

# Land Use Plan

## US Highway 12 Corridor (US 12) Land Use Plan

Cokato, Franklin, Marysville, Middleville, Stockholm, Victor  
and Woodland Townships

*Shaping Southern Wright County's Future*



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## **1.0 The US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Wright County's US Highway 12 Corridor (US 12) Land Use Plan is a vision of the future for a unique part of the County. It is also a framework for shaping future growth and change, for protecting what residents value, and for enhancing what residents want to improve. The previous Wright County Land Use Plan was adopted in 1988 and was amended several times since then. In response to both local and regional development forces, and to help ensure that the US 12 Corridor grows and changes with a strong vision for the future, Wright County decided to review and update the 1988 Land Use Plan in conjunction with all its Townships and Cities.

More specifically, this Land Use Plan serves the following purposes:

- ◆ Articulates a long-range vision that can serve Wright County through the future, and also provides specific policies that address current issues.
- ◆ Addresses physical planning issues such as land use and resource protection.
- ◆ Identifies key issues, sets goals, and defines policies to achieve the goals. This provides the legal basis for land use control and a link to Wright County's zoning and subdivision ordinances.
- ◆ Guides Wright County Staff, the Planning Commission, the County Board, Town Boards, City Councils, private property owners, and developers in decisions related to land use planning in the US 12 Corridor.

The Wright County Land Use Plan brings together various elements into a unified "big picture". It is not intended to provide a detailed development or natural resource plan for specific properties. Rather, it provides a framework that can guide development in the future. Lastly, the US 12 Corridor Land Use Plan is a dynamic plan that the County and Townships should review and refine on a regular basis, to ensure that it reflects the policy basis for decision-making as Wright County continues to grow and change.

### **1.2 Plan Purpose**

The purpose of this US 12 Corridor Land Use Plan is to provide an objective study of the US 12 Corridor's physical features, land use, population, natural resources, development trends and other factors in order to guide future decision-making as it relates to land use. This Plan will serve the purpose of a "comprehensive plan" or "policies plan" as noted in current Minnesota Statutes (chapter 394) and Wright County Zoning Ordinances, but does not include detailed studies or plans for roads, capital improvements, economic development or other subjects sometimes addressed in a "comprehensive plan". Future studies may address these topics in greater detail, but they are only included in this Plan in so far as they directly relate to land use issues. This US 12 Corridor Land Use Plan is

intended to replace the Wright County Land Use Plan adopted in 1988 and any amendments made to that Plan, as it specifically relates to Cokato, Franklin, Marysville, Middleville, Stockholm, Victor and Woodland Township.

Specific land use applications, proposals, and decisions in the future will be reviewed by the Wright County Board of Commissioners, Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment with the adopted US 12 Corridor Land Use Plan as a primary guide for land use decisions. Proposals that conflict with the adopted Plan will only be approved in extraordinary circumstances, when unique reasons justify the departure, and the basic policies and intent of the Land Use Plan are not compromised. Changes in the Plan should involve broad citizen participation, be supported by a proper, objective study based on planning principles and reflect the interests of a majority of the County's citizens. Land Use Plan changes that are made to benefit an individual or small group, or on an "ad hoc" basis, damage the credibility of the planning process and the usefulness of the Plan.

Because the vast majority of the unincorporated land area in the US 12 Corridor is agricultural in nature, a major thrust of this Land Use Plan is toward the protection and preservation of agricultural and rural areas. The intent is not just to protect prime, cultivated land from conversion to other uses. Rather, the intent is to protect areas that are and can remain rural or "agricultural" or "open space" in nature. Small woodlots, pasture, wetlands and other rural land types are an integral part of agricultural and rural areas in the Upper-Midwest, in addition to cultivated fields. In the past, farms and agricultural lands, as well as open space were viewed by planners and developers as "idle" land, waiting for something "better" to happen. More recently, agricultural areas, as well as open space and natural areas have come to be viewed as much more important land uses, deserving the same special consideration as commercial, industrial and residential areas. Just as residential and industrial areas are kept separated to their mutual benefit, so the protection of agricultural areas can benefit all the citizens of Wright County, not just those actively engaged in farming. In addition, the citizens of southern Wright County have placed a high value on wildlife habitat, open space and natural areas and these lands need to be protected.

