heidi Winskowski | Senior Environmental Specialist
- » Nicholas Neuman | Environmental Specialist
- » Cole Loewen | Environmental Specialist
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- » Ben Anderson | Parks Director
- » Michael Pooler | GIS Coordinator
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Project Consultants

- » HKGi (Planning Consultant)
- » Civicbrand (Branding and Project Website)

Special thanks to...

- » the townships and cities who participated in the planning process;
- » the hundreds of residents and stakeholders who provided comments;
- » Wakefield Township for hosting the Steering Committee meetings;
- » the local schools and Chambers of Commerce who promoted the public engagement activities; and,
- » Stearns County's Parks Commission.



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INTRODUCTION

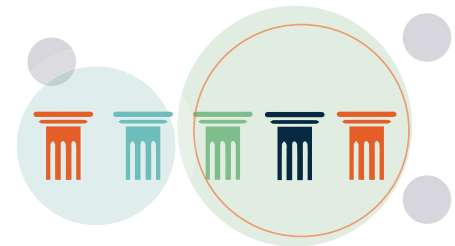
Stearns County's Comprehensive Plan (Shape 2040 Stearns) provides the County with a broad vision of its future, extending through the year 2040. This vision is discussed throughout this plan by using five Pillars (Living, Agriculture, Nature, Business, and Connectivity). Based on these Pillars, the plan establishes a framework for land use changes, public investments, infrastructure improvements, and intergovernmental cooperation. The plan was developed with substantial participation from County residents, local government officials, state agencies, Township officials, and a broad range of other stakeholders.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

Comprehensive planning is an important tool for communities to articulate desired land use patterns to ensure a safe, pleasant, and economical environment for residential, agricultural, and commercial activities. A comprehensive plan provides the overall foundation for all land use regulation in the County. In Minnesota, authority for land use planning and regulation is vested primarily in local governments. For cities and townships, the authority to plan is found in Minnesota Statutes Section 462.353. Counties are authorized to plan under Minnesota Statutes Section 394.23. Planning can help:

- » Preserve important natural resources, agricultural land, and other open lands.
- » Create the opportunity for residents to participate in guiding a community's future.
- » Identify issues, stay ahead of trends, and accommodate change.
- » Foster sustainable economic development.
- » Ensure more efficient and cost-effective infrastructure and public services.
- » Provide an opportunity to consider future implications of today's decisions.
- » Protect property rights and values.

"A comprehensive plan is an expression of the county's vision for the future and a strategic map to reach that vision."





“During times of conflict, decision makers can look to the Pillars as a way to find common ground and shared values. The Pillars will offer a source of energy and enthusiasm for maintaining a commitment to the future of Stearns County.”

The Five Pillars

Stearns County's Comprehensive Plan includes five Pillars that articulates the County's vision for the year 2040. The Pillars look to the current values and the character of the County to help define the priorities and direction for future decisions. The Pillars also serve as an umbrella for structuring the Comprehensive Plan's into five cohesive areas (see Figure 1.1) that cover a wide spectrum of topics.



Agriculture: Stearns County's agricultural heritage is the root of our prosperity and identity. Through product diversity, innovation, and sustainable practices, we will enhance and promote the advancement of our agricultural economy.



Living: Stearns County shares a broad set of values about ourselves and the place where we live. We will continue to embrace these diverse values by supporting a full range of housing choices that meets resident's needs at every stage of their lives, and ensure a healthy balance of housing types that meet the needs of a diverse population with diverse needs.



Nature: Stearns County recognizes the inherent values of the natural environment and connecting people to nature. We are committed to providing recreational opportunities, while recognizing the value of natural resource protection, restoration, and preservation. This will require sustainable practices that balance growth between urban and rural communities.



Business: Stearns County will invest in economic development strategies that are rooted in our shared values, skills, and identity. This will require a balanced economy that supports our existing businesses, while attracting new business that encourages entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity.



Connectivity: Stearns County's infrastructure, facilities, and services play an important role in connecting the places where we live, work and play. We recognize the inherent responsibility in maintaining these systems in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner. Enhancing these systems will require public and private partnerships that strive to maintain our quality of life.

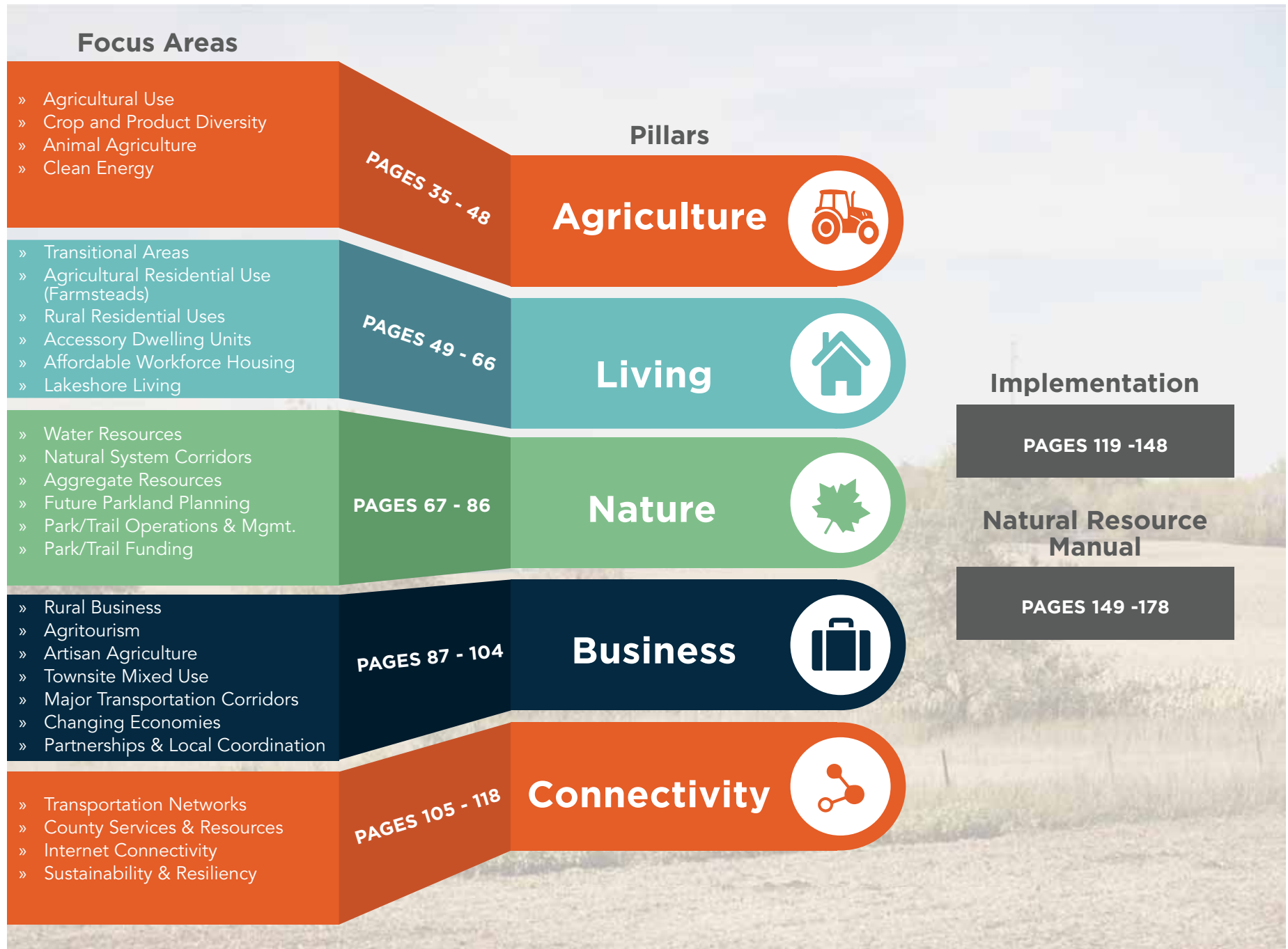


Figure 1.1 Focus Areas by Pillars



REGIONAL SETTING

#14

Located in central Minnesota, Stearns County is the largest county by area in the southern half of the state (14th in area overall). The total area of the County is 1,394 square miles or 892,160 acres, extending approximately 54 miles east to west and 36 miles north to south. Lakes and wetlands cover about 4% of the land area. The Mississippi River forms the County's eastern border and the Sauk River and its tributaries drain the majority of the County.

159,258

Stearns County contains 31 cities and 34 townships. *The population was estimated at 159,258 in 2018* (State Demographer estimate), and is concentrated on the east end of the county, in the St. Cloud metropolitan area. The metropolitan area spans the Mississippi and encompasses portions of Stearns, Benton and Sherburne counties.



Land use varies from urban/suburban residential in the east to rural towns and agriculture in the west. Because of its central location in the state, Stearns County, and particularly the St. Cloud metropolitan area, is considered a transportation hub, including Interstate 94, State Highways 10, 15 and 23, the St. Cloud Metropolitan Airport, and one of Burlington Northern's switching yards.



Because of the St. Cloud metropolitan area's role as a regional center, the County's population and economy will continue to grow. However, this growth will be concentrated in the eastern half of the County. Rapid growth increases the potential for land use conflicts and the pollution of land and water resources, while it creates new demands upon local schools, roadways, public infrastructure, law enforcement and other services.



Not all areas of the county are experiencing growth pressure. A majority of the townships, especially those in the western half of the County, have experienced population decreases since 2000. These areas are facing other challenges to their long-term sustainability, including farm consolidation in response to changing livestock management practices and loss of young people to urban areas with more employment opportunities.

The Planning Process

The planning process occurred over 16 months, starting in April of 2019 and ending in July of 2020. **The Stearns County Board of Commissioners adopted the Plan on July 28, 2020.**

The overall planning process was guided by a Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was appointed by the County Board and was comprised of 25 residents with varying backgrounds. Each committee member served as a “champion” of the process by promoting the public engagement activities and recommending changes to the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. The Steering Committee met a total of six times (see Table 1.1)

BRANDING

The title “Shape 2040 Stearns” was selected by the project team in an effort to create a “brand” and “identity” for the 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The logo represents the Plan’s five pillars and their relationship to one another.



Booth Set-up - Summertime by George! (2019)



Identifying issues at the First Steering Committee Meeting (2019)



The Public Engagement Process

Every effort was made to make the planning and public engagement processes accessible to all Stearns County residents. This was achieved by targeting public engagement activities in specific parts of the County, while leveraging online tools. A summary of these activities are listed below. Meeting dates and event types are documented in Table 1.1.

- » **Pop-Up Events:** Booths were setup at community events in an effort to promote the project, while offering fun activities and giveaways for all ages. Silly putty was handed out to children and residents and were asked “How they will Shape Stearns County’s Future.” Wild flower seed packets were also used as a giveaway to help promote the Plan’s goals in restoring our natural environment.
- » **Township Listening Sessions:** A great deal of outreach and engagement was conducted with the Townships. County staff made themselves available to attend town board meetings at their request. The County also hosted two Township Listening Sessions to discuss the Plan’s overarching changes. These sessions were also used as an opportunity for township officials from across the County to gather and discuss growth patterns and development trends.
- » **Stakeholder Meetings:** Presentations were given to a variety of stakeholder groups. This included meetings with local Chambers of Commerce, special interest groups, and organizations.
- » **Businesses:** Businesses located in the western part of the County were provided brochures to place in their break room. This was an opportunity to hear from rural businesses and employees who may experience different economic needs compared to the eastern part of the County. County staff also setup in break rooms (i.e., Cold Spring USA) to engage employees about their concerns and issues.

- » **School District:** Materials (e.g., posters, brochures, and class curriculum) were provided to the school districts to promote the importance of civic engagement within the classrooms. Presentations were also given to high school civic classes.
- » **Online Engagement:** A project website was developed to reach across all devices (e.g., desktop, laptop, tablet, and mobile) in order to help Stearns County connect with residents and businesses. The project website included regular project updates, draft materials, meeting minutes, and online engagement tools. Online engagement included surveys and an “ideas wall” (chat forum) to learn what makes Stearns County a great place to live, work, and recreate.

*Silly Putty Giveaways
(How will you shape Stearns’
future?)*



*Coldspring USA Employee
Break Room Pop-up*

Instagram Fun at Summertime by George!

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

DATE	GROUP	ENGAGEMENT TYPE
APRIL 1, 2019	Comp. Plan Steering Committee	Steering Committee Meeting #1
APRIL 5, 2019	Earth Day 5K	Pop Up Event
APRIL 23, 2019	Stearns County Board of Commissioners	Board or Commission Meeting
APRIL 25, 2019	Stearns County Township Officers Semi-Annual Meeting	Stakeholder Meeting
MAY 1, 2019	Dairy Advisory Committee	Stakeholder Meeting
MAY 21, 2019	County Municipal League	Stakeholder Meeting
JUNE 1, 2019	Breakfast on the Farm	Pop Up Event
JUNE 6, 2019	Coldspring USA (employee break room)	Pop Up Event
JUNE 12, 2019	Stearns County Park Commission	Board or Commission Meeting
JUNE 12, 2019	Summertime by George!	Pop Up Event
JULY 9, 2019	Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District Board	Stakeholder Meeting
JULY 17, 2019	Albany Chamber of Commerce	Stakeholder Meeting
JULY 10, 2019	Comp. Plan Steering Committee	Steering Committee Meeting #2
JULY 28, 2019	Summertime by George!	Pop Up Event
JULY 29 – AUGUST 2, 2019	Stearns County Fair	Pop Up Event
AUGUST 5, 2019	Comp. Plan Steering Committee	Steering Committee Meeting #3
AUGUST 8, 2019	Summertime by George!	Pop Up Event
AUGUST 13, 2019	Maine Prairie Township	Town Board Meeting
SEPTEMBER 11, 2019	Sauk Centre Chamber of Commerce	Stakeholder Meeting
SEPTEMBER 11, 2019	Stearns County Park Commission	Board or Commission Meeting
SEPTEMBER 12, 2019	Cold Spring Chamber of Commerce	Stakeholder Meeting
SEPTEMBER 12, 2019	North Fork Township	Town Board Meeting
SEPTEMBER 12, 2019	Getty Township	Town Board Meeting

Table 1.1 Engagement Activities 2019-2020



We wanted to see how the County parks and trails stacked up against one another in a bracket challenge. Two divisions (Parks & Open Space vs. Trails & Routes) were created and competed against one another to win over the hearts of residents as their favorite place to visit or recreate.



Future Land Use Exercise

WHAT WE HEARD

"STRENGTHEN OUR
RURAL AND AGRARIAN
IDENTITY"



"DIVERSIFY OUR
RURAL HOUSING
AND EMPLOYMENT
OPTIONS"



"PRESERVE NATURAL
RESOURCES FOR FUTURE
GENERATIONS"

"BALANCE GROWTH WITH
AGRICULTURAL, RURAL AND
URBAN LANDSCAPES"

"COUNTY PARKS
AND TRAILS ARE
HIGHLY VALUED"

"MAINTAIN
COUNTY ASSETS
AND FACILITIES"

"THE SMALL FARMS ARE DISAPPEARING
AND THOSE WHO ARE STILL FARMING ARE
STRUGGLING TO FIND FARM HANDS TO HELP
WITH OPERATIONS"

"WE NEED TO FIND WAYS TO ELIMINATE
BARRIERS AND CREATE GREATER FLEXIBILITY
FOR THE PROPERTY OWNER"

Table 1.1 Engagement Activities 2019-2020 (continued from the previous page)

DATE	GROUP	ENGAGEMENT TYPE
OCTOBER 1, 2019	Raymond Township	Town Board Meeting
OCTOBER 1, 2019	St. Wendel Township	Town Board Meeting
OCTOBER 13, 2019	Stearns County Park Commission	Board or Commission Meeting
OCTOBER 21, 2019	Township Listening Sessions	Township Listening Sessions
OCTOBER 22, 2019	Stearns County Board of Commissioners	Board or Commission Meeting
OCTOBER 28, 2019	Comp. Plan Steering Committee	Steering Committee Meeting #4
NOVEMBER 14, 2019	Stearns County Township Officers Semi-Annual Meeting	Stakeholder Meeting
NOVEMBER 19, 2019	Wakefield Township	Town Board Meeting
NOVEMBER 25, 2019	Comp. Plan Steering Committee	Steering Committee Meeting #5
JANUARY 8, 2020	Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation	Stakeholder Meeting
FEBRUARY 12, 2020	Dairy Advisory Committee	Stakeholder Meeting
FEBRUARY 24, 2020	Comp. Plan Steering Committee	Steering Committee Meeting #6
FEBRUARY 25 - 26, 2020	Central Minnesota Farm Show	Pop Up Event
MARCH 5, 2020	Township Listening Sessions	Township Listening Sessions
MARCH 10, 2020	Holding Township	Town Board Meeting
MARCH 10, 2020	Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District Board	Stakeholder Meeting



"WE ENJOY THE
COUNTY PARKS"



Talking with locals at the Annual Breakfast on the Farm 2019



Steering Committee 1



Shape Stearns 2040 Project Website Home Page April 2020

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EMERGING TRENDS

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EMERGING TRENDS

This section of the Plan provides an overview of the demographic, social and economic trends shaping Stearns County's future. For example, the population and demographic trends are primary factors shaping the land use patterns of our towns and cities. The number of people, their age, and the places available to find employment, all play an important role in how we shape the future and what type of services/programs are needed to accommodate their choices. Furthermore, this report helps identify the possible changes occurring in Stearns County that may influence the Comprehensive Plan's Five Pillars.



The Minnesota State Demographer has projected Stearns County will add 7,500 **NEW PEOPLE** by the year 2050. It is assumed this growth will primarily occur within the cities.



In 2000, there were 47,604 households, which increased to 57,695 households in 2016. **HOUSEHOLD GROWTH** from 2000 to 2016 has outpaced population growth.



The 2017 Census of Agriculture reported a 14% decrease in the **AMOUNT OF FARM LAND** (acres) between 2012 and 2017. The number of farming operations also decreased by 16%. This national trend reflects some of the challenges farmers are facing in today's economy.



14% of Stearns County's **FARMING OPERATIONS** are of 35 years of age or younger, which is slightly higher than the state average of 13%.



The **NUMBER OF JOBS** in Stearns County increased by more than 30% between 2000 and 2018 from 68,455 to 89,371. The majority of these jobs are within Health Care/ Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Manufacturing sectors.

POPULATION

How are Population Trends Shaping Stearns?

- » A growing population may put pressure on agricultural resources at city fringes, as well as increase demand for electricity generation (i.e. solar and wind farms).
- » As farmers age, farms may switch hands to larger corporations if future generations are unable or unwilling to continue the family business.

Agriculture



- » An increasingly diverse population may shape housing demands and communication materials.
- » An aging population may shape housing demands and transportation services.
- » A growing population in the eastern part of the County will require more housing and demand for services.
- » A declining population in the western part of the County will strain schools and businesses.

Living



- » A growing population may put pressure on natural resources at city fringes, as well as impair water resources in sensitive areas.
- » Changing demographics can influence how people recreate in County parks and socialize in their communities.

Nature



- » A growing population means more demand for goods and services.
- » A growing population means more demand for jobs.

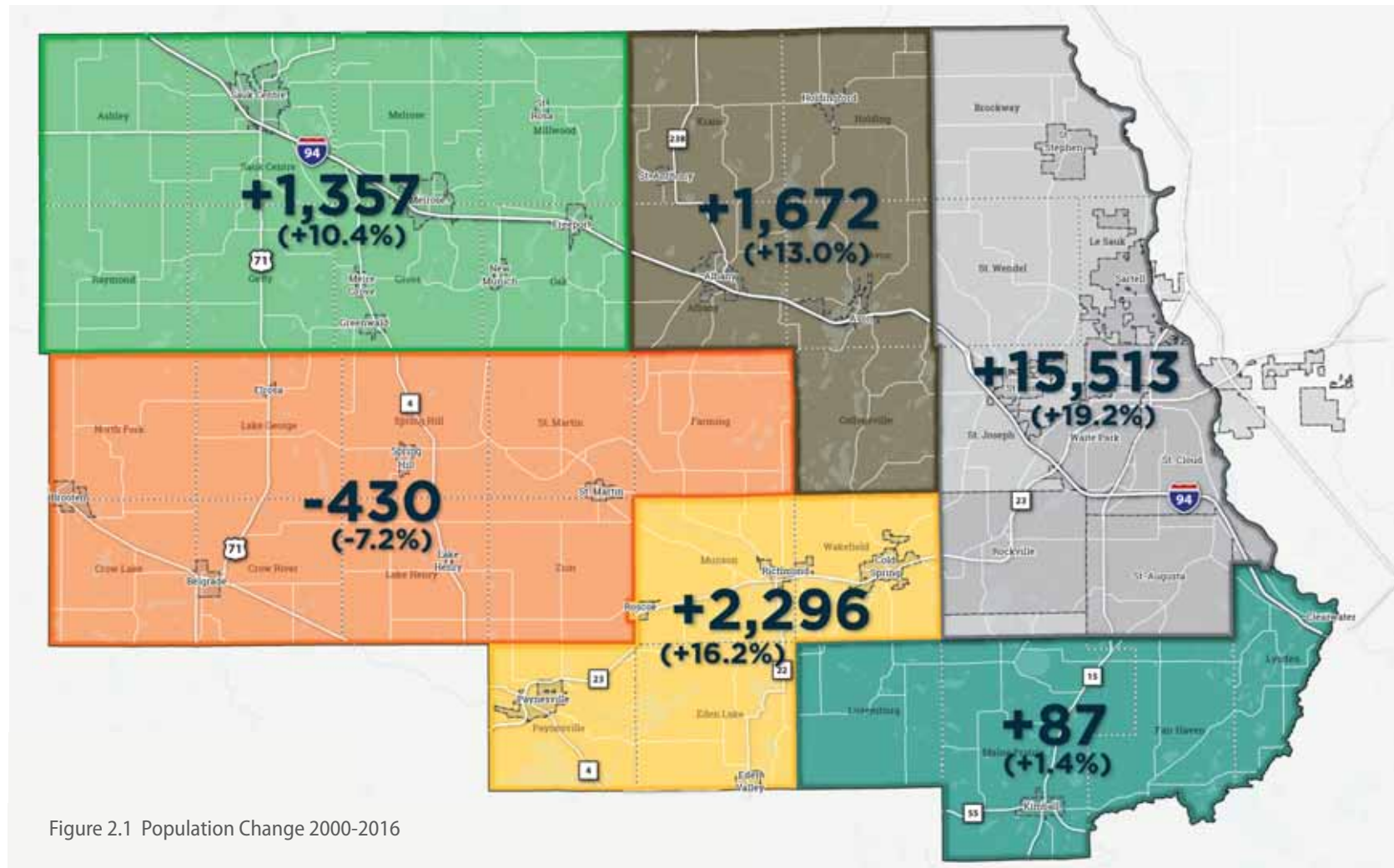
Business



- » A growing population will add demand to Stearns County's roadways, emergency services, and County facilities and services.
- » An increasingly diverse and aging population may have difficulty accessing certain facilities and services because of their location away from urban centers.
- » As more people desire the rural lifestyle, the demand for high speed internet and broadband will increase.

Connectivity





Population

GROWTH

Stearns County has seen a steady increase in population since 2000. In 2000, the population was 133,166 and increased to 153,661 in 2016. The fastest growing areas from a percentage basis have been in the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area and communities along the I-94 and Highway 23 corridor. Stearns County can anticipate modest levels of growth over the next twenty to thirty years. The Minnesota State Demographer has projected Stearns County will add 7,500 new people by the year 2050. It is assumed this growth will primarily occur within the cities or along their borders.

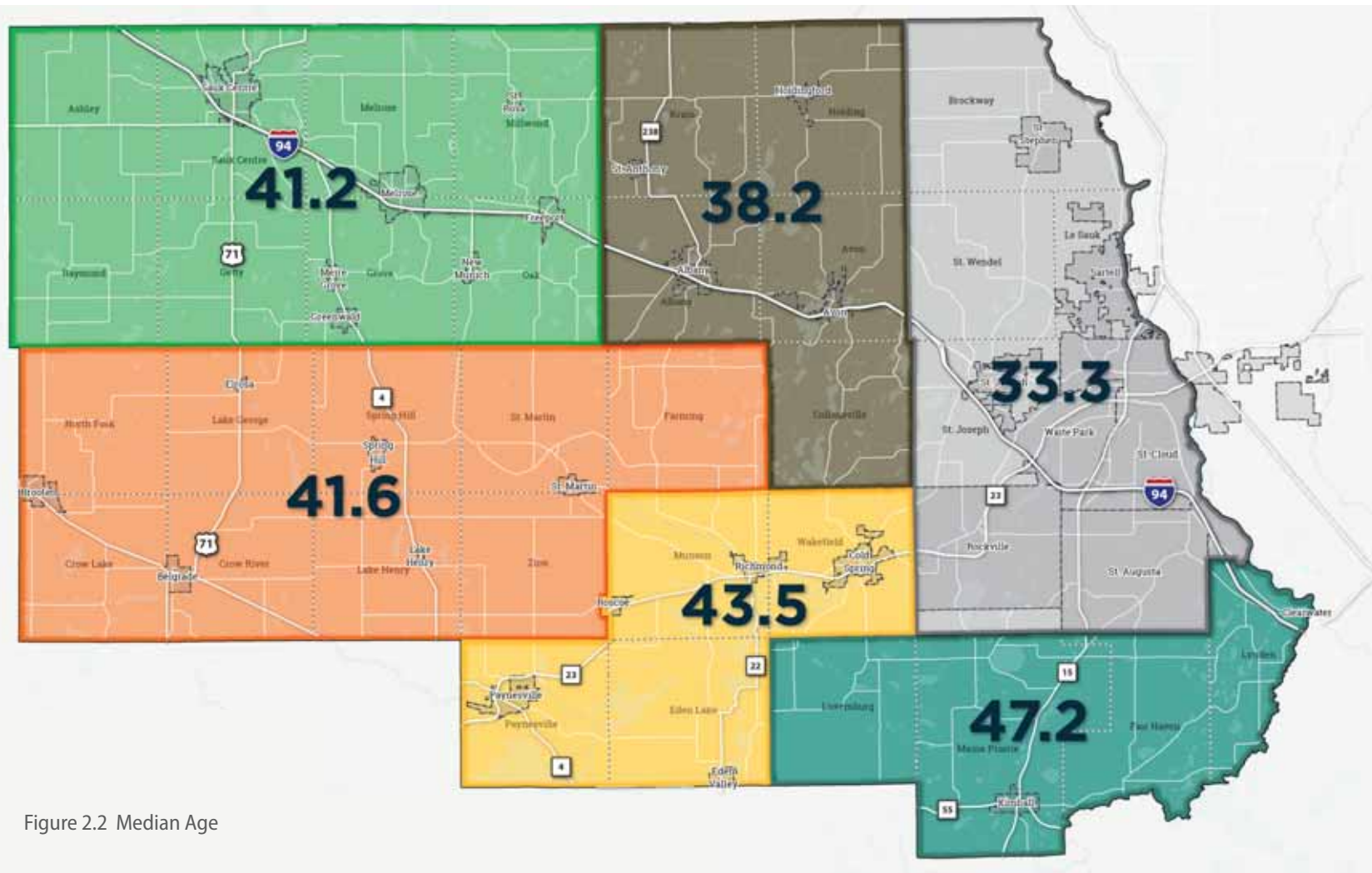
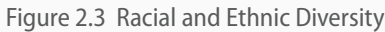


Figure 2.2 Median Age

AGE

The age distribution of the people who live in Stearns County will have an important impact on land uses and services that current and future residents will demand. It is important to examine the age distribution of current Stearns County residents, because they will demand certain types of housing as their age and family composition changes.

Stearns County's median age increased from 31.6 to 34.1 between 2000 and 2016. This increase suggests Stearns County residents are getting older, which mirrors national trends as the baby boom generation (born between approximately 1946 and 1964) gets older.



Minnesota's population is changing and so is that of Stearns County. In 2016, the largest groups of foreign-born Minnesotans were born in Mexico, India, and Somalia. In Stearns County it was Somalia, Mexico, and Ethiopia. Stearns County has seen significant increases in minority populations over the last two decades. In 2000, 95.2% of Stearns County identified themselves as "white only" (non-Hispanic/Latino). By 2016, 88.6% of Stearns County's population identified as "white only." This trend is likely to be one of the defining elements of Stearns County over the next decade. Stearns County's ethnic diversity will shape housing demands and the delivery of services, such as, recreation opportunities, multiple language materials and communications, and school programming. The diversity can also foster diverse business opportunities, as well as new cultural and community activities.

HOUSEHOLDS

How are Household Trends Shaping Stearns?

- » A growing amount of households may put pressure on agricultural resources at city fringes, as well as increase demand for electricity generation i.e. solar and wind farms.
- » As household sizes decrease, farmers may need to hire more outside work.

Agriculture



- » Decreases in household size may shape the size of future housing, as well as speed up the number of future housing units needed.
- » Low-income households, especially those who rent, may find it difficult to find housing that fits their needs.

Living



- » A growing amount of households may put pressure on natural resources at city fringes as well as threaten water resources in sensitive areas.
- » More people are looking to live within proximity to parks and trails.

Nature



- » A growing amount of households means more demand for goods and services, including the construction of new homes.

Business



- » As housing costs rise, some Stearns County residents may need greater assistance from County services for covering other costs like food.
- » It may become fiscally challenging to serve homes built further away from existing infrastructure with County services.
- » Access to reliable internet is becoming a key factor in where people chose to live.

Connectivity



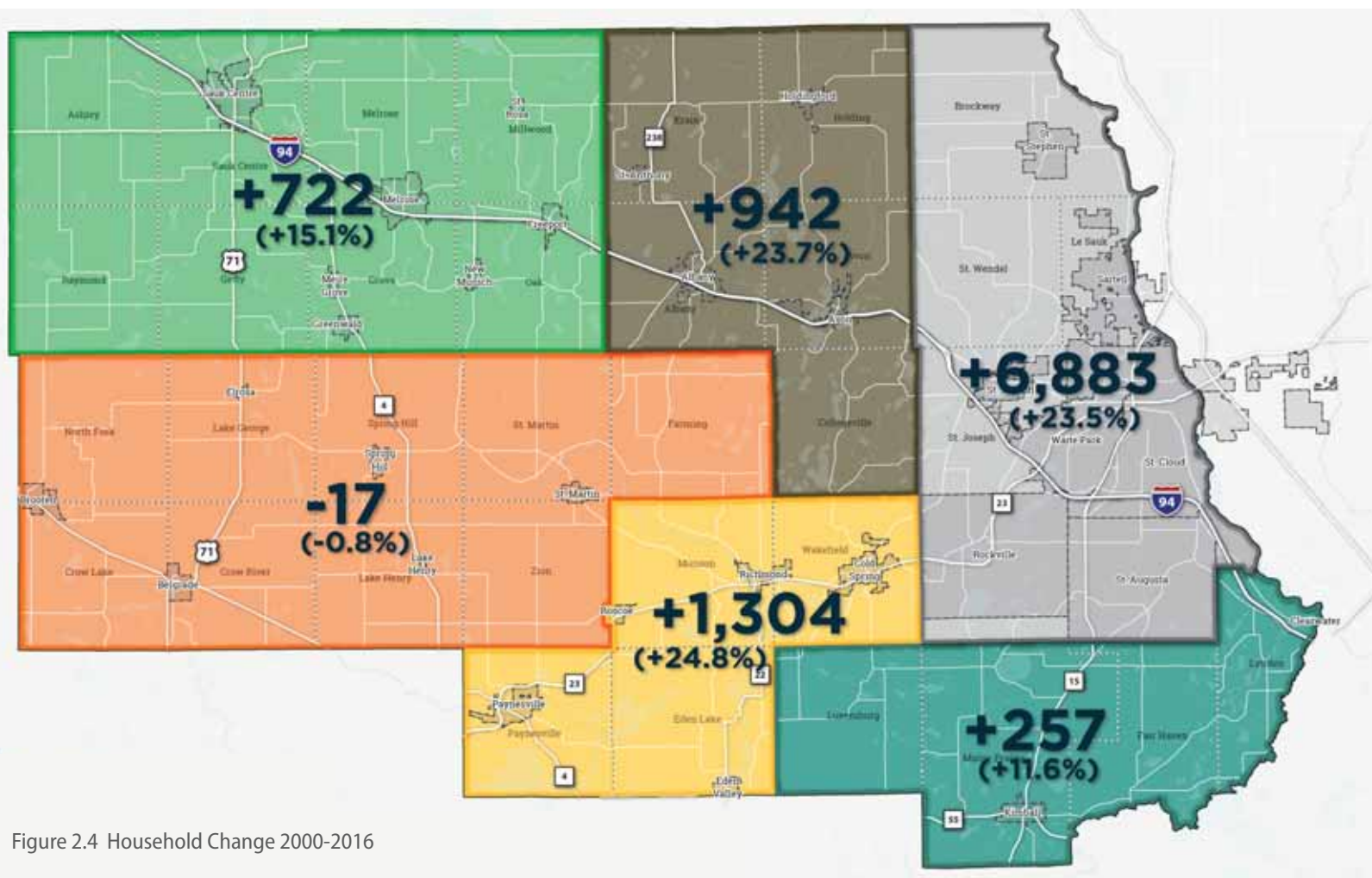


Figure 2.4 Household Change 2000-2016

Households

GROWTH

Stearns County has seen a steady increase in the number of households since 2000. In 2000, there were 47,604 households, which increased to 57,695 households in 2016. Household growth from 2000 to 2016 has outpaced population growth, 21% compared to 15% respectively. The fastest growing areas from a percentage basis have been in the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area and communities along the I-94 and Highway 23 corridor. Stearns County can anticipate modest levels of growth over the next twenty to thirty years. It is assumed this growth will primarily occur within the cities.

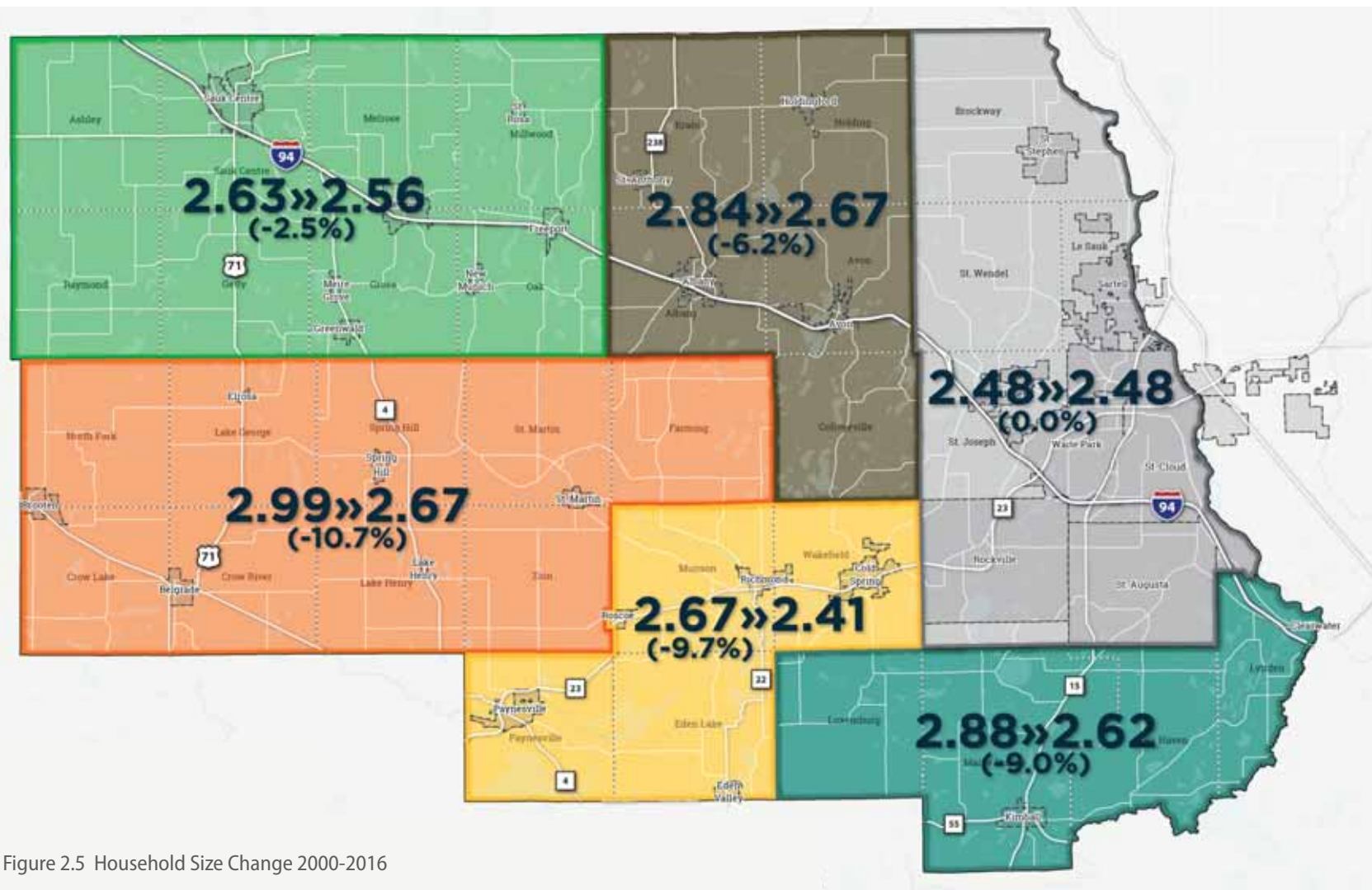


Figure 2.5 Household Size Change 2000-2016

SIZE

The median household size in Stearns County has seen a decrease from 2.64 persons per household in 2000 to 2.52 persons per household. Decreasing household size is also a national trend as more people are living alone, more families are deciding to have fewer children, and rates of multi-generational households are decreasing. Household sizes are decreasing most dramatically in the areas of the County with higher median ages. This correlation may suggest that as children age they are moving out of their parent's home and moving elsewhere, decreasing the median household size and increasing the median age.

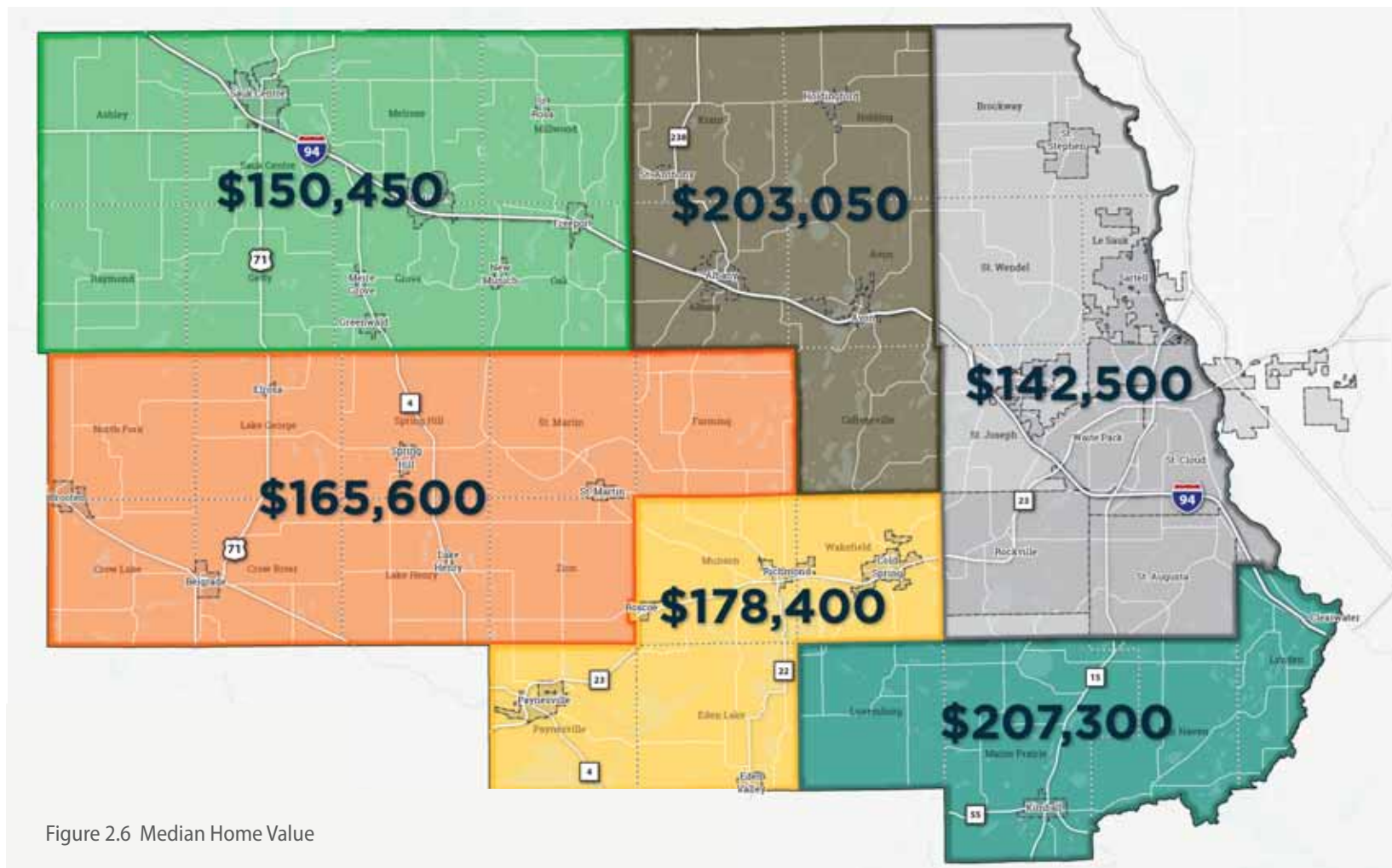
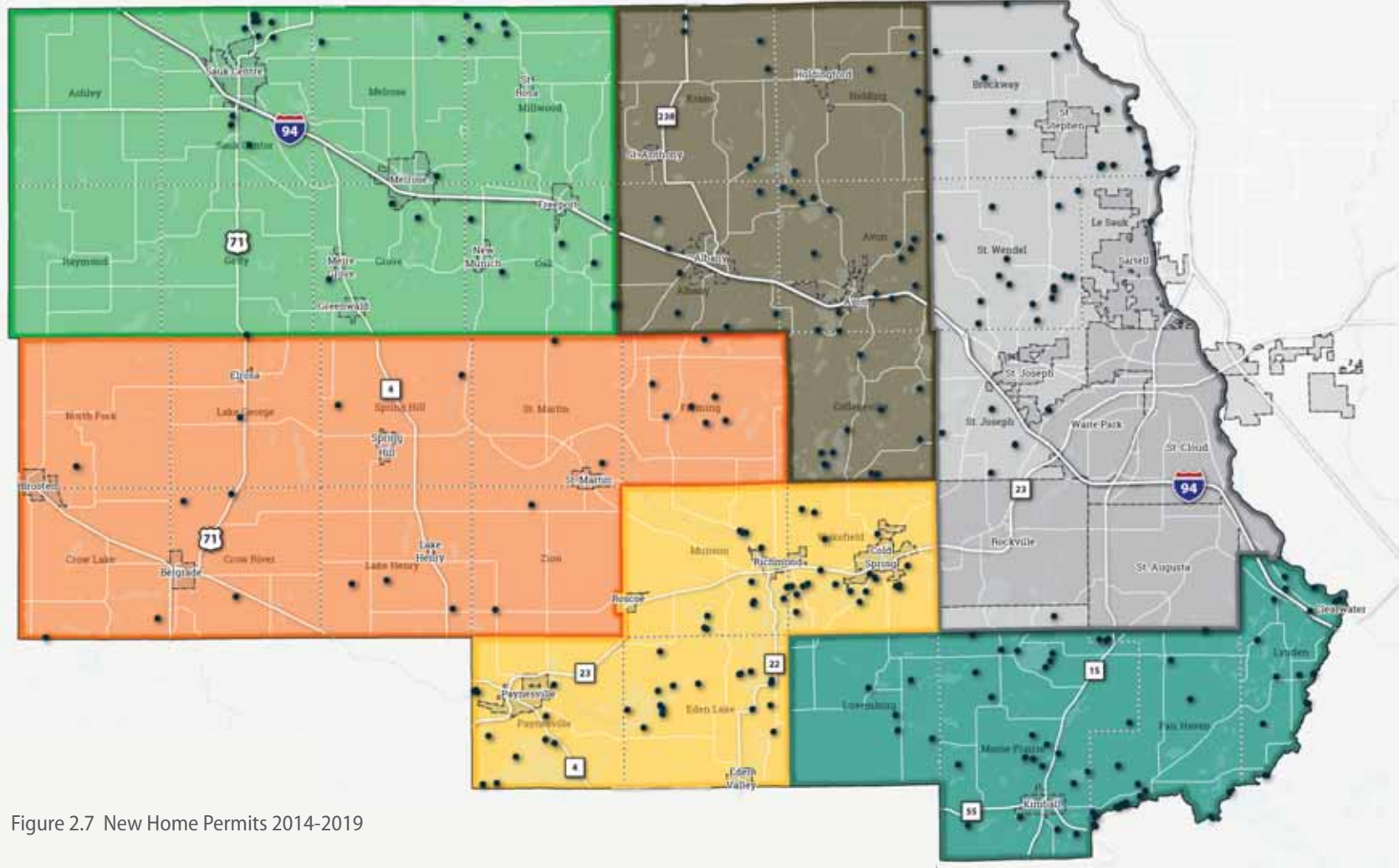


Figure 2.6 Median Home Value

AFFORDABILITY

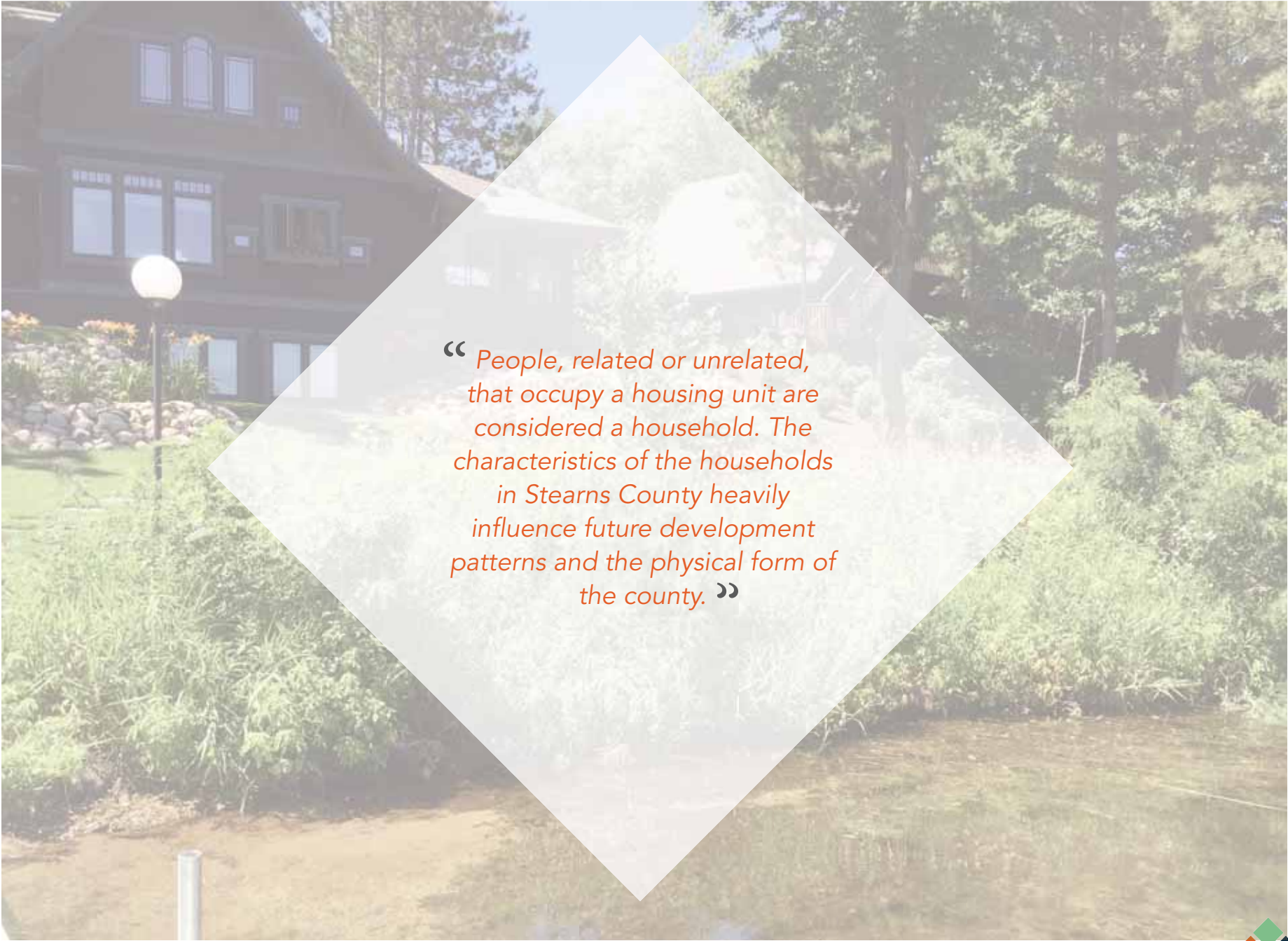
Home values differ around the County. The lowest median home values are found in the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area. The highest home values are found in the areas immediately adjacent to the metropolitan area suggesting that Stearns County residents are willing to pay a little more for their home to be close to, but not within the metropolitan area. The abundance of natural amenities in the areas with high home values may play a role as well.

When a household pays more than 30% of its income on housing costs it is classified as a housing burdened household. Approximately 27% of all Stearns County households pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs. There is an uneven distribution of this finding amongst renters and homeowners. Just under 20% of homeowners have a housing cost burden, while over 44% of renters have a housing cost burden.



NEW HOME PERMITS

The County saw 270+ new home construction permits during the April 2014 - September 2019 time period. These permits occurred throughout the County with concentrations seen in Munson, Wakefield, and Paynesville Townships near the lakes. New home permits issued in Collegeville and Avon Townships also appear to be concentrated around lakes. Many of the home permits issued in the western portion of the county are located adjacent to and within farmland. Most of these new homes (as seen in the figure) are on unplatted parcels.



“ People, related or unrelated, that occupy a housing unit are considered a household. The characteristics of the households in Stearns County heavily influence future development patterns and the physical form of the county. ”

ECONOMY

How are Economic Trends Shaping Stearns?

- » The character and intensity of the agricultural landscape may change over time as farmers are choosing to sell their land to larger operations.

- » An increased need for farm labor may increase the need for nearby workforce housing and associated services like day care.
- » Rural schools may see declining enrollment rates as family farms change hands to larger operators.

- » A decrease in crop diversity may affect the quality of Stearns County's rivers and lakes.
- » Environmental impacts depend on the type of farming practices, which can have a negative effect on natural resources, habitat, and the climate.

- » As the public continues to rely on granite and aggregate extraction, careful planning will be needed to ensure development comes after resources are extracted.
- » eCommerce will influence how residents shop within the County.
- » Rural residents and farmers are looking for greater flexibility to do more with their land to achieve economic prosperity as farming becomes more difficult from a financial perspective.
- » The number of home businesses may be on the rise.

- » A growing workforce may put strain on the transportation network during peak-commute hours.
- » Allowing locally sourced aggregate to be extracted before development occurs over the top of it can reduce the cost of new roads.
- » The increase in e-commerce may reduce the number of personal automobile trips taken, but may increase the number of trips taken by parcel delivery services.

Agriculture



Living



Nature

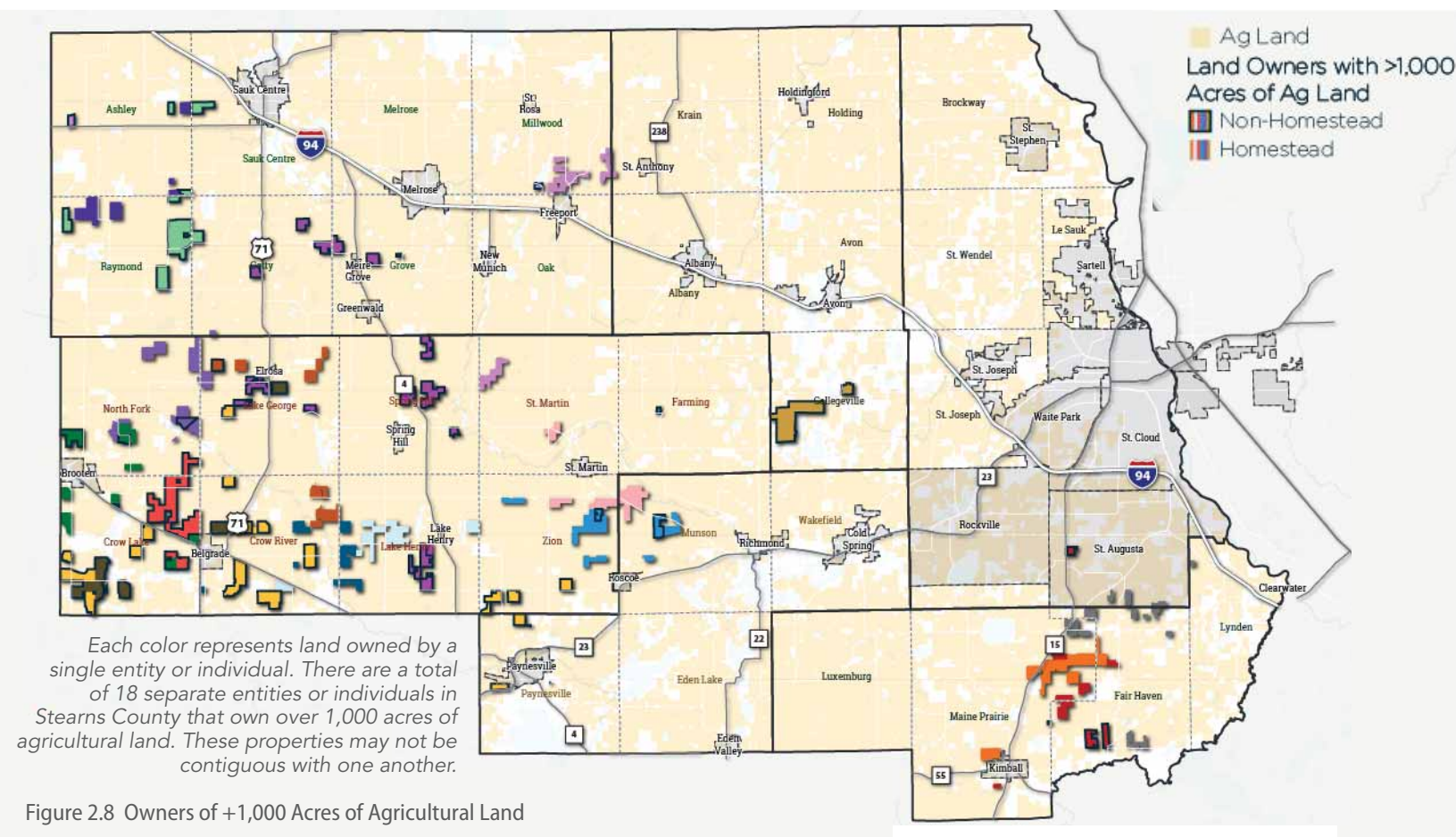


Business



Connectivity





Economy

FARMING OPERATIONS

Historically, Stearns County has experienced a steady increase in the number of farming operations and the amount of land in production. In recent years, Stearns County has experienced a decrease in both categories. The 2017 Census of Agriculture reported a 14% decrease in the amount of farm land (acres) between 2012 and 2017. The number of farming operations also decreased by 16%. This national trend reflects some of the challenges farmers are facing in today's economy. For example, farmers are experiencing lower commodity prices, while the cost of production has increased. The total operating expenses for all of Stearns County's farms increased from \$270.7 million to \$591.7 million between 2002 and 2017. This has created a situation where many farmers have a negative net income, and forced to sell their land or remove their land from production to get by.