Agricultural or open space preservation is sometimes viewed as being anti-growth or anti-development. This is not necessarily true, and it is certainly not the case with the US 12 Corridor Land Use Plan. The Wright County Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission realize that, for a number of reasons, the County will continue to experience significant growth and development in the future. As will be shown later, this Plan allows more than adequate room for growth and development to meet even the most optimistic predictions for the future.

Uncontrolled growth can lead to many problems, including land use conflicts, needlessly high public service costs, the overloading of natural ecological systems and gradual degradation of the environment, both natural and man-made. Land and water are the most precious resources available to any society, and the protection of the public health, safety and welfare demand that there be some controls on the use of privately owned

land, especially in rapidly growing areas. Such controls are never without controversy, especially in an area (or nation) where tradition and law attach great importance to the rights of landowners. However, all individual rights and freedoms are restricted to some degree, to preserve order and promote the good of the public as a whole. The purpose of this US 12 Corridor Land Use Plan is to provide a decision making guide that will serve the best interest of current and future citizens of Wright County as a whole, by controlling, not hindering, the growth of the County in a manner that best serves the public health, safety and welfare.

### **1.3 How to Use the Plan**

This Plan provides very specific policies to lead and manage US 12 Corridor growth and development. As with all land use decisions, implementing these growth and development recommendations will have different levels of benefit and impact on land owners and residents. There will be difficult choices in implementing the Plan. Not every individual will support each decision; however, this Plan was developed to represent the best interests of the County as a whole, including current and future residents as well as business owners and operators.

Implementation will require strong leadership and the on-going active participation and support of Wright County residents and other community members. This Plan is neither a blueprint nor is it a zoning code. Rather, it is a framework and policy guide for decision-making. To maximize the benefit of this Plan, it should be used to:

- ◆ Guide staff, the Planning Commission, and the County Board to assist them with a variety of tasks including the following:
  - Development decisions
  - Use of land
  - Budgeting capital improvements
  - Establishing regulatory changes
  - Communicating Wright County's vision for its future
- ◆ Guide property owners and residents to assist them in:
  - Determining potential property use
  - Understanding possible land use changes in the surrounding area
  - Establishing reasonable land value expectations
  - Understanding future infrastructure improvements
  - Making property improvements and investments
- ◆ Guide developers in their property acquisitions, and coordinate their development plans with County regulations.
- ◆ Help coordinate issues of mutual interests with neighboring and overlapping jurisdictions.

## **2.0 US Highway 12 Corridor Profile**

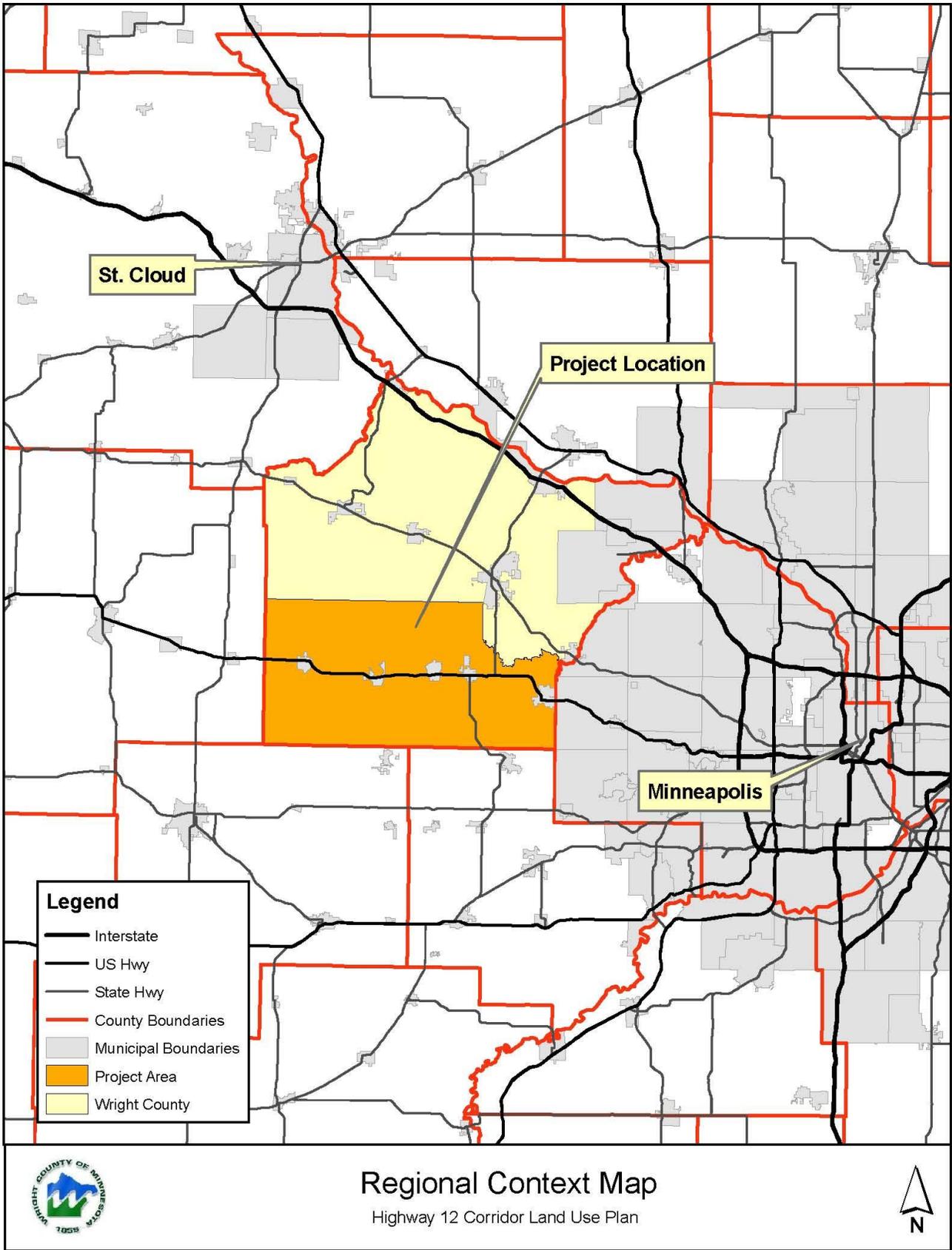
### **2.1 Overview**

Located in south-central Minnesota approximately 45 miles northwest of downtown Minneapolis, Wright County is the ninth largest County in Minnesota in terms of population. The 2000 Census estimated the Wright County population at 89,986, and it has grown to well over 100,000 since then. Wright County has been the sixth fastest growing county in Minnesota since 1980, due partly to its location, but also to the attractive areas for residential development, including 298 lakes over 10 acres in size.

Wright County has traditionally been predominately rural in nature, but recently has become subject to pressures for suburban development. Wright is the only County adjacent to Hennepin County that is not a part of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, but is inextricably tied to the Twin Cities economically, and is greatly affected by many of the same forces that affect the metropolitan region. In addition, Delano, the easternmost city in the US Highway 12 Corridor of Wright County, is 30 miles from downtown Minneapolis. A recently improved US 12 Corridor east of Maple Plain in Hennepin County will greatly decrease the commute time from the southern part of Wright County to the Twin Cities.

As a result of extremely rapid and uncontrolled growth, particularly in the northeastern part of the County, in the 1960's and 1970's, Wright County became involved in planning and land use controls at the request of its townships and has remained in a partnership with its townships to the present. In 1978, Wright County adopted a Comprehensive Plan that specifically addressed agricultural preservation and protection, and also adopted strict agricultural protection ordinances, modeled after those being used in some outlying parts of the metropolitan region. The 1988 Land Use Plan also included an agricultural protection element, but provides significant areas for urban growth in and around existing cities and also large areas for exurban or rural growth in those areas unsuited to long term agricultural use.