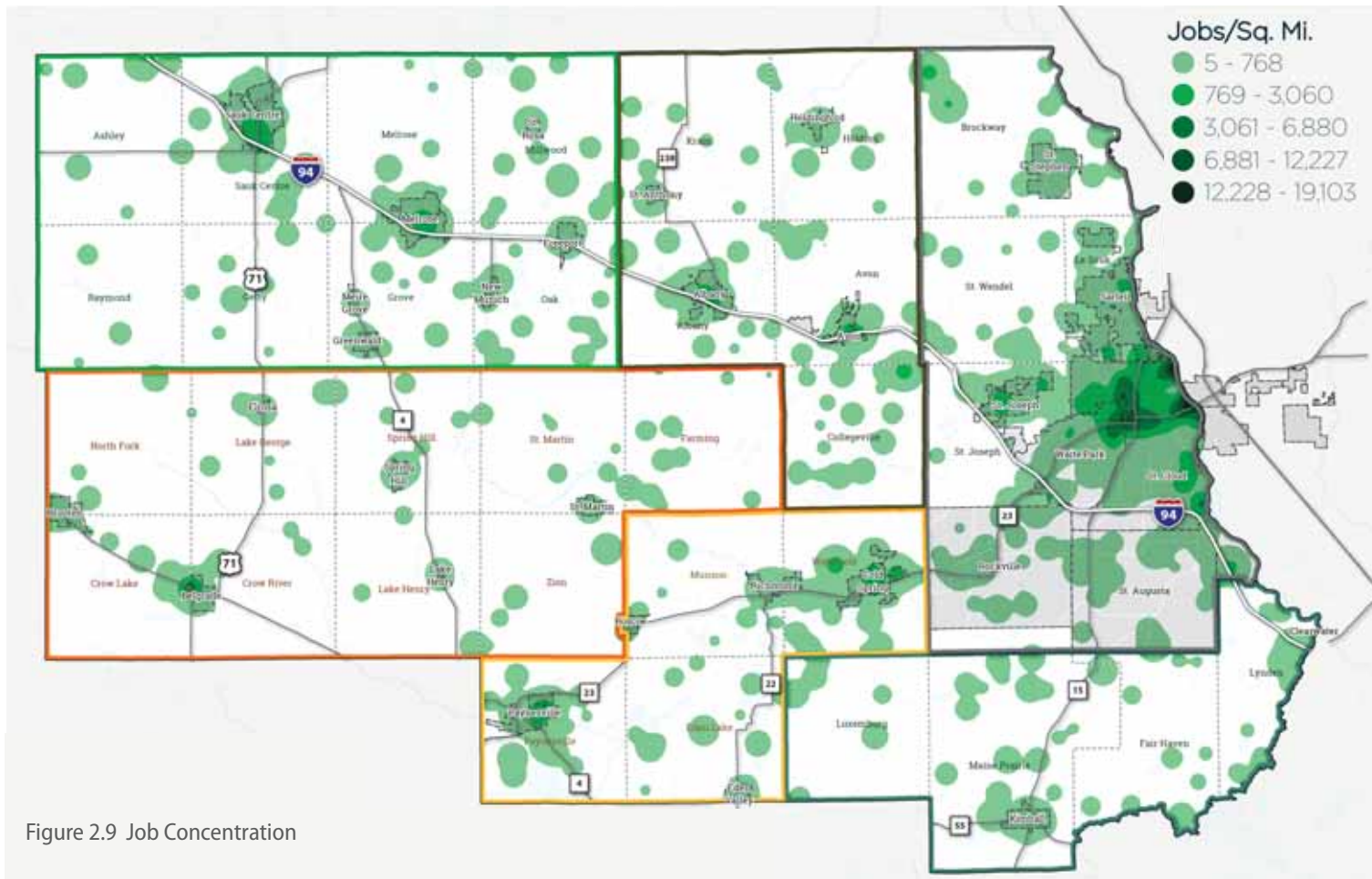


Figure 2.9 Job Concentration

WORKFORCE

The number of jobs in Stearns County increased by more than 30% between 2000 and 2018 from 68,455 to 89,371. The majority of these jobs are within Health Care/Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Manufacturing sectors. Stearns County's recent job growth during this time is also reflected in its unemployment rate. Unemployment has decreased from 6.8% to 3.4% between 2010 and 2017.

The 2017 Census of Agriculture has started to track the number of young and new/beginning producers. A young producer is defined as a producer 35 years of age or younger. A new/beginning producer includes producers operating on any operation for 10 years or less. They may be on farms with producers who are not beginning producers. The 2017 Census of Agriculture included the following findings for Stearns County:

- » 14% of Stearns County's farming operations are of 35 years of age or younger, which is slightly higher than the state average of 13%.
- » 10% of Stearns County's farming operations are new or beginning producers, which is lower than the state average of 14%.

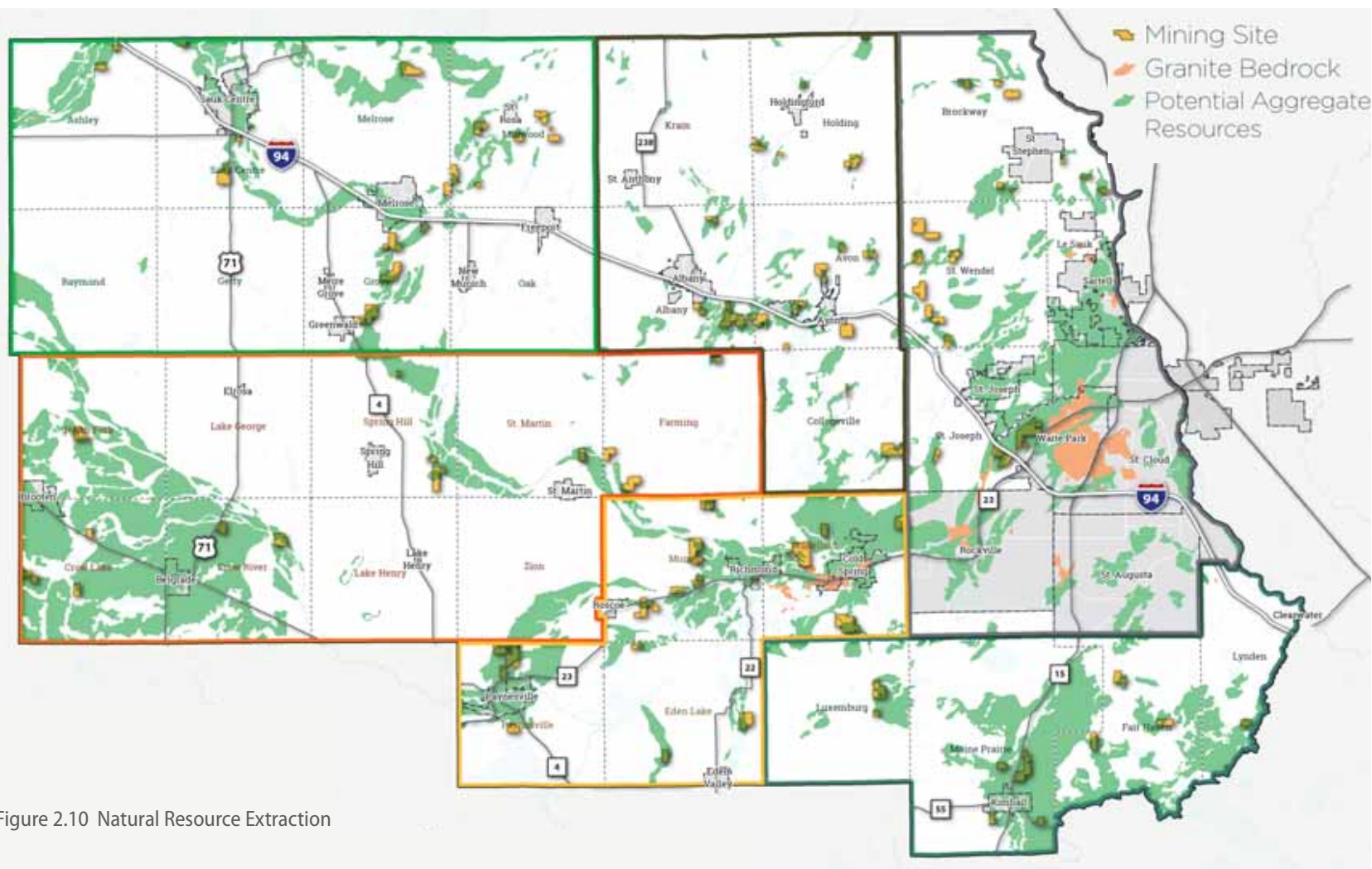


Figure 2.10 Natural Resource Extraction

NATURAL RESOURCE EXTRACTION

The extraction of natural resources such as granite and aggregate are an important part of Stearns County's economy. The premature development of homes and businesses can limit the extraction of the resource. Additionally, locally extracted aggregate can keep the cost of new roads and home foundations lower, making for more cost efficient development. Stearns County has many granite and aggregate quarries. Remaining granite is mostly found in the eastern part of Stearns County. Remaining aggregate is found throughout the County.

“ The County’s wellbeing depends on job creation, business growth, agricultural strength, and income growth. An appropriate mix and supply of development ready land, quality and efficient infrastructure, and a well-trained, abundant workforce directly influence the economic vitality of the County. ”

Market Trends + Shared Economies



eCommerce: Retailers in general have been impacted by the rise of online commerce, competing markets and behavioral change. In fact, online retail now constitutes a larger share of shopping in the U.S. This impact has played a role in a shrinking market for big-box retailers; resulting in some big-box stores closing or reducing the size of their building’s footprint. Other impacts include a growing number of trucks transporting goods to residential homes. Heavier truck traffic may have impacts on County and Township roads.



Entrepreneurship: The rise of online commerce has helped open the door for rural entrepreneurs to sell their goods and services from home. In turn, the number of home occupations and home extended businesses are on the rise. These types of businesses can range from professional services (accounting and hair salons), trades (auto repair/body shops and woodworking), and the production of goods (arts, crafts and food).



Work Space: As these home businesses out grow their space, entrepreneurs are seeking cheaper alternatives to leasing or buying office space. Some of this demand is being met through makerspace. Makerspace is commonly defined as a space where people can gather to create, invent and learn. Types of makerspace may include woodworking/metal shops, artisan space, and tech shops. These spaces are typically rented out through memberships or on a month-to-month basis. This is being seen to some degree in and around St. Cloud.

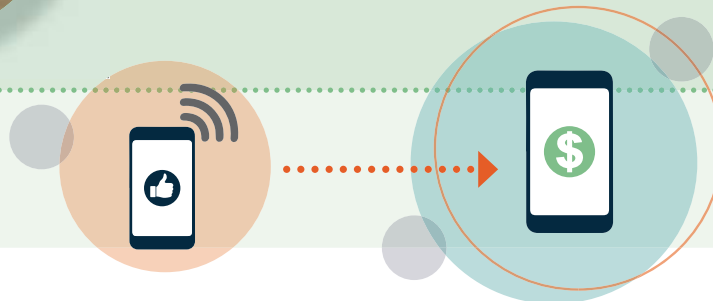


Event Space: People are looking for different experiences that are unique and memorable. Examples of new business models that provide agrarian experiences in rural communities include:

- » Meals (e.g., breakfast and dinner) on the farm
- » Wedding and event space in refurbished barns
- » Living farms that expose people to sustainable and organic farming practices



Shared Economies: Our economy is also being shaped by a shared economy, also known as a peer-to-peer (P2P) model. This model is based on the activity of acquiring, providing or sharing access to goods and services that are facilitated by an on-line platform. The most well known P2P models include grocery delivery services, home rentals (e.g., Airbnb ©), and ride-share programs (e.g., Uber© and Lyft©), while sharing equipment amongst common users.



TECHNOLOGY

How are Technology Trends Shaping Stearns?

- » The demand for renewable energy gives farmers options to enter into long term leases to supplement their income.
- » Farming practices are changing as a result of new technology, which can make farm equipment more efficient.
- » Human ingenuity is helping shape farming practices to have a positive impact on the natural environment.

Agriculture



- » Autonomous vehicles and improved internet accessibility may enable people to live more remotely.
- » More people are seeking clean energy sources to support their daily needs at home.

Living



- » The ability to live more remotely may put pressure on Stearns County's natural resources.
- » New technology (e.g., mobile applications) may influence how people recreate and connect with nature.

Nature



- » The expansion of clean energy may increase employment opportunities in the County and shape the skill sets required of the workforce.
- » Improved internet accessibility may allow more people to work at home and increase the demand for e-commerce.
- » Autonomous freight vehicles may decrease delivery costs for local manufacturers of goods.

Business



- » The infrastructure technology required for autonomous and connected vehicles may come with additional costs that will be added to transportation improvement projects.
- » Greater broadband connectivity will enable more businesses to participate in e-commerce.

Connectivity



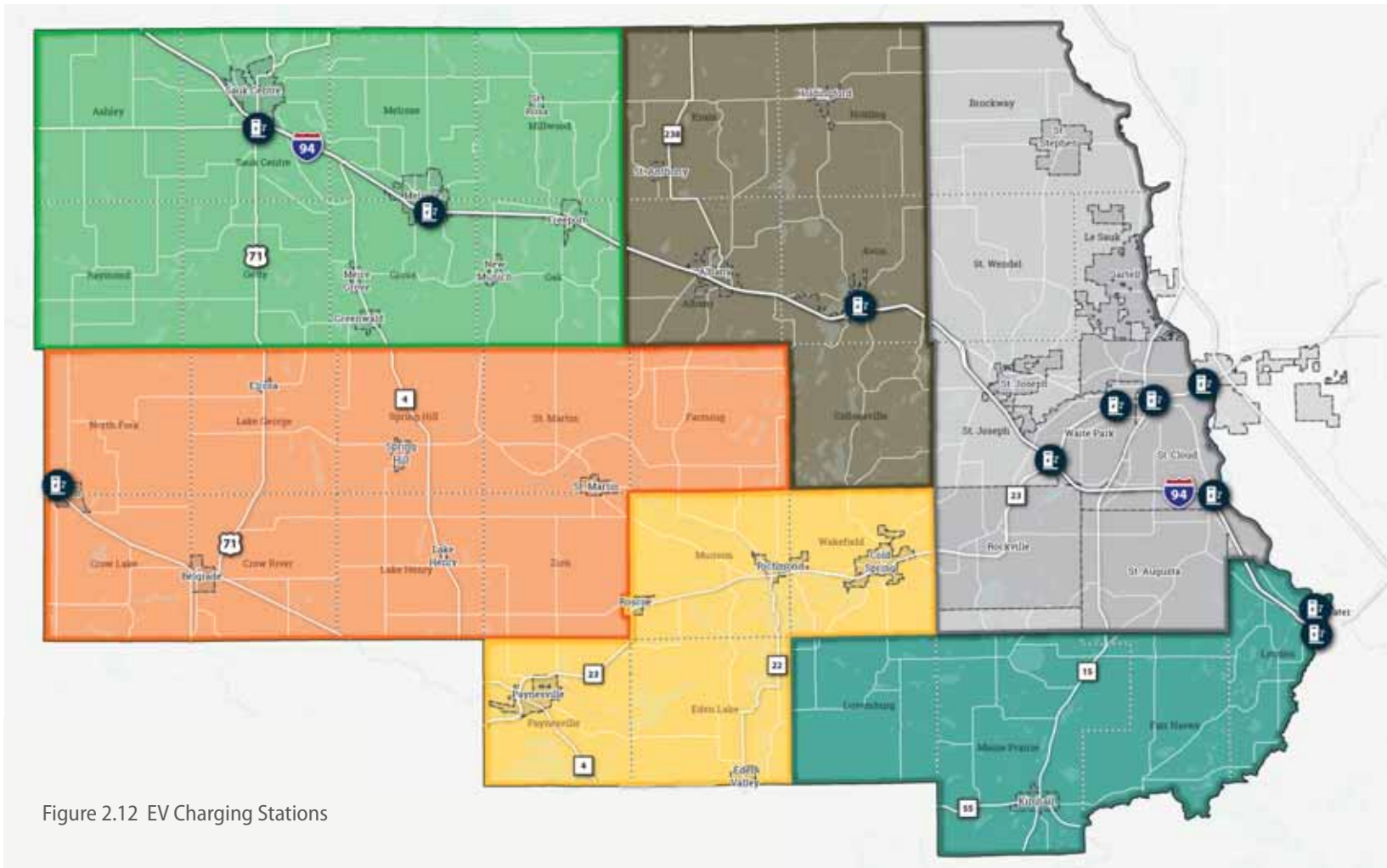


Figure 2.12 EV Charging Stations

AUTONOMOUS AND ELECTRIC VEHICLES


Fully autonomous cars are still in the advanced testing stages, but partially automated technology and low-speed cars are beginning to embed themselves into markets across the Country. In that respect, understanding autonomous vehicles and their different levels of automation will play an important role in how agencies manage their transportation assets, while setting the stage for investments. Connected vehicles could interact with our transportation system to complete driving functions or provide information to the driver to make informed decisions.

The electrification of the vehicle fleet will also have impacts on the County. As more people switch over to hybrid-electric or fully electric vehicles, there will be greater demand for charging stations and the production of electricity. There are currently 16 charging stations located in Stearns County.



Clean energy, primarily in the form of solar and wind, have continued to dot the landscape of Stearns County within the last decade. In that time period there have been approximately 80 solar facilities that have been permitted by the County, State and townships. Of those, 40 are solar farms with a generating capacity of over 1MW. The remainder are solar accessory which are designed to serve the energy needs of the property. At the end of 2016, the first wind farm permitted by the State went operational resulting in a 78 MW wind farm in the western part of the County.

With clean energy becoming increasingly competitive with other sources of energy and statewide mandates for clean energy portfolios, there may be a higher demand for wind and solar electricity production in Stearns County in the future. Stearns County is at the top of the Statewide list for solar garden generating capacity with nearly 70MW.



“Technological advancements are always making new things possible and potentially more affordable than in the past. Transformations in how Stearns County residents communicate, live, work, learn, do business, and get around are actively shaping the future of the County. It will be important for Stearns County to keep up with the fast paced tech world and recognize the positive and negative impacts it can have on us. ”



PILLAR: AGRICULTURE

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AGRICULTURE

The Agriculture Pillar pays tribute to the County's rural identity and agrarian economic lifestyle. It recognizes these attributes by supporting the County's ongoing farming activities, while setting the stage for future agricultural economies. Stearns County's commitment to this Pillar is further embodied in the following statement and goals.

Pillar Statement

Stearns County's agricultural heritage is the root of our prosperity and identity. Through product diversity, innovation, and sustainable practices, we will enhance and promote the advancement of our agricultural economy.

Goals

1. *Support agriculture as a desirable land use for the long term and facilitate diversification of the County's agricultural economy.*
2. *Utilize sustainable practices to protect prime farmland and water quality for future generations.*
3. *Retain areas with highly valued agricultural land or economically viable animal agriculture operations.*
4. *Strive for and support higher farm profitability and family farm stability.*
5. *Encourage cities to collaborate with the County on the review of animal agriculture issues in close proximity to boundaries or within orderly annexation areas.*



Existing Stearns
Agriculture



INTRODUCTION

The Agriculture Pillar serves as a framework to ensure future generations have the available land suitable for agriculture uses. To achieve this objective, the Agriculture Pillar identifies the County's primary land use as "agricultural." Agricultural uses include animal operations, crop production and any specialized agricultural enterprise, in combination with limited agriculture related businesses, recreational, institutional, and open space uses. The remaining Pillars can be looked to for additional guidance on other types of land uses.



Agricultural Framework

The Agriculture Pillar's framework begins by identifying prime soils for farming, which is portrayed in Figure 3.1. Prime farmland soils are defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as "soils that are best suited for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops."

The Stearns County Soil Survey (1980) also states that "Prime farmland soils produce the highest yields with minimal inputs of energy and economic resources, and farming these soils results in the least damage to the environment."

Most of these areas have been identified as "Agricultural" areas in the Future Land Use Plan Map. This designation targets property for long-term agricultural use. Preferred uses within this land use designation include agricultural uses and farmsteads related to the operations of the agricultural use at a maximum residential density.

Rural Residential: The Comprehensive Plan recognizes not all of these areas are well suited for agriculture activities given their soil types or natural features. Therefore, the property owner should also be given the flexibility to develop their land as long as it meets certain criteria that balances residential uses with adjacent land uses. Clustering development is encouraged to preserve existing natural resources (e.g., wetlands, prairie, woodlands, habitat corridors, and scenic views) or large areas for agricultural uses. Lot sizes may vary; however, properties are required to maintain enough buildable land to accommodate the construction of permitted structures, including primary and secondary septic systems or community systems.

Rural Business: It is important to recognize the type of rural businesses (e.g., woodworking shops and home based businesses) that may occur in the agricultural areas. These can be small, privately-owned businesses run primarily by residents of the property. The Comprehensive Plan continues to support businesses in the Agricultural areas that do not create negative impacts on the public health, safety, and general welfare of adjacent property owners.

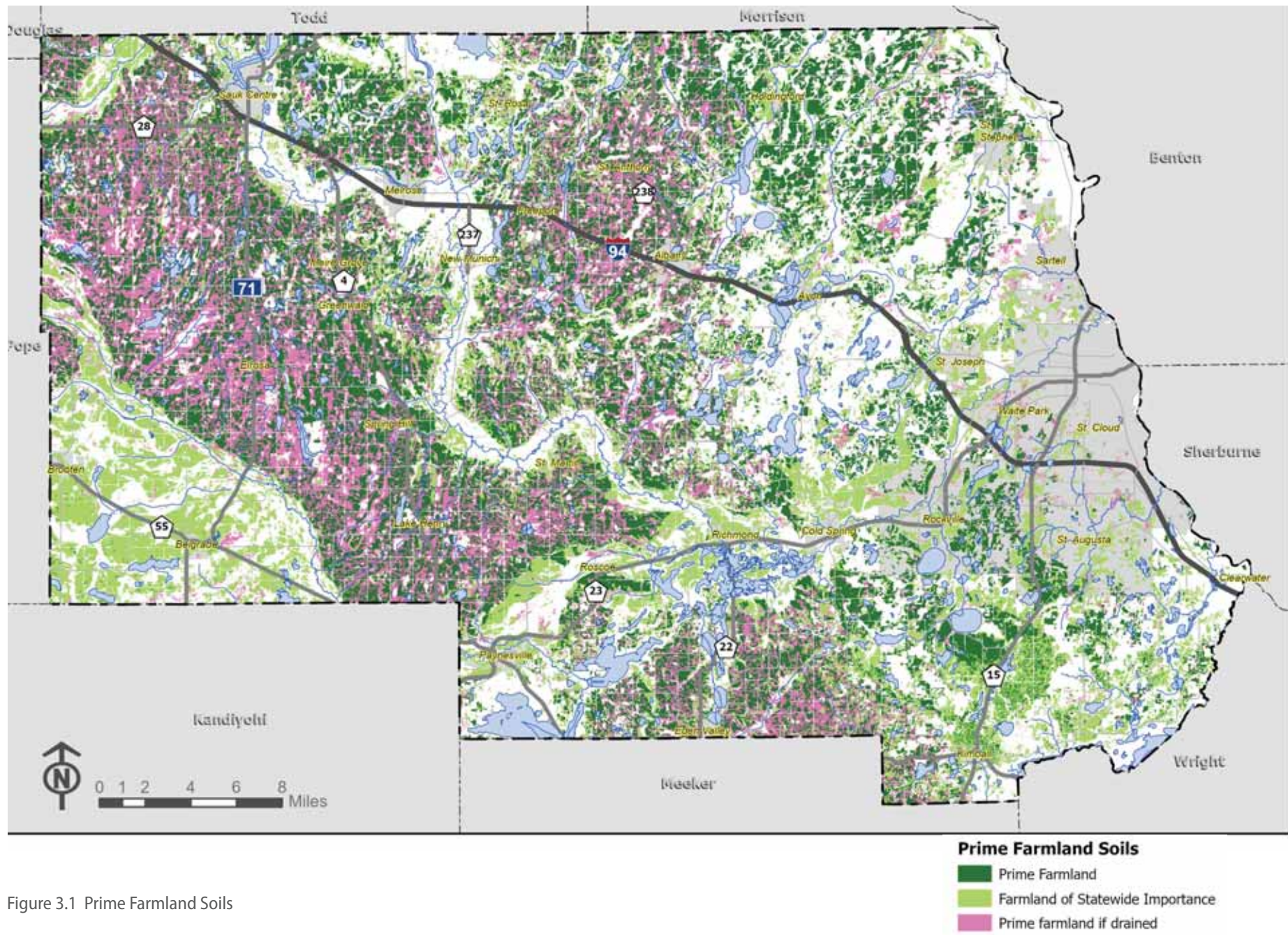


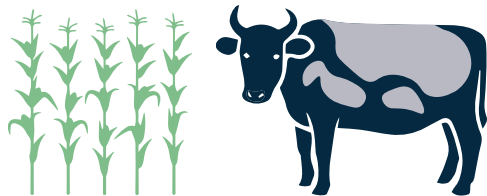
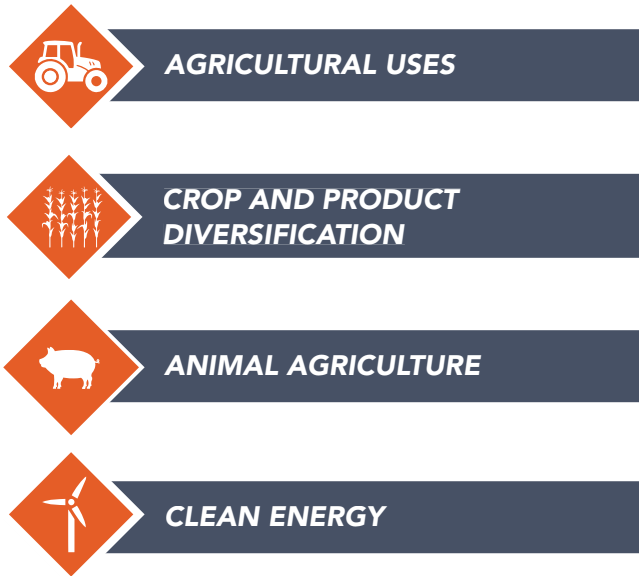
Figure 3.1 Prime Farmland Soils



“ Stearns County’s agricultural heritage is the root of our prosperity and identity. Through product diversity, innovation, and sustainable practices, we will enhance and promote the advancement of our agricultural economy. ”

Focus Areas

The focus areas capture new ideas in supporting today and tomorrow's agricultural economies. The focus areas build on the framework and the directions we feel are important to the future of our County. The focus areas are also intended to recognize long-term agriculture and farming activities throughout Stearns County.



AGRICULTURAL USES

Agriculture is an important part of the County's economy and rural character, but it is highly vulnerable to conflicts with non-agricultural uses. Agricultural activities with a more intense character, such as animal feedlot operations, are particularly sensitive to the proximity of housing, and are most susceptible to such land use conflicts. To help mitigate these conflicts, agricultural zoning has limited residential uses to one housing unit per 40 acres or more. This approach has not prevented the establishment of rural housing, which can make it more difficult to assemble and efficiently cultivate farmland. The County anticipates non-farmstead housing to continue to occur in the agricultural areas as people seek a rural lifestyle and open space. This presents future challenges in our objective to continue to encourage agricultural uses, while preventing barriers to future development opportunities.

"Our objective is to continue to encourage agricultural uses, while preventing barriers for future development opportunities."

Development Pressure

Many farmers and landowners desire to capture some of the value inherent in their land through development. Many township boards also see advantages in the development of land that is less suitable for agricultural uses as a way to diversify their tax base. However, even limited development can produce the conflicts with agriculture and other uses mentioned above. Scattered rural residential development, even at low overall densities, can have impacts on the viability of animal agriculture, the transportation system, and the quality and connectivity of sensitive natural resources. New residents of rural areas may also have different and often conflicting expectations regarding township and county services. To help balance these conflicts, the Living Pillar has encouraged new residential development to occur in Orderly Annexation Areas or as guided by the Future Land Use Plan map as Townsite Mixed Use or Transitional Areas.



Existing Farming

Moving forward, the County may consider some of the following tools to protect prime agricultural lands:

- » **Agricultural Zones:** Agricultural Zones are implemented through zoning regulations. Agricultural zones in other counties throughout Minnesota have used a density of 80 acres and up to 640 acres, depending on the land's productivity for crop production. This zoning tool can help protect larger areas of agricultural land, while maintaining open space and wildlife habitat; however, it can limit the land owner's ability to develop in the future. Stearns County's zoning districts range between 1 unit per 40 acres and 1 unit per 160 acres.
- » **Purchase of Development Rights:** The purchase of development rights is a voluntary program between the property owner and the County. The County buys development rights and restricts the use of the land to farming and open space in perpetuity. This approach can be very expensive depending on the value of the land. The County does not currently use this tool.
- » **Transfer of Development Rights:** This program allows the development potential of an agriculture preservation area (sending area) to be purchased by a developer and to be transferred to a designated developing area (receiving area). This tool helps manage urban growth areas, but can be very difficult to implement. Challenges include a supporting market place and financial mechanism to facilitate the purchasing of development rights. The County has a similar program in place, which allows a property owner or developer to purchase their neighbors development rights. The properties must be adjacent or contiguous to one another. This tool allows a property owner to develop at a higher density, while removing the future development ability of the adjacent properties.
- » **Preferential Property Taxation:** Land is taxed for its use-value rather than at its highest and best use for development, which helps encourage farmers to keep their land in production. Stearns County has a program similar in nature, known as Green Acres. The Green Acres Program provides property tax relief to qualifying owners of Class 2a agricultural property in areas where the market value of land is being affected by development pressure, sales of recreational land, or other non-agricultural factors.

- » **Easements:** An agricultural conservation easement is a voluntary, legally binding agreement between the landowner and a qualified third party that is placed on agricultural land to ensure that the land remains in agricultural production by removing most or all of its residential development potential. This type of tool has been used to preserve over 1,000 acres in the Avon Hills area.
- » **Advance Acquisition/Land Banking:** The local government can purchase land before it is ready to be developed. The property can be resold with restrictions, such as conservation easements with limited development. The County does not currently use this tool.



*Existing Stearns
Agriculture*

AGRICULTURAL USE POLICIES

- a. Primary land uses in the "Agricultural" areas should be agriculturally oriented, including animal agriculture, crop production and specialized agricultural enterprise, in combination with limited agricultural related business, solar and wind, recreational, institutional, and open space uses.
- b. Emphasize the importance of animal agriculture to the County economy by treating it as a priority land use in this area (compared with residential or other non-agricultural uses).
- c. Encourage agricultural practices that allow for co-existence with sensitive natural resources.
- d. Encourage sustainable agricultural practices that protect prime farmland and water resources for future generations.
- e. Projects that are located in an "Agricultural" area and are not agriculturally oriented should follow the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts with adjacent land uses and natural resources.
- f. Rural housing related to the operations of the agricultural use should occur at a maximum density of 1 unit per 40 acres.

CROP AND PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION POLICIES

- a. Encourage the diversification of crops and products to enhance Stearns County's regional agricultural presence.
- b. Recruit industries that utilize local production to improve the County's capture of value-added industries.



Existing Agriculture



CROP AND PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION

Crop and product diversification is a general practice that increases the region's crop portfolio, so that farmers are not dependent on a single crop to generate their income. Stearns County strongly encourages crop and product diversification to ensure the viability of farming throughout the county and region for years to come.

"The importance of crop and product diversification is critical as climate scenarios, economic markets, and federal subsidies are changing more rapidly."

Stearns County's role in crop and product diversification is somewhat limited. We can influence crop and product diversification through the education and promotion of sustainable farming practices that result in positive impacts to our economy and environment. As part of this role, the County has placed a greater emphasis on "value-added" products.

Crop and Product Diversification Benefits

- » Establishes new markets that are separate from the rest of the region.
- » Reduces the need for environmentally harmful inputs such as pesticides.
- » Results in greater yields and higher nutritional value of food crops.
- » Diversifies the local economy and protects against crop failure.
- » Ensures food security, while adapting to changing climates.
- » Improves soils and soil stability through cover crops, allowing farmers to be more productive on each acre, while protecting adjacent waterways and keeping nutrients where they are located.



Value Added Agriculture

Value added agriculture is a means to promoting the diversification of crops and products. Value added refers generally to strategies by which agricultural commodities such as crops or livestock are transformed into products of greater perceived value by the consumer and result in extended economic growth for the community or region. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Business Development defines value added agricultural products as follows:



A change in the physical state or form of the product such as turning milk into cheese, milling wheat into flour, or making strawberries into jam.



The production of a product in a manner that enhances its value such as organically produced products that command a higher retail price.



The physical segregation of an agricultural commodity or product in a manner that results in the enhancement of the value of that commodity or product such as an identity preserved marketing system.

The County can support the Department of Agriculture to promote better integration of producers with local retail markets and encourage more diversity in crop production, better local branding, improved cooperative efforts among agricultural producers, and other efforts to add value and lessen risk for the County's agricultural base.



Existing Agriculture

ANIMAL AGRICULTURE POLICIES

- a. Allow animal feedlots in the agricultural areas by protecting them from non-farm housing through County zoning.
- b. Follow pollution controls consistent with State requirements.
- c. Provide sources of assistance to allow for coexistence of agriculture and sensitive natural resources.

"Our objective is to continue to emphasize the importance of preserving and enhancing animal agricultural operations, while protecting the environment."



Feedlot Facts

From 2014 through 2019 (October), Stearns County approved the majority of variances that allowed a residential home to encroach on a feedlot or a feedlot to encroach on a residential home. In many cases, the requests involved a common owner of each or a reactivation of the feedlot.



ANIMAL AGRICULTURE

The County's primary agricultural output is in animal agriculture, which has nuisance risk and risks associated with natural resources. Maintaining a balance between non-agricultural rural developments and protecting the ability of animal agriculture producers to continue and expand their operations is an on-going dilemma. A number of incidents have occurred where animal agricultural operations have been unable to expand, or have been forced to absorb additional costs due to encroaching non-agricultural rural land uses (primarily housing). Difficulties in meeting natural resource protection standards have also limited producer's ability to expand. These standards may be viewed as barriers, but provide immense value in protecting our natural resources and water bodies.

The County continues to see a growing number of nuisance-related conflicts, as rural development pushes into areas with animal agriculture operations. Also, natural resource regulations are sometimes structured in a way that limits the expansion of animal agriculture operations. These barriers can limit a farmer's economic opportunities and investments from the farm. One particular barrier has been associated with the setbacks required between a residential dwelling and the construction and/or modification of a feedlot structure on a separate parcel.

Setback Requirements

Stearns County's ordinance requires a residential dwelling be located at a minimum of 700 feet from an animal feedlot (see Ordinance #439 Section 6.7.5). Minnesota Rules (Chapter 7020) do not require specific setbacks from residential dwellings. However, many local land-use ordinances have incorporated dwelling to feedlot setbacks and vice versa (600 to 2,000+ feet) from residential dwellings to reduce land use conflicts (e.g., noise, odor, and dust). Minnesota Statute 394.25 does require reciprocal setbacks for dwellings and feedlots in an agricultural zoning district.

Reducing or eliminating the setback requirements is a growing discussion in an effort to eliminate barriers that prevent feedlot owners from reactivating or expanding their operation; however, this would also eliminate barriers for residential dwelling construction closer to feedlot operations.



CLEAN ENERGY

Renewable energy technologies are having an increasingly prominent role in energy systems. Utility-scale wind power is the cheapest form of electric generation in the world and the cost continues to go down. The cost of solar is expected to achieve parity with wind in the next couple of years. More projects will come to Stearns County in the future and the County will continue to consider compatible land uses and community benefits as they do. The addition of renewable energy production technologies to a farmer/landowner's property as an accessory use can add value to the production of the property and make agricultural uses more feasible.



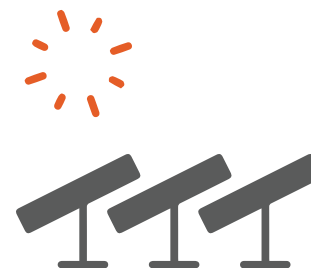
Wind energy production has limited conflicts with many forms of agricultural land uses and has many significant co-benefits with agricultural protection goals. It has a clear benefit of adding to agricultural economic diversity and can produce significant local tax benefits for the County. Primary land use conflicts with wind energy production include natural habitat and rural residences, both of which have a relatively limited presence on agricultural land. Visual impacts of wind energy production may be challenging to mitigate.



Solar energy production can enhance the economic diversity of agricultural operations as well. Visual impacts from solar production can be mitigated and opportunities exist for co-location with agricultural services. Solar development potentially has significant co-benefits with natural resource protection goals when solar array site design guidelines specify perennial ground cover with a mix of native grasses and pollinator flower mixes.

CLEAN ENERGY POLICIES

- Site solar energy systems in a way that reduces conflict with adjacent land uses, including but not limited to avoiding areas that will impact future development potential for a municipality.
- Continue to require beneficial habitat ground cover on solar sites.
- Direct the siting of wind energy to minimize impacts to habitat and natural areas. Local analysis should be considered in regard to nearby rural residences.
- Monitor State and Federal policies and programs to determine if any Zoning Ordinance changes need to be made.
- Encourage the development and use of renewable energy systems throughout the county, including wind energy and solar energy.



WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT CLEAN ENERGY



Wind Site Design Land Use Co-Benefits

Wind development has potential co-benefits with economic development goals discussed throughout this Pillar and the Business Pillar.

- » Compatible land use with many forms of agriculture.
- » Clear benefit of adding to agricultural economic diversity.
- » Least costly form of energy generation.
- » Significant local tax benefits.

Solar Site Design Land Use

Solar development potentially has significant co-benefits with natural resource protection goals discussed throughout the Nature Pillar.

- » Best practices for solar array site design specify perennial ground cover.
- » The industry standard has become native grass and pollinator flower mixes.
- » Stearns County was a leader, as the first county in the nation to support co-benefits via an ordinance requiring beneficial habitat ground cover on solar sites.
- » Perennial ground cover improves soil health and reduces erosion potential.

Solar Energy Legislation in Minnesota

In 2013, the Minnesota Legislature enacted a bill that contained several provisions designed to promote the growth of solar energy. Notable statutes include:

- » **Minnesota State Statute 216B.1691, subd. 2f.** A new law requires Minnesota's public utilities to generate or procure sufficient electricity from solar sources so that by the end of 2020, at least 1.5 percent of the utility's retail electricity sales in the state are produced from solar energy. (In computing its standard, a utility must exclude retail sales to iron mining and processing facilities, paper mills, sawmills, and wood product manufacturers.) At least 10 percent of this energy must be generated by facilities with a capacity of 20 kilowatts or less. Public utilities must comply with this solar standard in addition to fulfilling the existing Renewable Energy Standard, which requires that at least 20 percent of electricity sales originate from renewable energy sources by 2020, and 25 percent by 2025 (for Xcel Energy, these percentages are 25 and 30, respectively).
- » **Minnesota State Statute 116C.7792.** Beginning in 2014, Xcel Energy, which accounts for approximately half of Minnesota's retail electricity sales, must provide \$5 million in financial incentives annually for five years to promote the installation of solar energy systems in its service area. Eligible systems must have a capacity of 20 kilowatts or less that generate no more than 120 percent of the customer's on site annual electricity consumption. The incentive is paid for a period of ten years.

Source: August 2013 House Research, Bob Eleff



PILLAR: LIVING

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LIVING

The Living Pillar serves as the Comprehensive Plan's central element for guiding future growth without compromising our rural and agricultural character and natural resources. The Living Pillar will not only guide future growth, but will also help shape the County's policies that address rural housing needs and settlement patterns. Stearns County's commitment to this Pillar is further embodied in the following statement and goals.

Pillar Statement

Stearns County shares a broad set of values about ourselves and the place where we live. We will continue to embrace these diverse values by supporting a full range of housing choices that meets resident's needs at every stage of their lives, and ensure a healthy balance of housing types that meet the needs of a diverse population with diverse needs.

Goals

1. Collaborate with cities and townships to maintain sustainable growth patterns that align with the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Manage the impacts of growth and development on the County's rural character and natural resources.
3. Support housing options that give people in all life stages and of all economic means viable choices for safe, stable, and affordable homes.
4. Encourage new homes to be constructed in a sustainable manner, while including energy efficient technology and in accordance with state building code.
5. Respect and preserve architectural, archaeological, and cultural history, while building on all residents' cultural assets to strengthen County cohesion.



INTRODUCTION

A conventional comprehensive plan guides every parcel of land in a county to a specific land use (various forms of residential, commercial and institutional uses). Like a traditional land use plan, this Pillar provides a framework for guiding residential uses. The remaining Pillars can be looked to for additional guidance on other types of land uses.



Living Framework

Land use trends within the County have included increased pressure for development, varying by location and development type. The use of land and the patterns of development affect everything from the location and expansion of infrastructure (e.g., roads and utilities), to the state of animal operations, the provision of County services, and the protection of natural resources. As such, there are portions of the County that will experience growth over the next twenty years.

The Comprehensive Planning Team worked with local jurisdictions to confirm the growth areas that were depicted in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. In many cases, the boundaries have stayed the same or expanded through more recent planning efforts (see Figure 4.1). Outreach also determined that not every community has aspirations to grow or agree with their neighboring community's plans for growth. This presented challenges in rectifying the growth boundaries as part of the Comprehensive Plan update. It has also been the County's position to not dictate or advocate for growth at the community level. Growth boundaries should be established at the local level. In that respect, local jurisdictions (cities and townships) are encouraged to work together to develop a more formalized growth boundary that is mutually agreed upon.



Planning for Growth

The County's Comprehensive Plan has addressed areas of growth (see Figure 4.1) as prescribed by Minnesota law (State Statute 462.3535). Identifying these areas in the Plan will not force change to occur. Rather, it is an initial stage in the process of guiding land use appropriately to support change and an acknowledgement that change may occur. Identifying and planning for areas where change is likely to occur allows the County to take a proactive, rather than a reactive role in guiding development.

Orderly Annexation Agreements (OAA)

The Orderly Annexation Agreements represent property covered by an agreement between a city and a township in which land will be annexed to the city in the future under specified conditions. OAA's are a legal tool that can help a township control, to some degree, when and how land is annexed. This proactive measure includes an agreement between both the city and township that stipulates the terms and conditions in the transition/annexation of land.

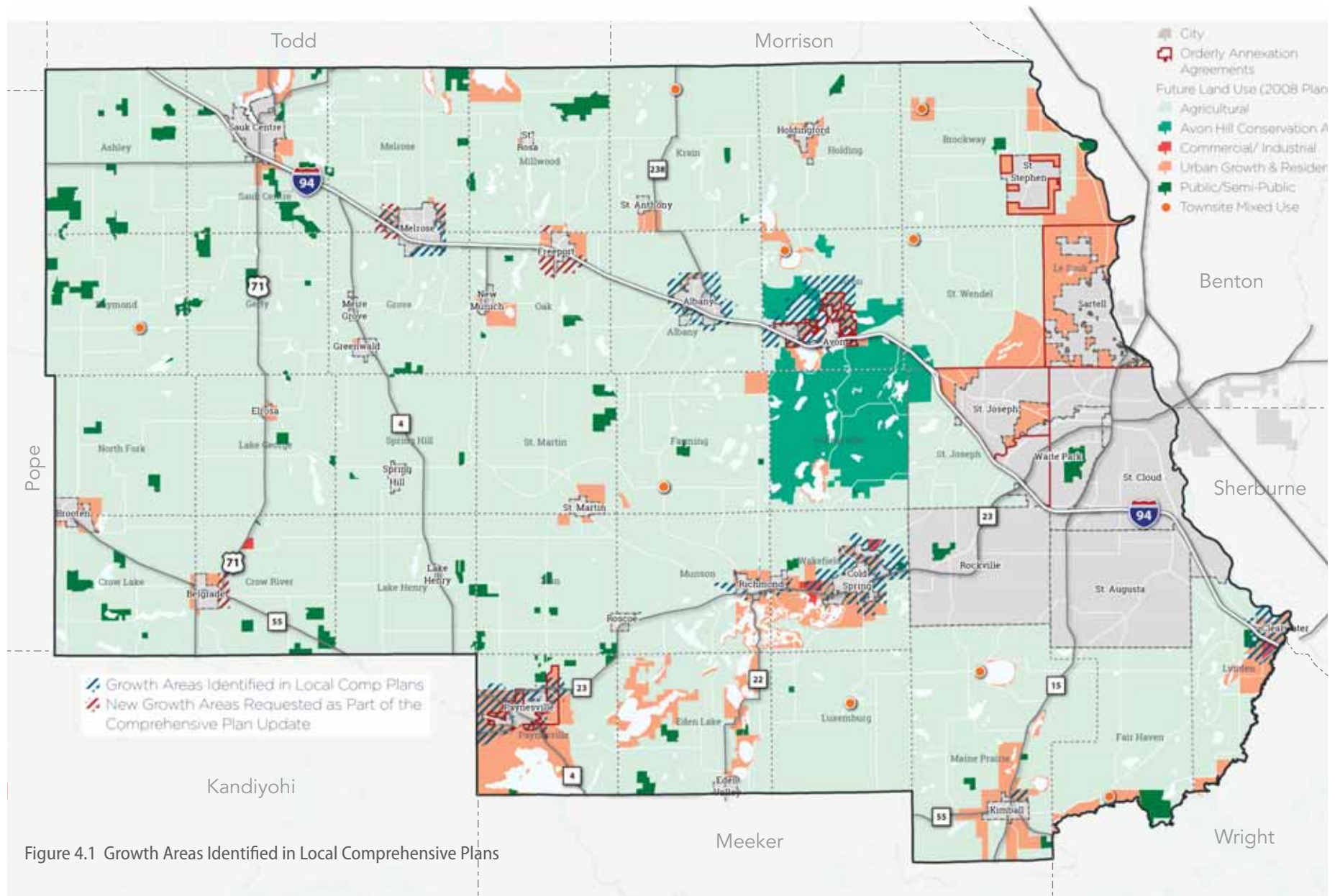


Figure 4.1 Growth Areas Identified in Local Comprehensive Plans

Focus Areas

Stearns County has identified a set of focus areas that helps articulate the Land Use Plan and the directions we feel are important to the future of our County. The focus areas are also intended to recognize the diversity of housing needs and growth pressures across Stearns County, while providing a path towards implementation.

The focus areas can also be interpreted through the future land use categories depicted in the Future Land Use Plan map. The boundaries of the land use categories maintain a degree of flexibility and interpretation, but the policy direction for the focus areas are clear.



TRANSITIONAL AREAS

Many cities within Stearns County, especially in the eastern areas, have adopted comprehensive plans that show substantial growth into the surrounding townships. Some cities and townships have negotiated orderly annexation agreements that match or partially match these urban growth boundaries.

It is important to recognize not every city or township has a locally approved comprehensive plan that identifies growth areas. The purpose of the Transitional Areas portrayed on the Future Land Use Plan map are described below.

“Good land use planning begins by recognizing areas of growth identified by a city and their planning documents (e.g., comprehensive plans or land use studies)(see Figure 4.1). Establishing growth boundaries provides cities and townships with a clear identification of where the urban/rural divide is planned to occur (see Figure 4.2). Such a divide provides policy direction to local and county officials in making key land use decisions in areas of transition.”

Purpose of the “Transitional Area” Land Use Category (see Figure 4.2)

- » To encourage cities and townships to evaluate their own growth potential and plan accordingly within a quarter-mile to half-mile buffer from their city limits. This effort should be locally driven and adopted as part of their own local comprehensive plan.
- » To guide future large lot rural development within the Transitional Areas and prevent the encroachment of non-farm uses into agricultural lands.
- » To provide property owners greater flexibility in developing their land when located in proximity to an urban centre.
- » To guide potential growth and prevent the encroachment of non-farm uses into agricultural lands.



What We Heard

Stearns County held various public engagement efforts, including Township Listening Sessions to better understand how growth (i.e., Transitional Areas) should be best addressed in the Comprehensive Plan.

Key takeaways from these meetings include:

1. Growth is viewed as a “positive” attribute for the county; however, development must be balanced in a sustainable manner that separates development from farming operations (e.g., animal agriculture and row crops).
2. It is important to recognize that the term “urban growth” or “urban expansion” may imply annexation.
3. The Comprehensive Plan should incorporate design standards or guidelines to help better inform development decisions that occur along the urban fringe.
4. The Comprehensive Plan should build in greater flexibility for the property owner to choose how they want to use their land, if it is done in a sustainable manner.
5. Develop a Future Land Use Plan that supports property owner rights.
6. Recognize that every community (cities and townships) has different aspirations to grow over the next 20 years.

TRANSITIONAL AREA POLICIES

- a. The County will not dictate or advocate for growth at the community level. Growth boundaries should be established at the local level.
- b. Evaluate development proposals in the Transitional Areas using the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Factors.
- c. Future Land Use Plan map amendments that expand or change a Transitional Area must include a finding:
 - i. That insufficient land is available in areas that the Comprehensive Plan has already designated for that land use to respond to market demand.
 - ii. That the expansion is consistent with City, County, and State infrastructure expansion plans, and with township staging plans where available.
 - iii. That the resources in the area proposed for change have been adequately assessed, or will be assessed prior to any development proposal.



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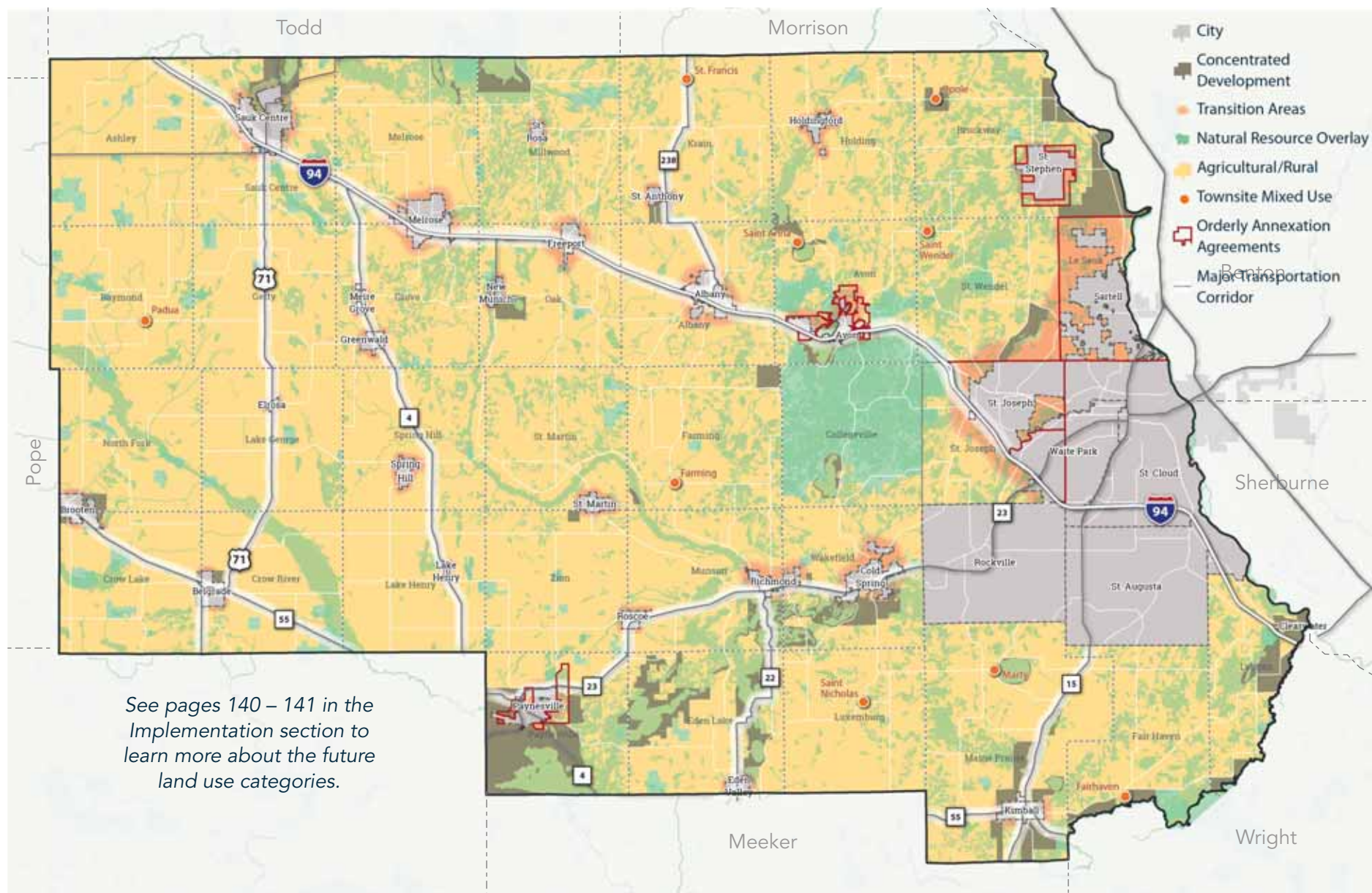


Figure 4.2 Future Land Use Plan



Farmstead



AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL USES (FARMSTEADS)

The Living Pillar recognizes the residential uses (farmsteads) that correspond with agriculture activities. However, recent trends have suggested a growing interest in splitting the farmstead from the acreage. This trend is a result of family farms being sold, as younger generations are not choosing to take over the farm. These requests provide the farmer an option to stay in their home, while selling their acreage to a larger farming operation.



Existing Stearns Farmstead

AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL USE POLICIES

- a. Residential uses in the agricultural areas must embrace the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts between adjacent land uses and natural resources





RURAL RESIDENTIAL USES

Agriculture is an important part of the County's economy, but it is highly vulnerable to conflicts with non-agricultural uses. As a county grows, farmland usually faces pressures from development. Often these rural estate developments have large lots that consume significant tracts of farmland. In addition, wildlife habitat and natural areas are lost because they become too small as they are fragmented between individual lots and are not protected from individual landowner development.

Even agricultural zoning of one housing unit per 40 acres has not prevented the development of 40 acre or larger residential parcels, making it more difficult to assemble and efficiently cultivate farmland. Agricultural activities with a more intense character, such as animal feedlot operations, are particularly sensitive to the proximity of housing, and are most susceptible to such land use conflicts.

"The intent of the Transitional Areas and Townsite Mixed Use category is to provide a district that provides the opportunities for limited to moderate residential development that may exceed 1 unit per 40 acres, without conflicting with agricultural uses. The County's zoning districts will also help dictate the appropriate locations for rural residential development."

RURAL RESIDENTIAL POLICIES

- a. Future density increases in the agricultural areas should consider conservation subdivision techniques.
- b. Encourage higher density developments to locate near municipal services.
- c. Residential uses in the agricultural areas must embrace the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts between adjacent land uses and natural resources.



Rural Residential Neighborhood





ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

ADUs can be a living area located on the grounds or attached to a single-family home. The demand for ADUs has grown in popularity in response to changing family needs and smaller households. Examples of ADUs include living areas above garages, tiny homes, and mobile homes. As Stearns County's demographics change (e.g., aging populations), the County should explore updates to its zoning code that continue to support ADUs. Providing this type of housing can offer the following benefits:

- » Increase housing affordability (both for homeowners and tenants).
- » Create a wider range of housing options within the county.
- » Enable seniors to stay near family as they age.
- » Allow more efficient use of existing housing stock, public infrastructure, and the embodied energy contained within existing structures.
- » Provide a mix of housing options that responds to changing family needs and smaller households.

ACCESSORY DWELLING UNIT POLICIES

- a. Support a mix of housing that are appropriate for each zoning district.
- b. Carefully manage ADU's in shoreland areas to ensure density is managed and shoreland aesthetics are not altered.

“The County has seen a growing interest in providing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which could be allowed in the residential and agricultural zoning districts as a permitted accessory use or structure.”



WORKFORCE HOUSING

Stearns County has its share of challenges and opportunities to maintain its farmsteads, rural housing and manufactured home parks, while simultaneously providing housing choices for all of its residents. One of these challenges includes a growing demand for affordable workforce housing. Workforce housing is housing that meets the needs of working families and is attractive to new residents locating in rural parts of the County.

Most of the County's 25 Manufactured Home Parks are located in the rural areas of the County. Many of these Parks are challenged with an aging housing stock, with homes built prior to the enactment of the HUD Code in 1974.

It's becoming increasingly clear that this aging housing stock is pervasive and has tentacles reaching into other issues. For low-income rural households, the struggle to access safe, quality, affordable housing is real. Incomes are too low and housing options, both homes for purchase or rent, at affordable prices are limited.

"Residents that spend more than 30% of their household income on housing costs are cost-burden. Approximately 27% of all Stearns County households pay more than 30% of their income on housing costs. Just under 20% of homeowners have a housing cost burden, while over 44% of renters have a housing cost burden."

Although housing costs are generally lower in rural communities, lower incomes and higher poverty rates make housing options simply unaffordable for many rural residents. Many of these households are faced with higher transportation costs, resulting in more money spent on transportation to travel greater distances to access work and services. Other cost-burdens may be associated with substandard housing. For example, naturally occurring affordable housing can be in extensive need of repairs to meet basic health and safety needs.

In order to sustain the long-term viability of agricultural operations in Stearns County, our communities should ensure access to quality, affordable housing to accommodate farm workers and their families. Local comprehensive plans, zoning regulations and subdivision and land development ordinances can help achieve this objective.