The current Plan also addresses agricultural and open space preservation and continues to provide ample opportunity for rural development at 1 per 40 acre densities (Agriculture) and 1 per 10 acre densities (Rural Residential) in limited areas. Areas which have particularly well-preserved natural resource lands and wildlife habitat in the US12 Corridor have been highlighted and policies created to protect and preserve these lands. While there are some limited areas for aggregate material (gravel) production in the US12 Corridor, they are relatively small in size and scattered compared to the very extensive areas found in Southside and Monticello Townships elsewhere in the County. Unfortunately, most of the gravel and sand materials found in the Corridor are along or near the North Fork Crow River flood plain and adjacent slopes, which are also areas which many feel should be protected for wildlife habitat and environmental reasons.



As mentioned briefly in the introduction, there are many governmental units within the US 12 Corridor that have an interest in land use planning. The Townships of Cokato, Franklin, Marysville, Middleville, Stockholm, Victor and Woodland as well as the Cities of Delano, Montrose, Waverly, Howard Lake and Cokato all have a vested interest in land use planning. As discussed later, Howard Lake, Waverly and Montrose have formal annexation agreements with their surrounding townships, while Cokato and Delano do not. In addition to these entities, the Wright Soil and Water Conservation District plays a key role in water management planning, wetland regulation and has done extensive work in recent years on water quality studies in the Lake Ann watershed in Victor Township.

The Wright County Planning and Zoning Office provides planning services and administers all land use regulations for the Townships in the US 12 Corridor except Middleville and Stockholm. Middleville and Stockholm Townships enforce their own Planning and Zoning controls, and have done so since the early 1990s. State law requires that any township doing so must be consistent with county regulations and as strict as or stricter than the County. State law and court rulings have determined that rezoning from one zoning district to another can only be approved by the County. Stockholm and Middleville have not made any changes to the Land Use Plan in force since 1988, and have been working cooperatively with Wright County on the preparation of this plan.

While Wright County does not participate directly in the land use planning process within cities, the County obviously can have an effect on these units with its planning. It has been County policy since the mid-1970s to promote orderly development within existing cities, while limiting development in the outlying “rural” areas. The County does not participate in economic development programs that would subsidize or promote residential or a substantial amount of commercial/industrial development outside the cities. The Cities of the US 12 Corridor, to varying degrees, have very substantial public and private investments in public services, economic development, infrastructure, and development plans and programs that the County does not desire to ignore nor counteract. To help protect these investments, and promote their wise and economical use, Wright County plans to enforce programs that will inhibit developmental sprawl in the Townships.

In summary, the compilation of the US 12 Corridor Land Use Plan has not, and could not have been completed in a vacuum. The review and integration of municipal plans into the County Plan was very important. The County staff's intimate familiarity with County-wide regulations (including shorelands) and the activities of other agencies involved in land use made compilation of the Land Use Plan a process that should address the concerns of other affected agencies. The public participation process, to be discussed later, will also promote the goals of consistency and compatibility.

## 2.2 Township Characteristics

### Cokato Township

Cokato Township is located on the western edge of Wright County, bordered by Meeker County to the west. The North Fork of the Crow River winds through the northeastern portion of the Township, with Cokato Lake just east of the township center. The City of Cokato occupies the south central portion of the Township. Cokato Township is home to Wildlife and Mud Lake County Parks and two public hunting areas: Knapp Wildlife Management Area and Cokato Waterfowl Production Area.

Cokato Township is part of the prime agricultural area that dominates the southwest part of Wright County. The Township is primarily agricultural in character, with the majority of residential development occurring around Cokato and Brooks Lake. Roughly 750 acres of land between the City of Cokato and Cokato Lake, along Sucker Creek, was added as Rural Residential in the latest plan update in 1993. Most of this land has yet to be developed beyond agricultural densities.