WORKFORCE HOUSING POLICIES

- a. Residential uses in the agricultural and rural areas must embrace the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts between adjacent land uses and natural resources.
- b. Allow workforce housing, accessory dwelling units, single-room occupancy housing, co-housing or tiny houses / apartments by right in selected zoning districts.
- c. The County will support affordable workforce housing projects following these guidelines:
 - i. A portion of the project provides affordable housing units for lower-income populations.
 - ii. The project has embraced best practices for on-site sewage treatment systems that do not negatively impact the environment.
 - iii. The delivery of other public services (i.e. fire, police, public works, and schools) have been consulted and the County is satisfied that the development can be serviced under existing or planned programming levels.



Sustainable Building Design Practices

Sustainable design practices are used in developments to minimize impacts to the natural environment, while improving our health and quality of life. The U.S. Green Building Council is an excellent resource to learn more. Examples of these practices include:

Energy Building Practices

- » Balancing of heating and cooling distribution systems
- » Efficient hot water distribution systems
- » High efficiency appliances
- » LED lighting
- » Minimum energy performance

Sustainable Site Design Practices

- » Access to transit, schools, and community resources
- » Building orientation for passive solar
- » Compact development (e.g., clustering)
- » Floodplain avoidance
- » Impervious surfaces are minimized
- » On-site stormwater management
- » Reestablish native plants and trees
- » Rainwater management (e.g., rain gardens)

Construction Practices

- » Environmental friendly products/construction materials
- » Material efficient framing
- » Enhanced ventilation
- » Radon-resistant construction

Affordable Workforce Housing Benefits

- » Provides support for local agricultural businesses by ensuring year-round housing opportunities for their employees.
- » Conserves energy because it provides housing close to the farm workers' place of employment, thus minimizing travel costs and fuel consumption.
- » Helps to sustain municipalities by providing stability for low-income families, while minimizing the gentrification of community.



Affordable workforce housing precedent



Affordable workforce housing precedent



LAKESHORE LIVING

Part of Stearns County's unique quality is attributed to its lakes, rivers, creeks, and streams. These water features contribute to the County's tourism, local economy, and ability to attract new residents. As a result, residential and recreational uses have developed along the lakes, especially along the Sauk River Chain of Lakes. This area includes some of the most intensive residential and recreational development in the County, with impacts on water quality and natural resources. Water bodies have limits for how much development can occur without degrading the very resource that attract development. Natural resource tourism is similarly faced with how to take advantage of the amenities that attract people without exceeding the capacity of the resource for development.

Shoreland Alterations

Major shoreland alterations are granted by the County Board, if it determines there are no adverse environment impacts. The approval of a permit can also be subject to the property owner meeting specific conditions. For example, the applicant may be required to reduce the amount of shoreland being altered or apply best practices to mitigate environmental impacts.

The ordinance does not provide specific thresholds for when a permit may be denied for major applications. As a result, many permits are approved with conditions. Moving forward, the County will need to consider implementing stronger tools.



Lakeshore Example

LAKESHORE LIVING POLICIES

- a. Limit the impacts of additional shoreland development by clustering housing away from shorelines, using a conservation design approach.
- b. Encourage shoreland protection and restoration methods such as vegetative buffers.
- c. Discourage the alteration of natural shorelands and the creation of impervious surface in near shore areas.
- d. Address wastewater treatment and water quality problems through the County Water Plan, Watershed Districts, lake associations and other partnerships.
- e. Encourage implementation of innovative stormwater management practices into shoreland projects such as rain gardens, permeable surfaces and vegetative buffers.
- f. Expand mitigation requirements for projects requesting to vary from lake setbacks to preserve the riparian environment and reduce erosion to enhance the water quality.
- g. Create riparian standards that balance the interests of both year round and seasonal residents, while protecting the natural resources that draw them to lakeshore amenities.
- h. Evaluate lakeshore housing projects using the following as guidelines, in addition to the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors:
 - i. The project preserves sight lines and does not negatively impact view sheds of adjacent properties.
 - ii. The project maintains the neighborhood's residential character by promoting compatible land uses. Land uses that detract from this character should be addressed through site design improvements and mitigation measures.



What is Conservation Design

Conservation design is a controlled-growth land use development that adopts the principle for allowing limited sustainable development while protecting the area's natural environmental features in perpetuity, including preserving open space landscape and vista, protecting farmland or natural habitats for wildlife, and maintaining the character of rural communities. Examples of conservation design principles include:

- » Cluster housing to retain and protect open spaces, such as farmland and natural areas.
- » Provide for greater setbacks from arterial and collector roadways.
- » Nestle building pads along the edges of woodlands and natural areas.
- » Provide patches of open space that are large enough for a sustainable agricultural use.
- » Minimize street widths, while maintaining consistency with accepted roadway standards.
- » Provide the retention of remnant pieces of farmsteads as an integral part of the development project where such pieces add value and historical amenities to the project.
- » Provide the use of alternative surfaces to pavement or asphalt in secondary vehicle access areas, such as driveways to outbuildings or second garages.
- » Provide features, such as stormwater ponds, to be designed as natural amenities and integrated into site design, and not relegated to left over parcels.



What are the Benefits to Conservation Design?

Using conservation design principles in your development can have the following benefits.

- » Maintaining or restoring native vegetation and protecting natural systems sequesters carbon and limits the release of stored carbon.
- » Well-managed open lands and rural development, whether fields, forests, agriculture lands, parks or wetlands, help sustain biodiversity, ecosystem services, and the community in a variety of ways, including:
 1. Reduced volume of stormwater runoff, surface water pollutants and sediment
 2. Enhanced groundwater recharge
 3. Reduced erosion
 4. Improved air quality
 5. Additional wildlife habitat and recreational space
 6. Preservation of rural community character and viewsheds
 7. Properties near open space and functioning natural systems show strong retention of housing values over time.
 8. Landscapes can be planned, designed, developed and maintained to protect and enhance the benefits society derives from healthy functioning landscapes.

Source: GreenStep Cities



Clustered Housing

As agricultural areas grow, farmland usually faces pressures from development. Often these rural estate developments have large lots that consume significant tracts of farmland. In addition, wildlife habitat and natural areas are lost because they become too small as they are chopped up between individual lots and are not protected from individual landowner development. Given the spacing between the lots, road and utility infrastructure, such as sewer services, requires significant investment.

In an effort to better protect natural areas and increase efficiencies, the development community has begun to use conservation subdivision techniques. Conservation subdivision, also called cluster development, seeks to cluster development areas to retain and protect open spaces such as farmland and natural areas. The process of creating a conservation subdivision begins with identifying the natural features on the site, including waterways, forest, prairie, and topography. It may also include farmland. These areas are then linked with green strips to create a connected open space system. With the areas to protect identified, the process of locating streets, utilities, and home sites can begin.

The use of conservation design should be strongly encouraged in agricultural and rural areas with significant natural habitat and resources. Conservation design should also be used in areas where farming is a desired pattern to retain for the development project.



Open Space



Typical Subdivision



Conservation Subdivision/Clustered Development

Photo Source: Rural by Design

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PILLAR: NATURE

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NATURE

The Nature Pillar recognizes the County's natural resources and the areas that reconnect people to nature through parks and trails. This Pillar is carefully balanced throughout the Comprehensive Plan to ensure the natural environment is brought to the forefront of conversations when making land use decisions. Stearns County's commitment to this Pillar is further embodied in the following statement and goals.

Pillar Statement

Stearns County recognizes the inherent values of the natural environment and connecting people to nature. We are committed to providing recreational opportunities, while recognizing the value of natural resource protection, restoration, and preservation. This will require sustainable practices that balance growth between urban and rural communities.

Goals

1. *Preserve, restore, and protect important natural systems and natural resources.*
2. *Ensure the reasonable and responsible use of the County's natural resources, including land, surface and ground water, minerals, open space, wetlands, wildlife, and woodlands.*
3. *Recognize the significance of water resources in the County and ensure the creation and implementation of policies to manage stormwater in collaboration with land use and development.*
4. *Protect the County's aggregate resources and provide for reasonable economic use of aggregate.*
5. *Partner with cities, townships, adjoining counties and state agencies to broaden the potential pool for park acquisition and improvement.*
6. *Provide park and open space areas throughout the County to meet the active and passive recreational needs of current and future residents.*
7. *Provide a regional trail system in order to support a variety of recreational activities, offer alternative transportation modes, and support tourism and economic development initiatives.*



INTRODUCTION

Natural resources provide the framework and support for land use and development choices. For example, underlying geology and hydrological systems often determine land use choices; row crops are located in areas of high quality soils; grazing occurs on rockier, less productive soils; agriculture transitions to forestry along the boundary between prairie and woodland ecological regions; and cities spring up where water is abundant.

Our natural environment has also shaped the parks and open spaces we've grown to love and connect with on a daily basis. Recreational use of open space complement the desire for maintaining natural spaces for scenic quality, wildlife habitat, and ecosystem functions.



Natural Resource Framework

A Natural Resource Manual was developed to help inform the Comprehensive Plan's update, while informing the focus areas discussed throughout this Pillar (see pages 143-172). The manual provides a snapshot of Stearns County's diverse natural resources, parks, open spaces, and trails. It also provides a foundation for developing the "natural resource overlay" depicted in the Future Land Use Plan map. The Nature Pillar and the Natural Resource Manual can be used in the following ways.


- » **When making future land use decisions.** Planning decisions are influenced by a variety of entities that have some regulatory or planning authority for natural resources in Stearns County. The Natural Resource Manual identifies some of these roles and responsibility (see sidebar), while providing resource links to learn more.
- » **Connecting people to nature.** Recreation programs, trail corridors, and parks are all part of the natural systems of Stearns County. These connections are recognized throughout the Natural Resource Manual. The manual provides an inventory and assessment of the existing system, contextual information regarding complementary state facilities, and a framework for Stearns County to follow in order to meet regional needs for recreation and open space and to preserve significant natural resources.
- » **Implementing the Focus Areas.** The focus areas in this Pillar represent some of the priorities discovered throughout the planning process. Therefore, it is important to note they are not all-encompassing when considering the range of environmental concerns and recreational needs facing our future.

"Stearns County will need to continue to evaluate policies, best practices, and regulations when making informed decisions about the natural environment and how we connect people with these resources."

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Examples of agencies responsible for Stearns County's natural resources:

- a. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) is responsible for a number of natural areas and management of natural systems (e.g., public waters).
- b. Four watershed organizations conduct planning and managing regulations and programs.
- c. Federal entities manage wildlife areas, and the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) oversees several regulatory areas, such as the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permits for most development activities.
- d. The County has statutory responsibility for completing and implementing both a Water Plan and a Solid Waste Management Plan.

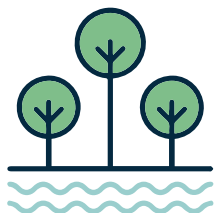


*“The nation behaves well if it treats
its natural resources as assets
which it must turn over to the
next generation increased, and
not impaired, in value.”*

- Theodore Roosevelt

Focus Areas

Stearns County identified focus areas to articulate important directions for the future of the County.



WATER RESOURCES

Water resource policies cover a broad spectrum of topics that range from floodplain management, stormwater runoff, erosion and sediment control, wetland management, and shoreland management. In many cases, these policy areas have already been established through past planning efforts and regulations. Examples include:

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Program: In 2014 the State of Minnesota first offered Local AIS Prevention Aid to all counties for the purpose of stopping the spread and/or preventing the introduction of aquatic invasive species, such as Eurasian watermilfoil and zebra mussels. A Stearns County AIS Committee was formed for the purpose of developing a County AIS Plan to best use these funds.

The Stearns County Board of Commissioners adopted the County's AIS Plan on February 17, 2015. Since the program's inception, inspectors have logged over 60,000 watercraft inspections. The premise of the Plan is the receipt of County AIS Prevention Aid. If that Aid is discontinued, the AIS Committee and County Officials will need to determine the future of the program.

The Comprehensive Local Management Water Plan: Stearns County's Comprehensive Local Water Management Plan (aka "County Water Plan") serves as a guide for water and land resource restoration, protection and preservation. It is a cooperative plan, relying on partnerships between many different entities in order to accomplish the goals of the plan. Stearns County, with its planning and land-use authorities, is a member of this partnership, positioned to link land use decisions with local goals for water resources.

Shoreland Management: The history of Minnesota's Shoreland Management Program dates back to 1969 with the passage of the Shoreland Management Act. Minimum development standards - such as structure setbacks, height limits, impervious surface limits, lot requirements, vegetation removal and land alteration requirements - are established in state rules (Minnesota Rules, part 6120.2500 - 6120.3900) and administered through local ordinances. Stearns adopted its first shoreland ordinance in 1973.

Floodplain Management: Floodplain management incorporates a community's actions for reducing flood damage. Stearns County's floodplain management ordinance specifies building standards for new and existing development that provide flood loss reduction as well as make flood insurance available to home and business owners through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

Under the NFIP program, federally insured or regulated institutions (such as banks) must require flood insurance policies on all new loans for structures in mapped floodplain areas recognized by FEMA.

Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program (SWPPP): The Goal of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of waters of the state through management and treatment of urban storm water runoff. The program requires that this be accomplished through the management of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4s) through the preparation of a Stearns County pollution prevention program.

Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP)

The SWPPP program has been prepared in conformance with the NPDES, Phase II Rules and is in compliance with the provision of the Clean Water Act. The SWPPP has been prepared to manage and minimize the discharge of pollutants from Stearns County MS4 systems to the maximum extent practicable. The SWPPP program's purpose is to identify goals and Best Management Practices (BMPs) that will be implemented to meet the requirements of the NPDES Phase II rules. Measurable goals have been established for each of the BMPs included in the SWPPP, along with the implementation plan and the persons responsible for the fulfillment of the BMPs.

BMPs are a combination of education, public outreach, maintenance, and engineering controls that are appropriate to comply with the requirements of the NPDES Phase II permit.



Shoreline Restoration in Stearns County



Existing Wetland

WATER RESOURCE POLICIES

- Adhere to adopted plans and regulations that maintain, restore, and enhance the County's water resources.
- Recognize the relationship between land use and water quality, and continue to support water quality improvements through land use plans and regulations.
- Preserve watershed functions for high-quality surface waters and recreation areas, and provide for restoration of watershed function for impaired waters.
- Minimize the alteration of wetlands.
- Recognize the carrying capacity) of groundwater and surface water in development and land use decisions.
- Protect drinking water sources through encouraging sustainable water use and preserving the function of wellhead protection areas and groundwater recharge areas in land use decisions.
- Use low impact development techniques, improved management of buffers and natural resources in shoreland areas, and improve stormwater management in existing developed areas.

Watershed Districts: A watershed district may cover several counties. The boundaries of the districts follow the natural watershed (region or area which drains to a particular watercourse or body of water). A watershed district is usually named after the biggest watershed in the district. There are four watershed districts in Stearns County (see Figure 5.1): Clearwater River, North Fork Crow River, Sauk River, and Middle Fork Crow River.

Each watershed district works to prevent and control water-related problems. Each district monitors the water quality within ditches, rivers, streams, creeks and lakes. Some projects the districts handle include: administration of public drainage systems, water quality improvement systems and regulatory controls to protect water resources.

Wetland Conservation Act: Stearns County administers the State of Minnesota's Wetland Conservation Act. This Act prohibits the draining and filling of wetlands without replacement. Excavations may also be regulated in some instances. The Act provides for exemptions which allow certain activities in wetlands without replacement. Activities managed by Stearns County include wetland determinations for certain property, reviewing wetland replacement plans, and providing certificates of exemptions, when applicable.

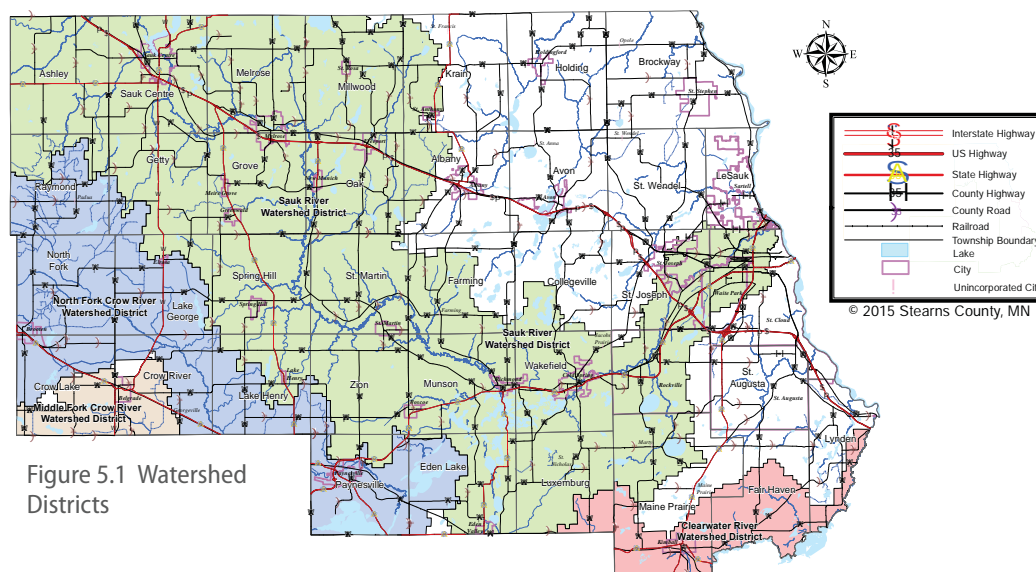


Figure 5.1 Watershed Districts



NATURAL SYSTEM CORRIDORS

Stearns County has a diversity of natural systems, including water bodies, wetlands, unique wooded areas with both natural and community value, prairie ecosystem areas, and a stretch of the Mississippi River. Combined, these natural areas are represented on the Future Land Use Plan map as a Natural Resource Overlay (see Figure 5.2). Connecting these resources together through conservation practices and land management tools will help establish stronger natural system corridors for natural habitat and plant communities. Natural system corridors can also serve as opportunities to expand the county's trail network.

Coordinating how to preserve the function of the County's natural systems, while also meeting the housing, economic development, and agricultural preservation goals of the County presents a signification challenge. This effort is a daunting task, requiring a collaborative approach among many agencies in helping balance development with natural preservation.

Items to Consider When Planning for Natural System Corridors

- » Use of low impact development techniques, conservation design, and selective preservation of critical areas.
- » Consider the carrying capacity (the quantity of stormwater runoff that can be conveyed and filtered) of shoreland areas that are under heavy development pressure, and how to restore some carrying capacity to lakes and rivers where waters are impaired.
- » Integrate agriculture, development, and recreation uses within the context of a sensitive natural resource area.
- » Manage the nitrate risk to groundwater that is associated with soils and geologic features, land use decisions, and various management practices.

NATURAL SYSTEM CORRIDOR POLICIES

- a. Recognize natural systems as critical infrastructure, equivalent to other kinds of infrastructure in ensuring the health, safety, welfare, and quality of life for County residents, visitors, and businesses.
- b. Work with the MnDNR, The Nature Conservancy, and other entities on green infrastructure corridors to:
 - i. Ensure consistency with County land use priorities and park and recreation goals.
 - ii. Work toward mutually achieving the County's and the State's green infrastructure priorities.
 - iii. Set implementation priorities that integrate agricultural protections, water resources protection, and the protection of green infrastructure corridors.



Greenway Corridors help protect natural habitat

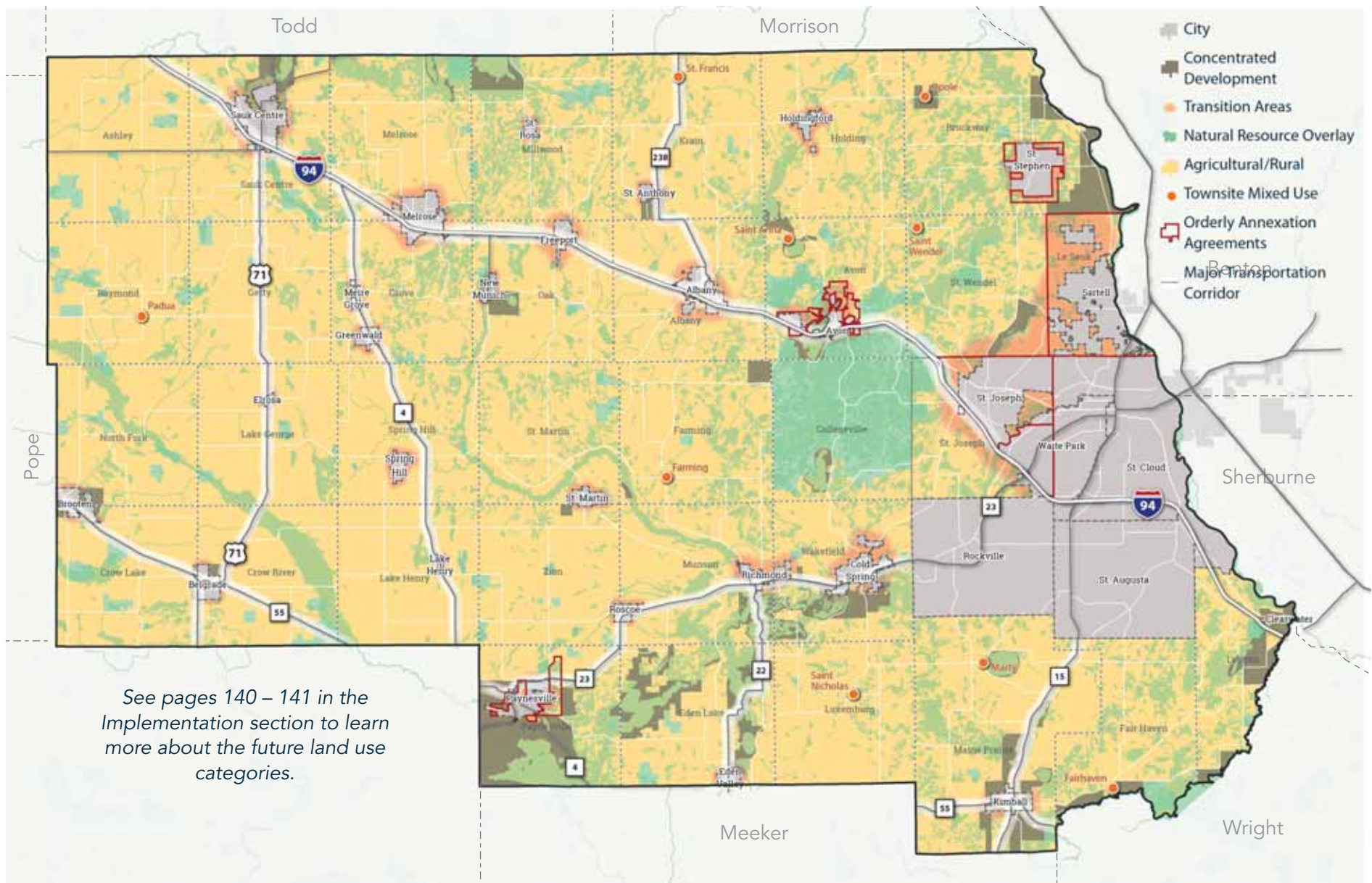


Figure 5.2 Future Land Use Plan



AGGREGATE RESOURCES

Local sources of aggregate are of prime importance to development activities, from building houses to maintaining the transportation system. Aggregate resources need to be protected so that development does not infringe upon them and prevent extraction. Aggregate extraction also creates significant nuisances and puts at risk other natural systems, if not appropriately managed.

High Quality Aggregate Resources

Large portions of aggregate resources can be found throughout the County. High quality aggregate areas may consist of sand and gravel and crushed stone. Most of the highest quality aggregate in these areas are used for construction purposes, such as the manufacturing of concrete or asphalt. Aggregates of lower quality are used for fill, base-course for roads, and for a variety of other purposes.

Aggregate resources in the region, particularly in the Twins Cities is rapidly diminishing. Stearns County recognizes these trends and the growing demand for mining operations in the area. There is a desire to preserve these resources for local economic development initiatives and public works projects. Accessing these resources locally can reduce the costs for local construction projects, compared to shipping resources from outside of the region.



Gravel Pit Precedent

AGGREGATE RESOURCE POLICIES

- Locate high quality aggregate resources to guide protection and utilization activities.
- Manage aggregate resources to provide for the extraction of high quality aggregate prior to non-agricultural development on the site.
- Adopt regulations to minimize nuisances from aggregate extraction that affect developed areas and that ensure restoration of extraction sites to protect other natural resources and natural functions.



FUTURE PARKLAND PLANNING

Planning for future improvements and expansion to the existing parks and recreation system includes the analysis of park access and coverage (see next page), guidelines for future acquisition, master plans for the park system and individual parks and trails, and development of system facilities.



Benefits of a Diverse Trail Network

The existing County trails network is connected to a number of state and local trails. Additionally, state water trails may be connected to the paved, land-based trails to create a more dynamic linear recreation system, combining walking/running and bicycling, with canoeing and kayaking. Developing and promoting this potential network could expand tourism and economic development in the County.



Regional Park Planning and Funding

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) allocates state legacy funds for park and trail projects. Stearns County has the opportunity to take advantage of this structure to acquire funding for potential park and trail improvements and expansion. A master plan must be completed for a certain facility, park, or trail that meets the requirements outlined by the GMRPTC before it can be designated as a regional facility.



Countywide Parks and Trails System Plan

Prioritization of future projects, including land acquisition, park and trail development, and partnership projects is needed in order to align staffing, funding, and maintenance needs. The County can identify all potential projects, conceptual cost estimates, funding options and sources, and associated priority levels in a parks and trails system plan.

PARKLAND PLANNING POLICIES

- Seek to expand and enhance the existing park system by acquiring property as opportunities arise in order to meet the goal of 20 acres per 1,000 residents and to add County Parkland to the system.
- Identify desired parcels throughout the county based on significant natural features, landscapes and potential acquisition opportunities.
- Seek investments into facilities and programs of the County park system to meet changes in recreational needs of residents and tourists.
- Invest in a Countywide Park System Plan to develop a vision, guiding principles, and priorities for the next 10-20 years.

Park Access & Coverage

County and regional parks are typically provided within a 15-30 minute drive, or a 30-45 minute bike ride, of residents. Stearns County has identified the distance of ten miles as a standard for providing park access to residents. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 show that most of the county residents are located within ten miles of a county park or trail. Residents in the western part of the county are located more than ten miles from a county park, which may indicate the need for additional park land in that area. As there has been growth in the Sauk Centre area, this may be the primary location to consider for an additional county park.

As the County is underdeveloped in terms of the amount of County parkland acreage for its size (see Table 5.1), there is the opportunity to acquire more land, particularly for natural resources protection and restoration. Specific sites should be identified as desired acquisition properties as opportunities arise with funding and transfers of property ownership.

Compared to selected peer counties in Minnesota, Stearns County has a smaller ratio of parkland to overall county land area and to number of residents. Table 5.2 includes a detailed analysis of parkland acreage compared to population and land area. Also included is the regional parkland in the Twin Cities metro area for comparison. In the past, the metro area has generally received more state funding for regional parks and trails compared to the rest of the state, so this is not an “apples to apples” comparison, but provided for reference.

Based on the above evaluation of current park acreage compared to standards for 20 acres of park land per 1,000 residents, Stearns County should add 415 acres of park land to its system to meet guidelines. In the next 30 years, this guideline will grow to 565 acres.

Table 5.1 Park Access and Coverage

STANDARD	CURRENT ACRES (2018)	ESTIMATED 2017 POPULATION*	2018 PARK ACREAGE NEEDS	PROJECTED 2050 POPULATION*	PROJECTED 2050 PARK ACREAGE NEEDS
20 ACRES PER 1,000 POPULATION	2,658 acres	157,660	3,073.22 acres	161,217	3,223.22 acres

*Source: MN State Demographer

Table 5.2 Peer County Park Comparison

COUNTY / REGION	POPULATION (2017, MN STATE DEMOG.)	COUNTY AREA (SQ. MILES)	# OF PARK FACILITIES	# OF RESIDENTS PER FACILITY	PARKLAND ACREAGE	TRAIL CORRIDOR ACREAGE	% OF COUNTY PARKLAND PER COUNTY AREA	PARKLAND ACRES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS
STEARNS	157,660	1,343.1	18	8,758.9	1,972.0	686.0	0.23%	12.51
WRIGHT	134,365	661.5	33	4,071.7	4,705.0	18.0	1.11%	35.02
WASHINGTON	256,905	423.0	8	32,113.1	4,404.4	NA	1.63%	17.14
OLMSTED	155,849	653.4	5	31,169.8	2,161.0	NA	0.52%	13.87
TC METRO AREA	3,113,338	6,364.0	64	48,645.9	54,370		1.33%	17.46

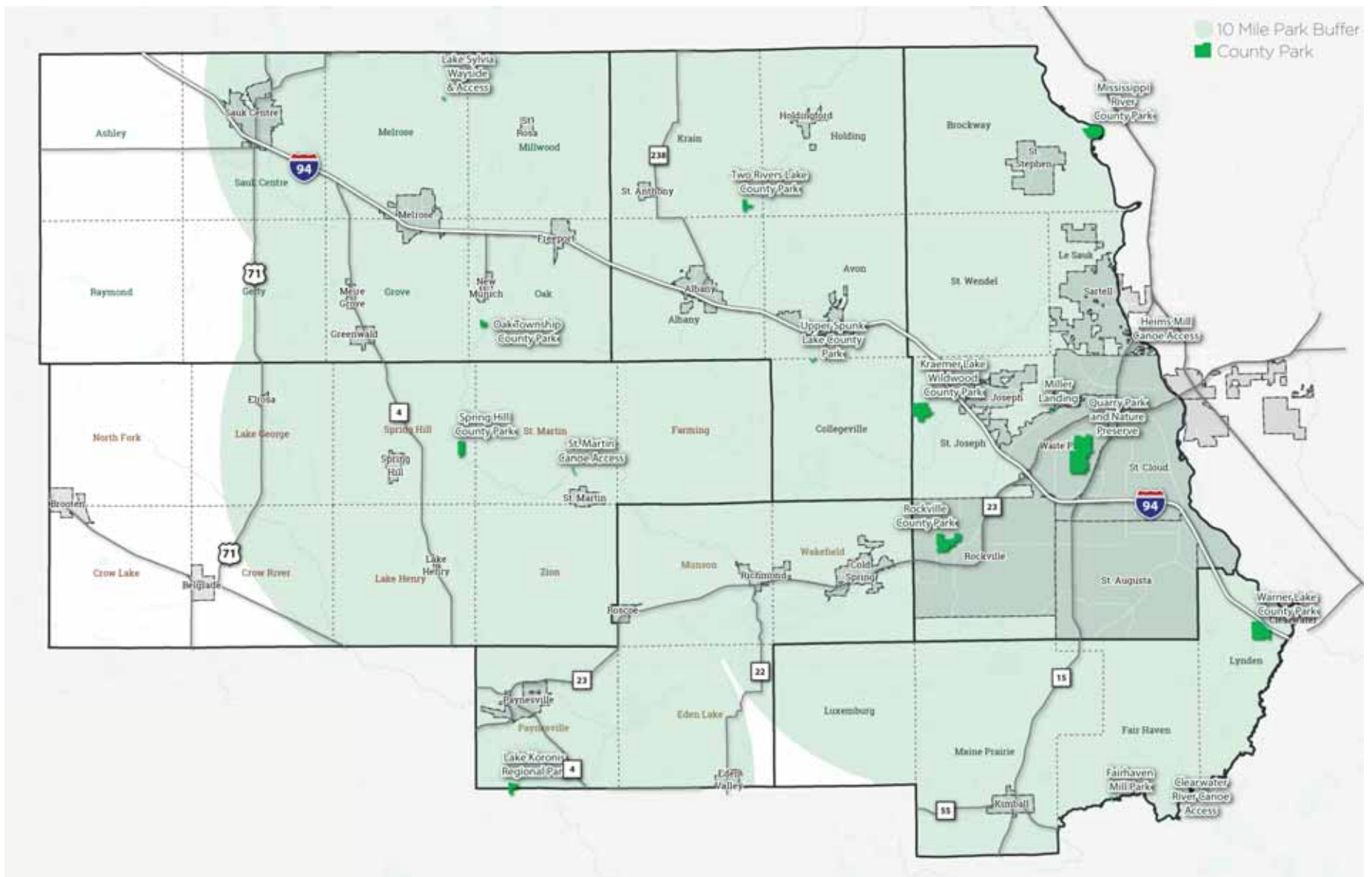


Figure 5.3 Access to County Parks

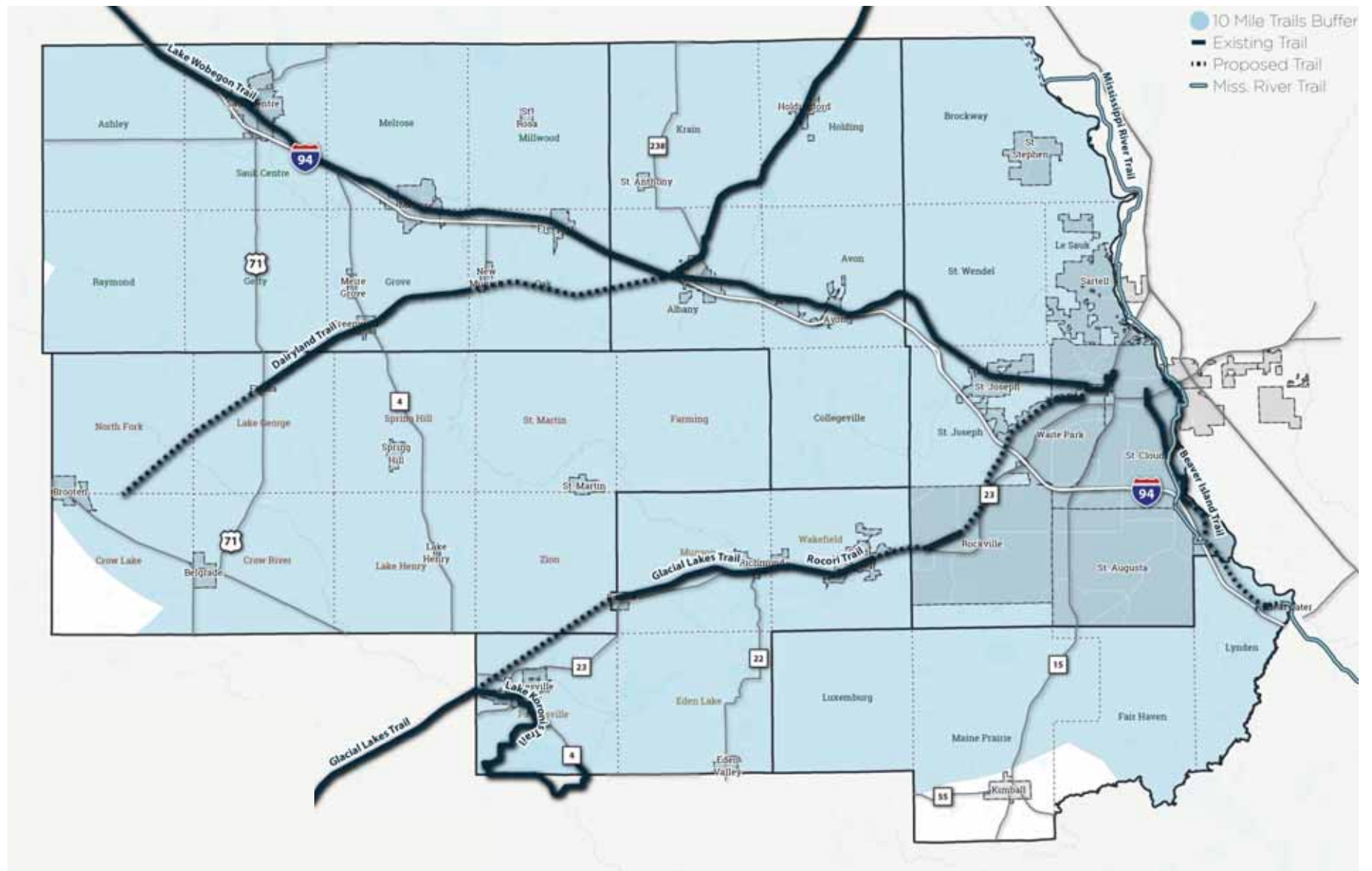


Figure 5.4 Access to County Trails



OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Operating and managing the existing parks and recreation system includes a variety of daily activities, as well as larger tasks that occur on a monthly or annual basis. Issues and opportunities that fall under this focus area may include staffing levels, natural resources management, customer service duties, ensuring infrastructure and facilities are safe and clean, marketing and wayfinding information, and managing programming contracts and partnerships.

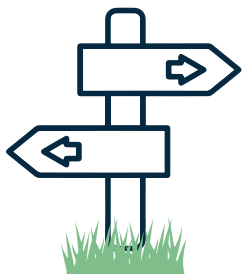
Support of Highly Valued Facilities

In concert with embarking on new investments in the system, it is important to understand the value of existing recreation facilities and programs.

The support, promotion, and reinvestment of these highly valued facilities should be a top priority of County staff and elected officials.

Stearns County residents highly value park and trail facilities in the County, based on input from a public survey completed in the fall of 2017:

- » Quarry Park and the Lake Wobegon Trail are the most popular facilities with over a third of respondents saying they have visited both facilities. Mississippi County Park and Warner Lake Park are close behind with 25% and 16% saying they have visited the parks, respectively.
- » Over 90% of respondents indicated the quality of County parks and trails as good, very good, or excellent.



St. Wendel Tamarack Bog and Fen



Quarry Park

OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT POLICIES

- Support and promote highly valued County park facilities through various marketing channels.
- Embrace public-private partnerships when the private organization's or agency's project aligns with Stearns County priorities.
- Ensure continuity of existing staff and operations by communicating with and protecting valuable parks and recreation staff.
- Consider adding facilities and programs that interpret and celebrate the agricultural identity, pre-settlement history, and natural features within the County.

Public-Private Partnerships

The County and private institutions could benefit from developing partnership projects, such as recreation facilities and amenities that may be owned by the County and operated by a private organization. Partnership facilities could include unique recreation opportunities, campgrounds, nature centers, or food services/concessions.

Interpretation and Cultural Programs

A large part of the County's identity is tied to agrarian lifestyles and values. This identity stems from generations of family farms and a history of success in dairy production. Strengthening this identity over time may have its challenges as farming operations change throughout the County. Preservation of this identity may be possible through interpretation of cultural resources and parks that celebrate the legacy of agriculture in the County.

In addition to the theme of agriculture, interpretation of pre-settlement history and natural features can be valuable additions to parks and recreation facilities and programs. Nature tourism could be explored through promotion and marketing of parks and trails, which is based on attractions that reconnect people with nature and provide outdoor recreational opportunities.

Marketing and Awareness

A park and trail system is useless if people are unaware of it. Stearns County should ensure that it regularly takes a count of how many residents and visitors are using its system of parks, trails, and programs. This information should inform future marketing efforts to promote the existing facilities to those who may be unaware of its existence.

In addition to marketing the system, it is important to provide accurate information for park and trail users on the internet and through print media. Park and trail maps and program information should be regularly updated and provided through various media channels.



Existing
Interpretive
Features



FUNDING

The Stearns County parks and recreation system needs a stable source of funding in order to operate and plan its facilities. Funding opportunities include:

- » Parkland Dedication
- » Outside Funding Sources
- » Partnerships
- » Grant Funding
- » Donations
- » Foundations & Non-Profits



Winter trail grooming is part of the County's park maintenance.



Park maintenance can include underground infrastructure improvements that address stormwater management and drainage.

FUNDING POLICIES

- a. Develop cooperative agreements with local units of government in order to utilize parkland dedication fees for the maximum benefit of County residents.
- b. Educate townships on parkland dedication funding issues and opportunities.



Parkland Dedication

Minnesota Statutes allow local governments to require dedication of land or cash in-lieu of land for parks and trails from new subdivisions. The dedication must be reasonable and rationally related to the recreation demand created by the development.

Stearns County Ordinance 334 addresses parkland dedication through fees or land as part of the County subdivision process. As of April 2020, the ordinance establishes a fee of \$1,000 per lot for a subdivisions of 3 or more lots, or up to 10% of the undeveloped tract's value, whichever is less. Seventy-five percent of the funds collected must be spent in Township of origin, unless there is an agreement otherwise, and may be used only for capital improvements.



Outside Funding Sources

Achieving the goals for the parks and recreation system may take additional funding, not only for large capital investments, but also for park revitalization, park maintenance, and improvements to accessibility, etc. Beyond the general County budget, other sources of funding (e.g., local partnerships, grants and donations) should be explored for implementation.



Partnerships

Public and private partnerships are valuable to community development of a parks and recreation system. These relationships can contribute to the development of parks, operation of athletic facilities, development and implementation of community programming and events, and natural resource management. Partnerships will continue to be important in Stearns County for both facilities and programming. Organizations with partner funding can also provide assistance with design, outreach and maintenance. Partnerships and relationships with private businesses can also result in easements and use agreements for trails across private lands.





Grant Funding

Various grant funding is available throughout Minnesota, and the grants available for parks and trails change frequently. Organizations that may have grants available for parks and trails include the following:

- » Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR)
- » Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)
- » Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- » Minnesota Department of Health (MDH)
- » Minnesota Historical Society
- » Minnesota State Arts Board
- » Regional art councils



Donations

Private donations are another potential funding source. These may be financial donations from individuals or area corporations, or donations of labor from recreation clubs or use agreements. Programs such as “adopt-a-trail” or “adopt-a-park” by an organization, business, or individuals have been used in many communities to help with maintenance tasks and raise awareness.



Foundations & Non-Profits

There are foundations and non-profits that are interested in fulfilling their missions by supporting local projects. There are a number of online tools that can assist with the process of identifying additional foundations that may provide financial support for park, trail, and bikeway improvements. The Minnesota Council of Foundations is a great starting point for identifying foundations. Another good starting point is to consider the businesses within Stearns County and identifying those that have a foundation or charitable giving department. In addition to retailers and manufacturers, be sure to consider businesses such as energy providers and communications companies.



PILLAR: BUSINESS

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BUSINESS

The Business Pillar provides a guide for facilitating commercial activity throughout the County, while recognizing opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic development initiatives at the local and regional level. Stearns County's commitment to this Pillar is further embodied in the following statement and goals.

Pillar Statement

Stearns County will invest in economic development strategies that are rooted in our shared values, skills, and identity. This will require a balanced economy that supports our existing businesses, while attracting new business that encourages entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity.

Goals

1. *Increase the County's regional prosperity by being globally competitive and a business-friendly region.*
2. *Increase the value of County economic production by ensuring that operations sustain natural resources.*
3. *Acknowledge tourism's economic value and the prospective contribution of this industry to both the diversity of the County economic base and the potential for growth.*
4. *Enhance the ability of local retail and commercial business to sustain small cities and rural townsites.*
5. *Continue to promote and encourage multi-jurisdictional partnerships and public-private partnerships that advance economic development opportunities.*
6. *Support opportunities for rural businesses that are compatible with agricultural environments and residential neighborhoods.*

Community
Engagement



INTRODUCTION

The Business Pillar is truly countywide in nature, applying as much to cities as to townships within the County. The County's economic roots in agricultural production are quite evident over much of its area, where agriculture still plays the primary economic role that it has for well over a century (see next page).

The Business Pillar serves as a framework to ensure economic prosperity continues throughout the agricultural community. To achieve this objective, the Business Pillar identifies policy areas that will help promote and expand business activity. This Pillar can be looked to for guidance in helping advance future land use decisions pertaining to business in the agricultural and rural areas.



Business Framework

The Comprehensive Plan continues to recognize agricultural activities as a cornerstone to the County's economy and identity. However, the County will need to adapt to changing markets, socioeconomic trends, and agricultural practices in order to maintain the County's rural economies. The County's agricultural production is a potential source of economic growth, but is also at risk due to the volatility of commodity markets, changing agricultural practices, and land use conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural development.

The Agricultural Pillar and Emerging Trends sections of this Plan has recognized some of these trends and challenges. Examples include:

- » **Aging:** As farmers age, farms tend to switch hands to larger corporations as future generations are choosing not to take over the farm.
- » **Land Sales:** The character and intensity of the agricultural landscape may change over time as farmers are choosing to sell their land to larger operations.
- » **Flexibility:** Rural residents and farmers are looking for greater flexibility to do more with their land to achieve economic prosperity, as farming becomes more difficult from a financial perspective.

To help address these trends, the Business Pillar has established policy areas to strengthen the rural economy.

Looking Beyond Agriculture



The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the County's economic diversity expands well beyond the agricultural sector. The urban areas also play a pivotal role in the County's economic diversity, serving as activity hubs for commerce and jobs. Much of this planning is done through partnerships that bring together cities, townships, local Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Authorities (EDAs), educational institutions, and private investors/businesses. Therefore, it is important to recognize planning for the County's economic prosperity falls well beyond this Plan. One should look to the various planning documents at the local and regional level to help inform future economic development decisions (e.g., local comprehensive plans).

THE AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

Minnesota is an agricultural state, and most Minnesota counties have a share of Minnesota's agricultural production. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Stearns County was, in 2017, the top Minnesota County in agricultural sales with total receipts of almost \$748,000 million (see Table 6.1). The County's ranking in the state will vary year by year depending on which commodities are particularly valuable in a given year and favorable weather patterns. Regardless, the County is always among the top production areas in the State as measured by total receipts. Most of the economic value of the County's agricultural production is in animal agriculture (see Table 6.2). In 2017, animal agriculture accounted for \$569 million (76%) of total agricultural production.

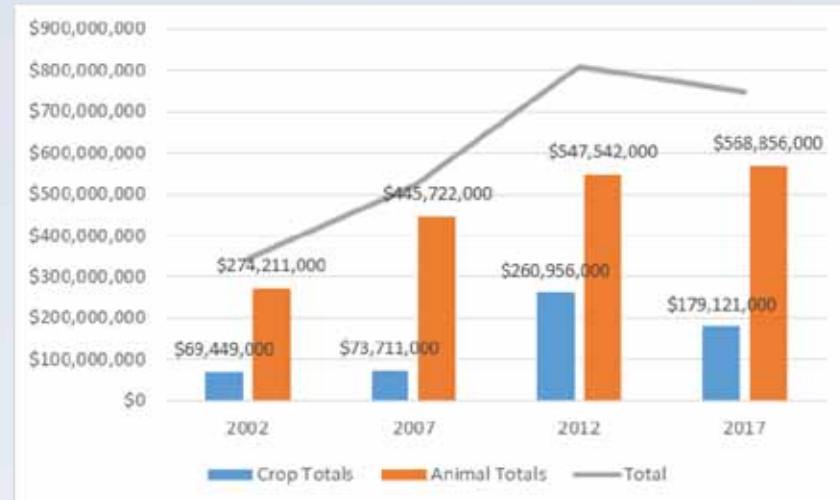


Table 6.1 Stearns County Agricultural Sales (2002 - 2017)

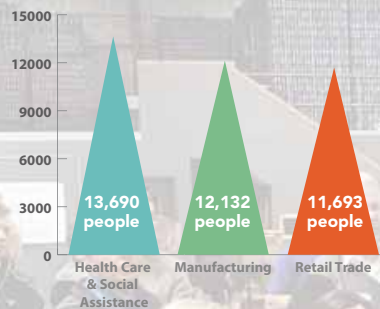
MINNESOTA COUNTY	TOTAL RECEIPTS OF STATE	SALES RECEIPTS OR SHIPMENTS
1. STEARNS COUNTY	4.1%	\$747.978 million
2. MARTIN COUNTY	3.5%	\$635.52 million
3. RENVILLE COUNTY	3.3%	\$609.19 million
4. NOBLES COUNTY	2.8%	\$518.97 million
5. BLUE EARTH COUNTY	2.6%	\$483.50 million
STATE TOTAL		\$18.40 billion

Table 6.2 Top 5 Counties in Agricultural Sales (2017)



ECONOMIC SNAP-SHOT

The economy of Stearns County employs 85.6k people. The largest industries in Stearns County, MN are:



Males in Stearns County have an average income that is 1.31 times higher than the average income of females, which is \$52,870. The income inequality in Stearns County (measured using the Gini index) is 0.467, which is lower than the national average.

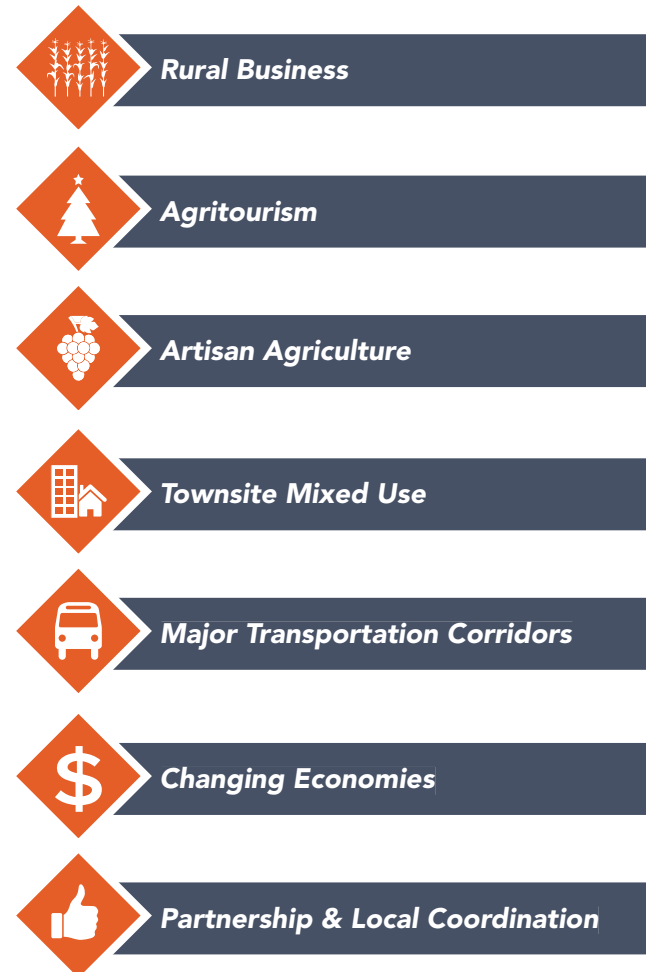
The highest paying industries are:



Median household income in Stearns County, MN is \$59,564.

Focus Areas

Stearns County has defined a set of focus areas that will help create greater flexibility for business opportunities in the agricultural areas. The focus areas are intended to recognize the diversity of business needs and growth pressures facing the county (see sidebar). Unlike other Pillars of this Plan, the Business policies are truly countywide in nature, applying as much to cities as to townships within the County.



(Source: 2017 Census Est.)



RURAL BUSINESS

Public engagement efforts helped reaffirm the County's agricultural identity from an economic development perspective. This identity continues to embrace a "rural character" through a rich history of family farms and agrarian economic lifestyles. The public engagement efforts also recognized the need to adapt to changing markets and socioeconomic trends to stay viable in the agricultural parts of the County. Businesses that are considered appropriate for the agricultural/rural areas should be able to meet the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors. Examples of these types of businesses include:

- » **Rural Business:** These are small, privately owned businesses conducted primarily by residents of the property. Typical home businesses in the County include "cottage" type industries or services, ranging from woodworking, cabinetry, contractors, small repair shops, seamstresses and beauty salons. Other types of business may include those that specialize in some form of service, such as accounting, web development, and legal guidance.
- » **Light Manufacturing/Industrial:** These types of uses are typically located along major transportation corridors (e.g., Highway 23 through Rockville, Richmond, and Cold Spring) for access and visibility purpose, and in areas that do not demand a high level of wastewater treatment or water supply. These types of business typically employ anywhere from 15 to 100+ employees.
- » **Commercial Services:** There are smaller commercial uses scattered throughout the County, such as convenience stores and gas stations. These uses are typically located near townships or at major intersections. There are also smaller commercial shops that have popped up throughout the County (e.g., gift shops), which are regulated by the County.
- » **Clean Energy:** Installing clean energy sources, such as wind and solar can be viewed as a business venture. These systems can help reduce energy costs associated with a residential home or farming/business operation. Larger systems also provide a source of income as collected energy is sold back to the utility provider. The State of Minnesota and Stearns County regulates wind and solar energy systems within the County.

RURAL BUSINESS POLICIES

- a. Rural business should not alter the rural character of the neighborhood and should not create negative impacts on the public health, safety, and general welfare of adjacent property owners.
- b. Rural businesses in the agricultural areas should utilize the properties existing infrastructure and buildings.
- c. Encourage rural businesses seeking expansion in agricultural areas to locate near Major Transportation Corridors, Townsite Mixed Use areas, or Transitional Areas (see Figure 6.1).
- d. Rural businesses in agricultural areas must embrace the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts between adjacent land uses and natural resources.





AGRITOURISM

A large part of the County's identity is tied to agrarian lifestyles and values. This identity stems from generations of family farms and a history of leading the State in dairy production. Strengthening this identity over time may have its challenges as farming operations change throughout the County. To help overcome these challenges, similar counties have helped strengthen their agricultural identity through agritourism and nature tourism:

- » **Agritourism** is the business of establishing farms as destinations for educational experiences and entertainment uses, while helping increase the farm income.
- » **Nature tourism** is based on attractions that reconnect people with nature and provide outdoor recreational opportunities.

Many aspects of agritourism and nature tourism have been established directly or indirectly throughout the County. Some of the most widely recognized events include Breakfast on the Farm and local festivals that celebrate its agricultural history (e.g., Pioneer Days in Albany). Other examples include regional destinations such as the Lake Wobegon Trail, Dairy Land Trail, and Quarry Park. Combined, these programs and amenities create a unique identity for Stearns County.

"Minnesota State Statute 604A.40. defines agritourism activity as an activity carried out on a farm or ranch that allows organizations or members of the general public, for recreational, entertainment, charitable, or educational purposes, to view, enjoy, or participate in rural activities, including, but not limited to: farming; viticulture; wine making; ranching; and historical, cultural, farm stay, gleaning, harvest-your-own, or natural activities and attractions. An activity is an agritourism activity whether or not the participant pays to participate in the activity."

Examples of Agritourism

- » Agricultural Museums
- » Breakfast/Dinner on the Farm
- » Corn Mazes
- » Cut-your-own Christmas Tree Farms
- » Demonstration Farms
- » Event Venues (Barn Weddings)
- » Garden & Barn Tours
- » Hay Rides
- » Living History Farms
- » On-farm Farmers' Markets
- » Petting and Feeding zoos
- » Pumpkin Picking Patches
- » Rural Bed & Breakfasts and Farm-stays
- » U-Pick Operations
- » Winery, Brewery, and Distillery Tours/Tasting



Collegeville
Orchards

AGRITOURISM POLICIES

- a. Agritourism businesses are subject to zoning restrictions, building codes, compliance with the Minnesota Accessibility Code, taxation, and business permits.
- b. Review high attendance agritourism activities to ensure mitigation of negative traffic impacts.
- c. Agritourism-related businesses located in the agricultural areas of the County should follow the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts with adjacent land uses and natural resources.



Animal
Agritourism

“Moving forward, Stearns County should look for opportunities to enhance its agricultural identity through agritourism and nature tourism. Supporting these initiatives will help bolster rural economic development goals, supplement farm incomes, and create unique experiences for visitors and residents.”



ARTISAN AGRICULTURE

By definition, artisan agricultural uses are small scale farms that can range from a few chickens in the backyard to a local farm producing meat, cheese, and honey, or breads for sale at your community's farmers market. The artisan farm has grown in popularity as people become more aware of their positive impacts on the environment and community. The popularity in other markets, such as organic farming, farm-to-table, and artisan products (e.g., breads, honey, beer, and wine) has also inspired younger populations to take on small scale farming.

"The Comprehensive Plan supports artisan farms or small scale farming throughout the County."

Stearns County's Zoning Districts will primarily dictate the appropriate locations for these types of uses to minimize potential conflicts between adjacent land uses. Moving forward, the County will need to consider how the Zoning Ordinance can provide flexibility to accommodate new markets. Areas for consideration include:

- » **Artisan Zoning:** Artisan zoning is an approach to land use and development that provides space for small-scale operations that produce little to no vibration, noise, fumes, or other nuisances. These type of uses can fit within a wide variety of agricultural, industrial, commercial, and even residential districts.
- » **Event Space:** Stearns County has experienced a growing interest in the conversion of barns and other buildings to event space that can be used for weddings, parties, and meetings. The conversion of a barn to a different use is subject to Minnesota State Building Code and the Stearns County Zoning Ordinance. Introducing food and beverages as part of these uses are also subject to Stearns County's Food, Beverage, and Lodging Ordinances. These ordinances are in place for public safety, health, and welfare purposes.
- » **Hunting & Fishing:** Stearns County's vast open spaces, woodlands, and waters attract hunters and fisherman from across the state. Artisan shops, tourism based businesses, and hunting/fishing

supply shops rely on these visitors and the various hunting/fishing seasons as a source of income.

- » **Farmers Markets:** Zoning language should be crafted that allows farmers markets to occur in particular areas of the County that do not disrupt adjacent areas.
- » **Tasting Rooms:** Tasting rooms are typically associated with wineries, breweries, cideries, cheese shops, and distilleries. The Zoning Ordinance can help facilitate the orderly development of these uses, within agricultural zoning districts and certain commercial, industrial and residential zoning districts, to encourage the economic development of the local agricultural industry, provide for the sampling and sales of value-added products, and protect the agricultural character and long-term agricultural production of agricultural lands.

ARTISAN AGRICULTURE POLICIES

- a. Permitting of small-scale farms, hobby farms, and home business will be guided by Stearns County's Zoning Districts and Ordinance.
- b. Farming operations and home businesses may be subject to zoning restrictions, building codes, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, taxation, and business permits.
- c. Producers who provide food products, food stands, or restaurants must consider local and state food safety and public health laws that may apply, in addition to laws governing liquor licenses.
- d. Businesses located in the agricultural areas of the County should follow the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts with adjacent land uses and natural resources.



Redhead Creamery in Brooten, MN (Stearns County)



Bad Habit Brewing in St. Joseph, MN (Stearns County)



St. Joseph Farmer's Market



TOWNSITE MIXED USE

These areas are defined by specific landmarks, intersections or identifiable places. Most of these nodes were established in the late 1800's as central hubs for agricultural business. The number of businesses within these nodes is relatively small. Types of businesses can range from implement stores, storage facilities, restaurants/bars, convenience/gas, and in some cases religious institutions. Smaller subdivisions and single-family residential homes are also common land uses in and around these areas.

Although incorporation is not anticipated, there may be opportunities to allow limited development in and around these centers. In order to maintain rural development patterns, new commercial development should be centralized within existing commercial nodes. Development should avoid linear type patterns that would occur along transportation corridors. Instead, development should be focused at commercial nodes.

Clustering development in this manner will help businesses support one another, providing successful and viable businesses.



Townsite Business Examples

TOWNSITE MIXED USE POLICIES

- Ensure a compatible design transition between land uses including retaining existing features of the landscape as defining elements of site design (fence rows, ditches, wetlands, woods) or incorporating greater setback and landscaping standards.
- Encourage building and site design in new commercial projects that reflect the historical context and identity.
- Encourage home businesses (e.g., cottage industries and beauty salons) to expand and relocate to Townsites.
- Development in the Townsite Mixed Use areas need to embrace the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts between adjacent land uses and natural resources.



Marty (Townsite Mixed Use Example)



MAJOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

The County's transportation network plays an important role in our economy by linking producers to markets, workers to jobs, residents to services, and students to schools. These corridors are also attractive locations for development given their visibility and access to markets. However, certain transportation corridors may be better suited for development, while others will continue to remain agricultural or undeveloped. Those that are more likely to experience development will have access to municipal services or located within a growth area identified by a township or city.

"The Future Land Use Plan map (see Figure 6.1) has recognized these corridors as Major Transportation Corridors. This land use designation essentially serves as an overlay, providing direction towards design standards more so than land use."



Land Use Patterns

- Most of the interchanges along I-94 have been recognized in local comprehensive plans as areas of opportunity for development.
- The State Highways have attracted strong industrial and commercial growth, as well as lake-related recreational and residential development pressure in certain areas (e.g., Highway 23). Light industrial/manufacturing uses can also be seen along these corridors.
- Corridors that are more rural in nature provide opportunities for smaller scale development that do not require municipal services. These corridors may be more attractive for rural subdivisions, light-industrial/manufacturing, and business that complement the agrarian lifestyle.

MAJOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR POLICIES

- Access to Major Transportation Corridors from individual properties/parcels should follow the road authorities access management guidelines.
- Roadway design should be guided first by the desired character of the road followed closely by the function and volume of traffic.
- Site planning and building orientation should direct visual elements of the site (i.e. landscaping and architectural details) toward the primary corridor. Setbacks should vary for residential and commercial uses.
- Commercial uses should be oriented principally around key intersections and commercial nodes.
- Residential uses should be allowed along the corridors, but should have increased setbacks proportional to the intensity of the traffic function of the corridor.
- Development along a Major Transportation Corridor must embrace the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors to minimize conflicts.

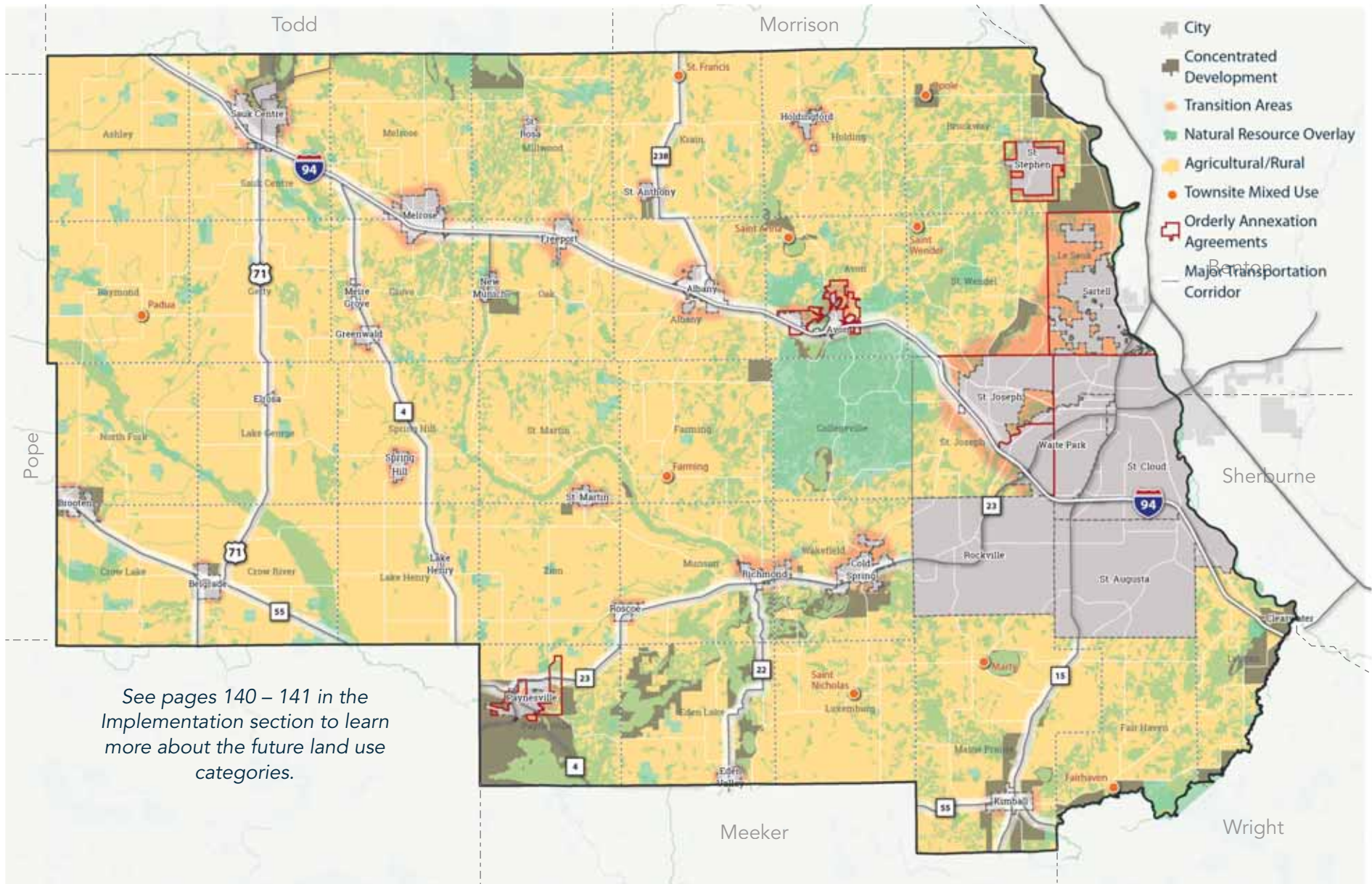


Figure 6.1 Future Land Use Plan Map



CHANGING ECONOMIES

Stearns County recognizes the changing technologies and economies that can influence the County's job growth. Rather than speculate on how or when these trends will impact the future of Stearns County, this plan highlights a few topics for future consideration in long-range plans.

- » **eCommerce:** Retailers in general have been impacted by the rise of online commerce, competing markets and behavioral change. In fact, online retail now constitutes a larger share of shopping in the U.S. This impact has played a role in a shrinking market for big-box retailers; resulting in some big-box stores closing or reducing the size of their building's footprint. Other impacts include a growing number of trucks transporting goods to residential homes. Heavier truck traffic may have impacts on County and Township roads.
- » **Circular Economies:** More Minnesota companies (e.g., 3M, Cargill, General Mills, Medtronic and Target) are embracing a circular economy. Circular economies are closed looped sustainable systems. Products and energy created on site happens efficiently and renewably, creating a circular flow of resources. For example, reusing a by-product (e.g., steam) to create a sustainable energy source is one of many close looped technologies. A more simplistic example of a circular economy includes the use of manure from feedlots to help fertilize farm fields. Other growing markets may include specialty crops that are being grown and processed on site, such as hops to hop-pellets, milk to cheese, and apples to cider.
- » **Autonomous & Electric Vehicles:** Over the next 30 years, ride-sharing, autonomous vehicles and increased access to public transportation are anticipated to change how future generations move about the region. The biggest unknown is the advancement of autonomous vehicle and its impact on the economy from how we get to work and transport goods. We do know that the demand for electrical vehicles are growing in popularity. The electrification of the vehicle fleet will also have impacts on the County. As more people switch over to hybrid-electric or fully electric vehicles, there will be greater demand for charging stations in rural areas.
- » **Automation:** Many industries (e.g., manufacturing and food processing) are finding business efficiency through the use of machines and technology to make processes run on their own without manpower (automation). This is also experienced to some degree in the agricultural sector as larger equipment is becoming more automated. This advancement in technology has reduced the number of jobs in certain sectors; however, there is a growing demand for labor in the technology/automation sector.

CHANGING ECONOMY POLICIES

- a. Support educational institutions and programs that enhance the County's labor force's skills to adapt to changing technologies and markets.
- b. Monitor changing markets and adjust zoning regulations accordingly to accommodate new uses.
- c. Program and prioritize transportation investments that address changing technologies and transportation needs.
- d. Support innovative business models and new markets that enhance the County's economy.



PARTNERSHIPS & LOCAL COORDINATION POLICIES

- a. Strengthen economic connections between the metropolitan area and other Stearns County cities and townships.
- b. Promote alignment of economic and workforce development goals, including encouraging post-secondary education and skills training to support high-growth and high-wage jobs.
- c. Develop and promote a regional marketing strategy
- d. Develop and ensure consistent regional branding efforts that promote local businesses and locally made and/or designed products.
- e. Campaign for competitively-priced, high-speed broadband infrastructure throughout the region
- f. Encourage industrial development within existing communities, including redevelopment of existing sites and filling of industrial and business parks.



PARTNERSHIPS & LOCAL COORDINATION

Most of the non-agricultural economic development will occur in the County's urban areas. The Comprehensive Plan's public engagement efforts (e.g., participation by local Chambers of Commerce) also determined that cities have a variety of needs to meet their economic development goals. These needs ranged from filling industrial parks, attracting new residents, creating development to help pay for recent infrastructure improvements, and new approaches to land use and natural resource conflicts.

Development opportunities can be difficult to balance in an effort to not over burden infrastructure or natural resource and not conflict with the agricultural base. Particularly as one moves out of the metropolitan region, diversifying the local economic base may require substantial investments in infrastructure (e.g., telecommunications, transportation, water and wastewater). Some of these investments are described in local comprehensive plans, while larger regional initiatives or infrastructure needs are described in their respective plans (see Table 6.3).



Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation Event

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLANS

DOCUMENT	ADOPTED	AGENCY CONTACT
LOCAL COMPREHENSIVE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS	NA	Cities and Townships
METRO BUS LONG RANGE TRANSIT PLAN	2015	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
ON-THE-ROAD BICYCLE FACILITIES REPORT	2016	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
REGIONAL FREIGHT FRAMEWORK	2018	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
REGIONAL MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS SUPPLEMENTAL DATA AND ANALYSIS	2018	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
REGIONAL PAVEMENT DATA COLLECTION AND PAVEMENT MANAGEMENT STUDY	2015	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS	2019	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
ST. CLOUD AREA PLANNING ORGANIZATION (APO) LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN	2014	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
STEARNS COUNTY 2040 TRANSPORTATION PLAN	2015	Stearns County Public Works
STEARNS COUNTY BROADBAND STUDY	2020	Stearns County Administration
STEARNS COUNTY CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN	Updated Annually	Stearns County Budget and Finance
STEARNS COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE WATER PLAN	2007	Stearns County Environmental Services
STEARNS COUNTY SUBSURFACE SEWAGE TREATMENT SYSTEM PROGRAM REPORT	Updated Annually	Stearns County Environmental Services

Table 6.3 Regional Plans of Note

"Stearns County plays a role in ensuring that local economic development is not at cross purposes with County land use goals, infrastructure plans, and with the economic needs of non-incorporated areas. Rather than having municipalities and townships compete with each other in order to attract development, the County can facilitate a cooperative process that works to maximize opportunity and create synergy. "



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

In 2017 Stearns, Benton, Sherburne, and Wright Counties drafted a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) planning document with a multi-jurisdictional task force comprised of representatives of local governments throughout the four counties. The CEDS focuses on four cornerstones to build a strong region. These cornerstones include:

- » Human Capital: developing, retaining, and attracting talent
- » Economic Competitiveness: making Central Minnesota an attractive environment for business
- » Community Resources: maintaining rural values and the heritage of the region
- » Foundational Assets: collaborative approaches/strategies for cost-effective infrastructure

This document can be used as a resource to learn more about the region's economic profile, such as demographics, labor force, income, wages, and occupations.

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PILLAR: CONNECTIVITY

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CONNECTIVITY

The Connectivity Pillar pays tribute to the community resources that help support our quality of life, while enhancing the vitality of each Pillar. These resources range from county buildings that provide community services (e.g., human services and emergency response teams) to gathering places (schools, parks and religious institutions) that create social cohesion. As a predominantly rural county, the Connectivity Pillar emphasizes the importance in providing reliable networks (physically and digitally) that connect people to these resources. Stearns County's commitment to this Pillar is further embodied in the following statement and goals.

Pillar Statement

Stearns County's infrastructure, facilities, and services play an important role in connecting the places where we live, work and play. We recognize the inherent responsibility in maintaining these systems in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner. Enhancing these systems will require public and private partnerships that strive to maintain our quality of life.

Goals

1. *Develop and maintain a transportation system that promotes the safety, mobility, and access of all users.*
2. *Coordinate infrastructure and service needs with development, and encourage development where the infrastructure and services are adequate to serve that growth.*
3. *Strengthen our regional role in connecting rural and agricultural economies with metropolitan areas through reliable transportation networks.*
4. *Deploy fast and reliable internet technologies that are equitable, affordable, and take advantage of existing infrastructure assets.*
5. *Provide County infrastructure, services, and facilities that benefit the residents of the County in a cost-effective manner.*
6. *Maintain a state of readiness to meet natural, man-made, and technological disasters on a local or countywide basis.*

INTRODUCTION

Stearns County's services and assets provide an important means for community development and the enhancement of the quality of life for citizens. The primary services provided by Stearns County include:

- » Maintaining County roads.
- » Enhancing and maintaining the public health and social welfare of the County.
- » Providing law enforcement and related administration of criminal justice services.
- » Managing and maintaining County solid waste facilities and waste facility planning.
- » Providing information to local communities and coordinating sanitary sewer treatment and disposal.

Stearns County Mission and Values

Provide exceptional public services to assure a safe, healthy, and vibrant County for all.

- » **Professional:** We are ethical, reliable, accountable for our actions, and strive for continuous improvement.
- » **Responsive:** We serve our clients and customers with a keen awareness of their needs
- » **Approachable:** We are eager to serve, friendly, helpful, and treat everyone with respect and dignity.
- » **Collaborative:** We serve the public best with teamwork and community partnership.
- » **Fair & Equitable:** We strive to eliminate disparities and provide impartial assistance to our employees and the people we serve.

Connectivity Framework

The Connectivity framework is built around Stearns County's Mission and Values, and the services/resources that contribute to our quality of life. Figure 7.1 shows County buildings, parks, hospitals, police and fire stations, and civic uses. Residents are largely connected to these resources through transportation systems (roads, rail, and air), and to a larger extent, the internet and telecommunications.

- » **County Buildings:** These buildings house various County Departments that offer a range of services and programs that meet our daily needs. Courthouse Square, located in downtown St. Cloud, is the headquarters for County emergency, legal and administrative services.. Other County facilities (e.g., Public Works) are strategically located throughout the county to meet various needs. In 2009, the County opened a service center in Waite Park that will soon houses the Environmental Services Department and other land departments.
- » **County Parks:** The County's park and trail system provide opportunities for recreation, social gatherings, and active lifestyles. The Stearns County Parks Department was established in 1974 and carries the responsibility for acquisition, planning, development, administration, and daily maintenance of over 2,600 acres of parks and trails. The Park's Department is located in Quarry Park.
- » **Emergency Services:** Emergency services in Stearns County can be divided into three categories: police, medical (ambulance) and fire department jurisdictions. Most areas of Stearns County outside major cities are served by the Patrol Division of the Stearns County Sheriff's Office. These areas are also provided primarily by volunteer fire and medical response teams. All emergency service communications are provided by the Sheriff's Office Communications Division, also known as the 911 Center. The Center dispatches for 30 fire and rescue departments, 17 police departments, and six ambulance services.
- » **Civic Uses:** The civic uses depicted in Figure 7.1 range greatly between public and semi-public uses. These may reflect the location of city halls, town halls, and schools. These uses play an integral part in building a sense of place and social cohesion.
- » **Transportation Systems:** Figure 7.1 highlights some of the County's important transportation systems (rail and air) that support our economy and quality of life.



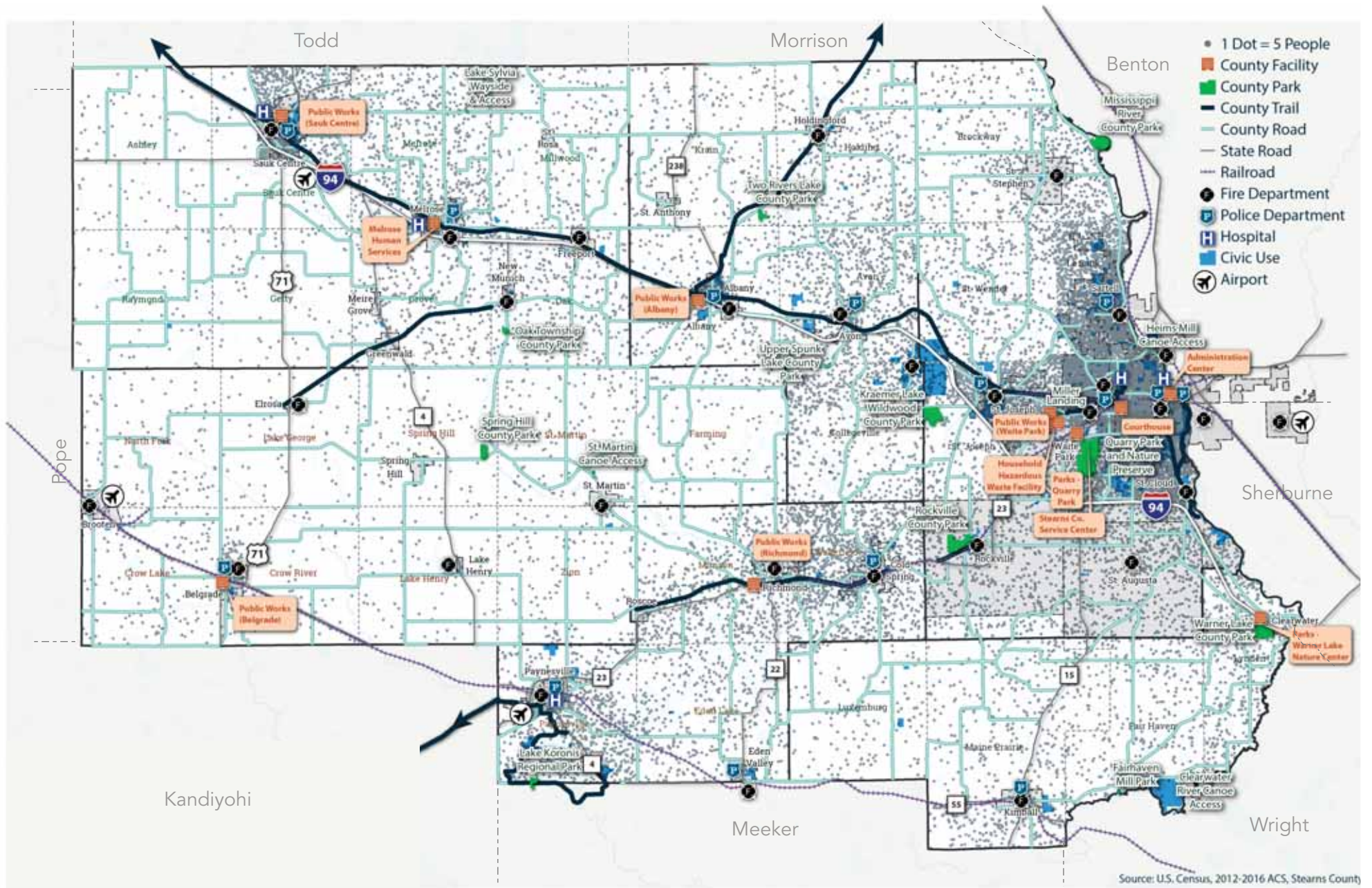


Figure 7.1 Map of County Facilities

Focus Areas

Stearns County has identified a set of focus areas that will help strengthen our connections to resources (i.e., transportation networks, county resources, and internet connectivity), while being more sustainable and resilient to changing environments.



Transportation Networks



County Resources



Internet Connectivity



Sustainability and Resiliency



TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS

The automobile continues to be a major mode of transportation and will be the primary mode of choice for many residents who live in rural parts of the County. This system will be relied on heavily by the rural community to access resources and services for the foreseeable future. Other transportation systems that play an important role to our economy and quality of life include freight, rail, and air. Long-term planning for these systems are done at all levels of government (federal, state, county and local) and through private entities. Stearns County's long-term transportation goals and needs are articulated in a separated document, which is known as the Stearns County 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

"The 2040 LRTP will continue to serve as a planning document for future transportation decisions. Maintaining and expanding this system is critical in connecting people to their destinations and county resources."

2040 Long Range Transportation Plan

The 2040 LRTP was adopted in 2016 and typically updated every ten years. The Plan prioritizes needs into specific actionable projects, prioritizes improvements to accommodate growth and the County's financial capacity, and presents new transportation initiatives and strategies. Plan elements included:

- » An assessment of existing conditions and identification of critical needs.
- » Establishment of long-term goals and objectives.
- » Preparation of updated traffic forecasts for both rural and metropolitan areas of the County.
- » Development and evaluation of alternatives to address existing and future system operational and capacity deficiencies.
- » A future system planning analysis that proposes functional classification, jurisdictional and designation updates, along with safety, freight, trail, and transit improvements.
- » Preparation of project scoping, cost, and priorities for future safety, capacity, and modal improvements, and a financial gap analysis for system preservation.
- » Preparation of plan implementation strategies and funding opportunities to advance recommended system improvements.

TRANSPORTATION SNAP-SHOT

The County's 2040 Transportation Plan was completed in 2016. The Plan highlights and evaluates various strategies to accomplish a comprehensive, multimodal transportation system. Many of these strategies focus on education, enforcement, and engineering standards to ensure people can move throughout the county safely and efficiently. The County's Transportation Goals for the future include:

State of the County

The county owns, operates, and maintains:

966

Miles of
County Road

90

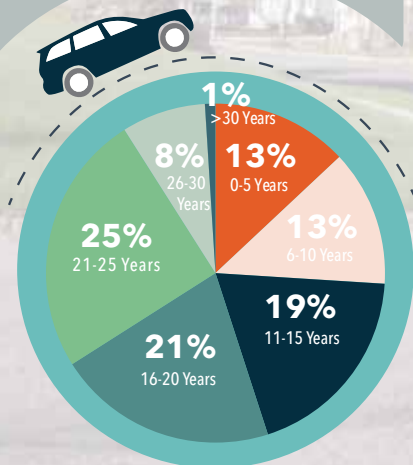
Miles of off-
road trails

123

Bridges

Age of Asphalt and Pavement

Fifty-five percent of Stearns County's asphalt roadways are over 15 years old.



Safety: Develop and maintain a transportation system that promotes the safety of all users.



Access and Mobility: Develop a transportation system that increases the accessibility and mobility options of all users.



Preservation and Maintenance: Develop a transportation system that is sustainable (e.g., cost-feasible), maintains a state of good repair, and explores low-cost/high-benefit solutions to satisfy public transportation priorities.



Coordination and Collaboration: Maximize intergovernmental cooperation and coordination.



Fiscally Responsible: Effectively and efficiently use available transportation funding.

Bridge Conditions

117 Adequate 2 Structurally Deficient
4 Functionally Obsolete



TRANSPORTATION TRENDS



Access & Maintenance: While most people may experience relatively good mobility around the County today, that may not always be true in the future without proper care for the County's existing transportation assets and multi-modal investments. The LRTP lays out a variety of financing mechanisms to ensure that Stearns County's maintenance practices don't fall behind industry roadway standards. Beyond maintenance, proper care also requires careful planning for future access onto the county roadway system (i.e., access management). The mobility of a roadway today can drastically change with future haphazard placement of access points to the roadway. The County is dedicated to planning for and maintaining proper access according to the MnDOT access management manual guidelines and best practices.



Aging in Place: Stearns County will need to take into consideration the aging population and their ability to access places they need to go, such as residential areas, churches, health care facilities, employment opportunities (as we anticipate the age of those still seeking employment will continue to rise), grocery stores, and drug stores. The majority of these facilities are typically located in the urbanized areas. Thus, older people living in rural areas may have more difficulty accessing certain facilities and services because of their location and further distance from the urban centers. The County should plan for different types of transportation systems, such as dial-a-ride, which provides economical transportation options for the community.



Autonomous Vehicles: Technological advancements are always making new things possible and potentially more affordable than in the past. Transformations in how Stearns County residents get around are actively shaping the future of the county. It will be important for Stearns County to keep up with the fast paced tech world and recognize the positive and negative impacts it can have on the transportation system. While the timing of mass adoption of autonomous vehicles (AV) is unknown, they will dramatically shape how people will get around. This plan does not address these anticipated changes given its unknowns. Instead, it continues to emphasize the importance of multimodal options over the personal vehicles. Stearns County should continue to monitor the changes in transportation technologies.



Emergency Services: A reliable transportation network is critical to the response times for emergency services (e.g., police, fire and medical). In fact, research has suggested people, who needed emergency medical attention and lived further away from a hospital, had an increased likelihood of mortality compared to those who lived closer to a hospital (source: Journal of American Medical Association – July 2019).

If residential development increases in the more rural areas of Stearns County, emergency service response times can lengthen due to distance and congestion on rural roads. While this issue has not yet been identified as a current problem, it should be considered as part of the review of proposed residential subdivisions.



Farm-to-Market: Transporting the goods produced by Stearns County farmers to local and regional markets and vice-versa is essential to the economic vitality of the county. Farmers depend on a reliable transportation network that can supports the movement of goods. Farm-to-market routes should be able to handle larger equipment sizes and weights, which can add stress to the county road. Maintaining a freight network to transport goods (e.g., crops, livestock, and aggregate) will be an ongoing priority for the County's economic viability. The 2040 LRTP provides a framework for the County's ten-ton network and freight priorities.



Rail, Freight and Air: Retailers in general have been impacted by the rise of online commerce, competing markets and behavioral change. In fact, online retail (eCommerce) now constitutes a larger share of shopping in the United States. A strong presence of online retail and day-to-day deliveries have become increasingly more important to the national economy. This phenomenon is also reflected at a regional level throughout the St. Cloud metropolitan area and the County's proximity to the Twins Cities. The demands of customers to receive seemingly any product of their choosing within a moment's notice. This trend will continue to increase air, rail and freight traffic. It is imperative that these trends be accounted for and planned for accordingly to maintain the viability of our transportation systems, while meeting expectation of the consumer and business community.

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM POLICIES

- a. Adhere to the goals, objectives, and recommendations stated in the Stearns County 2040 Transportation Plan.
- b. Embrace Stearns County's Access Management Guidelines.
- c. Prepare for widespread adoption of automated and connected vehicles,
- d. Prioritize transportation investments that provide multiple benefits beyond single-occupancy automobile travel.
- e. Support freight, rail, and air transportation investments that improve the region's economic initiatives.



Multimodal Options: Connectivity for all of Stearns County's residents means improving all ways to get around. An increasingly aging and diversifying population also means that the future population may have different transportation needs. Transit (including on-demand mobility services) and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure will play a bigger role in moving people around in the future. These modes of transportation include many benefits including; a smaller carbon footprint, greater affordability, healthier lifestyles, and less dependence on the user's ability to operate a personal automobile.

Other considerations will need to include multimodal options for commuters. Many residents are traveling greater distances to reach their jobs (rural to urban). Over 17%¹ of the population travels more than 50 miles to reach their job. Expanding local and regional transit options (e.g., Northstar Commuter Rail) will need to be an ongoing effort.

Safe Routes to School: Safe Routes to School is a national initiative to increase safety and promote walking and bicycling for America's youth. The Safe Routes to school program will assist in providing infrastructure and non-infrastructure grants to build trails, paths, and safe connections to local schools. Planning for safe routes to schools will require specific attention to certain elements such as bike routes, complete street treatments, sidewalk networks, pedestrian/bicycle amenities and wayfinding signage. Combined, these elements can create Safe Routes to Schools.

¹ Source: On the Map 2017 U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Economic Studies



COUNTY SERVICES & RESOURCES

Critical to the success of providing County services in Stearns County is the balancing of rural and urban service accessibility. This includes the convenient location of important County services and the expansion of services as needed. Currently the majority of citizens feel County facilities and services adequately meet their needs. The continued success of these services will rely on careful analysis and attention to citizen needs and desires that may warrant expansion of County services.

The planning for County services falls outside of this Comprehensive Plan's purview. However, the Comprehensive Plan's Pillars can be a source of guidance and direction when developing department plans. The Pillars are committed to advancing equitable opportunities for all. It is important to note that a focus on equity does not mean providing equal access to the same amount of resources. Equity is focused on making sure everyone has the resources they need to lead a healthy, productive life.

Stearns County Services

Stearns County provides a wealth of services and resources for its population, while planning for a diverse set of needs. County services and programs are housed under 17 different departments that employ over 900 people. The largest department includes Human Services, which provides some of the most important services to area residents, which include public health initiatives, community corrections, family and children services, and community support services.



Stearns County Courthouse



COUNTY SERVICES AND RESOURCES SYSTEM POLICIES

- a. Coordinate provision of services with other agencies, jurisdictions and private sector service providers to maximize efficiency.
- b. Recognize and consider existing or planned County facilities during the subdivision review process to assess the ability to provide services to new development.
- c. Plan for the future maintenance and/or expansion of County facilities and services by monitoring growth trends and demographic and socioeconomic indicators.
- d. Ensure reasonable access to County services and facilities, including access for transit-dependent populations.





INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

Reliable and affordable internet (wireless or broadband), also known as e-Connectivity plays a fundamental role in our economic activity. More importantly, access to high-speed internet is vital for attracting and retaining businesses. It also helps support a larger population of workers choosing to telecommute from home and serves as a catalyst in fostering entrepreneurship and small business growth in rural parts of the County.

Internet connectivity acts as a catalyst for rural prosperity by enabling efficient, modern communications between rural households, county services, schools, and health care facilities. The benefits are far reaching, which have been recognized not only at a national level, but also at the state. It is a state goal that no later than 2022, all Minnesota businesses and homes have access to high-speed broadband that provides minimum download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of at least three megabits per second; and no later than 2026, all Minnesota businesses and homes have access to at least one provider of broadband with download speeds of at least 100 megabits per second and upload speeds of at least 20 megabits per second.

BROADBAND INTERNET CONNECTIVITY POLICIES

- a. Adopt a "dig once" approach to align efforts for the planning, relocation, installation, or improvement of broadband conduit within the right-of-way in conjunction with any current or planned construction, including, trunk highways and bridges.
- b. Facilitate the timely and efficient deployment of broadband conduit or other broadband facilities on County-owned lands and buildings.

Stearns County Broadband Study (2019)

In January 2019, the County engaged NEO Connect (NEO) to provide the County with the information needed to analyze, select and implement the best solutions to improve broadband connectivity across the study area.

"The Vision for the Broadband Feasibility Study states "All Stearns County residents will be able to use convenient, affordable world-class broadband networks that enable us to survive and thrive in our communities and across the globe."

A summary of the study's recommendations include:

1. Implement broadband-friendly policies and ordinances in each of the cities, towns and counties to help reduce the cost of broadband expansion.
2. Work with Stearns Electric and Great River Electric to streamline the permitting process and gain access to their utility poles. Continue discussions in perfecting easements for telecommunications use, joint builds and shared capital costs in building middle mile infrastructure and potential collaboration in reducing costs of deploying fiber.
3. Follow up on discussion with the service providers for collaboration. Conversations regarding collaboration and partnership to share in the capital costs and leveraging grant funding are underway with several service providers.
4. Leverage grant funding – namely, the MN Border to Border Broadband Development Grant Program, the Economic Development Administration and USDA's Rural Utilities Services Reconnect program to pay for a significant part of these builds. These grant programs will pay for 50-65% of the capital costs to build fiber to homes and businesses.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY POLICIES

- a. Support policies, programs, best practices, and efforts that promote reuse of resources, energy efficient equipment and development, and reduction of energy use.
- b. Prepare, plan, and program for natural, man-made, and technological disasters on a local or countywide basis.

Existing Solar



Climate Change

The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee worked on ways to integrate sustainability and resiliency themes throughout this plan. Climate change was a particular area of interest as it relates to the County's natural resources and agricultural activities. The Agricultural Pillar has embraced a policy area that addresses crop diversity as a potential adaptation/mitigation measure in adapting to an increase in extreme weather events.



SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY

More communities (cities and counties) are integrating strategies into their comprehensive plans to be more sustainable and resilient to changing environments. These environments range greatly and can cover topics such as solar energy, food access, emergency preparedness, changing economies, and climate change. General definitions for these terms include:

- » **Resiliency:** Resiliency is defined as the ability to adapt to or recover from change.
- » **Sustainability:** Sustainability is defined as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations.

The term "resiliency" can also be linked to a community's ability to respond to natural disasters and public health crises. Many counties have adopted Emergency Preparedness Plans to address natural disasters. Stearns County's Emergency Management Division is responsible for the development of community based plans and programs to maintain a state of readiness to meet natural, man-made, and technological disasters on a local or countywide basis.

"Since 1965, each of Minnesota's 87 counties have respond to a number of disasters (e.g., floods, tornados, wildfires, and infectious diseases)."

Emergency Preparedness

Preparedness is one of the largest components of emergency management. As a function this is all the action we can take to prepare ourselves for any number of threats or hazards we may face in our local communities.

Preparedness is a partnership between people who live and work in the community as well as local government. As residents it is important to take action such as developing emergency plans for home, work, and in the car. As local government we focus on developing emergency plans, training personnel, and conducting drills and exercises to test our plans to best ensure they are complete and ready for use when emergencies happen.



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Agriculture



Living



Nature



Business



Connectivity



IMPLEMENTATION



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IMPLEMENTATION

The Comprehensive Plan can be implemented in a number of ways. On a daily basis, the document is used by County staff to review applications. The County Board, as well as other advisory commissions use the Plan when making decisions. It is used by residents and developers to understand the County's intentions for the use of land, infrastructure needs, and planned park and open space improvements.

This section of the Plan highlights several ways the Comprehensive Plan can be implemented over time. A summary of these initiatives include:

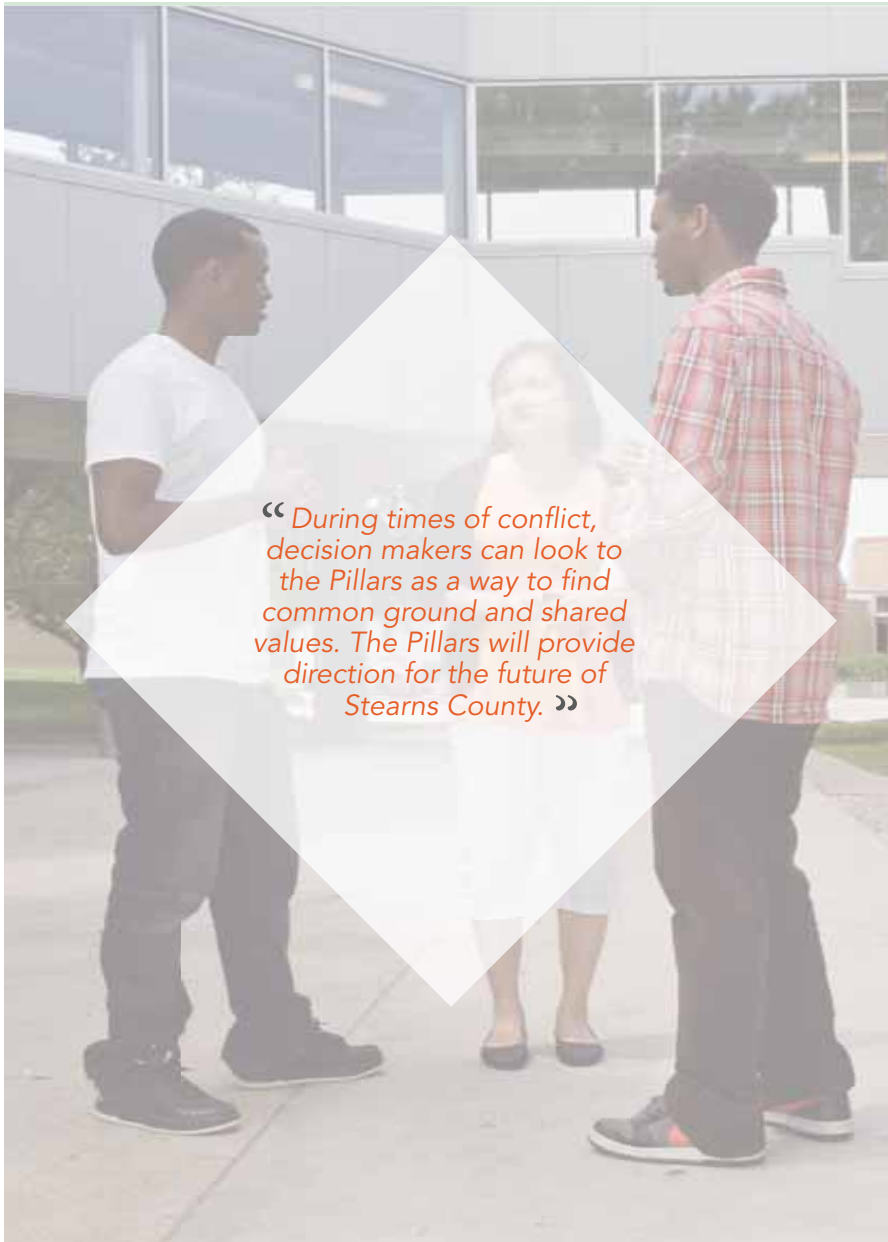
- » **Future Land Use Plan:** The Future Land Use Plan is an important part to the overall Comprehensive Plan and its Pillars. The Future Land Use Plan designates all land within Stearns County outside the incorporated cities into specific land use categories, as expressed on the Future Land Use Plan map. This map provides a basis for establishing zoning district boundaries and regulatory tools, and for guiding private and public land investments. The map helps guide land use decisions for the next 20 years.
- » **Official Controls:** Stearns County's Planning and Zoning Ordinances are used to support development and ensure that it adheres to the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. These tools are also used to ensure development is built in a manner that mitigates impacts to the natural and built environment, including traffic and adjacent neighborhoods. These tools will be updated over time to help advance the Comprehensive Plan's Pillars.
- » **Planning and Programming:** Many of the ideas discussed throughout the Pillars will require additional planning and resources to make reality. These ideas should be reflected upon when developing annual work plans and Capital Improvement Programs (CIP). The CIP is a five year program that identifies budgeting priorities for all capital projects (e.g., roads and parks).



THE PILLARS

The Comprehensive Plan is structured around five Pillars (Agriculture, Living, Nature, Business, and Connectivity). The Pillars help articulate the County's vision for the year 2040, and define the priorities (Focus Areas) and direction for future decisions.





- » **Coordination and Collaboration:** The Pillars include focus areas and policies that will require coordinated efforts by many different public, private, and non-profit entities. As an adopted policy plan, the Comprehensive Plan can help solidify the support, commitment, and collaboration needed to mobilize the county. The Comprehensive Plan's Pillars should be referenced, celebrated, and promoted both within the community and the region.
- » **Public Outreach and Education:** The entire Stearns County community will be affected by the Comprehensive Plan and the public's involvement in supporting and helping achieve the Comprehensive Plan's Pillars is critical. That involvement will be encouraged to continue through education and outreach tools, such as the County's Comprehensive Plan project website (shapestearns.com), the County newsletter, publications, public hearings, township board meetings, and special advisory panels. Other opportunities include partnerships with local schools to bring awareness to students about the County's aspirations for the future.





WHAT IS A FUTURE LAND USE PLAN?

The Future Land Use Plan map gives people a visual representation of what the County is expected to look like in the future. The text, maps and images contained throughout this Plan identify a framework for the future of land in Stearns County. It also helps guide future land use patterns and the development form in the County for the next 20 years. In doing so, it establishes how areas where people live, shop and work are anticipated to look and function in the future.

Examples of when the Future Land Use Plan map is consulted include:

- » Reviewing land use permits
- » Articulating future land use patterns
- » Evaluating rezoning requests
- » Guiding growth and new development
- » Identifying Orderly Annexation Agreement boundaries
- » Prioritizing infrastructure needs
- » Reviewing development proposals

Future Land Use Plan Map

A typical comprehensive plan guides every parcel of land in a community to a specific land use (various forms of agricultural, residential, commercial and institutional uses.). This is depicted on a Future Land Use Plan map (see Figure 8.1) and continues to guide a property's use. However, the planning process determined past Comprehensive Plans were too prescriptive in what one can do with their land – limiting the property owner's options. Updates to the Comprehensive Plan needed to create greater flexibility. Creating this flexibility is in response to changing markets and rural economies (see the Emerging Trends Chapter), while providing new opportunities for rural communities to attract new residents.

Greater flexibility comes with greater interpretation and cooperation in using the Comprehensive Plan and it's Future Land Use Plan map. This requires greater transparency in articulating preferred land use patterns and expectations on how to balance projects between land uses (e.g., residential and agricultural uses, and rural/urban fringe) and natural resources, while continuing to emphasize the importance of agricultural uses.

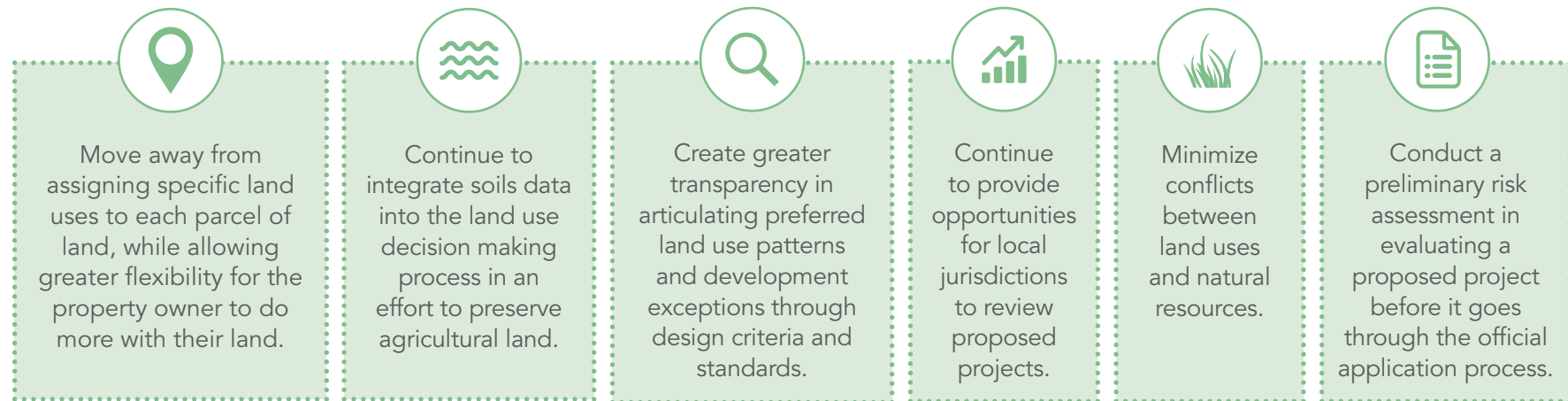


FUTURE LAND USE FACTORS

The Comprehensive Plan's Pillars and Future Land Use Plan map (see Figure 8.1) maintain a degree of flexibility and interpretation in our land uses. This is achieved through a series of Future Land Use Factors (see page 135). These factors are used to help inform future land use decisions and should be used as a filter for screening projects for their suitability and alignment with the Comprehensive Plan's Pillars. The factors include:

1. **Comprehensive Plan Alignment:** This factor builds on an existing process used by decision makers to determine if a proposed project aligns with the County's Comprehensive Plan.
2. **Future Land Use Category:** This factor helps determine the future land use category assigned to the project.
3. **Land Evaluation Site Assessment Score (LESA):** This factor uses soil data to inform the decision making process in an effort to promote agricultural preservation and manage non-farm rural residential development.
4. **Future Land Use Criteria:** This factor applies development standards and criteria to the Future Land Use categories (see Factor 2).
5. **Township Review:** This factor builds on an existing process that requires a Town Board's review or signature on certain proposed projects.
6. **Application Process:** Findings from the other factors will help identify if a proposed project has any perceived risks before advancing through the County's development review process.

Using the factors as a guide, will help achieve the following:

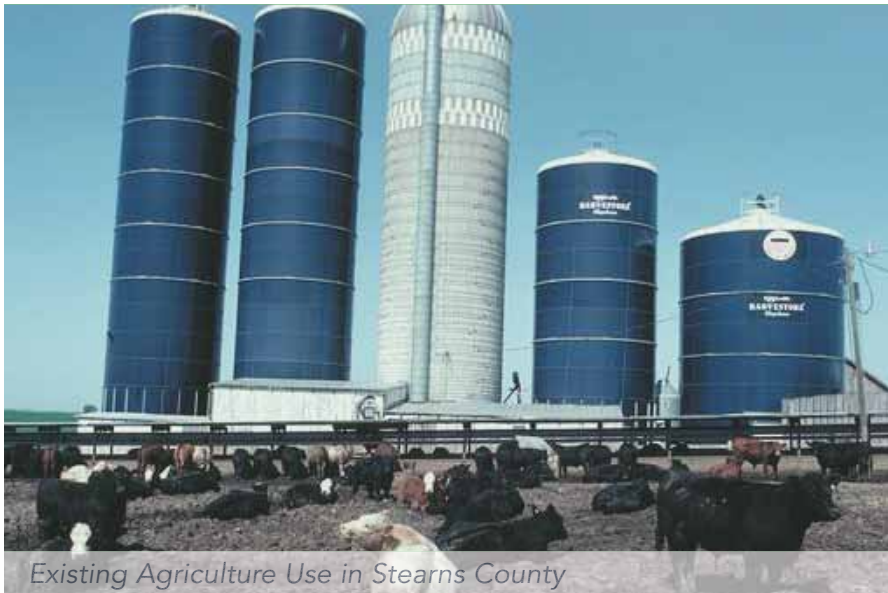


WHAT WE HEARD

The planning process determined past Comprehensive Plans were too prescriptive in what one can do with their land – limiting the property owner's options. Updates to the Future Land Use Plan needed to create greater flexibility. Creating this flexibility is in response to changing markets and rural economies, while providing new opportunities for rural communities to attract new residents.



Existing Businesses in Stearns County



Existing Agriculture Use in Stearns County

How to Use the Future Land Use Factors

The Future Land Use Factors provide a greater degree of flexibility when reviewing rezoning requests, subdivisions, and applications for other land use changes.

If a proposed project is generally consistent with the factors, then the proposed project could be considered to be in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan. For example, the County is largely guided for agricultural uses, but does not designate areas for rural residential uses or to some degree, commercial and light industrial uses. Using these factors, a developer is able to propose a development (e.g., subdivision or new land use) in an agricultural/rural area if it meets the six factors. The final determination if a project is consistent with these factors should be made by the County Board and advisory commissions, based on a review from County planning staff.

Purpose

The factors serve as a resource for helping screen projects or ideas to determine if they align with the Comprehensive Plan before they proceed through the County's Official Application Process. The factors should also be used when screening larger projects, such as rezoning requests, subdivisions, and applications for other land use changes.

Input received from the Steering Committee and Township Listening Sessions (see page 6) helped create the Future Land Use Factor.

OFFICIAL CONTROLS

Official controls, such as zoning regulations, subdivision regulations, and the zoning map shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. These controls represent the rules and regulations that govern county decisions related to growth and development. Specific updates will likely occur to Ordinance 439: Land Use and Zoning Ordinance. Updates to this ordinance may include, but not limited to the following “to-do” items in Table 8.1.

ORDINANCE 439: LAND USE AND ZONING ORDINANCE

This Ordinance is adopted for the purposes of:

1. Protecting and promoting the public health, safety, welfare and morals.
2. Promoting and providing for the orderly development of agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, recreational and public areas and land uses.
3. Preserving agricultural land and animal agriculture.
4. Conserving natural and scenic areas of the County.
5. Conserving natural resources and open spaces.
6. Providing official controls to implement the goals and policies included in the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan.

To-Do List

Stearns County Ordinance 439 (Land Use and Zoning Ordinance) Recommendations



Section 4.8.2 A Criteria for Considering Conditional Use Permits: Section 4.8.2 A requires the Planning Commission and Board to consider a proposals alignment with the 2008 Comprehensive Plan’s Policy Areas. This language will need to be amended to reflect the 2040 Comprehensive Plan’s goals and policies.



Section 4.10.5 Application for Change in District Boundary (Rezoning): Rezoning requests are required to describe how the proposed change in a district boundary will be compatible with the County Comprehensive Plan. The application process will need to provide stronger guidance on how the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Factors are used in making that determination through the use of the Future Land Use Decision Factors



Section 4.15 Shoreland Alteration Permits: All land within a 1,000 feet of a lake or 300 feet of a river, stream, or creek is designated as part of the County’s Shoreland Overlay District (Ordinance #439 Section 10.2). The overlay district regulates development and other activities. Alterations to the shoreland must receive a permit under this ordinance. The ordinance does not perfectly align with goals and objectives outlined in this plan. The ordinance should be amended periodically in order to achieve the desired water quality outcomes for water bodies in Stearns County.

Table 8.1 Stearns County Ordinance 439 (Land Use and Zoning Ordinance) Recommendations

Stearns County Ordinance 439 (Land Use and Zoning Ordinance) Recommendations

<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 4.24 LESA: This Plan continues to embrace the LESA score as a land use and zoning tool for evaluating projects. However, Appendix A of the ordinance should be updated to provide stronger guidance on how the LESA score will be used in the future when evaluating projects (e.g., Future Land Use Factors).
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 6 Performance Standards: Section 6 identifies the performance standards applied to specific uses by zoning district or any other applicable overlay district. This Section 6 will need to be revisited to determine if there are any barriers to creating greater flexibility in what one can do with their land. Particular areas of focus should be given to accessory dwelling units, workforce housing, evaluate home and attached garage ratio requirements and expand rural business opportunities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 6.7.5 Animal Feedlot Setback Provisions: Setback requirements between animal feedlots and residential uses will need to be revisited based on the policies established under the Agricultural Pillar. Aligning this ordinance with the Comprehensive Plan will require a reduction in setbacks between a feedlot and a residential dwelling (or vice versa) without a variance.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 6.52 Solar Energy Systems: Section 6.52 references specific goals from the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. This section will need to be amended to reflect the 2040 Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 7.1.1 New, Revised or Changed Use Accesses onto County Roads: Section 7.1.1 references the County's Comprehensive Plan to determine access management guidelines. This section should be amended to reference both the County's Comprehensive Plan and County's Transportation Plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 7.4 Cluster Development Standards: Section 7.4 references specific goals from the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. This section will need to be amended to reflect the 2040 Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 7.5 & 7.6 Conservation Design Overlay, Agricultural: This section references action items from the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. These references should be removed. Amendments should focus on the overall purpose and intent of the district without referencing specific statements from the Comprehensive Plan.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 9 Primary District Provisions: Section 9 includes purpose statements for each zoning district and references land use categories from the 2008 Comprehensive Plan. Amendments should avoid references to the Comprehensive Plan. This section will also need to be revisited to determine the appropriate uses allowed within each zoning district. For example, the Comprehensive Plan has emphasized greater flexibility in what one can do with their land. This includes the ability to operate rural businesses and other uses that are not currently allowed in the zoning districts. As part of these amendments, "Section 3.2. Definitions" will also need to be updated as new uses (e.g., tasting rooms, event centers, and accessory dwelling units) are introduced as permitted uses, provisional uses, conditional uses, or interim uses by zoning district.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 10.2 Shoreland Overlay Provisions: As more property owners make their home year-round, the intensity of use that accompanies seasonal properties with cabins or recreational vehicles can cause conflicts. Develop riparian standards that balance the interests of both year round and seasonal residents, while protecting the natural resources that draw them to lakeshore amenities.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Section 10.2.14 Shoreland Alteration Provisions: The County should work towards (1) developing shoreland alteration standards that acutely target sensitive areas including the shore impact zone, steep slopes, and bluffs., (2) further restrict native vegetation removal outside of identified water access corridors, and (3.) work with SWCD to develop unified standards and guidance for riparian lots.

Table 8.1 Stearns County Ordinance 439 (Land Use and Zoning Ordinance) Recommendations (continued from the previous page)

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING

The Plan's policies and recommendations listed in each Pillar should serve as a resource for county departments, boards, and commissions as they establish and review annual work programs and develop Capital Improvement Programs (CIPs). The County also uses others studies and plans as tools for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Notable plans include the County's 2040 Transportation Plan, Park Master Plans, and the Broadband Feasibility Study. Recommendations that emerged though out this Plan's development are listed in Table 8.2. Table 8.3 represents recommendations and park priorities identified by the public and the Parks Commission for implementation over the next ten years.

"Building a better future, while advancing the Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies will require thoughtful planning and programming."

To Do List

Planning and Programming Recommendations



Agriculture Zoning: Implement one of the zoning tools in the Agriculture Pillar to help preserve large agricultural areas.



Housing: Modify zoning district standards to expand housing options throughout the County (see Living Pillar).



Land Evaluation Site Assessment: Evaluate the LESA scoring system and adjust scoring and categories as needed.



Purchase of Development Rights Program: Gauge interest in creation of a PDR program. A PDR program is a voluntary farmland or natural resource protection technique that compensates landowners for limiting future development on their land.



Recycling Programs: Establish countywide recycling programs (e.g., educational materials or mandates) that helps advance the Comprehensive Plan's sustainability and resiliency goals and policies.



Transfer of Development Rights Program: The existing Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program was suspended due to a number of problems with administration and perceived fairness. A number of stakeholders have, however, requested that the County revisit the TDR program. To be effective and fair, the TDR program will need to be redesigned to work in synergy with the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors.

Table 8.2 Planning and Programming Recommendations



To Do List	Park & Trail Recommendations	Type	Roles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Beaver Island Trail Extension: Design and construct 4.5 miles of trail.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dairyland Trail Extension: Construct 3 miles of trail west of Elrosa.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kraemer Lake Wildwood County Park Phase II: Design and development parking, rest rooms, picnic shelters, caretakers station, and a playground.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kraemer Lake Wildwood County Park Phase III: Design and develop the beach, additional rest rooms, and parking.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lake Koronis Regional Park: Replace shower building.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Land Acquisition: Acquire Mississippi River parcel and other lands as opportunities arise	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Natural Resources: Review and recommend unique natural resource park and trail opportunities	Planning & Programming	Parks Dept. / Soil and Water Conservation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Oak Township Park: Open Oak Township Park for additional uses.	Ongoing Operations	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Park Dedication: Work with Townships to revise the County's Park Dedication Policy to allow more flexibility in spending options.	Planning & Programming	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staffing: Hire one Full Time Employee (FTE) to plan and operate programming within parks.	Planning & Programming	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Quarry Park & Nature Preserve Design and construct a two stall bathroom and changing house near the parking lot.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Quarry Park & Nature Preserve south unit Design and develop the southern unit.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Quarry Park Visitor Center: Design and construct the Granite Country Visitor Center.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept./Stearns County History Museum
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rockville County Park & Nature Preserve: Design and construct a picnic shelter.	Capital Investment	Parks Dept.