Limited commercial development does exist along the south side of US Highway 12 west of the City of Cokato up to the Dassel-Cokato School property. The School lies north of the Highway and one mile east of the western County border. The industrial “strip” lies between the Highway and the railroad to the south. The City of Cokato has an extended planning area that includes portions of Cokato Township with roughly ¼ mile of the city boundary. The Township Board expressed a desire to promote more industrial land in the plan, and suggested that all frontage on Highway 12 could be designated industrial . However, demand for industrial land is quite limited and large areas of township industrial lands in Rockford and Franklin Townships have sat empty for years. Also, shoreland areas and highway safety issues prohibit such an extensive industrial designations. Fortunately, there remains a large area of undeveloped industrial land in the pre-existing “strip” west of the City of Cokato, and there is also great potential in the Transition area east of the City if the City and Township were to work together on a more detailed development plan for the Transition area.

| Land Use Category       | Current LUP Acres | Percent     | Future LUP Acres | Percent     |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------|
| Agricultural            | 18,748            | 90%         | 16,824           | 81%         |
| Rural Residential       | 756               | 4%          | 731              | 4%          |
| Residential Large Lot   | 75                | 0%          | 75               | 0%          |
| Residential             | 118               | 1%          | 81               | 0%          |
| Transition Area         | 215               | 1%          | 860              | 4%          |
| Orderly Annexation Area | 0                 | 0%          | 0                | 0%          |
| Major Growth Area       | 0                 | 0%          | 0                | 0%          |
| Commercial              | 17                | 0%          | 17               | 0%          |
| Limited Industrial      | 76                | 0%          | 46               | 0%          |
| Resource Land           | 0                 | 0%          | 1,371            | 7%          |
| Aggregate Resources     | 0                 | 0%          | 0                | 0%          |
| Public Lands            | 830               | 4%          | 830              | 4%          |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>20,835</b>     | <b>100%</b> | <b>20,835</b>    | <b>100%</b> |

## **Franklin Township**

Located in the southeastern corner of Wright County, Franklin Township is as affected by the growth pressures of the Twin Cities metro as any township in the County. It is bordered by Carver County and the City of Watertown to the south and Hennepin County and the City of Independence to the east, and has quick and easy access to US Highway 12 for commuter traffic. During times of economic growth, Franklin is one of the first townships to come under observable development pressure. Balancing this pressure and the ensuing conflicts with the City of Delano over growth issues, along with a competing desire to remain a rural community have proven to be challenges for the Township. The Franklin Township land use plan is one of the most up-to-date plans in the County, having been reviewed from 2002-2004. For most purposes, it seems clear that update, which added residential and industrial land, is still adequate and purposeful 6 years later.

The Township is unique in the corridor, as much of it has been influenced and shaped by the meanderings of the South and North Fork of the Crow River. With so much riverine geography, floodplain areas are common. Much of the eastern part of the Township has been designated for rural residential (10 acres), and much of that, especially the northeast corner, is already developed. Most of the undeveloped land that is currently designated as Agricultural/Residential is in the southeast part of the township. Because of this mixture of land features and uses, Franklin Township has been known for and continues to be a popular place for alternative agricultural practices such as orchards, wineries and horse operations.

A primary planning issue for Franklin Township is managing the potential conflict between the Township and the growth of the City of Delano. Since there are prohibitive political and institutional impediments to Delano growing east into Hennepin County, most or all future growth of the City must come through the annexation of land in Franklin Township. Though the city's long-term growth plans include much of the Township, the Transition Area need not include more area than what is necessary to plan for reasonable growth in the time frame of this plan, which is 15 to 20 years. As noted in the Chapter 3, the City and Township have met to reach agreement on a working "Transition Area" for this plan. In the distant long-term, Franklin may also see pressures from Montrose in the northwest corner and Watertown from the south, but those pressures are too uncertain and too far in the future for this plan to address.