Table 8.3 Park & Trail Recommendations

COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

Implementing the Comprehensive Plan will require ongoing coordination with many municipalities, agencies and organizations. Given the multiple jurisdictions and agencies that manage land use, transportation, economic development, and natural resource protection within the region, coordination between these different governmental units is essential to effectively implement this plan. Recommendations to help strengthen these partnerships are listed in Table 8.4. Notable partnerships are discussed throughout this section.

County-Township Coordination

Stearns County's adoption of the 1998 Comprehensive Plan was followed by the development of the first county zoning ordinance (Ordinance 209), adopted in 2000. As a component of that effort, the County negotiated Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with most townships, defining a cooperative approach to ordinance administration. These MOUs specify in what respects the township land use regulations may differ from those of the County, and assign responsibilities for administering and enforcing the regulations. There are 28 MOUs between the County and the 34 townships.

County-City Coordination

Stearns County works with cities in several areas: economic development, transportation improvements, regional park and trail coordination, and participation in city-township discussions on growth and annexation, and is an active member in the Stearns County Municipal League. The County's Housing and Redevelopment Authority has taken the lead in integrating and coordinating local government marketing and assistance programs. The Park Department has worked with cities to develop joint or shared facilities. The Lake Wobegon Trail is one successful example of a cooperative effort that combines recreation, open space protection and economic development (tourism). These efforts are primarily voluntary and informal efforts. Many cities also contract with the County for police protection.

To Do
List

Coordination and Collaboration Recommendations

- ☐ **Agency Training:** Partner with agencies and organizations that offer professional trainings on best practices for land management or other emerging trends discussed throughout this Plan. Offer trainings to local partners (e.g., cities and townships).
- ☐ **Coordinated Growth:** Continue conversations with decision makers, property owners and developers in determining the type and intensity of development in transitional growth areas of the County.
- ☐ **Housing Task Force:** Establish a County task force to monitor and respond to housing needs (see Living Pillar) in manufactured home parks.
- ☐ **Township Meetings:** Conduct annual township listening sessions to discuss emerging topics and potential growth concerns.
- ☐ **Solid Waste Management:** Coordinate Solid Waste Management Plans with future Comprehensive Plan updates, including changes that better recycling mandates for food waste, agricultural plastics, etc.
- ☐ **Water Resources:** Pursue participation in the Clean Water Partnership program, which offers zero-interest loans to local units of government for implementing nonpoint-source best management practices.

Table 8.4 Coordination and Collaboration Recommendations



City-Township Coordination

Most city-township coordination revolves around the issues of annexation and urban growth, as well as related transportation and infrastructure needs. The County works with cities and townships to assist in the development of orderly annexation agreements. Several cities have such agreements in place, and a number of these have established joint planning boards. Other cities and townships have informal agreements to work jointly on annexation issues.

County-Agency/Organization Coordination

Stearns County coordinates and collaborates with a variety of other agencies and organizations. Examples of these partnerships include:

- » **Minnesota Department of Health** - Stearns County has a delegation agreement with the Minnesota Department of Health, which gives the County authority to administer the Food, Beverage & Lodging program. County staff issue licenses, conduct plan reviews of facilities, and perform yearly inspections of each facility located in the County. Those facilities located in the City of St. Cloud are the responsibility of the City Health Department. County staff also investigate any reported food-borne illnesses that may occur in the County, with the assistance of the Public Health Division of the Human Services Department.
- » **Minnesota Pollution Control Agency** - Stearns County is delegated by the State of Minnesota to administer the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Feedlot Program. Stearns County's Feedlot Officers (CFOs) work to assist the County's livestock producers in meeting State regulations and County ordinances while protecting water quality. County staff assists with feedlot registration, conditional use permits, variances, construction permits, feedlot evaluations, inspections and information and education.

MINNESOTA STATUTE 414.01

Minnesota Statute 414.01 provides guidance on the topic of "municipal boundary adjustments" as regulated by the State Office of Strategic and Long-Range Planning. In particular, findings of the Act state that:

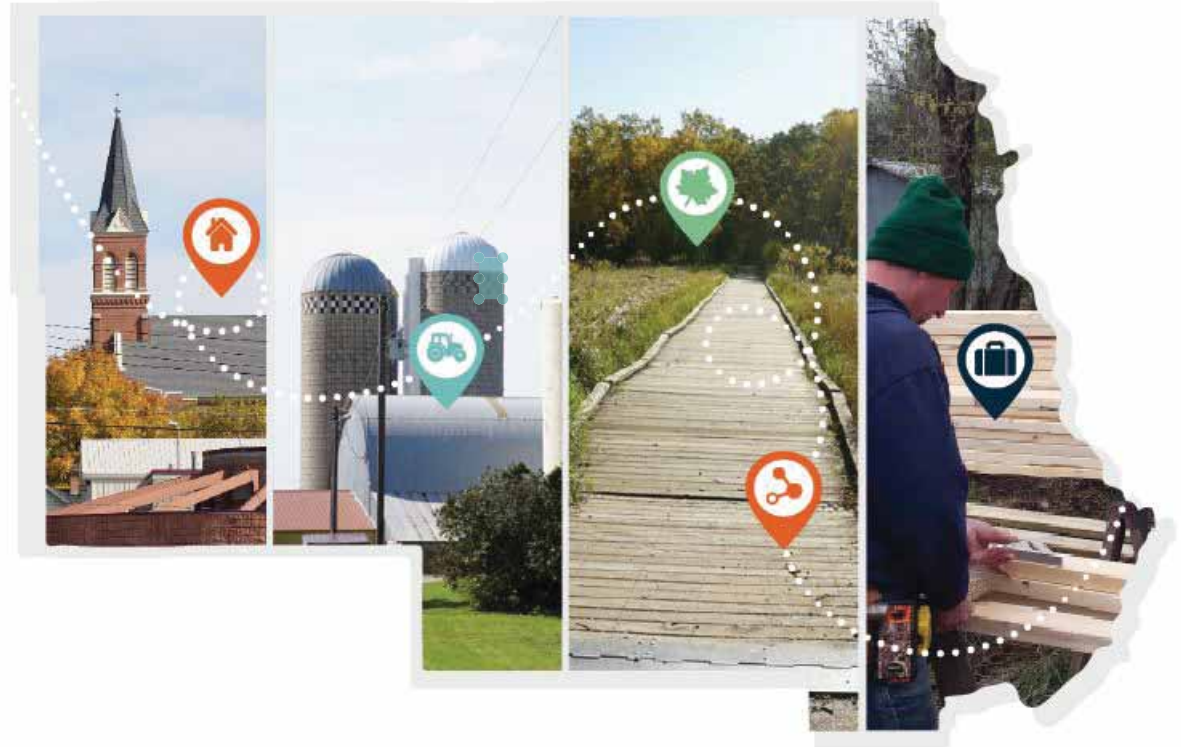
Municipal government most efficiently provides government services in areas intensively developed for residential, commercial, industrial, and governmental purposes; and township government most efficiently provides governmental services in areas used or developed for agricultural, open space, and rural residential purposes." ¹

The annexation process is often controversial if the process has not been well planned for by both the city and affected township(s). Minnesota State Statutes provide for three different annexation procedures:

1. Annexation by Ordinance – applies only to land that is owned by the city and completely surrounded by incorporated land.
2. Orderly Annexation – involves intergovernmental cooperation, since a joint resolution needs to be passed between the city and township(s) involved.
3. Annexation by Petition and Hearing – involves a public hearing before an adjudicated law judge who grants or denies the annexation. This process should only be done if the first two procedures fail.

- » **St. Cloud Area Planning Organization** - The St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) is the regional planning body for transportation planning in the St. Cloud area. The APO prepares and updates long-range transportation plans and improvement programs for the region. Stearns County works with the APO on projects within the metropolitan area, which includes the cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, St. Joseph, Waite Park and St. Augusta, and the townships of LeSauk, St. Joseph and St. Wendel.
- » **State Agencies** - Stearns County works with a number of state agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).
- » **Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District** - A partner in education and conservation, SWCD coordinates with several County departments to deliver conversation programs to project and enhance the County's natural resources.
- » **Tri-County Waste Management Commission** - Stearns County works with the Tri-County Waste Management Commission to address solid waste management issues within Stearns, Sherburne and Benton counties. Stearns County currently administers and manages trash hauling contracts with private haulers; solid waste is taken to disposal facilities in Perham and Elk River.
- » **Watershed Districts** - Watershed districts are special purpose units of local government that have been created to solve water resource problems on a watershed basis. Stearns County includes all or parts of 6 watersheds and four organized watershed districts (see Natural Resource Manual). The County works with these districts to implement water quality improvement projects, as specified in Local Water Management Plans.

"Advancing the Comprehensive Plan's Pillars will require ongoing coordination and collaboration amongst each agency and organization."



PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Citizen participation in the planning process is a key element in the continued implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. Open communication should characterize the relationship between county government and local citizens. The expression of public opinion and its subsequent consideration in decision making are essential ingredients in implementing all public policy issues including the Comprehensive Plan.

“The implementation of the Comprehensive Plan requires a strong citizen participation effort. Ongoing public agreement recommendations are listed in Table 8.5.”

Public outreach allows interested and affected individuals and organizations to have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. The County has a number of public education and outreach tools available including the County newsletter; the County’s website, special mailings and publications; public hearings; township meetings; and workshops. The County will continue to use these tools to involve the public in the Comprehensive Plan implementation process.

The County has also developed an online version of the Comprehensive Plan in effort to create greater transparency in promoting and using the Comprehensive Plan in the decision making process. The County will use this website to broadcast updates to how the Comprehensive Plan is being implemented, while continuing to seek public input and comments on the process.

To Do
List

Public Outreach and Education Recommendations



Civic Engagement: Offer programs or educational materials that helps build stronger community cohesion and encourage people to be civically engaged in the County’s planning process. This could include the engagement activities used to develop this plan (see page 6) and promoting the Comprehensive Plan’s website.

Educational Outreach: Encourage shoreland owners and decision makers to utilize tools such as DNR’s Score Your Shore to assess habitat conditions of developed lake lots.



Pop-Up Events: Continue to “pop-up” in the County at community events to promote the Comprehensive Plan, while celebrating it’s successes.



Project Website: Maintain the Comprehensive Plan website by providing regular updates and actively monitoring and responding to the online comment form.

Table 8.5 Public Outreach and Education Recommendations



Breakfast on the
Farm community
engagement



FUTURE LAND USE FACTORS



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LAND USE DECISION FACTORS

1 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ALIGNMENT

This factor builds on an existing process used by decision makers to determine if a proposed project aligns with the County's Comprehensive Plan. This factor places a stronger ownership on the Townships, property owner or applicant to determine how the proposed project fits within the overall context of the Comprehensive Plan.

AGRICULTURAL PILLAR

Stearns County's agricultural heritage is the root of our prosperity and identity. Through product diversity, innovation, and sustainable practices, we will enhance and promote the advancement of our agricultural economy.

GOALS

- ☐ Support agriculture as a desirable land use for the long term and facilitate diversification of the County's agricultural economy.
- ☐ Utilize sustainable practices to protect prime farmland and water quality for future generations.
- ☐ Retain areas with highly valued agricultural land or economically viable animal agriculture operations.
- ☐ Strive for and support higher farm profitability and family farm stability.
- ☐ Strengthen and retain areas with highly valued agricultural land or economically viable animal agriculture operations.
- ☐ Encourage cities to collaborate with the County on the review of animal agriculture issues in close proximity to boundaries or within orderly annexation areas.

FOCUS AREAS

- ☐ Agricultural Uses
- ☐ Crop/Product Diversification
- ☐ Animal Agriculture
- ☐ Clean Energy

Directions: Select the Goal statements and Focus Areas that align with the proposed project.

LIVING PILLAR

Stearns County shares a broad set of values about ourselves and the place where we live. We will continue to embrace these diverse values by supporting a full range of housing choices that meets resident's needs at every stage of their lives, and ensure a healthy balance of housing types that meet the needs of a diverse population with diverse needs.

GOALS

- ☐ Collaborate with cities and townships to maintain sustainable growth patterns that align with the Comprehensive Plan.
- ☐ Manage the impacts of growth and development on the County's rural character and natural resources.
- ☐ Support housing options that give people in all life stages and of all economic means viable choices for safe, stable, and affordable homes.
- ☐ Encourage new homes to be constructed in a sustainable manner, while including energy efficient technology and in accordance with state building code.
- ☐ Respect and preserve architectural, archaeological, and cultural history, while building on all residents' cultural assets to strengthen County cohesion.

FOCUS AREAS

- ☐ Transitional Areas
- ☐ Agricultural Residential Uses
- ☐ Rural Residential Uses
- ☐ Accessory Dwelling Units
- ☐ Workforce Housing
- ☐ Lakeshore Living



BUSINESS PILLAR

Stearns County will invest in economic development strategies that are rooted in our shared values, skills, and identity. This will require a balanced economy that supports our existing businesses, while attracting new business that encourages entrepreneurship, innovation, and creativity.

GOALS

- Increase the County's regional prosperity by being globally competitive and a business-friendly region.
- Increase the value of County economic production by ensuring that operations sustain natural resources.
- Acknowledge tourism's economic value and the prospective contribution of this industry to both the diversity of the County economic base and the potential for growth.
- Enhance the ability of local retail and commercial business to sustain small cities and rural townsites.
- Continue to promote and encourage multi-jurisdictional partnerships and public-private partnerships that advance economic development opportunities.
- Support opportunities for rural businesses that are compatible with agricultural environments and residential neighborhoods.

FOCUS AREAS

- Rural Business
- Agritourism
- Artisan Agriculture
- Townsite Mixed Use
- Major Transportation Corridors
- Changing Economies
- Partnerships & Local Coordination

CONNECTIVITY PILLAR

Stearns County's infrastructure, facilities, and services play an important role in connecting the places where we live, work and play. We recognize the inherent responsibility in maintaining these systems in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner. Enhancing these systems will require public and private partnerships that strive to maintain our quality of life.

GOALS

- Develop and maintain a transportation system that promotes the safety, mobility, and access of all users.
- Coordinate infrastructure and service needs with development, and encourage development where the infrastructure and services are adequate to serve that growth.
- Strengthen our regional role in connecting rural and agricultural economies with metropolitan areas through reliable transportation networks.
- Deploy fast and reliable internet technologies that are equitable, affordable, and take advantage of existing infrastructure assets.
- Provide County infrastructure, services, and facilities that benefit the residents of the County in a cost-effective manner.
- Maintain a state of readiness to meet natural, man-made, and technological disasters on a local or countywide basis.

FOCUS AREAS

- Transportation Networks
- County Resources
- Internet Connectivity
- Sustainability & Resiliency

NATURE PILLAR

Stearns County recognizes the inherent values of the natural environment and connecting people to nature. We are committed to providing recreational opportunities, while recognizing the value of natural resource protection, restoration, and preservation. This will require sustainable practices that balance growth between urban and rural communities.

GOALS

- Preserve, restore, and protect important natural systems and natural resources.
- Ensure the reasonable and responsible use of the County's natural resources, including land, surface and ground water, minerals, open space, wetlands, wildlife, and woodlands.
- Recognize the significance of water resources in the County and ensure the creation and implementation of policies to manage stormwater in collaboration with land use and development.
- Protect the County's aggregate resources and provide for reasonable economic use of aggregate.
- Partner with cities, townships, adjoining counties and state agencies to broaden the potential pool for park acquisition and improvement.
- Provide park and open space areas throughout the County to meet the active and passive recreational needs of current and future residents.
- Provide a regional trail system in order to support a variety of recreational activities, offer alternative transportation modes, and support tourism and economic development initiatives

FOCUS AREAS

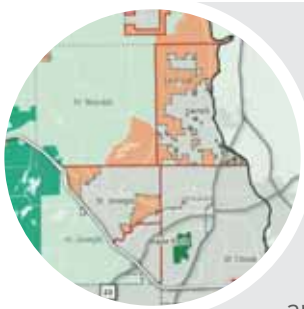
- Water Resources
- Natural System Corridors
- Aggregate Resources
- Future Parkland Planning
- Operations and Management
- Funding



2 FACTOR TWO IDENTIFY THE FUTURE LAND USE CATEGORY

The location of the proposed project should be identified on the Future Land Use Plan map to determine its future land use category (more than one may apply). The following provides general descriptions of the land use categories (or typologies) contained within Stearns County's Future Land Use Plan map. These descriptions provide the general guidelines for land use planning by category in Stearns County through 2040. The land use categories provide guidance for the application of the County's zoning ordinances and specific districts that regulate land development.

Directions: Reference the 2040 Future Land Use Plan map to determine what land use categories apply to the proposed project and the boxes to those that may apply. This finding will be used in Factor 4. Please note that more than one category may apply.



ORDERLY ANNEXATION AREAS (OAA) (CHECK THE BOX IF APPLICABLE)

The Orderly Annexation Area designation represents property covered by an agreement between a city and a township in which land will be annexed to the city in the future under specified conditions. Orderly annexation agreements are a legal tool that can help a township control, to some degree, when and how land is annexed. This proactive measure includes an agreement between both the city and township that stipulates the terms and conditions in the transition/annexation of land. Typical terms and conditions state the time, location, tax revenue, infrastructure and land uses associated with the property. This binding agreement has been a common practice by several communities in eastern Stearns County.

Note: Cities and townships are encouraged to work together to define their urban growth boundaries at the parcel level. Growth boundaries adopted at the local level will supersede those identified in the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan. If a locally adopted plan does not exist, the Stearns County Future Land Use Plan will be used as a guide to determine if the proposed project is within proximity to a city boundary and should follow the Transition Area criteria.



TRANSITIONAL AREAS (CHECK THE BOX IF APPLICABLE)

This designation reflects areas that could see change over the next twenty years. Land located within a quarter to a half-mile of city services (sewer and water) are subject to seeing greater development pressure. This designation also reflects growth areas identified by local jurisdictions. However, not every jurisdiction may have the aspiration or desire to grow. These areas are still important to designate as Transitional Areas as desires or markets can change over time. Therefore, these areas should be held to different design standards to ensure future land uses avoid unplanned sprawl, align with infrastructure needs and services, and minimize impacts to natural resources and agricultural uses. Future residential uses should be clustered and guided at higher densities than agricultural/rural areas.

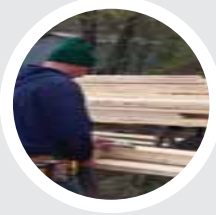


AGRICULTURAL/RURAL AREAS (CHECK THE BOX IF APPLICABLE)

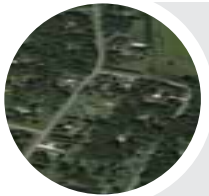
This designation identifies agricultural uses and farmsteads related to the operations of the agricultural use at a maximum residential density of 1 unit per 40 acres or greater.



Rural Residential: The Comprehensive Plan recognizes not all of these areas are well suited for agricultural activities given their soil types or natural features. Therefore, the property owner should also be given the flexibility to develop their land as long as it meets certain criteria that balances residential uses with adjacent land uses. Clustering development is encouraged to preserve existing natural resources (e.g., wetlands, prairie, woodlands, habitat corridors, and viewsheds) or large areas for agricultural uses. Lot sizes may vary; however, properties are required to maintain enough buildable land to accommodate the construction of permitted structures, including primary and secondary septic systems or community systems.



Business: It is important to recognize the type of businesses (e.g., woodworking shops and home based businesses) that may occur in the Agricultural/Rural Areas. These are small, privately-owned businesses that functions without altering the rural character of the area. The Comprehensive Plan continues to support businesses in the Agricultural/Rural Areas that do not create negative impacts on the public health, safety, and general welfare of adjacent property owners.



CONCENTRATED DEVELOPMENT (CHECK THE BOX IF APPLICABLE)

This designation captures most of the existing residential developments that have occurred through larger subdivisions or concentrated near water bodies (e.g., lakeshore development). Higher residential density ranges have largely been dictated by zoning districts and past development.



TOWNSITE MIXED USE (CHECK THE BOX IF APPLICABLE)

This designation identifies rural townsites that already include some variety of residential or commercial uses. Townsites are appropriate locations for non-agricultural development within many townships. Larger residential developments or commercial uses are encouraged to locate within these areas in effort to enhance small town economies.



MAJOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS (CHECK THE BOX IF APPLICABLE)

This designation captures the development potential that typically occurs along major transportation corridors as businesses seek locations with higher volumes of traffic and good visibility. The feasibility to develop along these corridors may be challenging from a transportation and environmental perspective. These challenges may include limited roadway access, wetland constraints, and the ability to address sewer and water needs.



FACTOR THREE LESA SCORE

Factor Three integrates soil data into the decision making process in an effort to promote agricultural preservation and manage non-farm rural residential development. The Land Evaluation Site Assessment (LESA) rating system is currently used as a tool to assist decision makers in assessing agricultural land in Stearns County. The LESA system was designed specifically to assess where the best farmlands are located locally. The system provides an objective and consistent tool for evaluating the relative importance of specific sites for continued agricultural uses.

Scoring Process

The LESA score is based on soils and their characteristics, and the site's relative importance for agricultural use. A LESA score of 65 points or greater (out of 100) is considered to be a site that is better suited for agricultural use. A score of less than 65 points is considered to be a site better suited for other land uses, if developed in a sustainable manner.

Historically, the LESA score has highly influenced land use decisions. Projects have been denied if it has received a score of 65 points or greater.

Resource

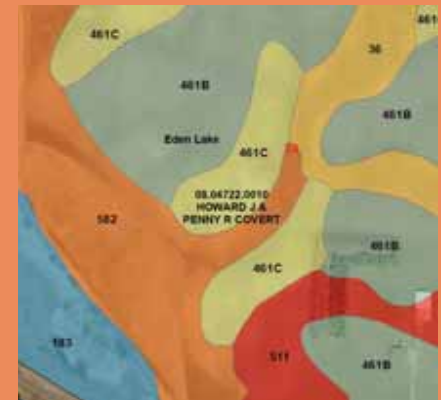
Moving forward, the LESA score should be used as a resource to educate the property owner about their lands potential significance it may play in long-term agricultural activities. Scores of agricultural significance should not limit a property owner's ability to develop as long as they adequately address the other factors, specifically those identified under Factor 4: Future Land Use Criteria.

Directions: The LESA score should be used as a resource to educate the property owner about their lands potential significance it may play in long-term agricultural activities.

HAS THE PROPOSED PROJECT RECEIVED A LESA SCORE?

The County is making an effort, based upon the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, to promote agricultural preservation and manage non-farm rural residential development.

The LESA score is based on two factors: soils and their characteristics (Land Evaluation), and the site's relative importance for agricultural use (Site Assessment).



NO

Work with
County Staff to
receive a LESA
score.

YES

Land Evaluation (LE) Score: _____
Site Assessment (SA) Score: _____
Total LESA Score: _____

The proposed project has taken the LESA score into consideration and has taken the appropriate steps to preserving prime farmland soils for future agricultural activities.

Y / N

4 FACTOR FOUR FUTURE LAND USE CRITERIA

This factor applies development standards and criteria to the Future Land Use categories (see Factor 2). This approach helps convey preferred land use patterns and expectations to minimize conflicts between adjacent land uses and natural resources.

Depending on the location of the proposed project, it may be required to address more than one land use criteria. For example, a proposed project may be located in an Agricultural/Rural Area and along a Major Transportation Corridor.

Directions: Select (check the boxes) of the design standards the proposed project is using under its future land use criteria (see Factor 2). More than one future land use category may apply.



Small Business in Stearns County





FACTOR FOUR FUTURE LAND USE CRITERIA



AGRICULTURAL/RURAL AREAS: RESIDENTIAL USE

- The project has taken the LESA score into consideration and has taken the appropriate steps to preserving prime farmland soils for future agricultural activities.
- Through good conservation oriented site design practices and principles, the site is able to protect and preserve significant natural resources and agricultural areas.
- The project can be designed to minimize potential conflicts with agricultural uses (agricultural uses take precedent).
- Proposed projects creating multiple residential lots should employ standards to minimize impacts on agricultural land.



AGRICULTURAL/RURAL AREAS: BUSINESS USE

- The project enhances the agricultural community.
- The project can be designed to minimize impacts to adjacent land uses.
- Through good conservation oriented site design practices and principles, the site is able to protect and preserve significant natural resources and agricultural areas.
- The project utilizes existing buildings and/or structures.
- The project's owner or operator lives on-site.
- The project has demonstrated that it will not alter the rural character.



TRANSITIONAL AREAS

- The project minimizes potential conflicts between urban and rural land uses.
- The project is logically connected to existing development; zoning districts shall be identified to prevent leapfrog or isolated development within contiguous land use districts.
- The delivery of other government services (i.e. fire, police, public works, and public education) have been consulted and the County is satisfied that the development can be serviced under existing or planned programming levels.
- Through good conservation oriented site design practices and principles, the project is able to protect and preserve natural resources.
- The project has been coordinated and aligned with the City and/or Township plans for future growth.



TOWNSITE MIXED USE

- The project fits the surrounding areas character and takes into consideration its historical context.
- The project promotes a positive image of the community through design principles (e.g., building materials and landscaping) that convey the area as an attractive place for visitors and prospective businesses.
- The project provides housing options or job opportunities that support local and regional economic development goals for future growth.



CONCENTRATED RESIDENTIAL

- The project can be designed to minimize impacts to adjacent land uses.
- If the project is located near a water body, it can be designed to restore or preserve shoreland.
- The project is logically connected to existing development.
- Through good conservation oriented site design practices and principles, the site is able to protect and preserve significant natural resources and agricultural areas.
- The project can be designed to easily address sewer system requirements.



MAJOR TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR

- The project demonstrates a transition between commercial uses and residential or agriculture uses including retaining existing features of the landscape as defining elements of site design (fence rows, ditches, wetlands, woods).
- The project promotes a positive image of the community through design principles (e.g., building materials and landscaping) that convey the corridor as an attractive place for visitors and prospective businesses.
- The project has met the roadway's access management guidelines.
- The project has taken the appropriate steps to mitigate traffic impacts.

5 FACTOR FIVE TOWNSHIP REVIEW

This factor builds on an existing process that requires a Town Board's review or signature on certain proposed projects (e.g., construction permits, development applications, rezoning requests, and subdivisions). Input received from the Town Board is carefully considered as part of the County's Official Application Process. Embracing this factor will continue to emphasize the importance of intergovernmental cooperation in the decision making process. This is also an opportunity for when a project falls within a "Transitional Area" to determine if it aligns with the Townships values and/or aspirations for growth.

Direction: This factor requires a Town Board's review or signature on a proposed project (e.g., construction permits, development applications, rezoning requests, and subdivisions). Input received from the Town Board is carefully considered as part of the County's Official Application Process (see Factor 6).

The applicant has acquired a review form with written documentation from the Town Board approving the proposed project before the application/plat/rezoning is submitted to the County.

NO

Continue to work collaboratively with the Township to obtain a signature. Factors 1 - 4 can be worked on during this time. A signature should be obtained before proceeding to Factor 6.

TOWNSHIP RECOMMENDATION FORM

A Township Recommendation Form can be obtained from your township of residency, visiting the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan website, or contacting the Stearns County Environmental Services Department.

APPLICANT INFORMATION To be filled out by County staff.

Applicant Name Parcel Number

Property Address

Request LESA Score

Future Land Use Category

TOWN REVIEW BOARD CHECKLIST

The Town Board has reviewed and considered the following items pertaining to the County's Comprehensive Plan.

(Choose One) Checklist Questions

Yes No **Question 1:** The request is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies.

Yes No **Question 2:** The request is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use designation.

Yes No **Question 3:** The request is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use Factors.

TOWNSHIP RECOMMENDATION

The Township Name Town Board met on Date to discuss the request.

The Town Board recommends (choose one) Approval Denial

Township Signature

Please explain the reason for approval or denial of the request. Meeting minutes are preferred.

6 FACTOR SIX APPLICATION PROCESS

Findings from the other factors will help identify if a proposed project has any perceived risks before advancing through the County's development review process. It is important to recognize this process is separate from the County's official application process. Proposed projects will still need to comply with the Stearns County Zoning Ordinance and application process for permits, construction activities, zoning amendments, etc.

Directions: Environmental Services will help determine if the project is ready to go through the County's official application process

THE PROPOSED PROJECT HAS ADDRESSED FACTORS 1 – 5.

YES

Proceed with the
Development Application
Process

NO

Revisit the factors with the
property owner or applicant



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NATURAL RESOURCE MANUAL

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NATURAL RESOURCE MANUAL

The Natural Resource Manual was created to help inform the Comprehensive Plan update, while informing the focus areas discussed throughout the Pillars. This manual provides a snapshot of Stearns County's diverse natural resources, parks, open spaces, and trails. It also provided a foundation for developing the "natural resource overlay" depicted in the Future Land Use Plan map.

The Natural Resource Manual can be used in the following ways.

- » **When Making Future Land Use Decisions:** Planning decisions are influenced by a variety of entities that have some regulatory or planning authority for natural resources in Stearns County. The Natural Resource Manual identifies some of these roles and responsibility, while providing resources to learn more.
- » **Connecting People to Nature:** Recreation programs, trail corridors, and parks are all part of the natural systems of Stearns County. The Natural Resource Manual provides an inventory and assessment of the existing systems and a framework for Stearns County to follow in order to meet regional needs for recreation and open space, while preserve significant natural resources.
- » **Implementing the Focus Areas:** The focus areas discussed throughout the Comprehensive Plan's Pillars represent some of the County's key priorities. Therefore, it is important to note they are not all encompassing when considering the range of environmental concerns and recreational needs facing our future. Stearns County will need to continue to evaluate policies, best practices, and regulations when making informed decisions about the natural environment and how we connect people to these resources.



Natural Resources

GEOLOGY

Depth to bedrock (see Figure 9.1) is an important consideration in land use planning. It indicates areas that will support agriculture and areas that have development constraints such as rock outcroppings and septic challenges. A summary of Stearns County's geological characteristics are summarized below.

- » Areas in Stearns County with over 100 feet of soil depth to bedrock tend to support agricultural land uses.
- » Areas with shallowest depth to bedrock (less than 50 feet) are in proximity to waterways and are likely locations for stone and aggregate mining (see sidebar).
- » Eastern and western Stearns County are underlain with igneous and metamorphic rock.
- » Central Stearns County is underlain with sedimentary rocks. The bedrock is covered by glacial material ranging from about 50 feet depth in the east to 350 feet depth in Collegeville Township to 200 feet depth in western parts of the County.



Stearns County is known for its geological formations, which have defined its landscapes that range from rolling pastures to hill crests.



Aggregate Resources

The following resources and regulations are examples of tools used to help manage and protect Stearns County's aggregate resources. These tools, and others should be referenced when making planning decisions that impact these resources.

- » Mining Standards: Stearns County's mining standards can be found in Stearns County Land Use Ordinance #439 Section 7.17
- » Mining (Gravel Operations): New mining operations are required to be permitted by the County or Township depending on their location. There are three types of mining operations or permits (i.e., Existing, pre-ordinance mining operations (POMO), Administrative Mining Permit, and a Interim Use Permit (IUP).
- » Aggregate Resource Maps: The DNR Interactive Aggregate Resource Mapping website provides information about the distribution of quality aggregate resources for local units of government, citizens, land use planners, private companies and environmental groups.
- » The Stearns County Comprehensive Water Plan (2013) and the Stearns County Geologic Atlas describe in detail the geologic history of Stearns County.

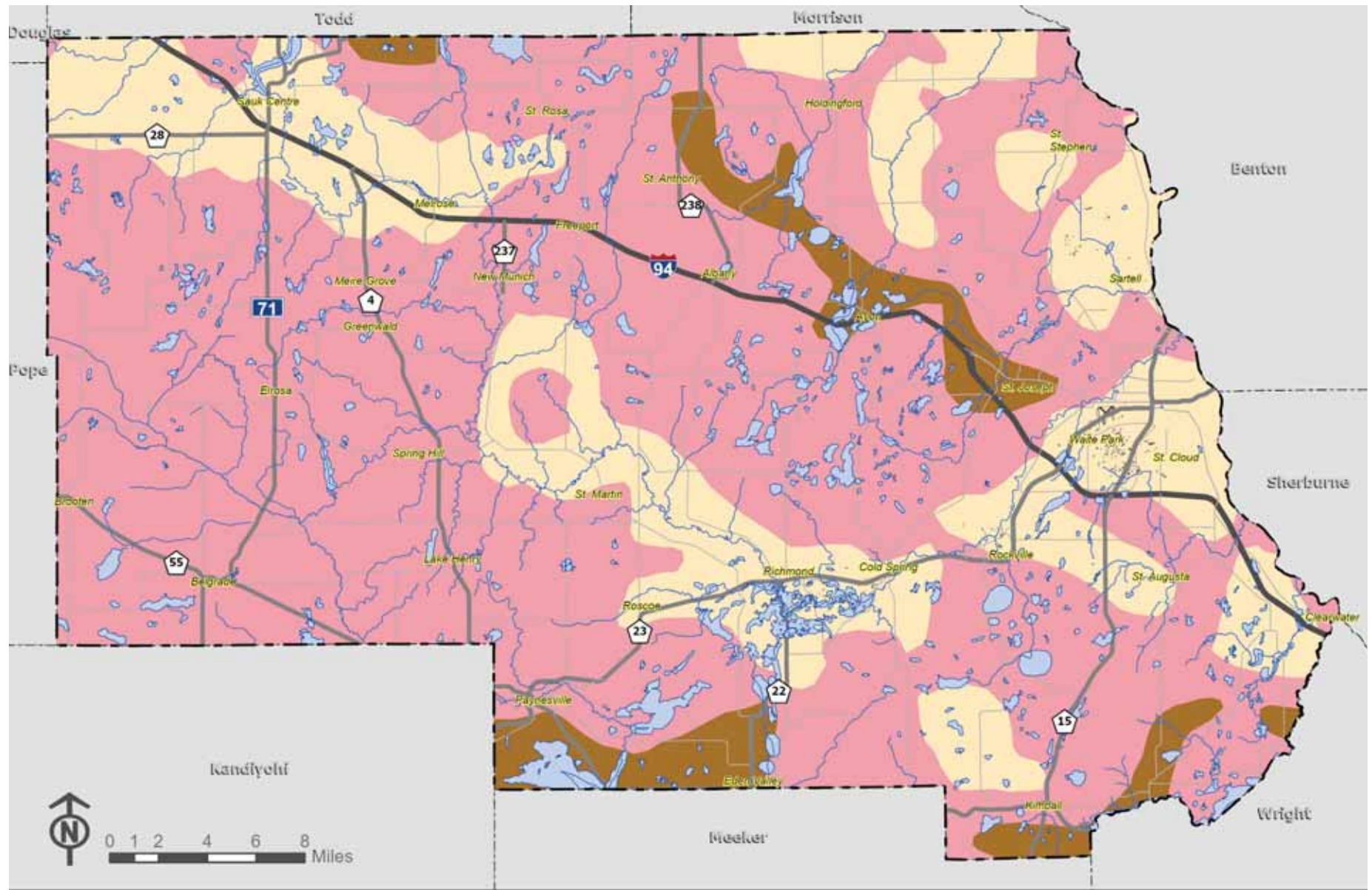


Figure 9.1 Geology

TOPOGRAPHY

Figure 9.2 is a representation of topography throughout Stearns County. Topography is determined in large part by underlying geology and refined by glaciation and stream erosion. Three major landforms in the County are: hilly lake regions or morainic hills; rolling till plains; and relatively flat outwash plains to the west. Lowest elevation areas tend to follow streams and lake complexes while highest elevation flat areas support agriculture. The prominent hills in the northern and eastern part of the County, created by glacial moraines, provide desirable amenities for developing areas. Development in these hills presents water quality challenges such as protecting soils from erosion (see sidebar) and keeping wooded areas intact.



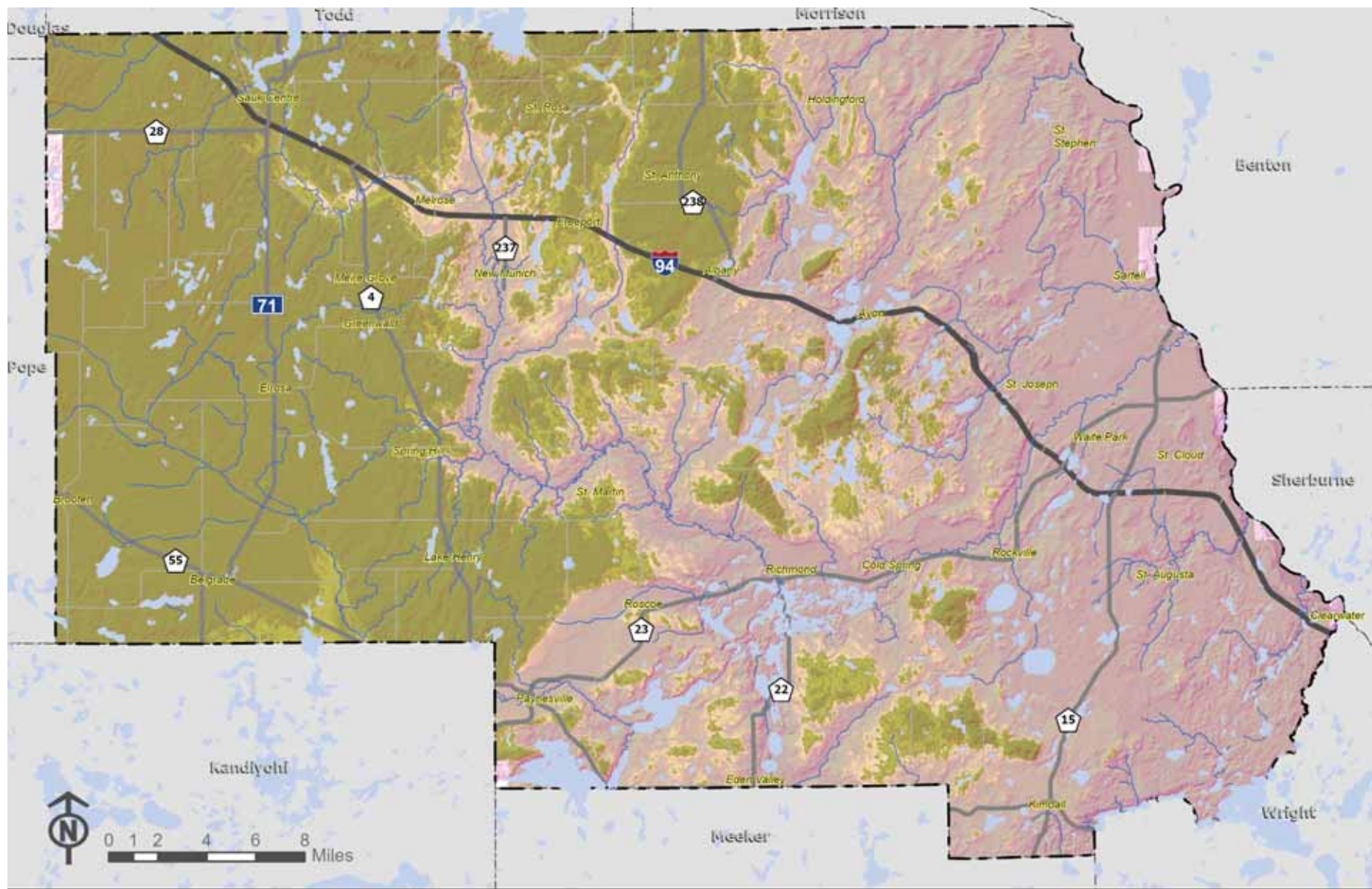
Prairie, woodland areas, and glacial moraines make up the historic natural landscapes found in Stearns County



Soil Erosion Resources

The following resources and regulations are examples of tools used to help manage and protect Stearns County's soil resources. These tools, and others should be referenced when making planning decisions that impact these resources.

- » The Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation (SWCD) District: The SWCD is a local unit of government that manages and directs natural resource management programs at the local level. The SWCD works in both urban and rural settings, with landowners and with other units of government, to carry out a program for the conservation, use, and development of soil, water, and related resources.
- » Construction – Best Management Practices: Improperly treated and untreated runoff from exposed soils of a construction site can cause soil erosion and sedimentation problems resulting in the pollution of lakes, rivers, and other water bodies. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is a resource for learning more about best management practices (BMPs) to address soil erosion at a construction site. See the MPCA Stormwater Manual for more information.



Hillshade and Elevation

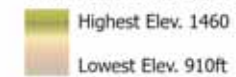


Figure 9.2 Topography



SOILS

There are fourteen general soil classifications in Stearns County detailed in the Stearns County Soil Survey, and grouped generally into outwash plains and glacial till. The outwash plains are associated with shallower depth to bedrock areas while the glacial till is associated with deeper depth to bedrock areas. Soil features that are particularly important to land use planning are erodible and hydric soils. Figure 9.3 and Figure 9.4 show the locations of erodible and hydric soils in Stearns County. Hydric soils are wet soils. Wet soils are not desirable for development, particularly for structures with basements. Erodible soils tend to be unstable if disturbed for either agriculture or development. Soil erosion has a direct impact on water quality in streams and lakes.

Prime farmland soils (see Figure 9.5) are defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as “soils that are best suited for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops.” The Stearns County Soil Survey (1980) also states that “Prime farmland soils produce the highest yields with minimal inputs of energy and economic resources, and farming these soils results in the least damage to the environment.” Within Stearns County, prime farmland soils are predominant in the Sauk River watershed and much of the northeast area of the County. These soils are less common in the southwest, the southeast, and much of the Avon Hills, although much of the farmland in these areas is still of high quality. Prime and other important farmland soils are considered an important natural resource that can be permanently destroyed or damaged by development.

“It should be noted that the locations of animal agriculture operations are not necessarily dependent on prime farmland soils, since lands suitable for pasturage may have steeper topography or other less ideal soil conditions. However, the larger “vertically integrated” operations (in which farmers are growing corn for their own feed) can benefit from high quality soils.”



Farmland Soil Resources

The following resources are examples of tools used to help identify prime soils for farming. These tools, and others should be referenced when making planning decisions.

- » Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA): LESA is a numeric rating system for scoring sites (based on land capacity factors, including soil ratings) to help make land use decisions (see Page 142 for more information). The LESA system was designed specifically to assess where the best farmlands are located locally. The system provides an objective and consistent tool for evaluating the relative importance of specific sites for continued agricultural use. The LESA rating system is used as a tool to assist decision makers in assessing agricultural land in Stearns County. To learn more, please reference the Future Land Use Plan Decision Criteria.
- » Web Soil Survey (WSS): WSS provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. It is operated by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and provides access to the largest natural resource information system in the world. NRCS has soil maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the nation's counties and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future.

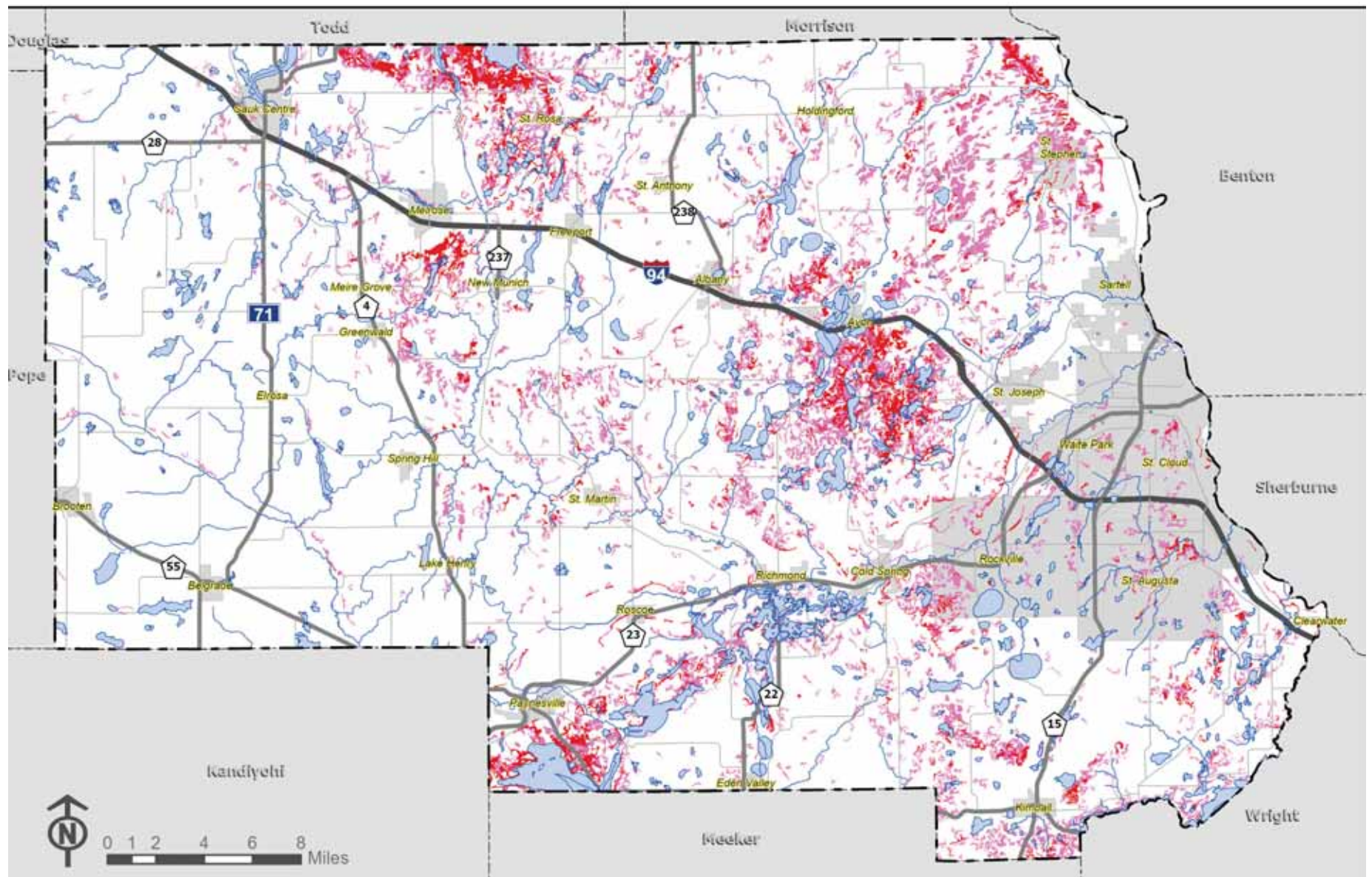


Figure 9.3 Erodible Soils

NRCS Erodible Soils

- Potentially Highly Erodible Soils
- Highly Erodible Soils

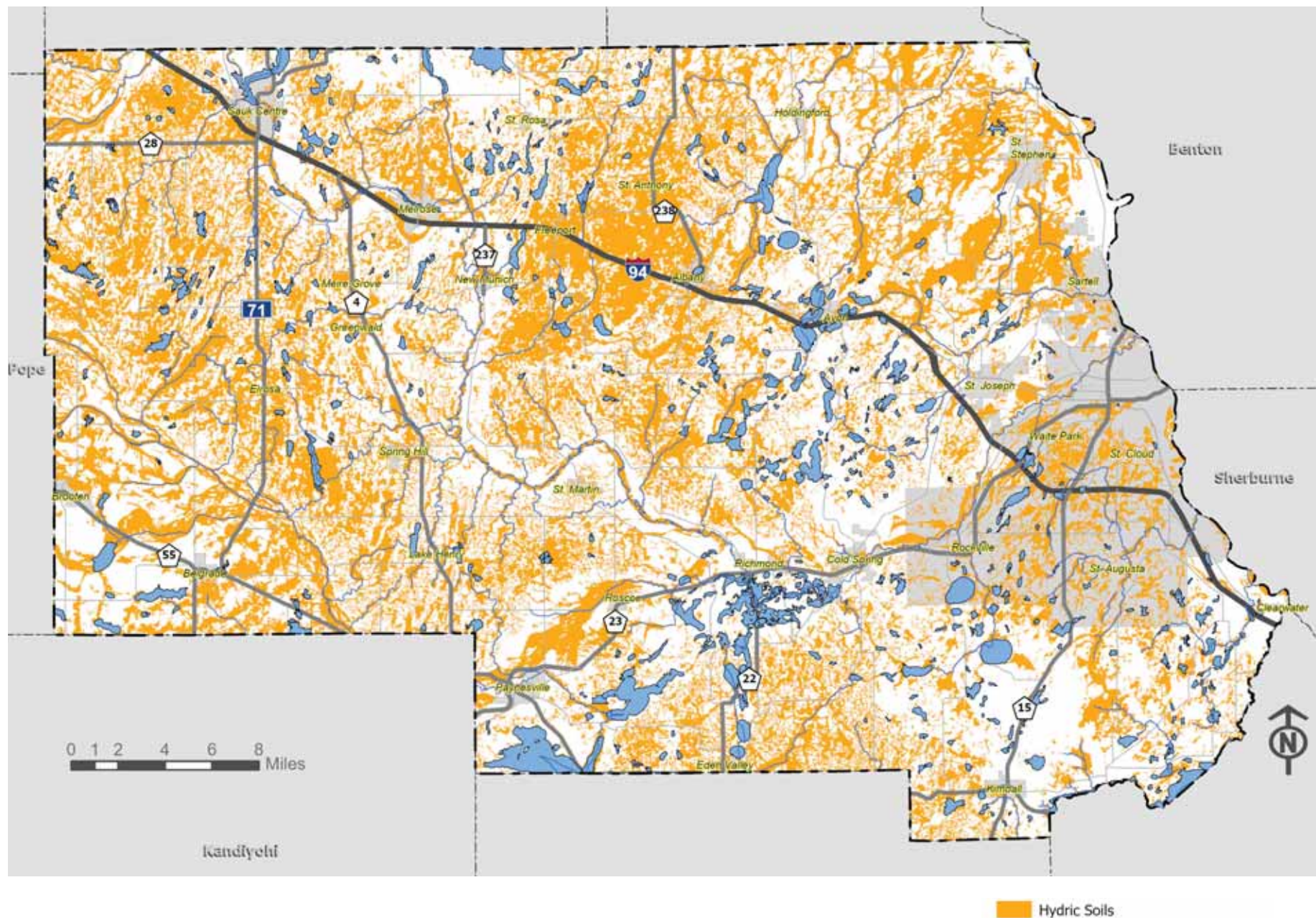


Figure 9.4 Hydric Soils

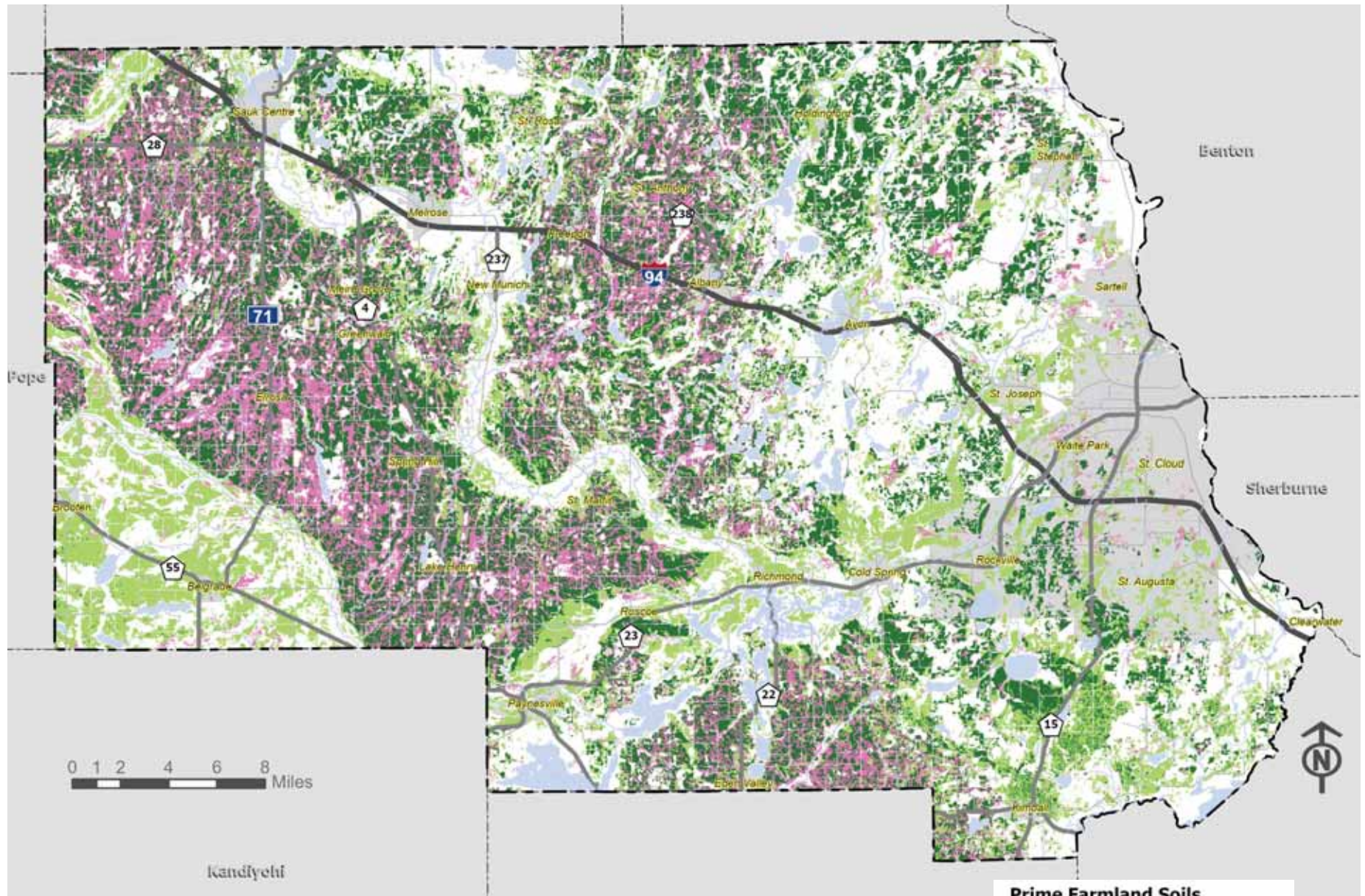


Figure 9.5 Prime Farmland Soils

NATURAL AREAS

The Minnesota County Biological Survey, conducted by the DNR, has identified areas of remaining natural land cover in Stearns County. Figure 9.6 shows the location of these areas and the general plant types within the natural areas. The remaining natural areas are often located in areas of wet soils, slopes, or other areas that are somewhat unsuitable for agriculture or development. DNR maps can be obtained that indicate the biological significance of the plant communities from a statewide perspective. The natural areas depicted in Figure 9.6 play an important role in the County's green infrastructure.



Existing natural areas within Stearns County



Natural Area Resources

Many of the County's environmental regulations and programs are administered through the Stearns County's Environmental Services Department. For example, the Land Use Division oversees the Comprehensive Plan, zoning, shoreland management, floodplain management, and land subdivision. The Agricultural and Water Resources Division is involved with all aspects of feedlot/animal production facilities, wetland management, and comprehensive water planning.

Other statewide resources to assist with natural area resources management and protection include:

- » MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is a state agency that works to protect and manage land, water, fish, and wildlife, and provide access to outdoor recreation opportunities.
- » Watershed Districts are local, special-purpose units of government that work to solve and prevent water-related problems. Watershed district boundaries follow natural watersheds and are not based on political boundaries. The MN Association of Watershed Districts includes a map of all watershed districts in the state. Stearns County includes portions of four watershed districts: the Sauk River, the North Fork Crow River, the Clearwater River, and the Middle Fork Crow River Watershed Districts.

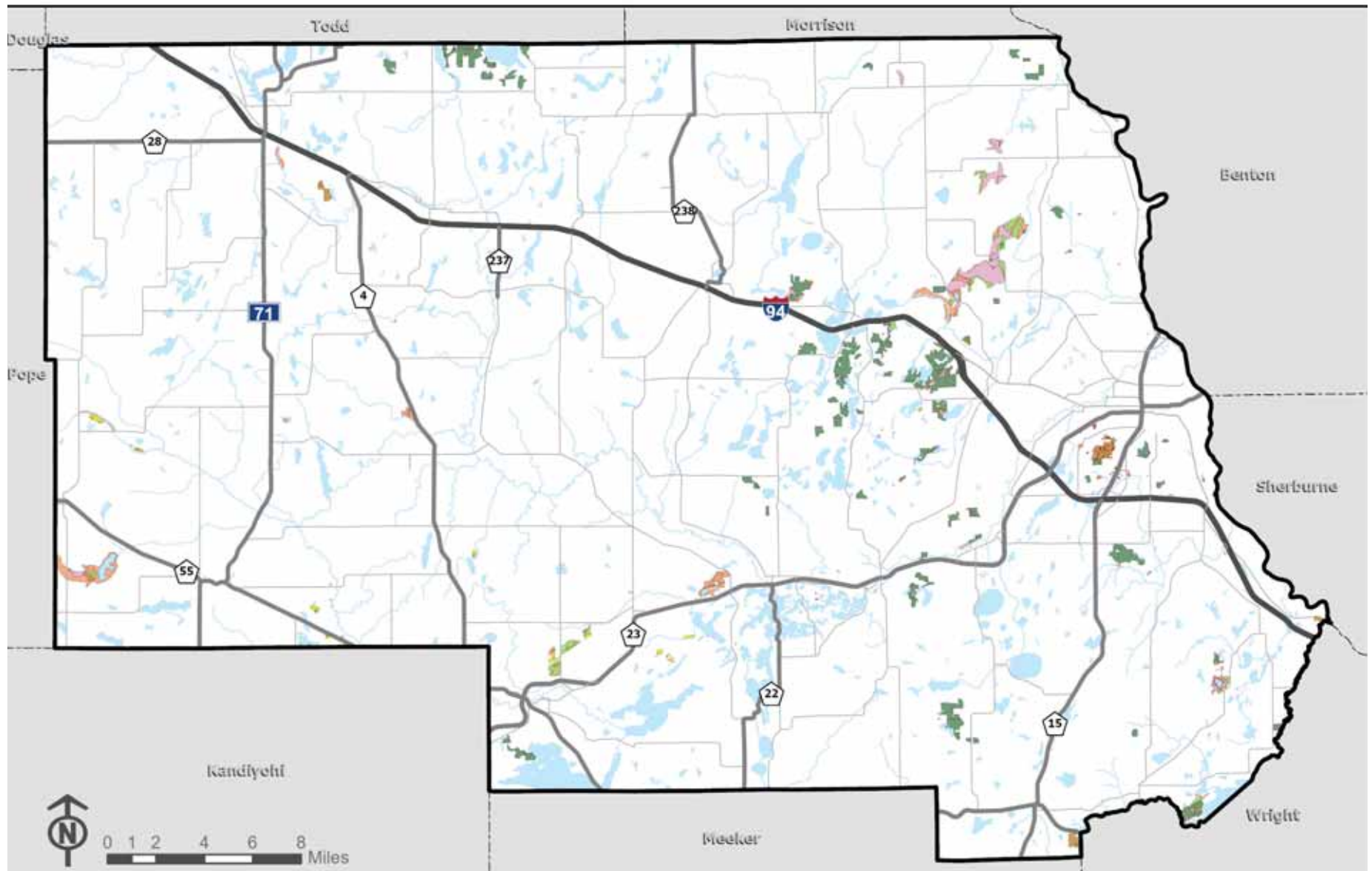


Figure 9.6 Natural Areas

Native Plant Communities

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Upland Forest | Shrub Wetland |
| Woodlands / Savannas | Open Wetland |
| Prairies | Primary Communities |
| Forested Wetlands | |

WATER RESOURCES

Determined to a great degree by underlying geology and subsequent glaciation, Stearns County rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands define unique subareas of the County. The land use plan areas reflect the varying distribution of water resources in the County. Figure 9.8 shows the extent of surface water resources in Stearns County. While lakes, rivers and streams provide desirable amenities for development, they are also susceptible to degradation from poorly planned development. The land use plan considers the relationship of development to surface water quality.

The Mississippi River creates the eastern border of the County and is fed by rivers and streams including the Sauk, North Fork Crow, Two Rivers, Watab, and Clearwater Rivers, and Johnson, Spunk, and Plum Creeks. Figure 9.7, Watershed Districts, illustrates the geographic distribution of watersheds in Stearns County as well as the managing watershed districts. Two distinct lakes regions are located in the central and southern areas of the County.

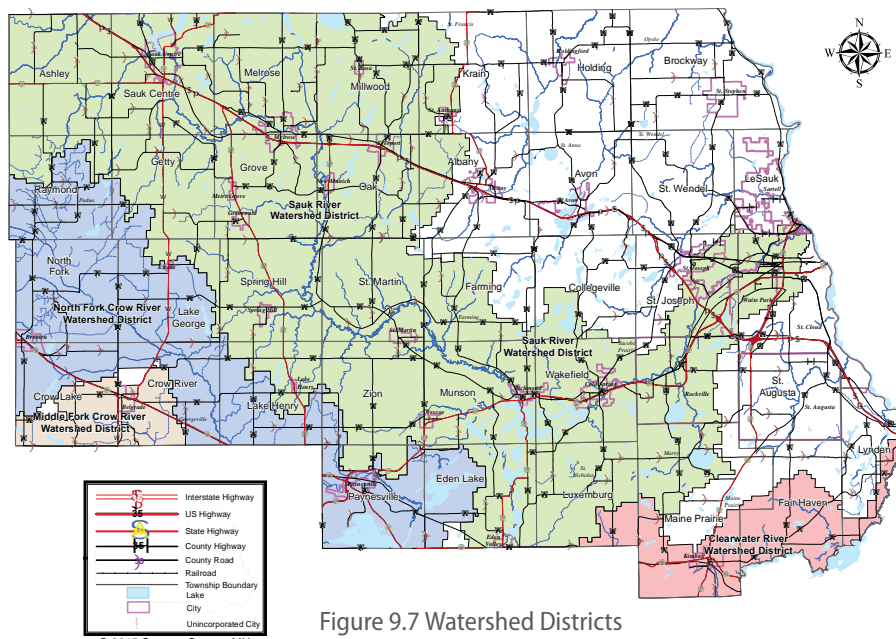


Figure 9.7 Watershed Districts



Water Resource Programs

The following resources are examples of tools used to help protect our water resources. These tools, and others should be referenced when making planning decisions.

- » Stearns County Comprehensive Local Water Plan: The plan focuses on locally-identifying water resource issues and concerns based on available data. From this assessment, the plan defines priorities, sets objectives and goals, and outlines measurable outcomes in improving the County's Water resources.
- » Wetlands: Stearns County's Environmental Services Department administers the State Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) for all areas of the County, except the cities of Roscoe and Sartell. Activities within the department include wetland determinations for certain property, reviewing wetland replacement plans, and providing certificates of exemptions, when applicable.
- » Shoreland Management: The shoreland management program requires permits for all structural, use, shoreland alteration and vegetative removal activities. The shoreland of lakes, rivers and streams are regulated under this program.
- » Floodplain Management: Stearns County participates in the Federal Flood Insurance program. Participation in the Federal Flood Insurance program allows certain structures that were built before the County began participating in the Flood Insurance Program to secure flood insurance at subsidized rates.

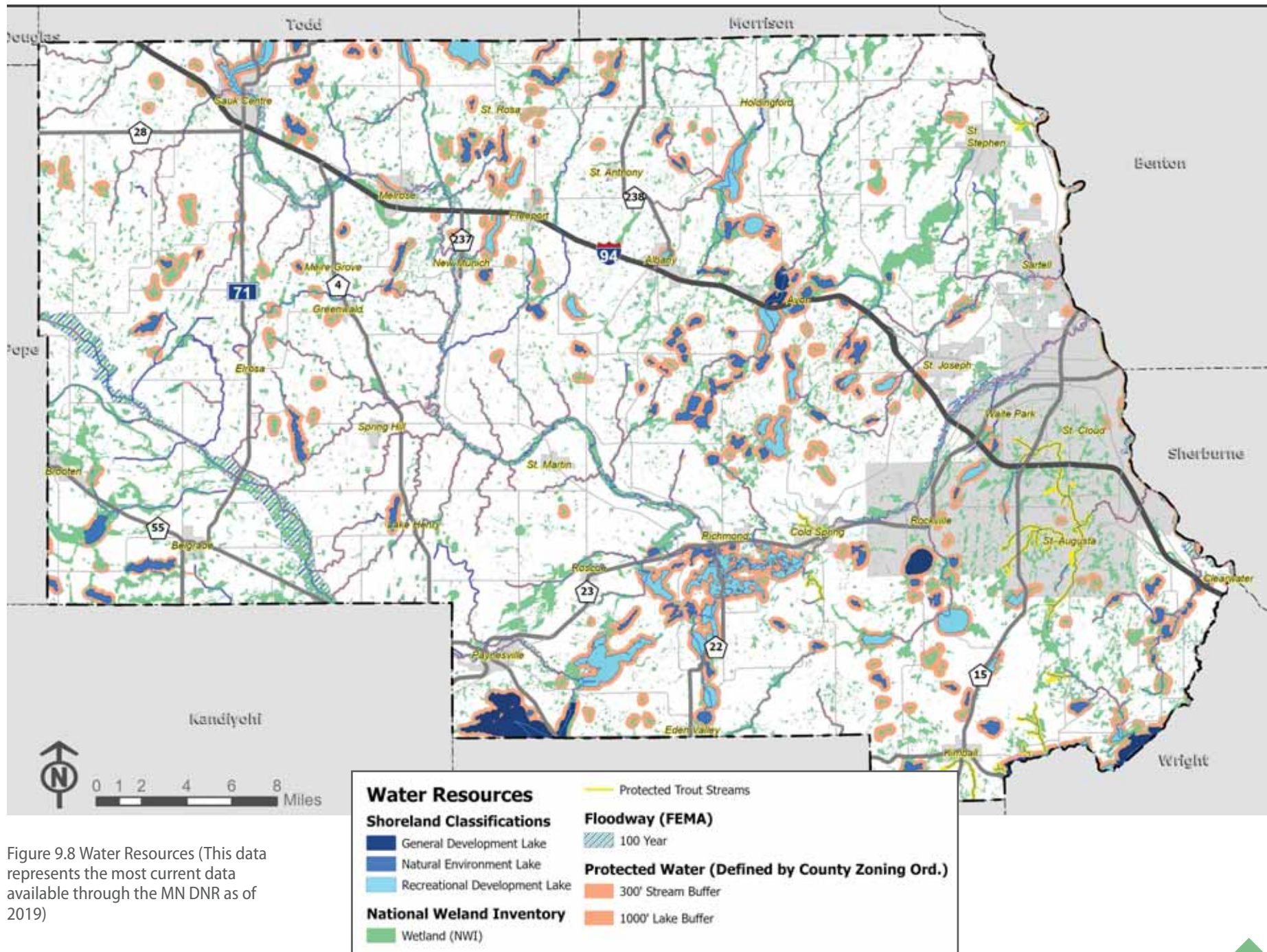


Figure 9.8 Water Resources (This data represents the most current data available through the MN DNR as of 2019)

Groundwater resources are also influenced by land use choices. The DNR has created a map (see Figure 9.9) of groundwater areas that are susceptible to contamination by nitrates. Development and agricultural land use practices should be considered when planning for land uses in areas of high nitrate susceptibility.

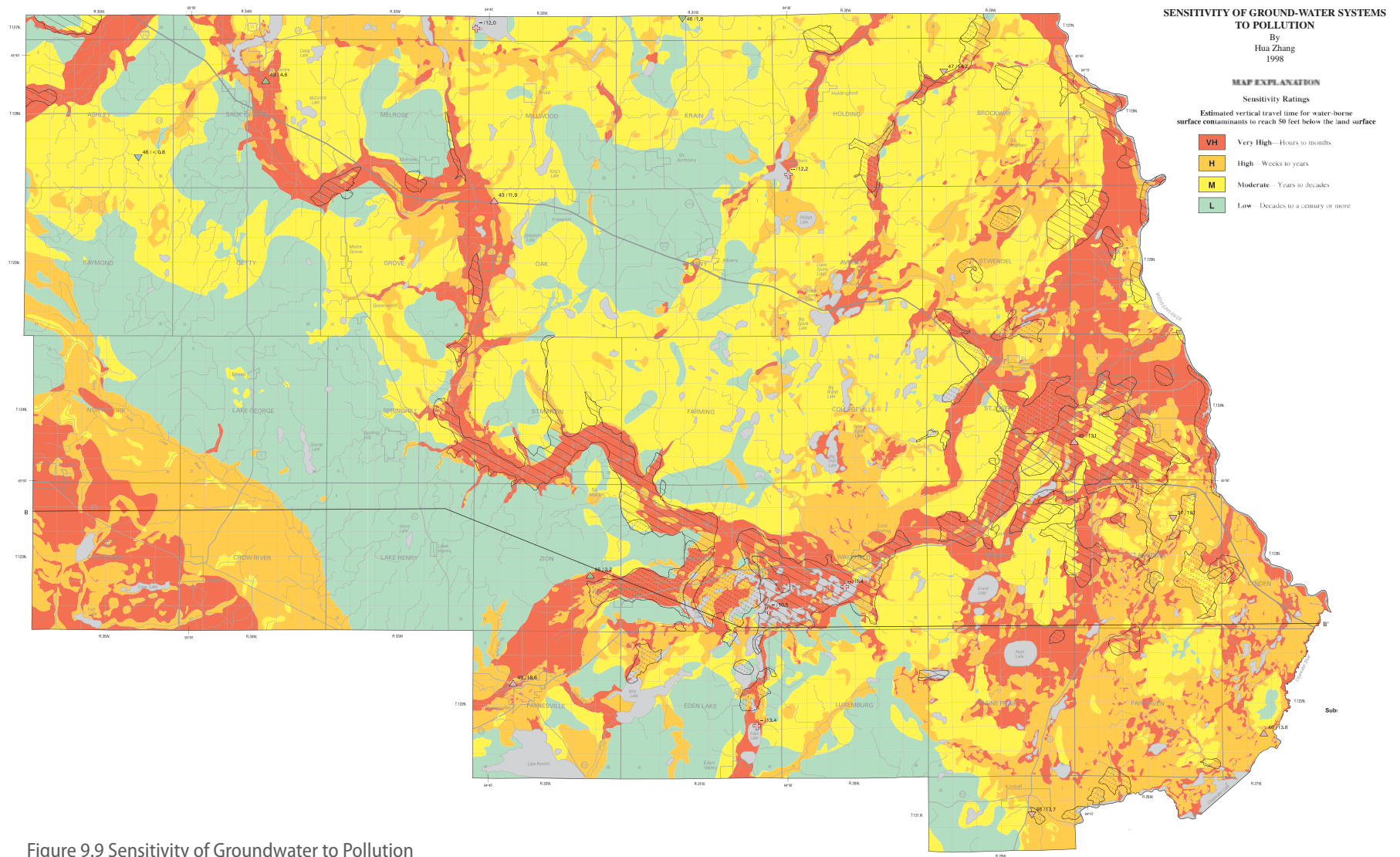


Figure 9.9 Sensitivity of Groundwater to Pollution



“We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

- Aldo Leopold





PARKS OPEN SPACE & RECREATION INVENTORY

INTRODUCTION

This part of the manual provides an inventory and assessment of the existing system, contextual information regarding complementary state facilities, and a framework for Stearns County to follow in order to meet regional needs for recreation and open space, and to preserve significant natural resources (see Figure 9.10).

Parks, Recreation and Open Space Inventory

ROLE OF THE COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM

The County's role in park and recreation planning is regional – it works to meet needs and provide facilities that are broader than those of an individual city or township. The County also plays a key role in coordinating among federal and state agencies and programs, municipal governments, and semi-private or nonprofit organizations such as watershed districts and lake associations.

Stearns County's existing system of parks, trails, and open space includes eighteen unique park and recreation facilities, ranging from boat landings to regional trails to significant regional parks (see Figure 9.10).

The County system is supplemented by a number of State Forests, Scientific and Natural Areas, and Wildlife Management Areas, as well as city parks and trails. Major recreation features in the Stearns County system include the highly used and valued Quarry Park and Nature Preserve in Waite Park, and the Lake Wobegon Trail, which stretches east and west across the County.



Quarry Park



County Picnic Shelter



Rockville County Park

STEARNS COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT

The Stearns County Parks Department was established in 1974 and carries the responsibility for acquisition, planning, development, administration, and daily maintenance of over 2,600 acres of parks and trails. It is the operating arm of the Stearns County Park Commission.

Parks department staff duties include:

- » Operate County parks, trails, and recreation programs
- » Provide and manage facilities
- » Improve and maintain parks and trails
- » Partner with recreation groups and organizations on programming
- » Acquire land and build new parks and trails
- » Manage natural open space in parks and along trails

THE COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

The Stearns County Park Commission was created by the County Board on October 20, 1970. Its responsibilities are described as follows:

- » To study and determine the park, recreation and open space needs of the County and make recommendations to the Planning Commission and the County Board of Commissioners.
- » Recommendations include “general and specific development standards and criteria for evaluating potential sites, the extent and objectives of county participation in outdoor recreation and a program for coordination with other groups or agencies, all in conjunction with the Stearns County Comprehensive Plan.”
- » To submit an annual budget and priority projects to the Administration Department to be approved by the Stearns County Board of Commissioners.

PARK COMMISSION'S MISSION STATEMENT

To provide natural resource-oriented parks and outdoor recreation opportunities, that enhance the quality of life of Stearns County residents through physical fitness, community building and economic vitality.

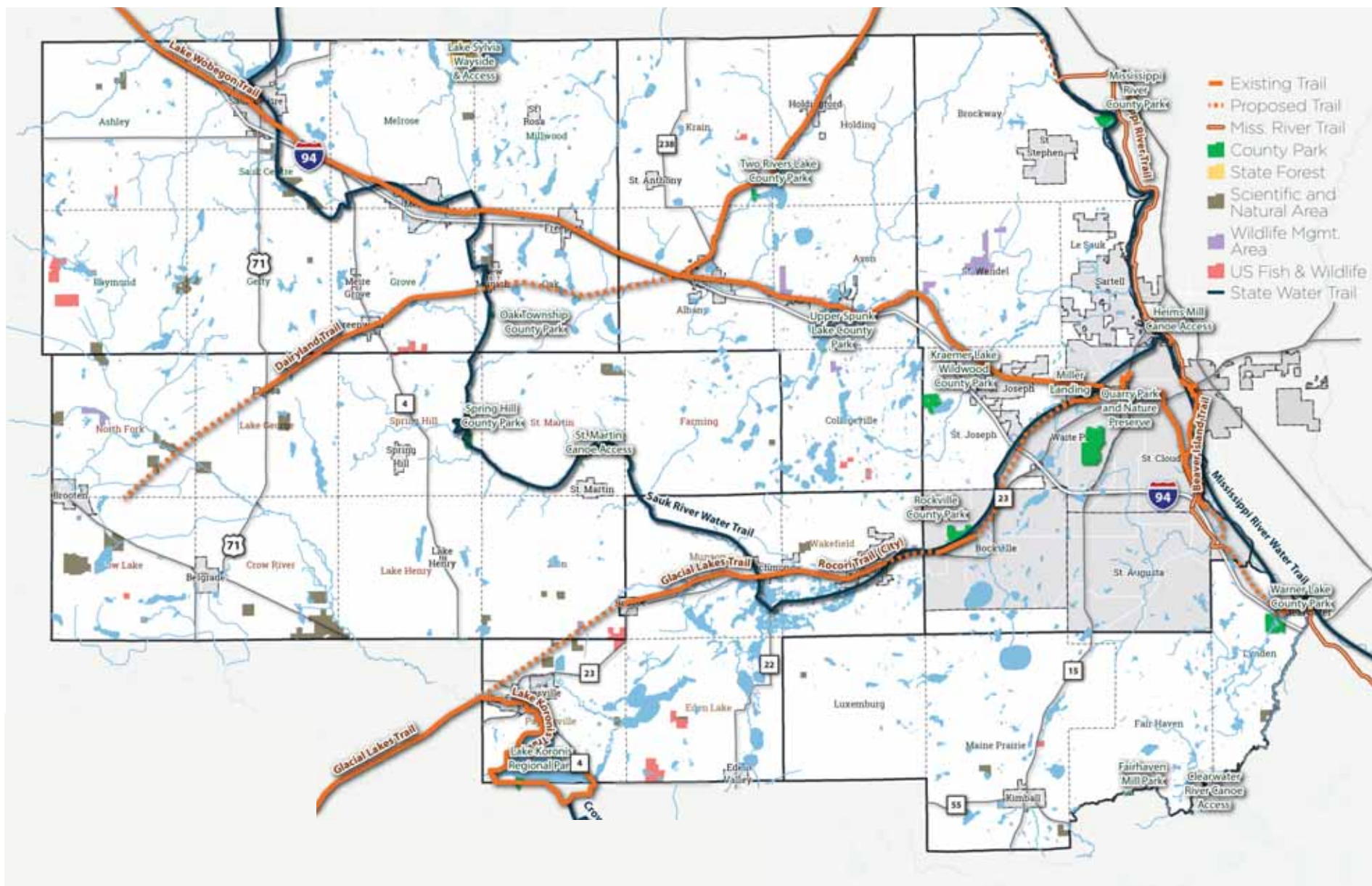


Figure 9.10 Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces



Quarry Park



Wildwood County Park

PAST PLANNING

The Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan chapter is an update to the 2008 Comprehensive Plan, which has its roots in the 1989 Recreation Plan. The 1989 Recreation Plan set the framework for the Stearns County park classification system and standards. The first recreation plan for Stearns County was developed in 1970, and it was comprehensively updated in the mid-1980s. The 1970 plan established the park acreage need of 20 acres of County parkland per 1,000 County residents.

PARK CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Stearns County has defined its parks facilities using a park classification system, which articulates the diversity and types of recreational uses available within the county (see Table 9.1 and 9.2). Table 9.1 has been revised from the version in the 2008 Comprehensive Plan to align with the existing and potential future park types in the County. The local or municipal park classifications have been removed as cities typically define their own classification standards.

Stearns County's existing system of parks, trails, and open space includes two (2) signature County recreation facilities, eight (8) County parks and open spaces, three (3) linear parks/greenways/trails, and seven (7) special features. The County system is supplemented by a number of State forests, Scientific and Natural Areas, and Wildlife Management Areas, as well as city parks and trails (see Figure 9.10).



CLASSIFICATION	USE	SERVICE AREA	SIZE	ATTRIBUTES/ LOCATION	EXISTING FACILITIES
SIGNATURE COUNTY RECREATION FACILITY	County parkland with a regional draw, such as a unique natural feature or recreation component	Countywide	100-1,000 acres	Unique recreation features; accessible facilities for diverse population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarry Park and Nature Preserve* Lake Wobegon Trail*
LINEAR PARK / GREENWAY / TRAIL	One or more modes of recreational travel; could include land-based trail or water trail	Countywide	Sufficient width to provide maximum resource protection and use; adequate length for use	Where corridors occur naturally and in the context of transportation corridors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beaver Island Trail (to be developed) * Dairyland Trail ROCORI Trail (to be developed)
SPECIAL FEATURE	Area for specialized or single-purpose activities – i.e., golf course, nature center, arboretum, historic site, canoe access, wayside, boat landing, etc.	Countywide	As needed for specific purpose	Appropriate to purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upper Spunk Lake County Park Fairhaven Mill Park Lake Sylvia Wayside St. Martin Canoe Access Heims Mill Canoe Access Miller Landing Clearwater River Canoe Access
COUNTY PARK OR OPEN SPACE	Area of natural or scenic quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation	3-5 communities or 10-mile radius	100 – 1,000 acres	Complete natural setting, preferably contiguous to water resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warner Lake County Park* Mississippi River County Park (*future) Oak Township Park site (New Munich River Wayside) Lake Koronis Regional Park (*future) Kraemer Lake Park* Rockville Park* Spring Hill County Park Two Rivers Lake Park site
COUNTY PARK RESERVE	Area of natural or scenic quality for nature-oriented outdoor recreation, including significant wildlife habitat and trail access; could include preservation land for environmental or aesthetic benefits; to avert negative consequences of development	Countywide	1,000+ acres Variable	Diversity of natural resources Significant resources which merit preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None

Table 9.1 Park Classification

*Regionally-designated parks or trails that serve a larger area



NAME	ACRES	ADDRESS / LOCATION	FEATURES ⁵	RECOMMENDED PARK CLASSIFICATION
QUARRY PARK AND NATURE PRESERVE ⁴	683	1802 County Road 137, Waite Park	Rock climbing, scuba diving, swimming, nature trails, picnic areas, ski, snowshoe, hiking trails, bike paths, environmental education, group camp, mountain bike trail, fat tire biking, historical site	Signature County Recreation Facility
ROCKVILLE COUNTY PARK AND NATURE PRESERVE ^{3,4}	294	11503 Glacier Road, St. Cloud	Fishing, canoe campsites, picnic area, canoe access, trails, group camp	County Park
KRAEMER LAKE-WILDWOOD COUNTY PARK	265	29709 Kipper Road, St. Joseph	Fishing, ski trails, hiking trails, overlook, youth group camp	County Park
WARNER LAKE COUNTY PARK ⁴	264	1485 County Road 143, Clearwater	Boat access, fishing, group camp, nature trail, hiking trails, picnic area, picnic shelter, play area, prairie, swimming beach, snowmobile trail	County Park
MISSISSIPPI RIVER COUNTY PARK ⁴	230	41300 County Road 1, Rice	Boat access, fishing, picnic area, nature trail, picnic shelter, play area, prairie, ski trail, disc golf course, group camp, archery range	County Park
SPRING HILL COUNTY PARK ^{3,4}	82	31938 County Road 14, Melrose	Canoe access, canoe campground, fishing, picnic area, picnic shelter, play area, prairie, river wayside, snowmobile trail	County Park
LAKE KORONIS REGIONAL PARK ¹	62	14076 Bluefield Road, Paynesville	Boat access, fishing, nature trail, picnic area, picnic shelter, play area, swimming beach, trailer campground	County Park (inter-county)
TWO RIVERS LAKE PARK SITE ⁴	56	38694 County Road 10, Albany	Fishing, picnic area, trails, group camp	County Park
OAK TOWNSHIP PARK SITE (NEW MUNICH RIVER WAYSIDE)	32	33685 County Road 12, Melrose	Open space, canoe access, picnic area, archery, canoe camp	County Park
UPPER SPUNK LAKE COUNTY PARK	7	17626 County Road 9, Avon	Fishing, picnic area	Special Feature

Table 9.2 Stearns County Park Facilities (continued on following page)

NAME	ACRES	ADDRESS / LOCATION	FEATURES	RECOMMENDED PARK CLASSIFICATION
FAIRHAVEN MILL PARK ²	5	5001 Birchdale Road, South Haven	Boat access, fishing, historic site, picnic area	Special Feature (inter-county)
LAKE SYLVIA WAYSIDE	3	32574 County Road 17, Melrose	Boat access, fishing, picnic area	Special Feature
ST. MARTIN CANOE ACCESS	1	27427 Sauk Landing Road, Paynesville	Canoe access, fishing	Special Feature
HEIMS MILL CANOE ACCESS	0.7	32324 County Road 1, St. Cloud	Fishing, canoe access, picnic area	Special Feature
MILLER LANDING	6	7502 County Road 138, St. Cloud	Canoe access, picnic area	Special Feature
CLEARWATER RIVER CANOE ACCESS	1	12482 Bayview Road, Clearwater	Canoe access, picnic area	Special Feature
BEAVER ISLAND TRAIL	40	St. Cloud - Clearwater	Paved trail (not completed as of 2019)	Linear Park / Greenway / Trail
DAIRYLAND TRAIL / SOO LINE RAIL CORRIDOR	485	Greenwald – New Munich	Aggregate trail	Linear Park / Greenway / Trail
LAKE WOBEGON TRAIL	161	Waite Park-Sauk Centre / Albany -Holdingford	Paved trail, snowmobiling, hiking, biking, snowshoeing, etc.	Signature County Recreation Facility

Note:

1. Meeker County is responsible for management; Stearns contributes financially
2. Owned by Wright County and located largely in Stearns; managed jointly with Wright County; costs shared 50/50
3. Horses are allowed
4. All park camping except canoe campsites are for non-profit youth groups.





Picnic shelters are provided at several County parks



Lake Wobegon Trail

RECENT SYSTEM ADDITIONS

Since the last Comprehensive Plan update, the County system has expanded with the following acquisitions:

- » **Kraemer Lake-Wildwood Park**, established in 2007, provides unique recreation and interpretation opportunities including cross-country skiing, hiking, maple syrup production, picnicking and swimming, amidst a high-quality forest landscape. The park has been designated as “Regionally Significant” by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission following development of a master plan in 2016.
- » **Rockville County Park and Nature Preserve** was established in late 2006 and early 2007 through the purchase of three major parcels of property. Minnesota Department of Natural Resources grants were used to match donations and County bonding funds to establish the park. This parcel is encumbered by a conservation easement held by the Minnesota Land Trust.

The largest parcel, the John and Linda Peck parcel, was donated to the project. Mr. Peck is a volunteer with the Minnesota Land Trust and was the chair of the Stearns County Park Commission. He and his wife, Linda were recognized as Stearns County Volunteers of the Year in 2007 for their commitment to conservation and their donation of property for the new park.

- » **Clearwater River Canoe Access** is three parcels with less than an acre of land. The tax forfeited property has been maintained by the Stearns County Parks since 2016. There is access to the Clearwater River which leads into Clearwater Lake.
- » **Lake Wobegon Trail expansion** from St. Joseph to Waite Park. The trail extended east of St. Joseph during 2017 and 2018 to add 3 miles of paved trail to the system.



FEDERAL AND STATE PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES

Stearns County works closely with other government agencies on protection of natural and recreational resources. Other types of protected open space within the County include:

Wildlife

Management Areas

are managed by the Minnesota DNR for wildlife production, public hunting and trapping. Stearns County contains 42 WMAs totaling 8,772 acres. Many are located near wetlands, where they also help protect water quality.

Waterfowl

Production Areas

are managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to maintain breeding habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. There are 2,152.6 acres in Stearns County owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs) are managed by the Minnesota DNR to “preserve and perpetuate the ecological diversity of Minnesota’s natural heritage, including landforms, fossil remains, plant and animal communities, rare and endangered species, or other biotic features and geological formations, for scientific study and public edification as components of a healthy environment.” (MN DNR web site) There are currently 7 SNAs in Stearns County, totaling 1,811 acres:

- » Cold Spring Heron Colony, Wakefield Township, 65 acres
- » Partch Woods, St. Wendel Township, 124 acres
- » Quarry Park (southern section of this County park), City of Waite Park, 323 acres
- » Roscoe Prairie, Zion Township, 57 acres
- » St. Wendel Tamarack Bog and Fen – 663 acres
- » Avon Hills Hardwood Forest/Collegeville Township – 354 acres
- » Sedan Brook Mesic Prairie – North Fork Township near Brooten – 225 acres

National and State Trails

Stearns County has worked with neighboring counties and the DNR to obtain bonding funds for construction of the Glacial Lakes State Trail from Richmond to Paynesville (16 miles). Portions of the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) is also located in the County. The MRT is a designated bicycle and pedestrian trail that traverses the shores of the Mississippi River in the United States. The trail extends from the headwaters at Lake Itasca in Minnesota to near the mouth of the river in Venice, Louisiana.

SWCD

Stearns County support Stearns County SWCD’s efforts in natural system corridor planning. To rank and prioritize conservation easement acquisition in the Sauk River Watershed in partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust. Priority is given to tracts of land that fall under multiple state priority designations for protection and provide the greatest benefit to citizens of Minnesota. Typically, tracts of land that augment or create habitat corridors rank highest. Land in close proximity to already protected habitat is also prioritized.

To rank and prioritize conservation easement acquisition in the Avon Hills ecoregion in partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust. Priority is given to tracts of land that fall under multiple state priority designations for protection and provide the greatest benefit to citizens of Minnesota. Typically, tracts of land that augment or create habitat corridors rank highest. Land in close proximity to already protected habitat is also prioritized.

To assess the potential for wetland and native vegetation restoration using a scoring matrix created by the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources to rank and prioritize applications for MN CREP conservation easements. Priority is given to tracts with greater wetland restoration potential in addition to being near species of conservation concern and near permanently protected habitat.

TRENDS IN RECREATION

The following list includes trends that have emerged locally and nationally over the last ten years that serve as potential opportunities for Stearns County. Whether the trends are on the rise or in decline, they are worth noting in this plan as they may affect how Stearns County plans for the future.



National Trends

The National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) 2019 Agency Performance Review indicates that in the coming years, park investments will grow compared to the last ten years. This is in comparison to the depressed spending following the 2008 economic downturn. In addition, local government agency tax revenues have been increasing, which provides park agencies with greater economic resources for recreation investments.

Nationwide there has been an increased use of technology for providing recreational services, monitoring use and performance, and collecting data. Impacts can be seen in parks agencies through the use of:

- » beacon counters to measure park use
- » autonomous vehicles to move people through parks and open spaces
- » georeferencing and GPS technology to monitor users and facilities
- » drones that photograph facilities as well as deliver food and beverages to park users, assist with public safety monitoring, and mapping natural areas

Changing climate and an increase in severe weather events globally and nationally has had an impact on our environment and outdoor spaces. It is important to recognize this issue and plan for future changes in the climate and environment to reduce economic impacts, mitigate where possible, and adapt as necessary.



Statewide Trends

The 2014-2018 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), published by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR), gives outdoor recreation decision-makers and managers a focused set of priorities and suggested actions to guide them as they make decisions about outdoor recreation. The SCORP outlines outdoor recreation trends, challenges and issues including protecting existing natural resources, sustaining existing facilities, promoting healthy lifestyles, connecting people with nature and an increasing demand for a diverse range of recreation opportunities based upon population changes.

Some challenges identified in the SCORP include low population growth in Minnesota compared to the rest of the nation, with the majority of the population growth in the state occurring in the metro area, and especially between Rochester and St. Cloud. This concentrated growth in the more densely populated areas of the state compared to low growth in the rural areas correlates with more interest in nature-based activities such as fishing and boating, and less interest in activities such as hunting, snowmobiling, and ATV use.

The Minnesota State Demographer states that recent population growth in Minnesota has been increasingly coming from immigration. "While both the U.S.-born population and foreign-born population have grown since 1970, the foreign-born population has swelled more quickly. Minnesota had about 113,000 foreign-born residents in 1990, but that number had more than quadrupled to about 457,200 residents by 2015."

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission provides a new funding stream for out-state regional parks and trails by designating State Legacy Funding to be allocated to specific projects. Stearns County has six regionally designated facilities: Kraemer Lake Park, Lake Wobegon Trail, Rockville Park, Quarry Park, Warner Lake Park, and Beaver Island Trail.



Regional/County-wide Trends

Emerging trends in regional and county parks and recreation facilities include a continued growth and interest in trails and linear recreation, such as biking, walking, and running. This interest in trails is expected to continue to increase in the coming years. Regional destination trails with amenities and facilities, such as trailheads, campsites, views/overlooks, cultural interpretation, and connections to local breweries and eateries, are becoming more popular statewide.

Physical and mental health have been recognized as important considerations for parks, trails, and recreation programming with county-wide active living plans and Safe Routes to School (SRTS) investments. With an increase in obesity and mental health issues, regional parks have been tasked with providing facilities and programs that help people lead healthier lives.

Counties are dealing with a variety of demographic changes, such as increasing diversity, an aging population, and smaller households and families. These changes indicate a greater need for parks and recreation providers to be flexible in terms of programs and facilities that they are offering to meet the needs of their residents.

In addition to the above trends, a number of recreation facilities and programs are becoming more popular for regional park agencies to provide in their systems:

- » Outdoor events - trail runs, adventure races
- » Aquatic facilities - splash pads, swim ponds, beaches
- » Events and experiences - amphitheaters, outdoor wedding facilities, family reunions, festivals
- » Efficient operational models – public/private partnerships
- » Environmental learning - camps, nature centers, naturalist-led programming
- » Cultural and natural interpretation – sign panels, overlooks and views, plant identification, arboretums
- » Natural resources preservation and restoration - prairies, oak savannas, woodlands
- » Adventure recreation - rock climbing, mountain biking
- » Unique amenities - off-leash dog parks, disc golf, archery
- » Camping - camper cabins, yurts, RVs/campers
- » Winter recreation - snow shoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling
- » Outdoor activities - fishing, boating, canoeing/kayaking

Note:

COVID-19 was at the forefront of all of our lives during the last several months of developing this Plan. During this time, Stearns County's park and trail system experienced a large increase in the number of users. Much of the response to COVID is continually evolving and few concrete answers exist to how we will continue to feel impacts in our communities and parks/trail systems.



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APPENDIX E-25

Minnesota SCORP

MINNESOTA STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN, 2020-2024

November 2019



A report submitted in fulfillment of requirements for Minnesota's continued eligibility for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).





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Fall landscape photo of Maplewood State Park on page 32 is by Don Del Greco.

All other photos are Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Minnesota State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020-2024 (SCORP) provides guidance and direction to the state's outdoor recreation providers for their work in protecting, maintaining and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities for the state's residents and visitors. This SCORP is intended to meet the requirements for continued eligibility to receive matching Land and Water Conservation Funds.

Minnesota has a long history of preserving lands for public use and recreation, from the efforts to preserve the lands around Minnehaha Falls beginning in 1885 (eventually becoming a Minneapolis city park) and the establishment of Itasca State Park in 1891, one of the earliest state parks in the nation.

Today, Minnesota enjoys a system of outdoor recreation that provides residents and visitors opportunities for a wide array of experiences across the state. A host of public agencies provides these opportunities, including the federal and state governments, regional organizations, counties and municipalities. Non-profit organizations and the private sector also play an important role in land preservation and recreation in Minnesota. Together, these groups provide a diverse suite of outdoor recreation opportunities: hiking, biking, camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, wildlife watching, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, rock climbing, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, ATV riding, team sports and more.

The SCORP 2020-2024 continues to build on the previous work set out in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* (2011) and Minnesota's previous State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014-2018. The SCORP 2020-2024 is structured around **four Strategic Directions**, with strategies that provide guidance for outdoor recreation providers over the next five years. This SCORP process used Information from public engagement efforts and a survey of local recreation providers to develop, refine and prioritize the strategies within each Strategic Direction.

SCORP 2020-2024 Strategic Directions

- *Connect People and the Outdoors*
- *Acquire Land, Create Opportunities*
- *Take Care of What We Have*
- *Coordinate Among Partners*

The plan also identifies several current and future trends that are expected to continue to affect outdoor recreation in Minnesota: issues around public health; addressing diversity, equity and inclusion challenges; demographic changes in Minnesota's population; climate change impacts; and accessibility.

Taken together, these trends and the strategies within the four Strategic Directions represent both challenges and opportunities for Minnesota's outdoor recreation providers for the next five years. The intention is that SCORP 2020-2024 will aid these agencies and organizations as they plan for, and invest in, facilities and programs to meet the outdoor recreation interests of Minnesota's residents and visitors.

INTRODUCTION

FRAMEWORK FOR THE 2020 – 2024 STATE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

Minnesota’s State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020-2024 (SCORP) is based on a consistent framework to address the state’s outdoor recreation needs. This plan continues the direction set out in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* and Minnesota’s previous SCORP (2014-2018).

The parks and trails “legacy” planning process was an effort initiated by the Minnesota State Legislature to provide guidance for how funds generated by the newly created Parks and Trails Legacy Fund should be used. As with the previous SCORP, the planning process for the SCORP 2020-2024 utilized additional public engagement to build on the foundation laid out in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* and to identify strategies to guide the next five years of outdoor recreation efforts in Minnesota. The goals and strategies in the SCORP 2020-2024 continue to reinforce the vision and four strategic directions that comprise the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

The SCORP 2020-2024 gives outdoor recreation decision-makers and managers a set of priorities and suggested actions to guide them as they make decisions about outdoor recreation.

The National Park Service (NPS) requires completion of the SCORP to maintain Minnesota’s eligibility to participate in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (also known as LWCF, or “LAWCON”).

BACKGROUND

In 2018, Minnesota marked the tenth anniversary of the passage of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to enhance funding for the protection of natural resources, outdoor recreation, the arts and cultural heritage. In 2008, voters approved raising the state sales tax by 3/8 of 1 percent (from 6.5 percent to 6.875 percent) for 25 years, to contribute to a dedicated fund. Often called the Legacy Fund, this dedicated fund is divided into four parts that receive the proceeds from the sales tax increase, with 33% of the revenue going to the Outdoor Heritage Fund, 33% of the revenue going to the Clean Water Fund, 19.75% to the Arts and Culture Fund, and 14.25% to the Parks and Trails Fund.

Over these first ten years, the Parks and Trails Fund has collected approximately \$360 million in revenue. The Parks and Trails Fund is distributed among three implementing agencies: Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Metropolitan Council (Met Council), and Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). These three agencies meet regularly with the Parks and Trails Legacy Advisory Committee (PTLAC). The PTLAC was established to provide recommendations to enhance

Parks and Trails Legacy Plan Vision Statement

“A Parks and Trails Vision for Minnesotans: In 2035, our world-class parks and trails connect everyone to the outdoors. They create experiences that inspire a legacy of stewardship for the natural world and they provide fun outdoor recreational opportunities that strengthen friendships, families, health, and spirit, now and into the future. Minnesotans experience the full range of benefits that outdoor recreation provides, reinforcing our identity as an outdoor culture.”

promotion, coordination, and accountability throughout the implementation of the 25-year Legacy Plan. This advisory committee is composed of private citizens appointed by the three implementing agencies involved with the distribution of Parks and Trails Legacy Funds (DNR, Met Council and GMRPTC).

To recognize the first ten-year anniversary of this 25-year constitutional amendment, the implementing agencies held a series of nine regional public events in 2018 to celebrate, educate and listen as citizens shared their perspectives on, and aspirations for, Minnesota's comprehensive system of state and regional parks and trails. A team of PTLAC members, with leadership and staff from the Legacy agencies, planned and executed the events with volunteer assistance from a host of parks and trails friends from across the state. Over 12,500 Minnesotans participated in these events. An overview of the event locations is provided in **Public Engagement** and in **Appendix C**.

BUILDING ON THE PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY PLAN AND SCORP 2014-2018

With the passing of the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment, the Minnesota State Legislature mandated that the DNR commissioner develop a plan to guide the use of the Parks and Trails Fund and other traditional sources of funding. In response to this new opportunity and legislative direction, DNR developed a collaborative planning process that relied heavily on public involvement to develop and finalize the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* was organized around four Strategic Directions that provide a framework for the strategies and actions identified in the plan. The four Strategic Directions are:

- **Connect People and the Outdoors:** develop Minnesota's stewards of tomorrow through efforts to increase life-long participation in outdoor recreation and appreciation for our natural heritage.
- **Acquire Land, Create Opportunities:** expand and create new park and trail opportunities to satisfy current customers as well as to reach out to new ones.
- **Take Care of What We Have:** provide safe, high-quality park and trail experiences by regular re-investment in park and trail infrastructure, and natural resource management.
- **Coordinate Among Partners:** enhance coordination across the large and complex network of public, private and non-profit partners that support Minnesota's parks and trails to ensure seamless, enjoyable park and trail experiences for Minnesotans.

The *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* was used as the foundation for the previous SCORP, and we have retained the structure around four Strategic Direction's structure in SCORP 2020-2024. Although the scope of the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* was focused primarily on parks and trails of state and regional significance, the issues and concerns raised also relate to local parks and trails and other outdoor recreation facilities and lands.

Some recreation uses and facilities, such as athletic fields and playgrounds, are important elements for local park systems but are not as common in regional or state parks. To make sure that a



broad range of recreational uses and demands are reflected in the SCORP, additional information from local park providers was sought to complement the more regional and state-focused perspectives in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan*.

Several sources of information were used during the planning process to evaluate the directions set out in the previous SCORP, and to determine the strategies and priorities to include in the SCORP 2020-2024.

Among the information sources used during this planning process were:

- *Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan* – prepared for the GMRPTC and last updated in 2015.
- Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Household Survey – conducted by the DNR in 2017.
- Local Outdoor Recreation Provider Survey – conducted by the DNR in 2019.
- Parks and Trails Legacy 10-Year Celebration Events – held throughout Minnesota in 2018.
- Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program Requests – review of ongoing local provider grant program requests.
- Research studies – relating to recreational trends, impacts of climate change on recreation and natural lands, etc.

Several of these sources are further described in **Public Engagement** and in the **Appendices**.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

An important part of developing Minnesota’s SCORP 2020-2024 is public and stakeholder input. To better understand patterns and priorities for outdoor recreation in Minnesota, several efforts were used to gather information and feedback from outdoor recreation providers and from the public.

RESIDENTS AND USERS

MINNESOTA OUTDOOR RECREATION HOUSEHOLD SURVEY 2017

In 2017, the Minnesota DNR updated a statewide outdoor recreation household survey that had previously been conducted in 2004. The survey invited a random sample of 8,000 Minnesotans to share about their participation in outdoor activities, what motivates them to get outdoors, factors that limit participation, and preferences for communication. A total of 1,987 Minnesotans shared responses online, over the phone, and via paper surveys.

Key findings from the survey included positive news that outdoor activities are an increasingly important part of most Minnesotan’s lives. In 2004, data suggested that outdoor recreation participation was declining, causing concern for public agencies charged with providing outdoor recreation. Fortunately, the 2017 survey results indicate that from 2004 to 2017, the percentage of Minnesotans who reported that outdoor activities are very important increased from 57 to 70 percent. And, most Minnesotans reported that they participate in outdoor activities frequently: nearly two-thirds of Minnesotans reported recreating, on average, more than twice per week over the past year.

Findings also revealed that “Minnesotans see the outdoors as a place to rest and relax, connect with family and friends, and improve their health.” Favorite activities were broken up into seasonal categories, with activities such as “relaxing in the outdoors,” “walking or hiking,” “relaxing by the water,” and “picnicking outdoors” identified as highly popular year-round and three-season activities. In winter, top activities were “sledding and snow tubing,” and “ice fishing.” These findings suggest a

number of interesting possibilities: that Minnesotans prefer activities that require less equipment or advanced skills, and/or that they have not had the opportunity to develop interests and skills to participate in other activities. This is an area for additional exploration.

In terms of barriers to getting outdoors, findings were consistent with past data suggesting that pests, time, and convenience were primary reasons people are not spending more time outdoors. More information about this survey and its findings are available in **Appendix A** and at www.mndnr.gov.

PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION EVENTS

In 2018, Minnesota’s Parks and Trails Legacy Fund marked its tenth anniversary. The PTLAC hosted a series of events statewide to:

- Celebrate the anniversary
- Listen to the public about their “Legacy stories” and ideas for the future
- Educate the public about what the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund is and why it’s important

Staff representing the ten metropolitan regional park agencies, the Metropolitan Council, the Minnesota DNR, and the GMRPTC gathered ideas from the public at nine regional events – including the Minnesota State Fair. All told, 12,500 Minnesotans were engaged in events designed to learn what people know about the Legacy Amendment and what they would like to see in the future.

Staff and consultants analyzed feedback received at regional events and completed a report that presented key findings and recommended next steps. Major *priorities of interest* identified by attendees included:

- Acquire land for parks, trails, and conservation
- Maintain and improve natural resources
- Maintain parks and trails facilities
- Provide more programming and events
- Provide more and improved features (e.g., equipment and accessible infrastructure)
- Create greater awareness and marketing of parks, trails, and programming



Overall *learnings and recommendations* from these public engagement activities were as follows:

- Many people take great pride in Minnesota’s quality parks, trails, and natural resources.
- Minnesotans place high value on taking care of facilities and preserving the natural resources already found within existing parks and trails.
- Many Minnesotans see the health and wellness benefits offered by nearby parks and trails as part of their daily lives.
- Parks and trails must become more accessible and welcoming to people of varying abilities.
- More public awareness of these outdoor recreation resources, and marketing of specific parks and trails, is necessary.
- Older participants are concerned about preserving natural resources for younger generations and about teaching them about nature and outdoor activities.

More information about the celebration events can be found in **Appendix C**.

OUTDOOR RECREATION PROVIDERS

LOCAL RECREATION PROVIDER SURVEY

While Parks and Trails Legacy partners represent a large number of outdoor recreation systems statewide, they do not administer local systems. In order to ensure Minnesota's SCORP is effectively comprehensive in its scope, a local recreation provider questionnaire was distributed to city and county recreation departments. The responses received from 56 entities, 22 cities and 34 counties, were analyzed to help inform this SCORP.

The most relevant feedback received from the responses is as follows:

- The large majority of providers reported increased visitation to their parks and facilities in the past five years (77%).
- Amongst local providers, there is not consistent direction around acquiring land for the next five years. However, some common needs identified were trail development (predominantly non-motorized), open space (e.g., athletic fields), and expanded parking and dog parks.
- Lack of funding, lack of capacity to manage more land, and a sense that their system is already developed were the main reasons some departments were not planning to acquire new land.
- Most respondents plan to develop new infrastructure in the next five years. Priorities for new development are trails, playgrounds (including nature play), athletic fields, and trailhead amenities (e.g., restrooms).
- Respondents ranked natural resource management-related activities as the highest priority for the next five years.
- Local providers are taking actions to respond to climate change impacts, such as relocating or rerouting trails to avoid flooding, making energy-efficiency improvements, and modifying how they provide winter activities.
- Other priorities local providers would like to see addressed in the SCORP include:
 - o Focusing on trails
 - o Funding to take care of what we have
 - o Health connections of recreation, such as fitness programs
 - o Inclusion and diversity efforts
 - o Flexibility that allows for different needs and interests across the state



More information about the local recreation providers survey can be found in **Appendix B**.

SCORP STEERING COMMITTEE

PURPOSE AND MEMBERSHIP

The Minnesota DNR convened a Steering Committee to help guide the development of the SCORP 2020-2024. The twelve members of the committee were selected to represent a broad array of interests in outdoor recreation in Minnesota. The Steering Committee included local and regional park agency staff, members of outdoor recreation advocacy groups, and community leaders involved with health, youth, and accessibility issues. The Steering Committee met several times with the DNR Planning Team during the SCORP planning process.

ROLE AND TASKS

The Steering Committee played several important roles during the planning process:

- Ensuring that the diverse perspectives on outdoor recreation are represented in the plan
- Reviewing information and data to be included in the plan, and suggesting additional information sources
- Reviewing the draft plan and providing feedback on its structure and content

An important task for the Steering Committee was to review the strategies to be included in the plan. This involved recommending revisions to existing strategies and the development of new strategies to address emerging issues. The Steering Committee provided recommendations for prioritizing the strategies to be included in each of the four Strategic Directions in the SCORP.



OVERVIEW OF MINNESOTA'S OUTDOOR RECREATION SYSTEM

Minnesota's outdoor recreation system includes lands owned or managed by local, regional, state and federal governments, as well as some owned by nonprofit and for-profit entities. All play different roles in managing and maintaining Minnesota's outdoor recreation system. The system includes everything from neighborhood playgrounds, to regional parks, to state parks, to national forests. About one-fourth of the land in Minnesota is in some form of public ownership, and the vast majority is administered by federal, state or county governments. Almost all of this land provides conservation benefits as well as some kind of outdoor recreation opportunity. Managing this land for public benefits is an important responsibility and requires significant resources.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Federal lands providing outdoor recreation in Minnesota include two national forests, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, five units managed by the National Park Service (Voyageurs National Park, Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, Pipestone National Monument, and Grand Portage National Monument), and 13 national wildlife refuges.

The Chippewa National Forest, established in 1908, was the first national forest east of the Mississippi River. The Superior National Forest, established in 1909, contains the largest wilderness area east of the Rocky Mountains and north of the Everglades. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is the most heavily used of all federal wilderness areas.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages nine national wildlife refuges and nine wetland management districts. These units provide hunting, fishing, bird watching and photography opportunities.

For more than 50 years, the federal government has had a funding partnership with the state and local governments in Minnesota through the Land and Water Conservation Fund program. The impact of this program on the outdoor recreation system in Minnesota has been significant. This program is further described in **The Land and Water Conservation Fund** section of this report.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Itasca State Park, established in 1891, is one of the earliest state parks in the country. Many other state parks in Minnesota were established during the 1930s with help from the federal government through the Civilian Conservation Corps, Works Progress Administration, and other federal Depression-era programs. There are currently 75 state parks and recreation areas, over 1,300 miles of state trails, more than 1,500 DNR-managed water access sites, and over 4,500 miles of waterways designated as state water trails. Minnesota's first state forest was created in 1900. Today there are 58 state forests totaling nearly 4 million acres. These lands provide many opportunities for camping, fishing, hunting, bird watching, canoeing, boating and other natural resource-based outdoor recreation. State trails and other trails in these units support a wide variety of recreational uses. Some support multiple uses while others cater to a specific use, such as single-track mountain bike or all-terrain vehicle (ATV) riding trails. Other state-owned lands and

managed areas that provide opportunities for some types of outdoor recreation include wildlife management areas, aquatic management areas, and scientific and natural areas.

In 1963, the Minnesota Outdoor Recreation Resources Commission was created to help determine state outdoor recreation needs and guide state investments to meet those needs. A cigarette tax was enacted to help fund outdoor recreation investments through the state Future Resources Fund. The commission later became the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), and now allocates some of the proceeds from the Minnesota State Lottery (the state's Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund) to natural resource-related initiatives and projects. The commission has recommended projects and programs for funding to the legislature for the past five decades, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars of investment in both state and local outdoor recreation lands and facilities. The outdoor recreation system in Minnesota owes much of its existence to this multi-decade effort. Other major state investments in outdoor recreation acquisition and facilities have come through state capital bonding and the Clean Water Land and Legacy Act funds (the "Legacy Amendment"), described on pages 4-5 here.

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

The Minneapolis-St. Paul seven-county area's Metropolitan Council coordinates and plans for the Twin Cities' regional outdoor recreation system in the form of regional parks, trails and park reserves. The Metropolitan Council provides state and regional funding for acquisition and development of the system through grants to ten county and city implementing agencies, which are responsible for operating and maintaining the park and trail facilities. The system, begun in 1974, now includes 56 regional parks and park reserves, eight special recreation areas, over 400 miles of interconnected trails, and more than 54,000 acres of land throughout the seven-county area.

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS AND TRAILS COMMISSION (GMRPTC)

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission was established in 2013 to carry out system planning and provide recommendations to the state legislature for grants funded by the Legacy Parks and Trails Fund to counties and cities outside the seven-county metropolitan area for parks and trails of regional significance. Previously, recreation providers in greater Minnesota had not been formally organized like the metropolitan area regional providers and state park and trail organizations have been.

The Commission is now legislatively established and includes 61 facilities across several categories, including natural resource-based parks, special recreation feature parks, non-motorized trails, motorized trails and mixed-use trails.



LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Minneapolis and St. Paul have extensive park systems dating back to the 1800s, as do many of the older and larger cities throughout the state. As suburbs arose in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, they acquired and developed increasingly extensive park and trail systems. Several counties throughout the state also began to acquire and develop county parks in the last half of the Twentieth Century.

These facilities primarily provide close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities and often focus more attention on youth-related outdoor recreation, such as playgrounds, athletic fields, community centers, swimming pools and beaches. While most of these facilities have been acquired and developed with locally generated funds, a significant number have been assisted by state and federal grants through the years.

PRIVATE SECTOR AND NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

The private resort industry has been particularly important in Minnesota for water-related recreation such as fishing, canoeing, boating and swimming. Larger resorts also have added golf courses, tennis courts, and other facilities. A few resorts offer downhill and cross-country skiing. Apart from the resort industry, the private sector is also a major provider of golfing and downhill skiing opportunities. There are some privately operated hunting reserves, horse riding stables, and similar facilities in the state. Businesses also support outdoor recreation by renting bicycles, canoes, snowmobiles, ATVs and other equipment. These private businesses are an important part of the larger tourism industry, one of the most important economic engines of the state.

Private landowners also play an important role in helping support outdoor recreation in Minnesota. Several types of facilities – including some state trails and large portions of the grant-in-aid snowmobile trail system, as examples – rely on access to private lands via easements or other agreements. These trail opportunities would not be possible without use of these private lands.

Non-profit organizations also support outdoor recreation in the state. The Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the state's park and state trail systems, dates back to 1954. It has helped the state acquire about \$10 million of state park and trail land. Organizations such as the Trust for Public Land, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and the Nature Conservancy have also played key roles in supporting funding for state, regional and local outdoor recreation land; protection and restoration of natural areas; wetland protection; water quality and other natural resource and outdoor recreation-related purposes. Other non-profit organizations play an important role as partners for building and maintaining trails through volunteers, such as local equestrian, horse-riding, ATV and snowmobile clubs.



CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS

This section provides an overview of the most pressing current and future trends and issues that impact how we plan for, manage, and enjoy the outdoor recreation system in Minnesota. These trends include recognition of 1) the public health benefits of outdoor recreation; 2) the need to serve all Minnesotan's equitably in outdoor recreation spaces; 3) Minnesota's changing population demographics; 4) climate change impacts on our natural world and recreational facilities; and 5) continued accessibility challenges at our outdoor recreation facilities.

PUBLIC HEALTH

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Although many people can speak to the health benefits of nature from personal experience, the scientific community had not spent much energy investigating those connections until relatively recently. As of 2019, there are now more than 400 studies that demonstrate the numerous health benefits that nature provides.

Physiological Health

Most of the research on health and nature has focused on physical health benefits. Many of the benefits discovered are helpful in preventing leading causes of chronic disease, including stress reduction; reduced blood pressure; faster healing; addiction recovery; and reduced cardiovascular, respiratory and long-term illness.