Franklin Township is one of a very few Townships in the County with plans for a large industrial area. Such development outside city limits is generally not promoted by the County Plan, but there have been some demands for limited industrial uses that may need large land areas but not the full range of services in a municipal industrial park. (Examples might include trucking firms, contractor yards, and other uses that may need outdoor storage or otherwise demand large land areas.) Partly due to the economic downturn in 2009, neither the large area designated for new industrial development in Rockford Township on State Highway 55 nor the area in Franklin on US 12 Corridor has seen any development in several years, even before the downturn. Delano, and other cities, have rightfully voiced concerns that County ordinances do not have adequate

standards for industrial areas which may abut or be near a City, and could prove to be unsightly and have a negative impact on development or the image of the City. Due to the lack of development to date, there is still time and opportunity for Delano and Franklin Township and the County to work on appropriate environmental and esthetic standards for these industrial areas. This need is also addressed in Chapter 5.

| <b>Land Use Category</b> | <b>Current LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Future LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Agricultural             | 15,757                   | 61%            | 14,437                  | 55%            |
| Rural Residential        | 8,619                    | 33%            | 7,188                   | 28%            |
| Residential Large Lot    | 59                       | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Residential              | 60                       | 0%             | 60                      | 0%             |
| Transition Area          | 0                        | 0%             | 2,360                   | 9%             |
| Orderly Annexation Area  | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Major Growth Area        | 1,204                    | 5%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Commercial               | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Limited Industrial       | 267                      | 1%             | 267                     | 1%             |
| Resource Land            | 0                        | 0%             | 1,654                   | 6%             |
| Aggregate Resources      | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Public Lands             | 48                       | 0%             | 48                      | 0%             |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>26,014</b>            | <b>100%</b>    | <b>26,014</b>           | <b>100%</b>    |

## Marysville Township

Marysville Township is located in south central Wright County and also contains a wide variety of landscapes and land uses. While primarily rural, the northeast corner of the Township contains suburban type development from the City of Buffalo and around Deer, Mink, and Goose lakes. The southern portion of the Township is affected by growth from the cities of Montrose and Waverly. Hobby farms and large lot development are somewhat scattered throughout the Township, especially in and near the Crow River valley. The Township also contains a very large area of floodplain from the North Fork Crow River, which runs through the northern third of the Township. Several County Parks, some wildlife management areas and extensive natural and floodplain areas create many areas of scenic and natural beauty in the Township.

There is no significant commercial development in the Township, as Montrose and Waverly dominate the U.S. Highway 12 area. Significant farms and some feedlot operations exist throughout the Township, particularly the western portion and north of County Road 107 in the central part of the Township.

There is some evidence of aggregate resources in the Township, primarily in the areas in small pockets along the North Fork Crow River. It does not appear that there is enough aggregate in these deposits to make large scale mining commercially viable, as those areas have been or are currently being mined. Any remaining resources would likely be most suited for temporary, project specific mines.

The Marysville Township has entered into Orderly Annexation Agreements (OAAs) with both Montrose and Waverly. These OAAs encompass the southern 12 sections, or southern two miles, of the Township running the entire width of the Township from east to west. Any extensive development in these areas would require annexation into the respective city, with the extension of city sewer and water facilities and other city services.

| <b>Land Use Category</b> | <b>Current LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Future LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Agricultural             | 16,335                   | 78%            | 11,568                  | 55%            |
| Rural Residential        | 3,063                    | 15%            | 2,933                   | 14%            |
| Residential Large Lot    | 348                      | 2%             | 332                     | 2%             |
| Residential              | 193                      | 1%             | 117                     | 1%             |
| Transition Area          | 0                        | 0%             | 1,966                   | 9%             |
| Orderly Annexation Area  | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Major Growth Area        | 152                      | 1%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Commercial               | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Limited Industrial       | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Resource Land            | 0                        | 0%             | 3,175                   | 15%            |
| Aggregate Resources      | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Public Lands             | 852                      | 4%             | 852                     | 4%             |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>20,943</b>            | <b>100%</b>    | <b>20,943</b>           | <b>100%</b>    |

## Middleville Township

Middleville Township is predominately rural and agricultural in nature. It is primarily a farming community, and a very high percentage of the land is classified as prime farmland (62.5%). The Township is committed to agricultural preservation.