Cognitive Development

Benefits of nature exposure for cognitive development is increasingly recognized in the fields of education and human development, among others. Studies illustrate nature's positive effects on attentional restoration, reduced mental fatigue, improved academic performance, improved cognitive function in children and improved productivity.

Psychological Well-being

Studies detailing the positive effects of nature on mental processing have no doubt inspired practices such as forest bathing and other newly popular wellness-based outdoor programs in recent years. Increased self-esteem, improved mood, reduced anger/frustration and reduced anxiety are some of the key examples of the improvements documented by research on nature interactions for mental health.

Social Effects

Finally, a less well-known, but critically important benefit of time outdoors is the positive social effects at an individual or community public health scale. Several articles have found that nature facilitates social interaction, enables social empowerment, reduces crime rates and violence, and enables interracial interaction, among other positive social behaviors.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Research shows that spending time outdoors is good for us. However, do Minnesotans view nature as an “alternative” healthcare system? The 2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey found that top motivations for spending time outdoors were to feel healthier (69%), rest mentally (65%) and be physically fit (64%).

The research supports, and the public is seemingly ready to embrace, a healthier outdoor lifestyle. Public agencies and healthcare systems just have to catch-up. Outdoor recreation providers have only recently begun to formalize partnerships and programs focused on the “healthy” aspects of being outside. Park prescriptions, wellness-inspired outdoor programs, and nature-based therapy are just some of the initiatives that have taken off because of new data on this subject. There is an international movement underway to better understand how we can promote being outside as a way to live longer, be happier and spend less on healthcare costs. Several national leaders of the movement, have envisioned a future where health insurance companies will fund park entry fees and equipment needed to recreate outdoors.

Moving forward, outdoor recreation providers should consider how to enhance their operations in ways that promote visitor health and well-being. Leveraging this connection is important for outdoor organizations of all scales, because it has potential for innovative programs, new funding, fresh marketing and improved infrastructure. The end goal of all these efforts is better, healthier lives for all people.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

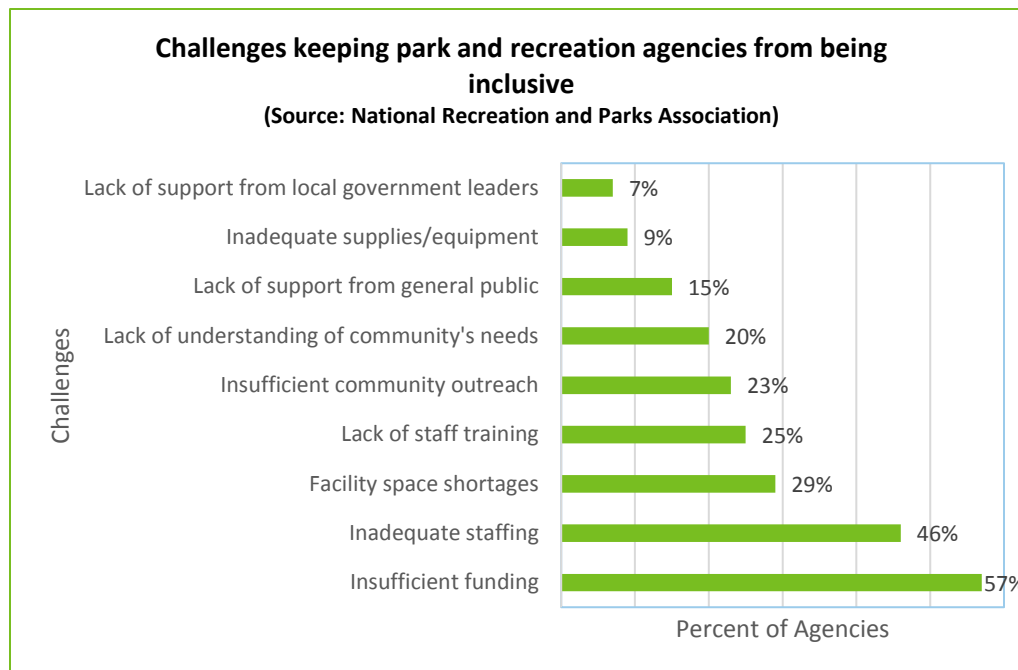
As evidenced by the current and projected demographic trends in the United States, including Minnesota, outdoor recreation providers will need to enhance programs, services, and opportunities to embrace and advance the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Programming and Facilities

A National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) survey found that park and recreation agencies across America provide programming and activities for many community members. This included 74% that provided programs and activities specifically designed for individuals with physical disabilities; 71% for members of multicultural, racial and ethnic communities; 62% for individuals with cognitive disabilities; 30% for members of LGBTQ communities; and 27% for members of refugee/immigrant communities.

The NRPA survey identified insufficient funding, inadequate staffing, facility space shortages, and lack of staff training as among the most common challenges that park and recreation agencies face when trying to build more inclusive environments for all members of their communities. Findings also suggest that agencies also need to be aware how well these groups are represented, or not represented, by stakeholder organizations or through traditional public input processes.





Policy Integration

To be effective, social equity must be integrated into policy and structure, so accountability for making improvements that address equity can be shared across all levels of an organization. Yet, only two in five park and recreation agencies in the United States have a formal inclusion policy.

Partnerships

Schools, non-profit organizations, agencies on aging and disabilities, and local law enforcement are some of the most likely organizations that park and recreation agencies partner with to develop and enhance inclusion in programming and activities to better serve all members of their communities.

Outcomes

Creating equal, equitable and inclusive outdoor recreation spaces for individuals of all abilities, backgrounds and identities can enhance outcomes in neighborhood development, health and education across all groups.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Minnesota's nature-based recreation providers must continue to develop more programs and facilities that serve everyone, including individuals with disabilities; members of multicultural, racial and ethnic communities; individuals identifying as LGBTQ; and refugees and new immigrants. There are many challenges and obstacles to overcome when establishing equal, equitable and inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities. However, providers can find and develop new ways of mitigating these challenges through policy integration, accountability and partnerships, where solutions and positive outcomes are comprehensive, long lasting and sustainable. Agencies should seek out opportunities to connect with under-served and under-represented communities, and enhance outreach efforts to better address their needs and ideas.

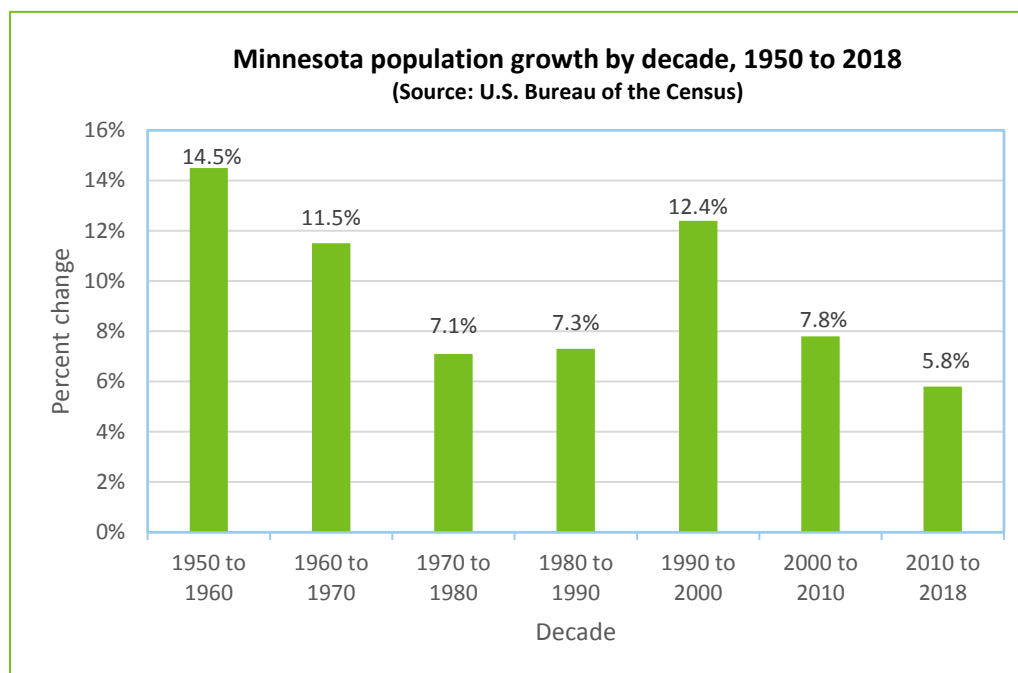
MINNESOTA'S CHANGING POPULATION

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Declining population growth rates, increasing numbers of older people, and expanding communities of color are all evidence of Minnesota's changing population. These changes will play an important role in the demand for, and value placed on, outdoor recreation opportunities, and how nature-based recreation providers choose to serve their communities over the next five years and beyond.

Declining Population Growth

Minnesota added nearly 310,000 residents between 2010 and 2018, a 5.8% increase over 8 years, contributing to an estimated total population of more than 5.5 million. However, the growth rate in Minnesota's population has declined overall in the post-war period, with the exception of the 1990s when there was a 12.4% increase in population over 10 years. These rates are projected to decline further through the decades of the 2020s, 2030s and 2040s.



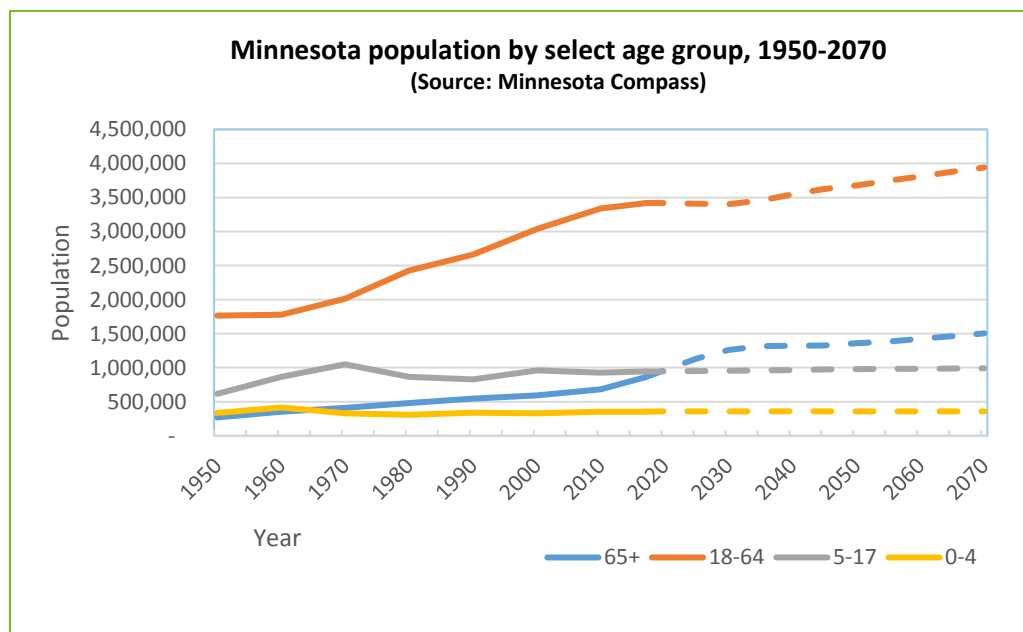
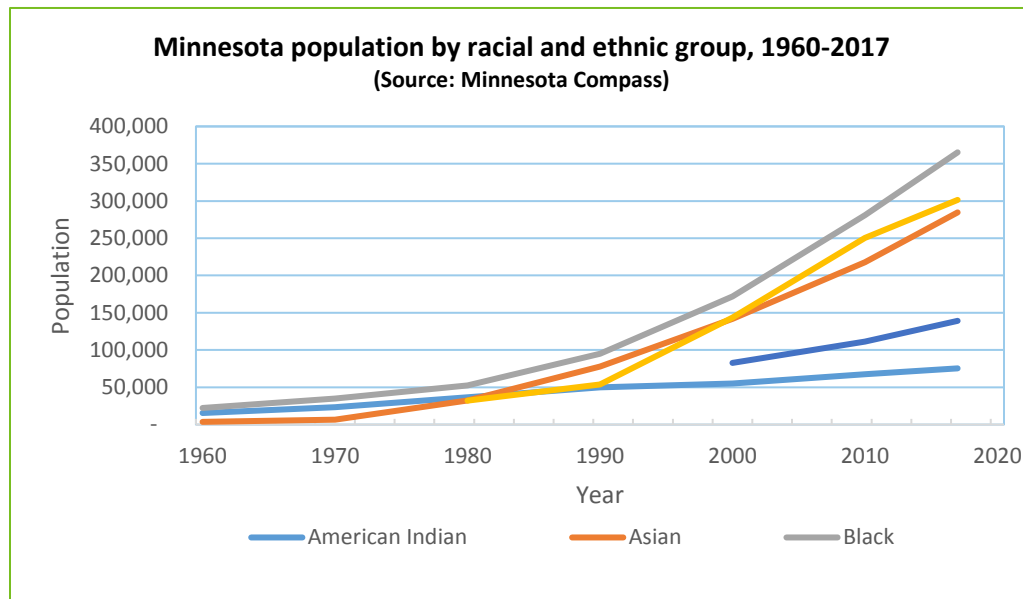
Aging Minnesotans

About 285,000 Minnesotans will have turned 65 years old between 2010 and 2020, which will be more than in the last four decades combined. “Empty nesters” are now the most common household type in Minnesota, followed by households consisting of older adults living alone. Projections indicate that the total number of adults 65 and older living in Minnesota will double between 2010 and 2030, and most of this growth will take place in metropolitan areas, specifically suburban communities in and around Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Growing Multicultural, Racial, and Ethnic Groups

Between 2010 and 2017, the populations of Black or African American and Asian Minnesotans grew by 29%, and the population of Hispanic Minnesotans grew by 20%, helping contribute to five times more

people of color being added to the total state population than non-Hispanic, white residents. Additionally, in 2017, the largest group of foreign-born Minnesotans were born in Mexico, followed by those born in Somalia, India, Laos (including Hmong), Vietnam, China (excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan), Ethiopia and Thailand (including Hmong). Growing multicultural, racial and ethnic groups will continue to diversify Minnesota into the future. One report suggests that 24.8% of Minnesota's population will be nonwhite or Latino by 2035, making for a 121% increase in this portion of the state's population between 2005 and 2035.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Although the population in Minnesota is growing, the rate of growth has slowed since the 1950s and is projected to continue to decline. This translates into lower outlooks for population-driven increases in recreation outcomes, including urban expansion-driven park and trail development; near-home parks and

trails demand; and potential participants in nature-based outdoor recreation. Because Minnesota's demographics are skewing older, outdoor recreation providers should consider how their services will need to adapt in order to reach and provide for an older audience in the upcoming decades. Although the overall trend is that older adults participate less in outdoor recreation as they age, this growing age cohort also represents an opportunity for providers – a group that may have more free time and interest in programming and activities that promote the health and wellness benefits of outdoor recreation.

Additionally, the growth in populations of color presents an opportunity for outdoor recreation providers to connect to a new, more diverse audience. Providers should seek ways to better serve a more diverse suite of communities by increasing access to, and seeking a greater understanding of, the recreation opportunities desired by a wide spectrum of communities. Recreational providers will also need to consider what changes they could make in the type of activities they support that may be more attractive to a more diverse, next generation of users. For example, programs such as the DNR Parks and Trail's "I Can!" series teach outdoor skills for activities like camping, paddling, and fishing. These kinds of programs can help with outreach to groups that are infrequent participants in outdoor recreation and build interest and awareness among new audiences.



CLIMATE CHANGE

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Climate change is already occurring in Minnesota, affecting natural landscapes and outdoor recreation resources across the state. Increasing precipitation, more frequent extreme rain events, and substantially warmer winter temperatures are among the most well documented climate change impacts.

Warmer and Wetter

Between 1895 and 2017, Minnesota has warmed by 2.9 degrees Fahrenheit and has received an annual average of 3.4 inches of additional precipitation. The most dramatic changes have happened in the past several decades. Each of the top-10 combined warmest and wettest years on record have occurred within the last 20 years.

More Damaging Rainfalls

Heavy rainfall events are more common and more intense now than any time on record. The frequency of heavy rainfall events has increased 42% in the last 50 years. Mega rain events are also increasing – these are storms that deliver more than 6 inches of rain over a 1,000 square mile area.

Warming Winter Temperatures

The most significant impacts of warming related to climate change in Minnesota are happening in the winter. Although Minnesota will always see periodic severe cold spells, the overall trend is for warmer winter temperatures. Minnesota's winter temperatures have warmed 13 times faster than summer temperatures since 1970.

These trends are expected to continue and likely intensify in the decades ahead.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Climate change will continue to have profound impacts on how agencies manage natural landscapes and provide outdoor recreation opportunities to Minnesotans and visitors. Recreation providers will need to adjust their programs and facilities to adapt to these climate change impacts. Some examples of impacts to outdoor recreation from climate change that have already been documented include:

- Shorter winter seasons - shorter and more inconsistent conditions for winter activities such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, ice fishing, and snowmobiling.
- Longer shoulder seasons - some recreational activities may benefit as temperatures warm more quickly in the spring and stay warm longer in the fall.
- More storm event impacts to recreation facilities – wind and flooding damages trails, beaches and other facilities.
- Greater damage to natural communities and cultural resource sites – erosion along rivers and destabilizing slopes are causing loss of historic sites and impacts to rare natural communities.
- Higher prevalence of invasive species - increasing spread of invasive species that are suited to changing conditions and the arrival of new invasive species.
- Additional ecological impacts affecting other activities – changes to fish and animal populations affect fishing, hunting and wildlife watching.

Recreation providers will need to adapt to these changing conditions and seek to mitigate climate change impacts. Visitors and the public increasingly expect park and recreation agencies to communicate and demonstrate how they are addressing climate change. Some possible actions may include practices like adopting non-carbon-based energy sources (e.g., solar and wind power); using electric vehicles for facility operations; reducing energy and water use at facilities; and providing charging stations for privately owned electric vehicles. Agencies can take actions that reduce their climate impacts, and in some cases reduce long-term costs, in concert with promoting environmental stewardship messages to their visitors.

ACCESSIBILITY

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

With the enactment of various state and federal laws and guidelines, and the recognition of barriers to all Minnesotans benefiting from nature-based recreation, many public agencies - including those providing nature-based recreation services - are now offering more opportunities to Minnesotans with disabilities.

Prevalence

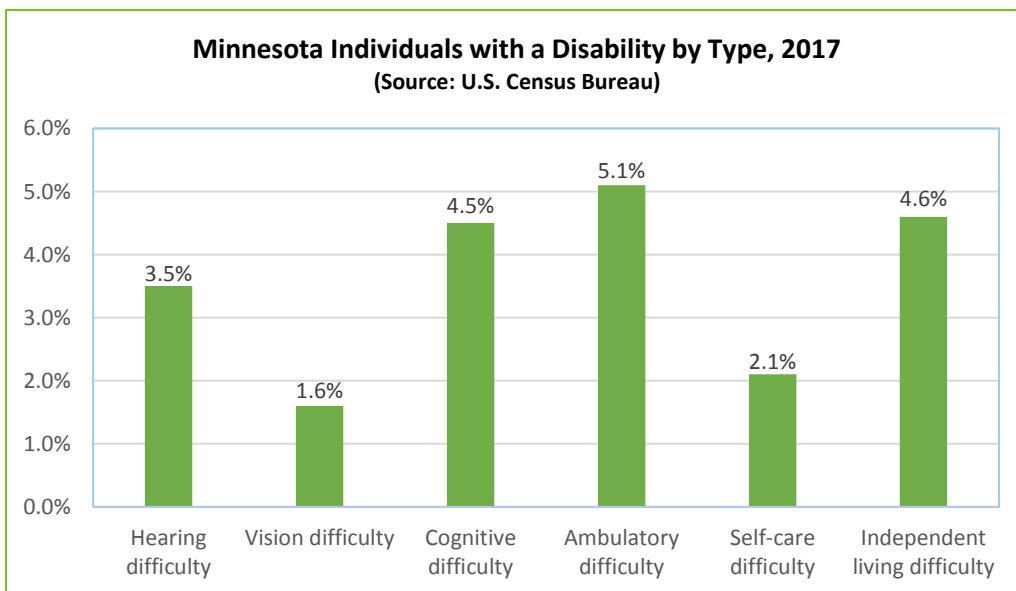
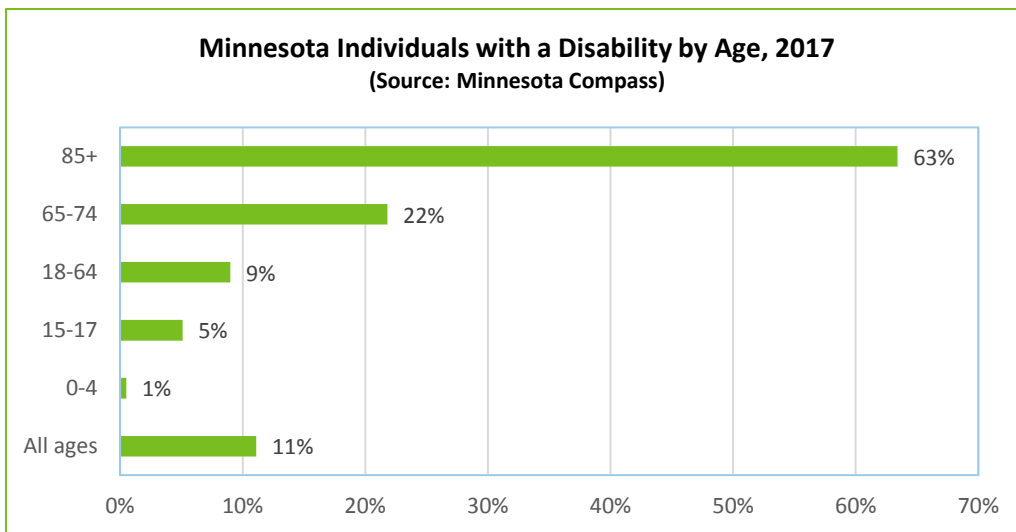
In 2017, a reported 584,974 Minnesotans had a disability, which is an estimated 10.8% of the total civilian non-institutionalized population for that year. The most common type of disability among Minnesotans is ambulatory difficulty, with 5.1% of people having this type of disability. The second most common type of disability is independent living difficulty, at 4.6%, followed by cognitive difficulty, at 4.5%. The percentage of those with a disability who are American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and Black or African American is higher than other racial groups. The percentage of those with a disability increases significantly with age, an important factor in light of Minnesota's aging population.

Law

Federal and state law prohibits discrimination by state and local government services against persons with disabilities. These laws are applied to federal- and state-funded outdoor recreation and education programs, services and activities. Recreation providers must make reasonable modifications to ensure equal opportunities for access and participation.

Development and Redevelopment

State and local outdoor recreation providers are developing and updating public spaces, programs and services to improve access for all and meet state and federal accessibility standards. Public outdoor spaces include forests, parks, trails, and wildlife areas. Programs include camping, fishing and hunting, while services include technology and access to trip planning information and resources.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Minnesota's outdoor recreation providers will need to continue developing and updating their programming, facilities and services to facilitate more and better access to opportunities for people with disabilities. Since being enacted, the Americans with Disabilities Act and other similar laws and guidelines have been an important part of planning and development of publicly funded outdoor recreation programs and services in Minnesota. With a wide range of disabilities, providing accessible facilities and opportunities will be an important consideration for nature-based recreation providers.

The percentage of Minnesotans with a disability will increase over the next few decades as the average age of Minnesota's population continues to get older. The prevalence of disabilities will be much higher among older age groups. Agencies will need to significantly increase their investments for accessibility improvements to keep pace with Minnesota's growing need for facilities and opportunities that accommodate, and are welcoming for, people with disabilities.



THE LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND STATE GRANT PROGRAM

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), created by Congress in 1964, has an important place in the history of the United States' outdoor recreation and conservation funding efforts. The program has provided \$3.9 billion for the LWCF State Grants program nationwide through 42,000 matching grants. The states have matched this amount with another \$3.9 billion, for a total of at least \$7.8 billion, to acquire and improve parks and natural areas in every county in the nation.

Revenue for the LWCF comes primarily from offshore oil and gas lease receipts received by the federal government. Since offshore drilling for oil and gas depletes a valuable natural resource, Congress determined that it was appropriate to invest the proceeds from offshore leases to protect America's natural resources and provide land and facilities for outdoor recreation experiences.

In 2019, Congress voted to reauthorize the LWCF permanently in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (S.47). This was a definitive statement in support of the LWCF as a unique program dedicated to the protection of our recreation lands and outdoor places.

The LWCF State Grants Program has had a large impact on the outdoor recreation infrastructure of Minnesota, with investments of more than \$81 million, most of it during the late 1960s to mid-1980s, in the state's outdoor recreation system for close-to-home recreational opportunities. The federal dollars have leveraged more than \$81 million in matching state and local dollars. Adjusted for inflation, the total investment is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, funding projects in 157 DNR-managed outdoor recreation units; three Minnesota Historical Society recreation sites; three University of Minnesota recreation sites; and over 800 hundred local government park and trail projects throughout the state. This investment has created a permanent legacy of parks and trails throughout Minnesota.

The LWCF in Minnesota supports a state program and a local program, each getting 50 percent of the federal appropriation. The state program supports the acquisition and development of the State Outdoor Recreation System as defined in Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 86A. The local program, funded through the Outdoor Recreation and Natural and Scenic Area Grant Programs, provides matching grants to local units of government for acquisition, development and/or redevelopment of outdoor recreation and natural areas.



MINNESOTA'S FINANCIAL NEEDS

Minnesota's estimated annual financial needs for the acquisition, development and redevelopment of outdoor recreation facilities are shown below, grouped by the four different types of Minnesota providers:

1. Local governments (cities, counties and townships)
2. State (state parks, state trails, water access sites and natural areas)
3. Metropolitan Council (regional parks and trails in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area)
4. Greater Minnesota Regional Park and Trail Commission (regional parks outside of the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area)

Annual Financial Needs by Outdoor Recreation Provider	Requested Funding (\$)
Local governments (cities, counties, townships) Local parks and trails 2019 Application Requests through DNR grant programs	19,000,000
State agencies (state parks, state trails, water access sites and natural areas) Department of Natural Resources 2019 10-Year Capital Asset Need Document - annual need for recreational areas, water accesses, trails, bridges and roads	90,000,000
Metropolitan Council (regional parks and trails in the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area) Metropolitan Council 2019 Regional Park and Trails Capital Improvement Plan	30,000,000
Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (regional parks outside of the seven county Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area); Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails 2019 Application Requests	20,000,000
Total	\$159,000,000

These figures only represent an approximate annual request/need for funding. Minnesota has a **backlog of financial needs in the billions of dollars** to take care of the existing facilities and expand the system to meet current and future demand. We are seeing an increasing demand from communities to renovate or replace their existing facilities to meet current safety and accessibility standards. Demand for the limited available funding is significant. Additional funding is needed so that outdoor recreation facilities can fulfill their vital role in connecting people to the outdoors and creating the next generation of natural resource stewards. Both destination and close-to-home experiences are essential if the vision is to be achieved.

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

Four strategic directions organize the strategies included in SCORP 2020-2024. These strategic directions are the same as those articulated in the *Parks and Trails Legacy Plan* and SCORP 2014-2018. This structure is well known by outdoor recreational providers in Minnesota and provides a consistent framework for understanding the priorities and activities of groups involved in these efforts throughout the state.

Within each strategic direction, strategies are grouped together to provide further structure. Strategies from the previous SCORP were reviewed and edited or discarded, and new strategies were developed during the planning process to reflect priorities for outdoor recreation for the next five years.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: CONNECT PEOPLE AND THE OUTDOORS

WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

1. Mentor, recruit, and hire employees and volunteers who reflect the population of the users they serve.
2. Provide ongoing diversity, equity and inclusion training to employees.
3. Build relationships with groups that are underrepresented as users of public lands to increase their awareness of opportunities and comfort in outdoor spaces.
4. Help visitors, through information and education, feel comfortable, stay safe and understand rules.

ACCESS

1. Design and redevelop outdoor recreation facilities so that they can accommodate varying forms of transportation to sites (e.g., driving, walking, biking, ATV riding)
2. Work with other organizations to provide transportation to programs and special events tailored as first experience (trial) opportunities.
3. Design, develop, rehabilitate and manage outdoor recreation facilities to encourage use by people with all abilities and backgrounds.
4. Continue to keep costs affordable.

AWARENESS

1. Promote the outdoor recreation experiences, programs and activities that visitors may enjoy, so that potential and current users are aware of, and motivated to use, them.
2. Maintain ongoing market research to better understand current and potential visitors' motivations, attitudes, beliefs and preferred ways of receiving information.
3. Use technology to communicate conditions and site information with visitors in real-time to ensure visitor expectations are met and exceeded.

QUALITY

1. Provide high-quality experiences to visitors through thoughtful design, interpretation and innovative programming.
2. Repair and maintain high-demand facilities.
3. Invest in professional development practices that lead to exceptional staff.

PROGRAMMING AND SPECIAL EVENTS

1. Increase development and promotion of social and health-related outdoor activities.
2. Expand introductory experience programs to attract new users and provide intermediate- and advanced-experience programs to retain existing users.
3. Recruit and welcome organizations and businesses that want to conduct programs at Minnesota outdoor recreation lands and facilities when those interests are compatible to provider missions.
4. Ensure that programming and special events cater to visitors' interests and needs, including incorporation of new opportunities and technology where logical.
5. Use program and special events as a method of attracting users during non-peak times.

PARTNERSHIPS

1. Build relationships with community organizations and leaders that help providers better reach new visitors.
2. Develop partnerships with "friends of" groups that will help maintain, promote and support Minnesota outdoor recreation opportunities.
3. Develop partnerships with private industry, such as tourism providers and other companies that share goals and/or target markets and can enhance the image of the provider.

Addressing the Trends: Connect People and the Outdoors

Recreational providers in Minnesota can address the current and future trends highlighted in this plan as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort, but can be part of core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:

Public Health –

Promote the physical and mental wellness benefits of nature, and encourage people to get outside.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion –

Design and host activities and programming meant to attract new visitors and to welcome the broadest array of people and groups in our communities.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: ACQUIRE LAND, CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

STRATEGIC ACQUISITION

1. Place a priority on near-home acquisition of natural resource-based lands in densely settled and rapidly growing areas.
2. Place a priority on natural resource-based lands near regional centers that lack near-home opportunities.
3. Accelerate the acquisition of private in-holdings and add lands to existing parks to enhance resource protection and recreational opportunities.
4. Focus acquisitions of new state parks on high-quality natural resource areas, particularly where ecological subsections are not represented by the state park system or comparable land holding.
5. Focus on acquiring priority trail segments according to established criteria.
6. Place a priority on new trail opportunities that are closer to the concentration of users – including snowmobilers, off-highway vehicle riders, horseback riders, and canoeists/kayakers.
7. Acquire permanent trail easements within critical grant-in-aid trail corridors so they are not lost to development or other land use changes.

8. Acquire exceptional one-time opportunities of unique, high-quality natural resources that meet critical needs outside of regional centers.
9. Acquire the land needed for support facilities for trail systems (e.g., accesses, portages, rest areas, trailheads). Prioritize facilities that serve multiple interests.
10. Place a priority on protecting important water resources including lakes, rivers, wetlands, shoreline and critical watersheds.
11. Acquire land to connect protected and high-quality natural resource corridors.
12. Acquire land to mitigate the loss of recreational opportunities caused by unavoidable conversions of existing parkland to non-recreational use.

DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT

1. Place a priority on development in the densely settled and rapidly growing parts of the state that have the fewest opportunities per person now and into the future.
2. Place a priority on regional centers that lack a near-home outdoor recreation opportunity.
3. Design, develop and redevelop facilities that meet the differing outdoor recreation needs for people of all abilities.
4. Create an accessible environment that is open and flexible to accommodate new and emerging nature-based recreation uses, such as nature play areas.
5. Develop infrastructure and amenities that meet the needs and interests of future generations and diverse communities.
6. Establish sustainable trail systems to provide high-quality and compatible opportunities for specialized trail interests that take into account existing user groups.
7. Design and construct sustainable and resilient infrastructure. Rely on up-to-date green infrastructure and best practice design.
8. Seek opportunities to use renewable or low-carbon energy sources (such as solar and wind) to meet the needs of park and recreation facilities.

Addressing the Trends: Acquire Lands, Create Opportunities

Recreational providers in Minnesota can address the current and future trends highlighted here as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort, but can be part of core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:

Minnesota's Changing Population –

When acquiring or developing new facilities, add amenities that cater to the interests and abilities of the state's aging and more diverse population – responding more specifically to how this trend is playing out in individual communities.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion –

Seek out acquisition and development opportunities that, because of their location or connections with transportation options, can help serve groups that have less access to outdoor recreation opportunities or that are underrepresented among our current visitors.

Accessibility –

Design new facilities and rehabilitate existing ones to serve people across a wide range of abilities. Consider how the recreational activities being provided can create a range of opportunities for people with disabilities. Recognize the variety of recreation experiences and personal challenges people with disabilities may be seeking.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: TAKE CARE OF WHAT WE HAVE

PROTECT THE PUBLIC'S INVESTMENT IN BUILT INFRASTRUCTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

1. Prioritize investment in existing infrastructure to ensure high quality and safe experiences for the public.
2. Maintain capital asset management plans to ensure protection and full utilization of facilities.
3. When proposing new acquisitions and facilities, communicate operational, maintenance and capital management costs based on lifecycles of assets.

MAINTAIN THE QUALITY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

1. Preserve existing high-quality natural areas and water resources. It is more cost-effective to preserve existing natural communities than it is to restore or reconstruct them.
2. Restore and reconstruct natural communities that have been degraded or lost due to agriculture or development. Prioritize locations where success of restoration is likely.



Addressing the Trends: Take Care of What You Have

Recreational providers in Minnesota can address the current and future trends highlighted here as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort, but can be part of core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:

Minnesota's Changing Population –
Evaluate ways that existing facilities could meet the needs of older visitors and attract new visitors as part of renovation and rehabilitation projects.

Climate Change –
Mitigate impacts from flooding and other climate-related changes by relocating trails and other infrastructure. Reduce our contribution to climate change by improving energy and resource efficiency in our buildings, vehicle fleets, and other systems. Manage our lands, waters, and other natural systems in ways that increase resilience and reduce the impacts of invasive species.

Accessibility –
Prioritize projects to increase accessibility at existing facilities, and invest in accessibility-related improvements as part of maintenance and rehabilitation work.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: COORDINATE AMONG PARTNERS

ENHANCED, INTEGRATED AND ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION USERS

1. Maintain and enhance a comprehensive, integrated, standardized and accessible database of statewide recreational assets.
2. Continue to collaborate and improve on providing an experience where users can locate essential recreation information, do trip planning, and create customized maps.
3. Incentivize coordination and cooperation among providers, such as cross-promoting local, regional, state and other opportunities for outdoor recreation and its diverse benefits.

ENHANCED COORDINATION AT THE REGIONAL AND SITE LEVELS

1. Support projects that incorporate multi-jurisdictional planning efforts to create a seamless recreational system.
2. Develop best practices for enhancing coordination, e.g., technical information about how to set up joint powers agreements that support coordination efforts.
3. Provide technical assistance for developing grant proposals.
4. Provide funding for research and monitoring to measure progress according to benchmarks.

ENHANCED COORDINATION AMONG THE FOUR LEGACY FUNDS

1. Share the goals and strategies of the four Legacy Funds with outdoor recreation providers and others, so they can find overlapping opportunities.
2. Encourage coordination among the Legacy Funds to work together at the funding, landscape and project levels.

ENHANCED COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND NONPROFITS

1. Continue partnering with transportation interests and regional and local transportation authorities to support access to outdoor recreation as well as expand opportunities to develop new trails, enhance trail use and increase access to transit.
2. Continue partnering with health agencies, health maintenance organizations and providers to support shared health and wellness goals.
3. Build stronger relationships with schools and increase the level of service provided to schools. Outdoor recreation providers are an important resource for schools in teaching lifelong recreation skills and environmental stewardship.
4. Continue partnering with tourism, chambers of commerce and other local tourism

Addressing the Trends: Coordinate Among Partners

Recreational providers in Minnesota can address the current and future trends highlighted here as they implement strategies within each of the Strategic Directions. Progress toward addressing the trends does not have to be a separate effort, but can be part of core work of our agencies. Examples in this Strategic Direction include:

Public Health –

Work with health care providers, community health agencies, and other partners to promote outdoor recreation as part of pursuing healthy lifestyles – linking health outcomes and the outdoor activities in ways that attract more people to participate in outdoor recreation.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion –

Outdoor recreation providers can work together to expand their connections to diverse audiences, to share contacts with leaders and influencers in under-represented communities, and to coordinate outreach efforts.

providers. They play a key role in providing information about outdoor recreation providers to promote opportunities.

5. Continue partnering with grant-in-aid groups and local communities that are actively promoting outdoor recreation opportunities.
6. Continue partnering with natural resource conservation groups, non-profits, and other key stakeholders.
7. Facilitate discussion among different trail user groups across the state to find balance and cooperation on recreational trail use demands and management.



OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS FOR LWCF PROPOSALS

The Open Project Selection process is a systematic approach for administering the Land and Water Conservation Fund financial assistance programs. It ensures equal opportunity for all eligible projects by establishing public notification of the availability of funding, application assistance, and an objective review system based on the priorities established in the SCORP.

The criteria and standards for prioritizing and selecting projects are based on the first three strategic directions. The fourth strategic direction is not directly utilized in evaluating grant proposals.

For the state-level program, projects are solicited from managers of the State Outdoor Recreation System on a periodic basis. The State Outdoor Recreation System is established in state statutes and includes an array of outdoor recreation areas and facilities owned and managed by the State of Minnesota and the Minnesota Historical Society.

For grants to local units of government, project applications are solicited annually from cities, counties, townships and recognized tribal governments. The Department of Natural Resources manages the program and applications, which are due by March 31 of each year.

MINNESOTA'S 2020-2024 OPEN PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

1. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

For the state-level program, potential grantees are made aware of the availability of funding (Minnesota departments of Natural Resources and Transportation and the Minnesota Historical Society).

For grants to local units of government, the Department of Natural Resources local grants staff informs all potential project sponsors each November about the availability of funding. This is done through e-mail, news releases and notice on the DNR website. Potential applicants can request application materials that include Minnesota's selection criteria for use of the funds during the current funding cycle, the types of areas and facilities eligible for funding and an explanation of how the open project selection process works. Potential applicants may obtain application materials by e-mail, by visiting the DNR website at www.mndnr.gov, or by calling the DNR public information number at (651) 296-6157 or (888) 646-6367.



2. PROGRAM ASSISTANCE

For grants to local units of government, DNR local grants staff assists potential applicants with the preparation of applications, including prerequisite requirements such as the need to pass a public resolution before submitting the proposal and the preparation of proposed site plans. Grants staff will review draft applications and provide comments prior to the application deadline.

3. THE PRIORITY RANKING AND PROJECT SELECTION SYSTEM

Minnesota has an objective, two-part process to evaluate, rank and select state and local projects for LWCF dollars.

The first part of the process is an evaluation based on the Minnesota's SCORP strategies and the associated priority actions. A number of specific criteria derived from these priorities are included in the evaluation sheet used in reviewing each application.

In the second part of the evaluation, applications are evaluated on site-level design criteria including accessibility, quality of design and safety. Other criteria include: quality of the application, level of local government commitments, environmental impact, etc. This evaluation ensures that projects selected for funding are viable, well designed and in conformance with current laws and standards.

Minnesota allocates 50% of its LWCF apportionments to state agencies and 50% to local units of government. Minnesota's state agency apportionment has gone toward statewide facilities including state parks, historical interpretive sites, state trails, wildlife management areas and water access sites. Most of these state grants have been used by the DNR, though some have also been used by the MN Historical Society, the University of Minnesota, and MN Department of Transportation. The local government apportionment has been awarded via grants to counties, cities, and townships throughout the state.

DNR is responsible for overseeing the LWCF program in Minnesota and is the liaison between the state and the National Park Service. DNR staff conduct separate funding competitions for the state agency and local government apportionments and recommend the highest-ranking proposals to the Commissioner of Natural Resources for final approval.

STATE AND LOCAL LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND SELECTION GUIDELINES

The state and local LWCF programs use the following selection guidelines to evaluate project applications. These guidelines are based on three of the four strategic directions and associated priority goals and strategies in the SCORP. The fourth strategic direction dealing with coordination among partners is not directly utilized in evaluating grant proposals.

SCORP PRIORITIES

The answers to the following questions, based on the priority actions for each strategy, will be used to evaluate project applications.

Does the Project Connect People to the Outdoors?

- Does the proposed project design and redevelop outdoor recreation facilities so that they can accommodate varying forms of transportation to sites (e.g., driving, walking, biking)?
- Does the proposed project design, develop, rehabilitate and manage outdoor recreation facilities to encourage use by people with all abilities?
- Does the proposed project design, develop, rehabilitate and manage outdoor recreation facilities to encourage use by people of diverse backgrounds and experience?
- Does the proposed project provide high-quality experiences to visitors through thoughtful design, programming, and interpretation?

Does the Project Acquire Land and/or Create Opportunities?

- Is the proposed project located in a densely settled area or area of rapid population growth?
- Does the proposed project accelerate the acquisition of private in-holdings and add lands to existing parks to enhance resource protection and recreational opportunities?
- Does the proposed project acquire exceptional one-time opportunities of unique, high-quality natural resources that meet critical needs outside of regional centers?
- Does the proposed project acquire land to connect protected and high-quality natural resource corridors?
- Does the proposed project acquire land that protects important water resources including lakes, rivers, wetlands, shoreline and critical watersheds?
- Does the proposed project design, develop, and/or redevelop facilities that meet the differing outdoor recreation needs for people of all abilities?
- Does the proposed project create an accessible environment that is open and flexible to accommodate new and emerging nature-based recreation uses?
- Does the proposed project develop infrastructure and amenities that meet the needs and interests of future generations and diverse communities?
- Is the proposed project designed and constructed with sustainable and resilient infrastructure, (rely on up-to-date green infrastructure and best practice designs)?

Does the Project Take Care of What We Have?

- Does the proposed project result in redevelopment, renovation or rehabilitation of existing infrastructure to ensure high quality and safe experiences for the public?
- Does the project sponsor maintain a capital asset management plan to ensure protection and full utilization of the proposed facilities?
- Does the proposed project preserve existing high-quality natural areas and water resources?
- Does the proposed project restore and reconstruct natural communities that have been degraded or lost due to agriculture or development?



MINNESOTA'S WETLANDS

The National Park Service requires each SCORP to address wetlands as an important outdoor recreation resource. This section articulates this value for Minnesota's SCORP 2020-2024

There are many types of wetlands in Minnesota, each with widely varying characteristics. Some wetlands are dry for much of the year; others are almost always covered by several feet of water. Some wetlands have grasses and sedges, shrubs, or trees. They may be small confined basins or extend for hundreds of miles. It is estimated that Minnesota has lost about 50 percent of its original wetland acreage.

Minnesota recognizes the multiple benefits that wetlands provide, including:

- Erosion control: Wetland vegetation reduces lakeshore wave damage and stream bank erosion.
- Flood control: Wetlands can slow and retain runoff, reducing the frequency of flooding along streams and rivers.
- Groundwater recharge and discharge: Some wetlands recharge groundwater by holding surface water and allowing it to slowly filter into the groundwater reserves. Some wetlands are discharge areas; they receive groundwater even during dry periods, and help maintain flows in nearby rivers and streams.
- Water quality: Wetlands protect the water quality of downstream lakes, streams and rivers by removing pollutants and moderating flow.
- Rare species habitat: 43 percent of threatened or endangered species in the U.S. live in or depend on wetlands.
- Recreation: Wetlands are a great place to canoe, hunt, fish or watch wildlife.
- Economic value: Wetlands provide economic commodities such as wild rice and bait fish.

MINNESOTA WETLANDS CONSERVATION PLAN

The *Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Plan* (MWCP) sets directions for managing and regulating the state's wetlands and examines the way to consolidate the many different existing wetland programs. As stated in the plan, the goal for wetland conservation in Minnesota is to maintain and restore the quality and diversity and increase the overall quantity of wetlands in the state, varying regionally in accordance with differences in the character and health of the wetland resource, in order to promote ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable communities.

Implementation of the MWCP is further guided by a memorandum of understanding that includes state and federal agencies whose work impacts wetland issues. Signing agencies to the memorandum are Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture as "Sponsoring State Agencies"; and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services collectively as the "Cooperating Federal Agencies."

Further description of the status of wetland resources in the state, the *Minnesota Wetlands Conservation Plan*, and the Memorandum of Understanding are available on the Minnesota DNR website:

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/wetlands/index.html>.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. OUTDOOR RECREATION HOUSEHOLD SURVEY 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted an Outdoor Recreation Household Survey between October of 2017 and February of 2018. The survey, also known as the 2017 Minnesota Outdoor Activities Survey, serves as a tool to better understand and respond to Minnesotans' needs and preferences for outdoor recreation. The information gathered from the survey was used to update the 2004 Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey, define current trends in adult recreation and factors that motivate and create barriers to recreation, and establish a baseline dataset on outdoor activities participation across the state. Outdoor recreation providers throughout Minnesota are able to reference this information to better serve their communities.

METHODOLOGY

SURVEY INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The survey and related communication materials were developed by the survey project team following a cross-division meeting with DNR staff and a key informant review process. Staff representing different divisions within the DNR helped to develop high-level goals and priorities for the survey, and establish how the information would be used. The key informant group consisted of members from Minnesota's Somali, Hispanic/Latinx, African American, Southeast Asian, and Native American communities with expert knowledge in both recreation and the communities they represent. This group reviewed the survey instrument and communication materials to ensure they were developed using appropriate and respectful language that would be understood by individuals within their communities. Additionally, the group shared knowledge related to how best to deliver messages and generally reduce barriers to completing the survey.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT DESCRIPTION

The finalized survey instrument instructed participants that 'outdoor activities' were defined as "anything you do outside during your free time," and consisted of 22 scale, list, and open-ended response questions. Questions related to a wide variety of topics, including but not limited to, participation in outdoor activities and motivating factors, barriers to participation in outdoor activities, and preferences for communication related to outdoor activities. The survey also asked participants general demographic questions.

SAMPLING STRATEGY FOR THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

A stratified random sample of 8,000 Minnesota households was purchased for the study, and after initial surveys were sent out, 468 were returned as non-deliverable, making for a true sample size of 7,532. To maintain consistency with the 2004 survey, sampling was based on five regions, four of which represent greater Minnesota, and the fifth representing the Minneapolis-St. Paul seven-county metropolitan area. Proportionality was distributed the same in both the 2017 and 2004 surveys, meaning the four greater Minnesota regions each represent 18 percent of the total sample size, while the Minneapolis-St. Paul region represents 28 percent of the total sample size.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

Participants could complete the survey using one of three modes—online, on paper, or by phone. The survey and many of the communication materials were available in English, Somali, and Spanish. Those who shared their responses to the survey were entered into a series of drawings for Visa gift cards.

Each household was first sent a postcard letting them know they were selected to participate. The postcard included a web address to complete the survey online. Those who did not complete the survey online after initial contact were sent paper copies of the survey via mail on two separate occasions. The paper version of the survey included a cover letter explaining the survey’s purpose, a pre-paid, pre-addressed reply envelope, as well as a web address to complete the survey online. Following the mailings, selected participants were contacted by telephone interviewers to complete the survey over the phone. A final mailing of the paper survey was distributed to those households who had not yet completed the survey.

ANALYSIS

Following data collection, all completed survey responses were combined into a single dataset. Following the removal of all duplicate responses from a single household and unusable partial responses, the final dataset included 1,987 respondents, making for an overall response rate of 26 percent. Because the data showed heavier response rates from those identifying as male, as well as those who were older, weighting was applied to both gender and age, helping the data more closely represent the general population of Minnesota. Weighting was also applied according to the state regions to improve proportionality between responses and the population of each region. Overall, the resulting weighted dataset is reflective of the age, gender and geographic distributions in Minnesota’s population, with slight over-representations of people age 18 to 34 and of females. However when comparing to the total population of Minnesota, the final weighted dataset still underrepresents people from communities of color. Weighting to account for this underrepresentation would have been inappropriate given the low number of responses from some of these groups in the dataset.

APPENDIX B. LOCAL RECREATION PROVIDERS SURVEY 2019

INTRODUCTION

To help inform this SCORP, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) distributed an on-line survey to local outdoor recreation providers throughout the state of Minnesota in November 2018. The intent of the survey was to gather information from local providers – primarily counties and cities – about issues they see for outdoor recreation and how they anticipate prioritizing their efforts for the next five years. The survey results would supplement information about local-level outdoor recreation that was already available from other sources, including the Greater Minnesota Park and Trail Commission.

METHODOLOGY

SURVEY INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

The survey instrument and communication materials were developed by the DNR SCORP project team. Survey topics were selected to collect data that could be compared with information about state-level and regional level priorities. The team also looked at survey instruments used by other states as part of their SCORP planning processes.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT DESCRIPTION

The survey instrument consisted of 29 scale, list, and open-ended response questions. Topics addressed by survey questions included visitation trends, funding sources, types and conditions of facilities managed, and plans for acquisition, development and rehabilitation activities. Open-ended questions included inquiries about climate change impacts and adaptations, and priorities for the next SCORP.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE LOCAL RECREATION PROVIDERS SURVEY

The notice of the online survey was distributed to local recreation providers with the assistance of several groups. The survey notice was distributed by the Minnesota Parks and Recreation Association to its member organizations. The notice was also distributed via the Association of Minnesota Counties and League of Minnesota Cities. The project team realized there would be some overlap – with some organizations possibly receiving multiple notices – when distributing the survey through these three groups, but preferred that situation to potentially not reaching some local providers.

ANALYSIS

A total of 56 survey responses were received – 34 from counties and 22 from cities. Overall, the information shared by local recreation providers about recreational trends and their plans for providing opportunities over the next five years was consistent with the directions heard from state and regional entities, and with the input that had been gathered from the Parks and Trails Legacy 10-Year Celebration events and other sources.

APPENDIX C. LEGACY AMENDMENT 10th ANNIVERSARY – PARKS AND TRAILS CELEBRATION EVENTS

In 2018, Minnesota marked the tenth anniversary of the passage of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment to enhance, but not replace, existing funding for the protection of natural resources, outdoor recreation, the arts and cultural heritage. To recognize the first ten years of this 25-year constitutional amendment, a series of nine regional public events were held around the state to celebrate, educate, and listen as citizens shared their perspectives on, and aspirations for, Minnesota's comprehensive system of state and regional parks and trails. These public engagement events were held at the following locations:



1. *Silverwood Park*

Location: (North Twin Cities) St. Anthony (Three Rivers Park District)

Date: Saturday, January 27, 2018

Number of public attendees: 200

2. *Saint John's University*

Location: (Central Minnesota) Collegeville

Date: Friday, April 27, 2018

Number of public attendees: 20

3. *City of Marshall*

Location: (Southwest Minnesota) Red Baron Arena, Marshall

Date: Sunday, April 29, 2018

Number of public attendees: 65

4. *City of Bloomington*

Location: (South Twin Cities) Hyland-Bush-Anderson Lakes Park Reserve, Normandale Lake Band Shell, Bloomington (City of Bloomington Parks/Three Rivers Park District)

Date: Friday, May 11, 2018

Number of public attendees: 85

5. *City of Rochester*

Location: (Southeast Minnesota) 125 LIVE Center for Active Adults, Rochester

Date: Saturday, May 19, 2018

Number of public attendees: 20

6. *Itasca State Park*

Location: (Northwest Minnesota) Itasca State Park, Park Rapids

Date: Saturday, June 2, 2018

Number of public attendees: 200

7. *City of Fergus Falls*

Location: (West-Central Minnesota) Prairie Wetland Environmental Learning Center, Fergus Falls

Date: Saturday, June 16, 2018

Number of public attendees: 20

8. *City of Duluth*

Location: (Northeast Minnesota) Essentia Health Duluth Heritage Sports Center, Duluth

Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2018

Number of public attendees: 1,000

9. *Minnesota State Fair*

Location: Minnesota State Fair, MN DNR Building, Falcon Heights

Dates: August 23 to September 3, 2018

Number of public attendees: 2,400+ (recorded interactions)

Note: Several thousand more fairgoers provided feedback on Legacy priorities through an engagement activity at the fair. This attendance number does not reflect those interactions.

Recreation Inventory and Condition Assessment									
Location: Benton Beach Park Boat Launch					Date: 5/5/20201				
Sartell Hydroelectric Project P-8315									
Survey Person:		Kevin Winkelman							
GPS Location:		45.74693		-94.16560					
Amenity Photo Numbers:		See additional word doc for photos.							
Shoreline Photo Numbers:									
Entryway Photo Number:									
Type of Amenity:	Quantity of Amenities:	Condition of Amenity:				Notes:	Barrier Free? (Y or N)		
		-Not Usable (N)							
		-Needs Repair (R)							
		-Needs Maintenance (M)							
		-Good Working Condition (G)							
Boat Launch	Lanes: 1 Launches:	N	R	M	GX	Shallow, gravel Launch	Y		
Skid Pier	0	N	R	M	G				
Fishing Pier	0	N	R	M	G				
Picnic Tables	0	N	R	M	G	Adjacent park with amenities			
Restroom	1	N	R	M	GX				
Trash Receptacles	0	N	R	M	G				
Trail	0	N	R	M	G				
Other		N	R	M	G				
Parking	Total Spaces:	Number of Spaces (each type):				Notes:	Condition:		
		Standard:							
		Barrier-Free:							
		Trailer:							
		Other:							
						Gravel parking area. Room to park 8-10 and trailers.	N		
							R		
							M		
							GX		
Signage:	Number:	Condition:	Comments: Provide Details on which signs need attention.						
FERC Project Sign	NA	N R M G							
Regulations Signs		N R M GX							
Directional		N R M GX							
Interpretive		N R M GX							
Additional Comments:									
Describe any signs of overuse or anything observed that is not already documented above.									
Adjacent park w/ volleyball, disc golf, ball field, camping, pavillions, playground. Also an Event Center for rent.									

Recreation Inventory and Condition Assessment									
Location: Highway 10 Boat Launch					Date: 5/5/2021				
Sartell Hydroelectric Project P-8315									
Survey Person:		Kevin Winkelman							
GPS Location:		45.70476		-94.17584					
Amenity Photo Numbers:									
Shoreline Photo Numbers:									
Entryway Photo Number:									
Type of Amenity:	Quantity of Amenities	Condition of Amenity:				Notes:	Barrier Free? (Y or N)		
		-Not Usable (N)							
		-Needs Repair (R)							
		-Needs Maintenance (M)							
		-Good Working Condition (G)							
Boat Launch	Lanes: 2 Launches:	N	R	M	G	X		Y	
Skid Pier	1	N	R	M	G	X		Y	
Fishing Pier	0	N	R	M	G				
Picnic Tables	0	N	R	M	G				
Restroom	1	N	R	M	G	X	Needs to be serviced	Y	
Trash Receptacles	0	N	R	M	G				
Trail	0	N	R	M	G				
Other		N	R	M	G				
Parking	Total Spaces:	Number of Spaces (each type):				Notes:	Condition:		
	29	Standard:							
		Barrier-Free:	29						
		Trailer:							
		Other:							
		All spaces are barrier free. Two are designated Handicap. All are suitable for Truck/trailer parking.				N			
						R			
						M			
						G			
						X			
Signage:	Number:	Condition:	Comments: Provide Details on which signs need attention.						
FERC Project Sign	NA	N R M G							
Regulations Signs		N R M G							
Directional		NX R M G	Public Water Access sign is missing at entrance						
Interpretive		N R M G							
Additional Comments:									
Describe any signs of overuse or anything observed that is not already documented above.									

Recreation Inventory and Condition Assessment										
Location:		Sartell Boat Launch					Date:		5/5/2021	
Sartell Hydroelectric Project P-8315										
Survey Person:		Kevin Winkelman								
GPS Location:		45.57337		-94.19781						
Amenity Photo Numbers:										
Shoreline Photo Numbers:										
Entryway Photo Number:										
Type of Amenity:	Quantity of Amenities	Condition of Amenity:				Notes:	Barrier Free? (Y or N)			
		-Not Usable (N)								
		-Needs Repair (R)								
		-Needs Maintenance (M)								
		-Good Working Condition (G)								
Boat Launch	Lanes: 2 Launches:	N	R	M	GX		Y			
Skid Pier	1	N	R	M	GX		Y			
Fishing Pier	1	N	R	M	GX		Y			
Picnic Tables	0	N	R	M	G					
Restroom	2	N	R	M	GX		1Y 1N			
Trash Receptacles	0	N	R	M	G					
Trail	0	N	R	M	G					
Other		N	R	M	G					
Parking	Total Spaces:	40		Number of Spaces (each type):		Notes: All parking spots are barrier free. 2 are designated Handicap. 1 spot reserved for Enforcement officer on the grass. 2 others reserved for IS enforcement.	Condition:			
	Standard:	11		N						
	Barrier-Free:	39		R						
	Trailer:	39		M						
	Other:	1 Grass for enforcement officer		GX						
Signage:	Number:	Condition:		Comments: Provide Details on which signs need attention.						
FERC Project Sign	NA	N	R	M	G					
Regulations Signs		N	R	M	GX					
Directional		N	R	M	GX					
Interpretive		N	R	M	GX					
Additional Comments:										
Describe any signs of overuse or anything observed that is not already documented above.										

Recreation Inventory and Condition Assessment										
Location:		Sartell Canoe Portage					Date:		8/21/2021	
Sartell Hydroelectric Project P-8315										
Survey Person:		Kevin Winkelman								
GPS Location:		T.O. 45.62216 -9420360		P.L. 45.62011 -9420538						
Amenity Photo Numbers:		See additional word doc for photos.								
Shoreline Photo Numbers:										
Entryway Photo Number:										
Type of Amenity:		Quantity of Amenities:		Condition of Amenity:		Notes:		Barrier Free? (Y or N)		
				-Not Usable (N)						
				-Needs Repair (R)						
				-Needs Maintenance (M)						
				-Good Working Condition (G)						
Canoe Portage Take-Out		1		N R M GX				N		
Canoe Portage Put-In		1		N R M GX				N		
Canoe Portage Route		Length: 326 yards, 978 feet		N R M GX		Half of route is mowed grass and half is asphalt path		Y		
Other				N R M G						
Parking		Total Spaces:		Number of Spaces (each type):		Notes:		Condition:		
		No Parking		Standard:				N		
				Barrier-Free:				R		
				Trailer:				M		
				Other:						G
Signage:		Number:		Condition:		Comments: Provide Details on which signs need attention.				
FERC Project Sign		1		N R MX G		The project name and other info needs updating				
Regulations Signs		1		N R M GX						
Directional		1		N R M GX						
Interpretive		1		N R M GX						
Additional Comments:										
Describe any signs of overuse or anything observed that is not already documented above.										
<p>It is interesting to note that only one canoe has been observed portaging all summer and that was not during a documented Rec Survey. It is used by shore fishermen pretty often however.</p>										

APPENDIX E-27

Recreation Site Photos

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH

1.



Sign at entrance from 125th St NW

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH



Signs

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH



Signs

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH



LRLA sign

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH



Parking area

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH



Bathroom facility

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH



Boat Ramp

BENTON BEACH BOAT LAUNCH



Shoreline at the ramp.

HIGHWAY 10 BOAT LAUNCH



Entrance



Entrance road.

HIGHWAY 10 BOAT LAUNCH



DNR Sign.



Parking area.

HIGHWAY 10 BOAT LAUNCH



Handicap parking

HIGHWAY 10 BOAT LAUNCH



Bathroom facilities.

HIGHWAY 10 BOAT LAUNCH



Ramp and shoreline.



Ramp and Shoreline.

HIGHWAY 10 BOAT LAUNCH



Sign

HIGHWAY 10 BOAT LAUNCH



Signs.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



From NE River Rd.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Access Sign

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Parking area.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Parking area.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Handicap Parking.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Boat Ramp.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Ramp, Shoreline and Courtesy Docks.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Ramp, Shoreline, and Courtesy Dock.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Dock sign.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Dock Sign.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Signs.

SARTELL BOAT LAUNCH



Restroom Facilities.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



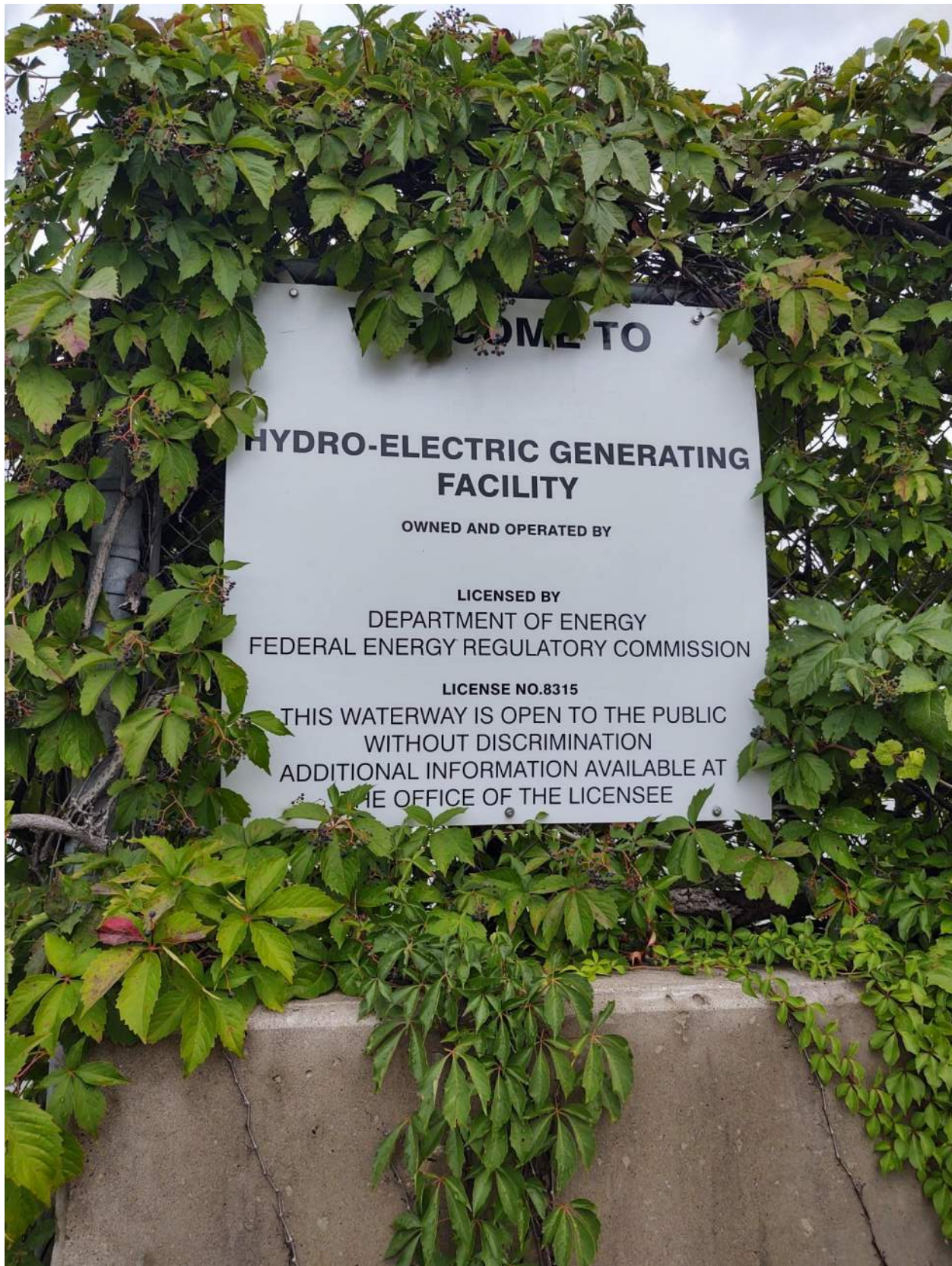
Canoe portage sign from the water side.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



Looking downstream from portage takeout.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



Project sign.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



Looking downstream from midpoint of portage.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



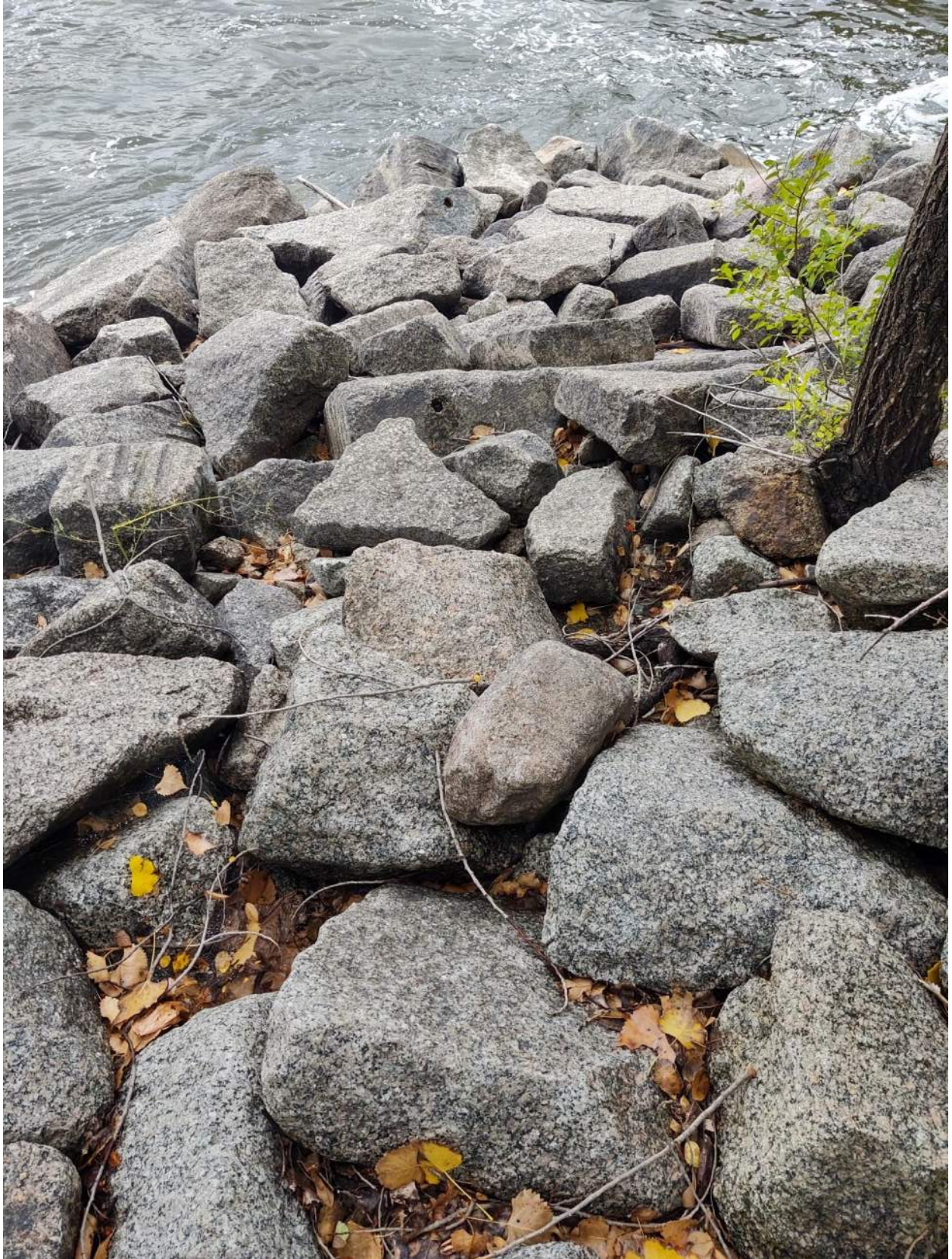
Looking upstream from portage put in.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



Put in point.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



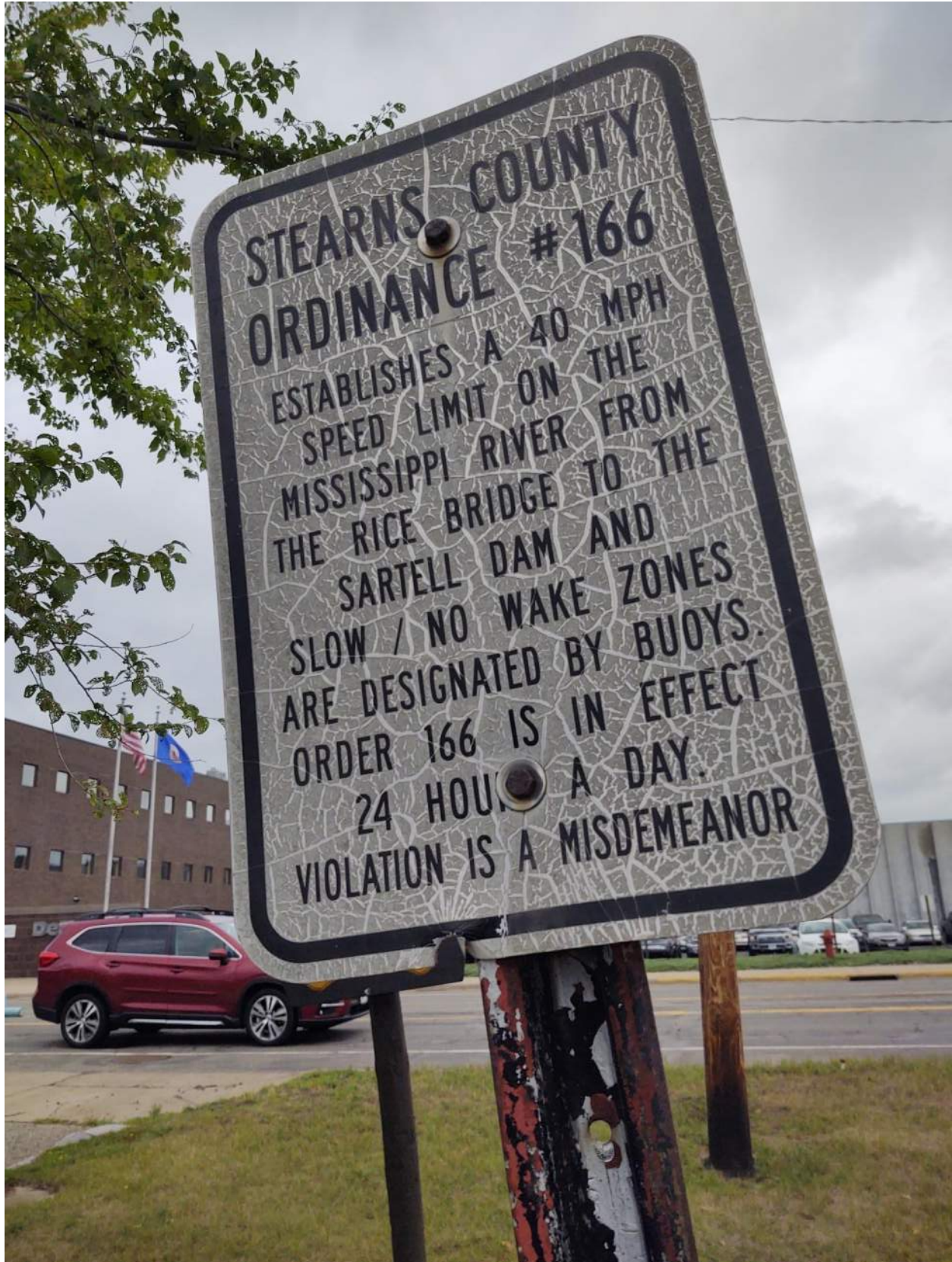
Put in point. (Low water)

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



Signs.

SARTELL CANOE PORTAGE



Sign at take out.

Recreation Observation Form													
Date:		4-17-2021				Time:		13:30 (1:30 PM)					
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)													
Survey Person:		Ryan Giacola				Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities							
Temperature:		53°F		Weather:		Clear		Wind Speed:		10 mph			
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities										Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Logging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non Powered Boating		Power Boating
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0												
Highway 10 Boat Launch	6		P	S									
Sartell Boat Launch	4												
Sartell Canoe Portage	0												
Additional Comments:													
Hwy 10 had 3 vehicles w/trailers, 3 w/o. Put Primary for shore fishing based on what I could see													

Recreation Observation Form

Date: 5/15/2021 Time: 8:15 AM

Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)

Survey Person: Bryan
 Temperature: 52° Weather: Clear Wind Speed: 5 mph
 Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.

Temperature:	52°	Weather:	Clear	Wind Speed:	5 mph									
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities											Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating		Other (specify)
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	1													
Highway 10 Boat Launch	27		S											
Sartell Boat Launch	13			P									S	
Sartell Canoe Portage	0													

Additional Comments:

Sartell - One boater was DNR officer 2 unobserved - no boat trailers but there was a construction truck there. May have been some landscaping next door.
 Today was fishing opener.

Recreation Observation Form														
Date:	5/31/2021					Time:	7:36AM							
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)														
Survey Person:	Bryan Giancola										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.			
Temperature:	55	Weather:	Cloudy		Wind Speed:	5 mph								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities											Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating		Other (specify)
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0													
Highway 10 Boat Launch	5		S/2	P/3										3 vehicles w/ boat trailers
Sartell Boat Launch	5			P										
Sartell Canoe Portage	0													
Additional Comments:														

Recreation Observation Form														
Date:	6/9/2021				Time:	4:00pm - 4:30pm								
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)														
Survey Person:	Kevin Winkelman (Canoe portage and Sartell) Brian Daniel (Hiway 10 and Benton Beach)										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.			
Temperature:	95	Weather:	Sunny		Wind Speed:	SW 10								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities											Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating		Other (specify)
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0													
Highway 10 Boat Launch	0P / 1V			X										1 Truck w/ boat trailer
Sartell Boat Launch	0P / 3V			X										3 Trucks w/ boat trailers
Sartell Canoe Portage	1		P											
Additional Comments:														
No persons were seen at the Hiway 10 and the Sartell Boat launches. The vehicles observed in the parking lots most likely indicate people were fishing.														

Recreation Observation Form														
Date:	6/12/2021				Time:	10:30 am								
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)														
Survey Person:	Bryan Giancola										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.			
Temperature:	75	Weather:	Sunny		Wind Speed:	12 mph								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities											Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating		Other (specify)
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	8							P						
Highway 10 Boat Launch	3			P										
Sartell Boat Launch	7		S	P										
Sartell Canoe Portage	0													
Additional Comments:														

Recreation Observation Form														
Date:	6/19/2021					Time:	9:20 am							
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)														
Survey Person:	Brian Daniel										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.			
Temperature:	69	Weather:	Sunny		Wind Speed:	NNW 6mph								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities											Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating		Other (specify)
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0													
Highway 10 Boat Launch	1			P										1 truck and trailer
Sartell Boat Launch	24			S							S	P		
Sartell Canoe Portage	0													
Additional Comments:														
<p>At Sartell Boat Launch there were 23 vehicles in the lot. Most were very large trailers indicating power boaters vs. fishermen. Also a truck and trailer arrived with 4 people with 4 kayaks.</p>														

Recreation Observation Form															
Date:	7/11/2021				Time:	07:45									
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)															
Survey Person:	Bryan Giancola									Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.					
Temperature:	74		Weather:	Clear		Wind Speed:	Calm								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities										Notes			
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating		Power Boating	Other (specify)	
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0														
Highway 10 Boat Launch	0														
Sartell Boat Launch			1	6											
Sartell Canoe Portage	0														
Additional Comments:															

Recreation Observation Form													
Date:	7/20/2021					Time:	10:40						
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)													
Survey Person:	Brian Daniel										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.		
Temperature:	78	Weather:	PC		Wind Speed:	N5							
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities										Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating		Power Boating
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0												
Highway 10 Boat Launch	0												
Sartell Boat Launch	1										1		1 truck and trailer
Sartell Canoe Portage	0												
Additional Comments:													

Recreation Observation Form															
Date:	7/24/2021				Time:	08:45									
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)															
Survey Person:	Bryan Giancola									Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.					
Temperature:	89		Weather:	Sunny/haze		Wind Speed:	NW7								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities										Notes			
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating		Power Boating	Other (specify)	
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	1			1											
Highway 10 Boat Launch	2			2											
Sartell Boat Launch	5			5											
Sartell Canoe Portage	0														
Additional Comments:															

Recreation Observation Form															
Date:	8/5/2021				Time:	16:20									
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)															
Survey Person:	Kevin Winkelman									Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.					
Temperature:	84		Weather:	Partly Sunny		Wind Speed:	W 5								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities											Notes		
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating		Other (specify)	
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0														
Highway 10 Boat Launch	0														
Sartell Boat Launch	12			2							10			5 canoes/10 people	
Sartell Canoe Portage	2		2												
Additional Comments:															

Recreation Observation Form													
Date:	8/14/2021				Time:	16:45							
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)													
Survey Person:	Kevin Winkelman										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.		
Temperature:	86	Weather:	Sunny		Wind Speed:	SW 10 mph							
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities										Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating		Power Boating
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0												
Highway 10 Boat Launch	2		1	1									
Sartell Boat Launch	20+										20		
Sartell Canoe Portage	0												
Additional Comments: There were 13 vehicles with trailers at the Sartell landing, 11 were boat trailers and 2 were pontoon trailers. There were 7 additional vehicles without trailers and no one was on shore. There were probably close to 40 people using this landing, but everyone was already on the water and couldn't be counted.													

Recreation Observation Form														
Date:	8/21/2021				Time:	08:45								
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)														
Survey Person:	Bryan Giancola										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.			
Temperature:	65	Weather:	sunny		Wind Speed:	WNW 14								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities										Notes		
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating		Power Boating	Other (specify)
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	1												X	Playing with dog
Highway 10 Boat Launch	0													
Sartell Boat Launch	0													
Sartell Canoe Portage	0													
Additional Comments:														

Recreation Observation Form													
Date:	9/12/21				Time:	14:00							
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)													
Survey Person:	Zach Juaire										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.		
Temperature:	71	Weather:	PC		Wind Speed:	NW 10							
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities										Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating		Power Boating
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	0												
Highway 10 Boat Launch	4											4	See note below.
Sartell Boat Launch	4		2	2									
Sartell Canoe Portage	0												
Additional Comments:													
At the Highway 10 boat Launch: There was a fire next door. The vehicles there were parked and watching the firefighters.													

Recreation Observation Form															
Date:	12/19/2021				Time:	11:30 am									
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)															
Survey Person:	Kevin Winkelman										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.				
Temperature:	16	Weather:	Cloudy		Wind Speed:	S 18									
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities												Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating	Other (specify)		
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	4													4	Ice Fishing
Highway 10 Boat Launch															
Sartell Boat Launch	0														
Sartell Canoe Portage	1													1	Ice Fishing
Additional Comments:															

Recreation Observation Form														
Date:	1/15/2022				Time:	3:35 PM								
Sartell Hydroelectric Project (P-8315)														
Survey Person:	Kevin Winkelman										Note: Please list primary activity by placing a "P" in the box. Use an "S" for secondary activities.			
Temperature:	12 degrees	Weather:	Sunny		Wind Speed:	S9								
Recreation Site	Number of People	Recreation Activities											Notes	
		Using Portage Facilities for Portage	Shore Fishing	Boat Fishing	Swimming	Hiking/Walking/Jogging	Bicycling	Picnicking	Bird Watching	Wildlife Viewing	Non-Powered Boating	Power Boating		Other (specify)
Benton Beach Park Boat Launch	4													Ice Fishing
Highway 10 Boat Launch	1													Ice Fishing
Sartell Boat Launch	0													
Sartell Canoe Portage	4													4 fishhouses
Additional Comments:														
<p>There were snowmobile tracks at all boat launches. Unknow number of people using the reservoir on snowmobile.</p>														

APPENDIX E-29 Recreation Questionnaire Responses

Eagle Creek Sartell Hydro, LLC (Sartell Hydro, Licensee) is in the process of relicensing the Sartell Hydroelectric Project (Project) located on the Mississippi River in Benton and Stearns Counties, Minnesota.

Sartell Hydro is gathering information about potential recreation needs in the vicinity of the Sartell Hydroelectric Project. The Project vicinity is defined as the area within ¼ mile of the shoreline, extending upstream of the Sartell Dam for approximately 13 miles, including Little Rock Creek extending from its confluence with the Mississippi River to Little Rock Lake, and extending downstream of the Sartell Dam for approximately 1 mile.

If you have any questions about this questionnaire, please contact Melissa Sonnleitner via email or phone at: melissa.sonnleitner@eaglecreekre.com or 920-293-4628 ext. 347.

1. Information about person completing the questionnaire:

Name: John Kothenbeutel

Title: Public Works Director

Agency: City of Sartell

Address: 125 PineCone Road North
Sartell, MN 56377

Phone: (320)258-7339

Email: John@Sartellmn.com

2. Is your agency responsible for recreation sites, amenities, formal access sites, or planning for recreation sites within the Project vicinity as defined above?

☒ Yes (Please proceed to 2a below) ☐ No (No additional information is needed and thank you)

- a. Please describe your primary function pertaining to recreation and list any recreation sites or access sites (formal or informal) in the Project vicinity you are responsible for in the space provided below: (Additional information may be provided on the final sheet of this questionnaire.)

Manage park land

Please proceed to question 2b on the next page.

- b. Please list any recreation amenities available at each recreation site or access site you manage (e.g., docks, restrooms, parking areas, interpretive signage, picnic tables, trails, etc.) below:
(Additional information may be provided on the final sheet of this questionnaire.)

Park land green space

- c. Please provide the location of each site listed above using a map, street address, or GPS location:
(Additional information may be provided on the final sheet of this questionnaire.)

Park land east side of County Road #1 from 1st Street North to 7th Street North

- d. Do any of the sites listed in 2a or amenities listed in 2b ever exceed capacity or not have enough parking capacity? (Additional information may be provided on the final sheet of this questionnaire.)

☐ Yes (Please list location, amenity, and when capacity is exceeded below.) ☒ No

Recreation Site/Amenity

Event(s) Exceeding Capacity

Please proceed to question 2e on the next page.

- e. Based on the sites listed in 2a and amenities listed in 2b, do you have any planned improvements of existing recreation sites or any plans for development of new recreation sites?
(Additional information may be provided on the final sheet of this questionnaire.)

☐ Yes (Please list location, planned improvement, and anticipated opening date below.) ☐ No

Planned Improvements/Locations

Walking Path 2022

Anticipated Opening Date

Fall 2022

- f. Do you believe additional recreation sites/amenities are needed within the Project vicinity?
(Additional information may be provided on the final sheet of this questionnaire.)

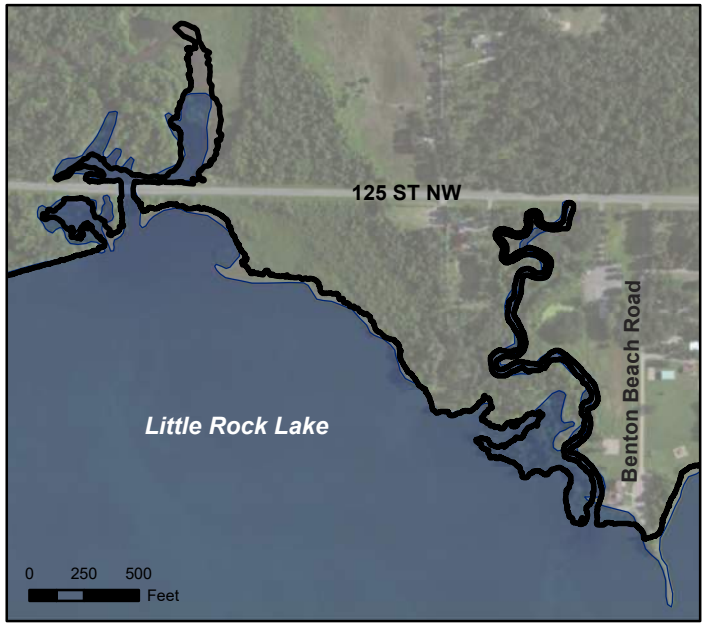
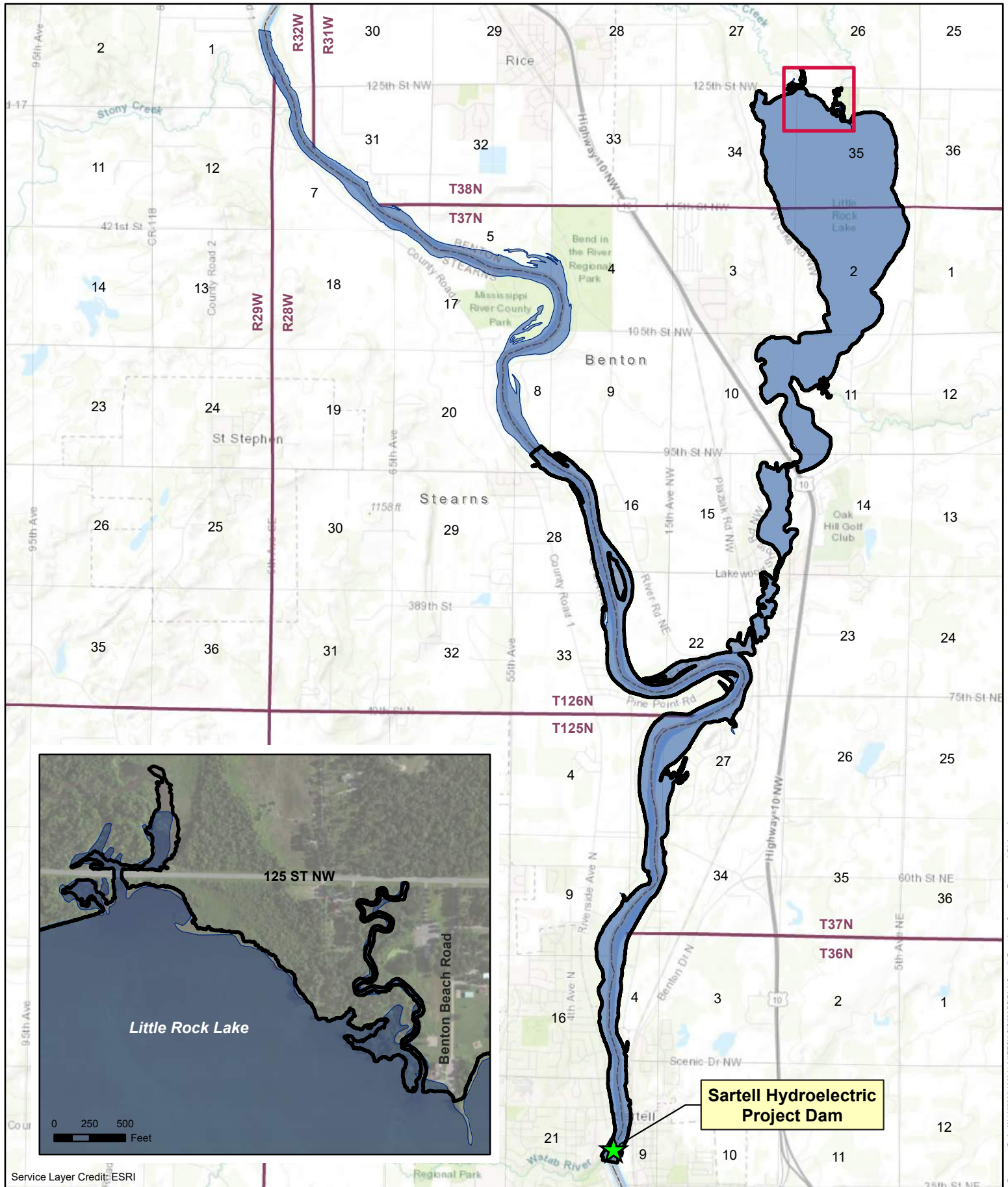
☐ Yes (Please list reasoning below.) ☒ No

Additional Recreation Sites/Amenities Reasoning

- g. Please indicate if there is a specific representative you wish to designate for potential follow-up contact by Sartell Hydro or Sartell Hydro's representative for any recreation site listed above:
(Additional information may be provided on the final sheet of this questionnaire.)

Representative Contact Information

Name: Scott Saehr
Address: 125 Pinecone Rd. N.
Sartell, MN 56377
Phone: 320-258-7316
Email: Scott.Saehr@Sartellmn.com

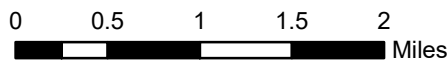


Service Layer Credit: ESRI



Project Boundary

- Proposed
- Current

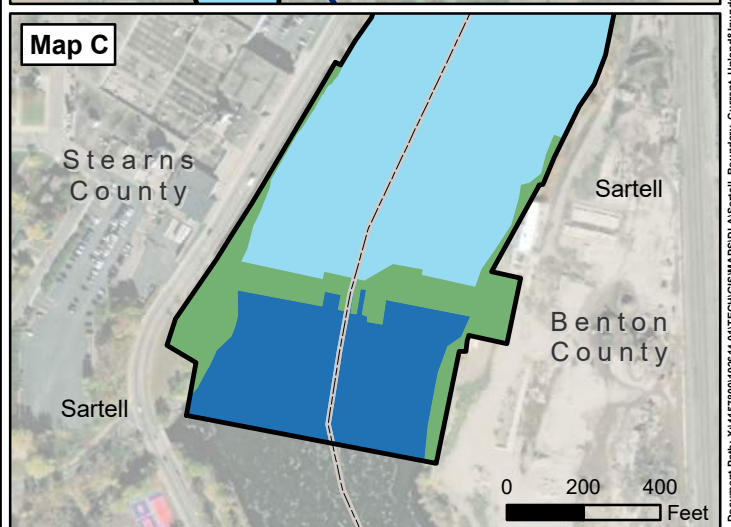
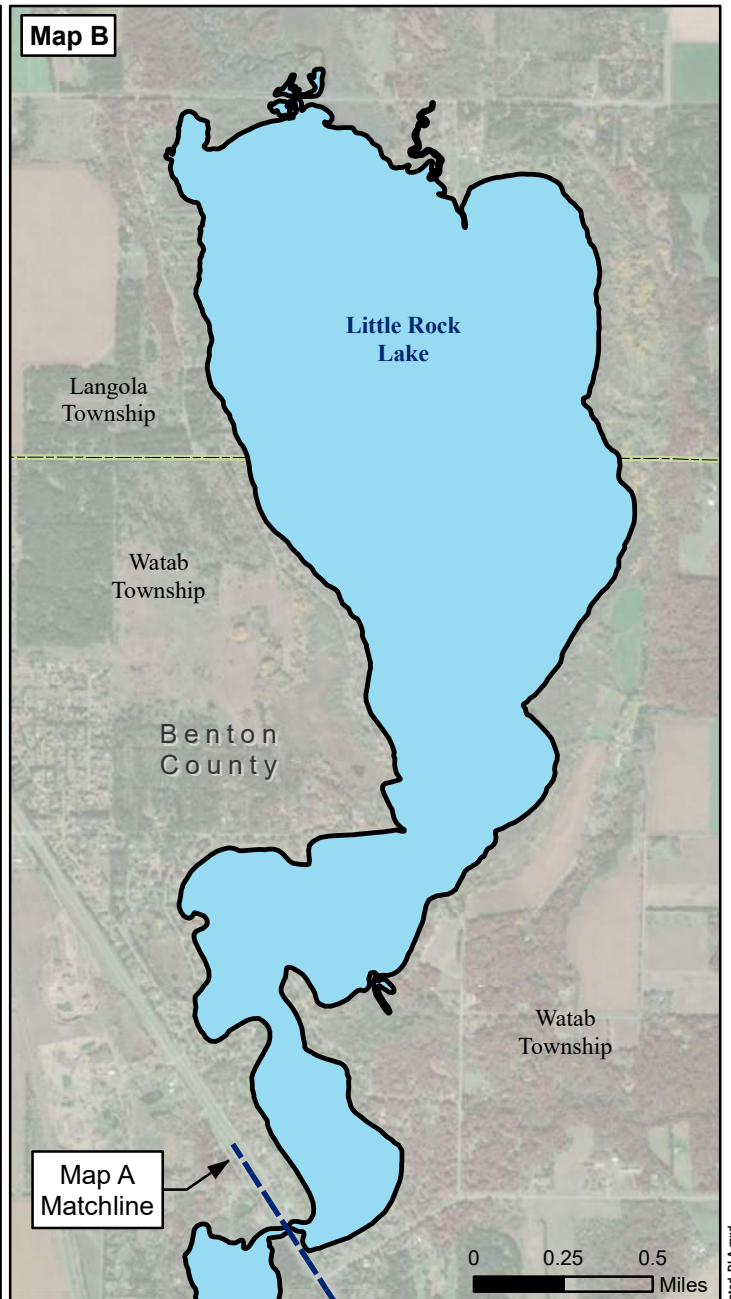
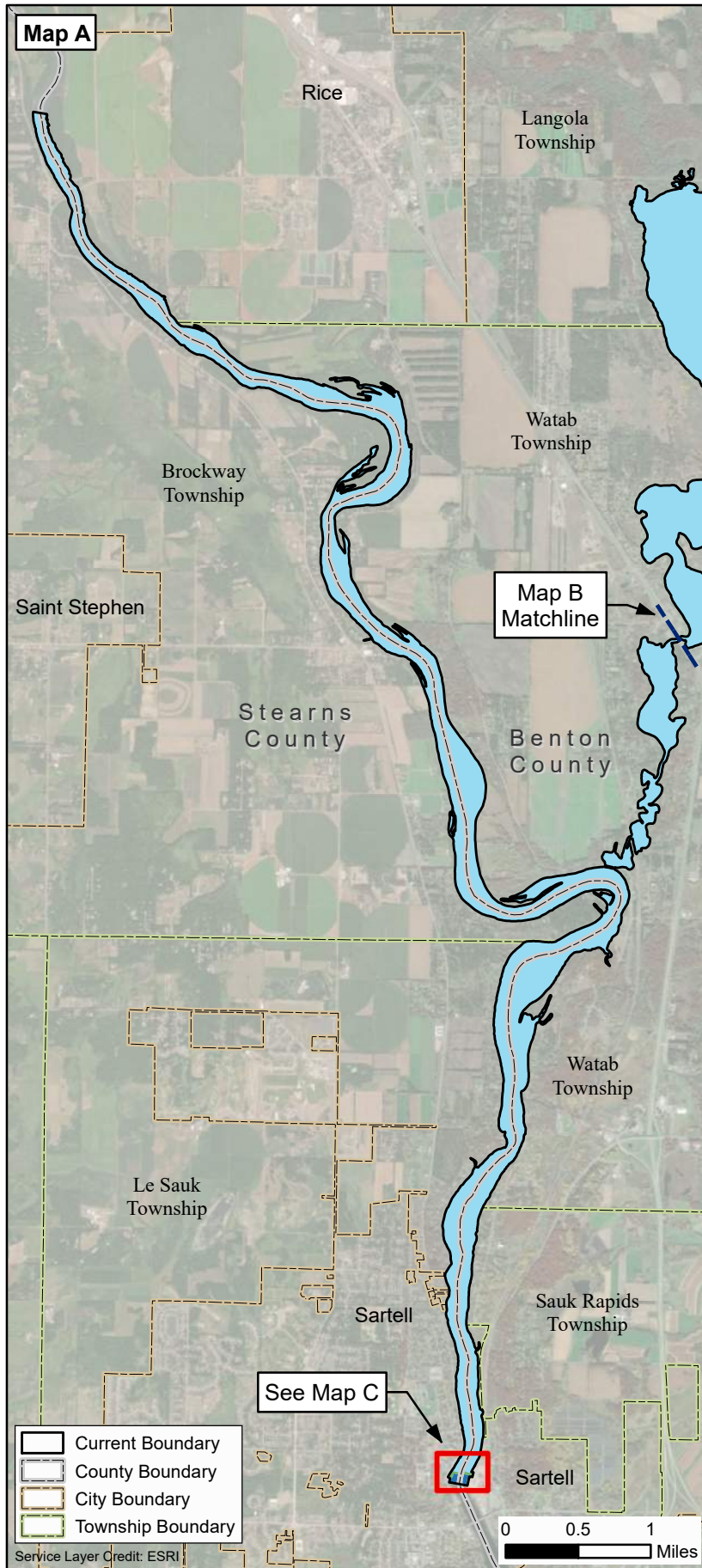


Sartell Hydroelectric Project Current vs Proposed Project Boundary

FERC No. 8315

APPENDIX E-31

Sartell Project Land and Inundated Area Maps



Current Project Boundary (2,803.3 acres)

Project Lands - 3.1 acres

Inundated Areas - 2,800.2 acres

Project Land

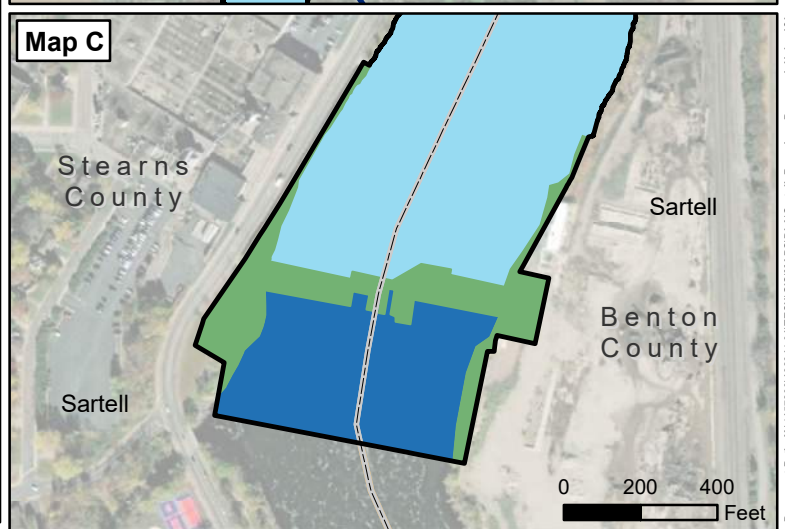
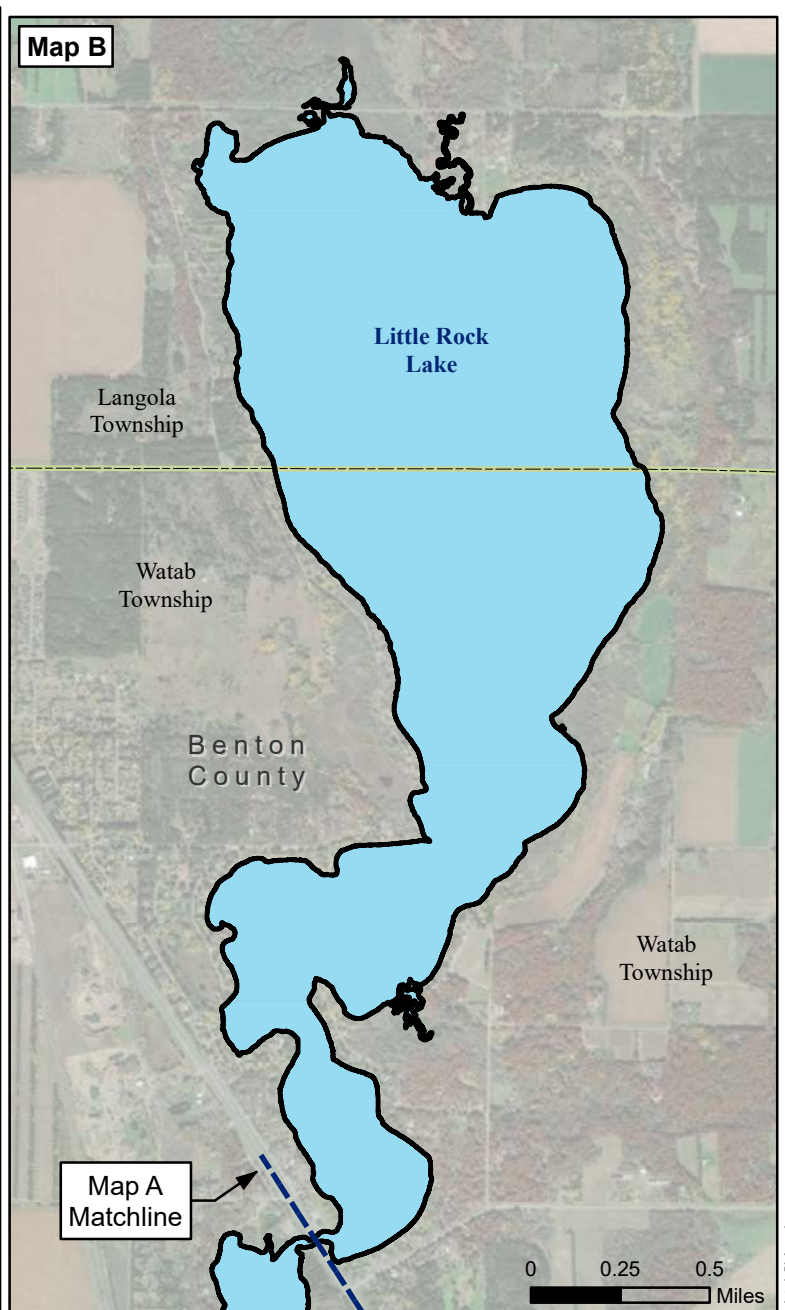
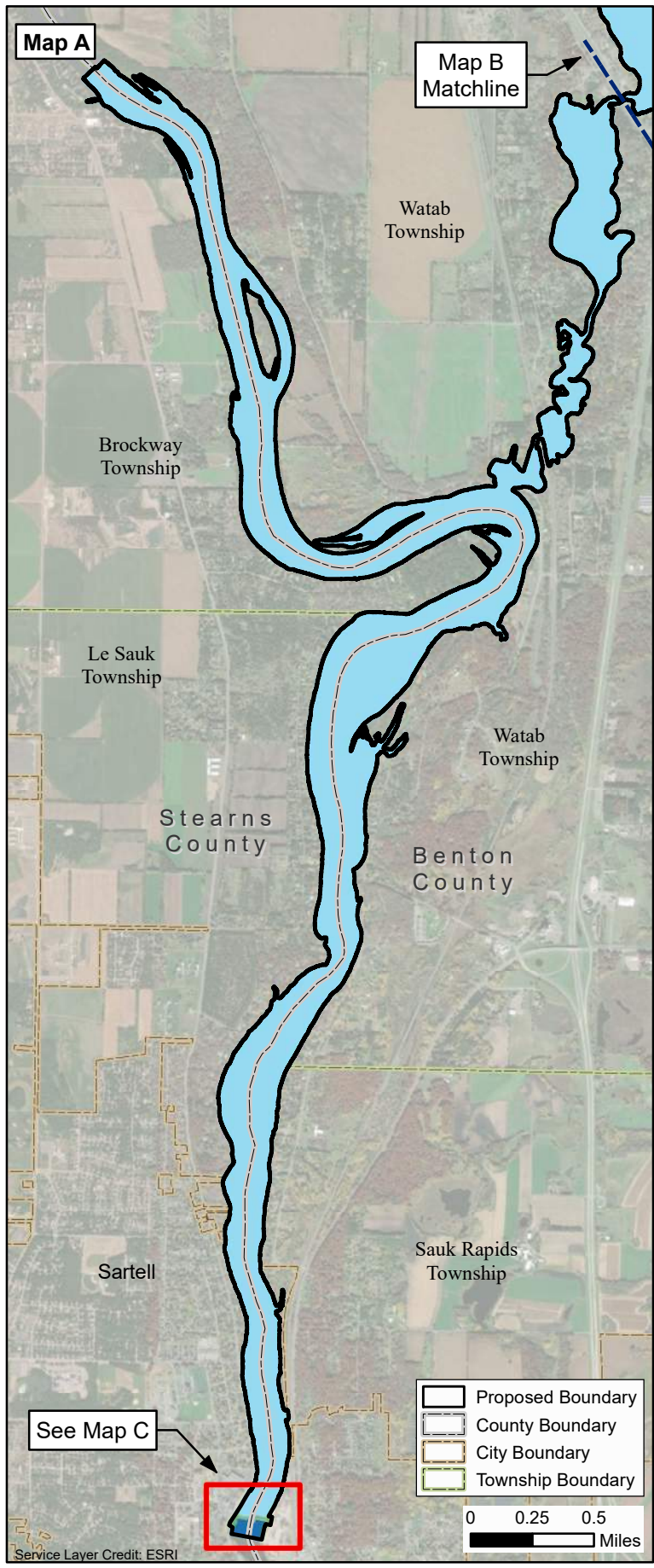
Upstream of Dam, Reservoir (2,795.2 acres)


Downstream of Dam, Tailwater (5.0 acres)



**Sartell Hydroelectric Project
Current Project Lands
and Inundated Areas**

FERC No. 8315






Proposed Project Boundary (2,358.6 acres)

Project Lands - 3.1 acres

Inundated Areas - 2,355.5 acres


N




Sartell Hydroelectric Project

Proposed Project Lands and Inundated Areas


FERC No. 8315



Project Land



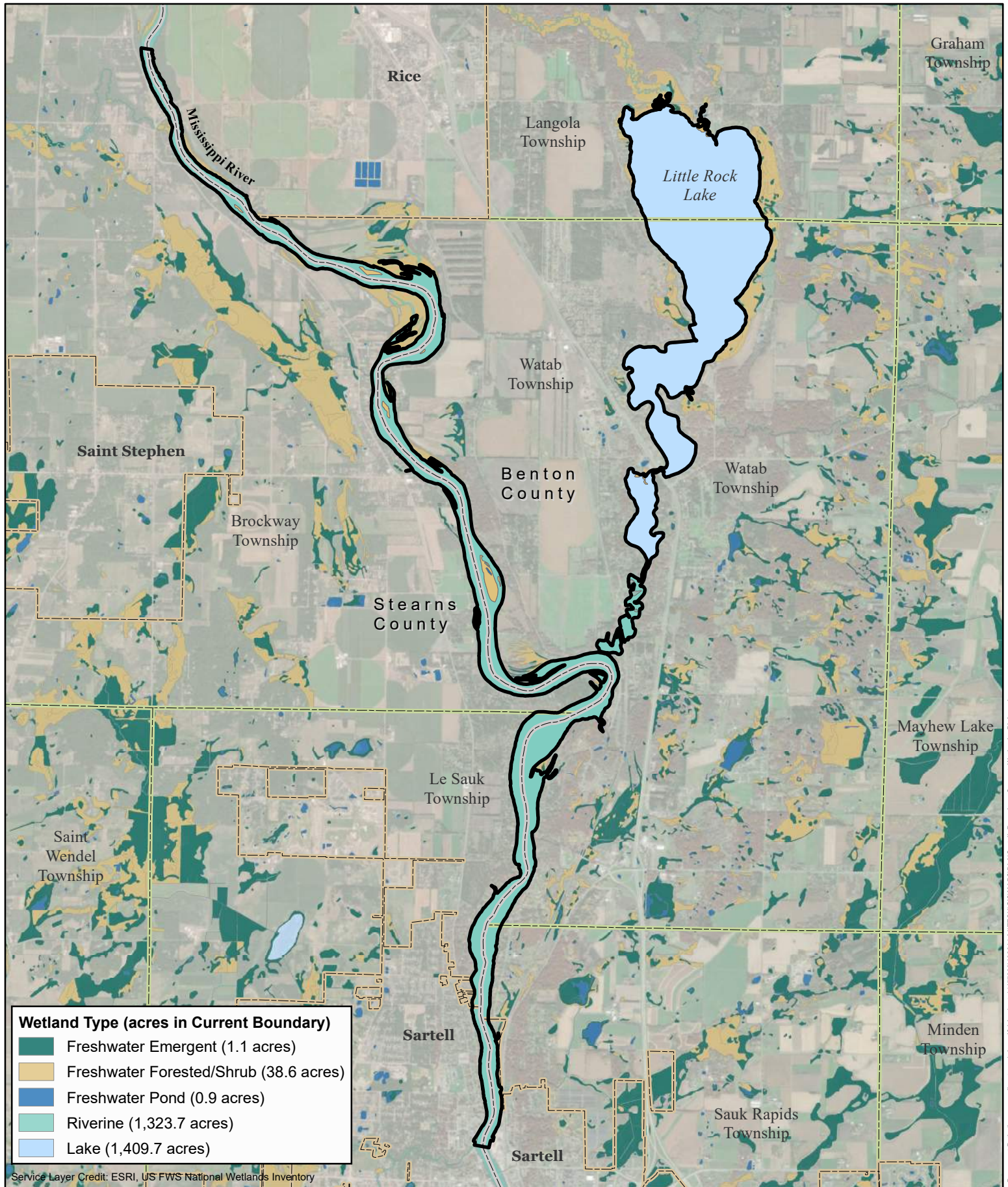
Upstream of Dam, Reservoir (2,350.5 acres)



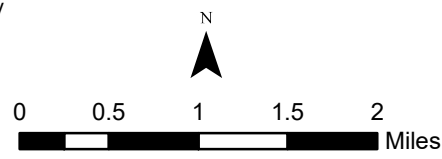
Downstream of Dam, Tailwater (5.0 acres)

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APPENDIX E-32 Wetlands Within the Sartell Proposed and Current Project Boundary



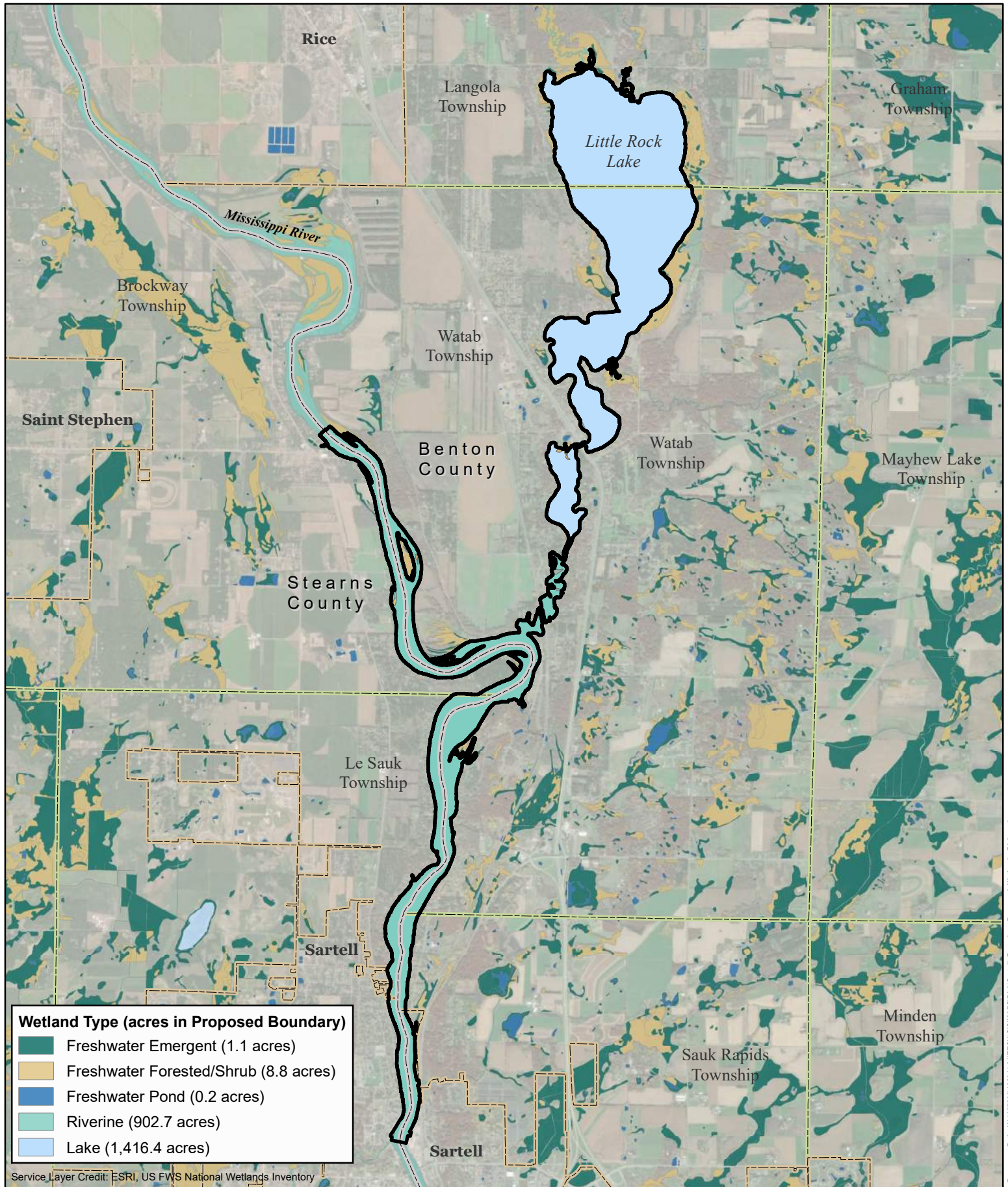
- Current Project Boundary
- County Boundary
- City Boundary
- Township Boundary



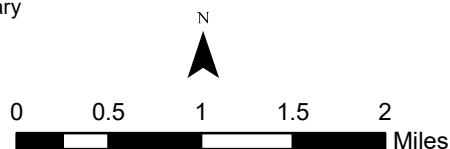
Sartell Hydroelectric Project Project Vicinity Wetlands

FERC No. 8315

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- Proposed Project Boundary
- County Boundary
- City Boundary
- Township Boundary



Sartell Hydroelectric Project Project Vicinity Wetlands

FERC No. 8315