The North Fork of the Crow River cuts through the northern portion of the Township. This is not only an area worth preserving with high ecological values but also their main source of aggregate resources. Maintaining the balance between the two can be challenging but both resources are extremely important to the area. There are two County Parks in the Township, Albright Mills County Park and Anderson County Park. Both parks are located along the Crow River.

The southern portion of the Township contains some scattered lakes. Howard Lake is the largest of the lakes; it is mostly surrounded by small lakeshore lots or is within the city limits of Howard Lake. The other lakes in the Township are Natural Environment Lakes and still remain largely undeveloped.

Except for the Transition Area around Howard Lake and some smaller areas of Industrial along State Highway 12, virtually the entire Township is designated as Agricultural in the Land Use Plan. The current number of potential building sites, based on 1 home per 40 acres in the Agricultural District and 1 per 10 in the Rural Residential Land Use District, is estimated at 271 homes, which would take decades to exhaust at the rate of development in Middleville over the past years, even before the housing “bust”.

| <b>Land Use Category</b> | <b>Current LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Future LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Agricultural             | 20,521                   | 96%            | 18,953                  | 89%            |
| Rural Residential        | 113                      | 1%             | 20                      | 0%             |
| Residential Large Lot    | 22                       | 0%             | 22                      | 0%             |
| Residential              | 110                      | 1%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Transition Area          | 0                        | 0%             | 952                     | 4%             |
| Orderly Annexation Area  | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Major Growth Area        | 26                       | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Commercial               | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Limited Industrial       | 231                      | 1%             | 181                     | 1%             |
| Resource Land            | 0                        | 0%             | 895                     | 4%             |
| Aggregate Resources      | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Public Lands             | 322                      | 2%             | 322                     | 2%             |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>21,345</b>            | <b>100%</b>    | <b>21,345</b>           | <b>100%</b>    |

## Stockholm Township

Stockholm Township is also primarily agricultural in nature. It is a farming community and a very high percentage of the land is classified as prime farmland (65%). The Township is committed to agricultural preservation and does not want to see much more development outside of the transition area.

Collinwood Lake is a Recreational Development Lake that is located in the northwestern part of Stockholm Township and also lies partly in Meeker County. There is some development on this lake, however much of the east side of the lake is made up of Collinwood County Park and large tracts of tillable land. The park extends to Chelgren Lake which is a very small Natural Environment Lake to the east of Collinwood. Other than Collinwood Lake the other lakes located in this Township are smaller in size and are classified as Natural Environment Lakes. Another important natural area is Grass Lake, which is a Natural Environment Lake located in the northeast portion of Stockholm Township. Just south and east of Grass Lake is a protected area owned by the Minnesota DNR called Grass Lake State Wildlife Management Area (WMA). This WMA has excellent prairie grassland and cattail dominated wetland habitat.

Except for the City of Cokato Transition Area, some smaller areas of Industrial along State Highway 12, and some pockets of old residential lots, virtually the entire Township is designated as Agricultural in the Land Use Plan. A relatively small area of new Rural Residential area is proposed south of and adjacent to the City of Cokato. The City has indicated it has no plans to grow to the south. The current number of potential building sites, based on 1 home per 40 acres in the Agricultural District is estimated at 305 homes, which would take many years to exhaust at the rate of development in Stockholm over the past decade.

| <b>Land Use Category</b> | <b>Current LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Future LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Agricultural             | 20,713                   | 96%            | 19,236                  | 89%            |
| Rural Residential        | 0                        | 0%             | 336                     | 2%             |
| Residential Large Lot    | 3                        | 0%             | 3                       | 0%             |
| Residential              | 122                      | 1%             | 122                     | 1%             |
| Transition Area          | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Orderly Annexation Area  | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Major Growth Area        | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Commercial               | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Limited Industrial       | 100                      | 0%             | 100                     | 0%             |
| Resource Land            | 0                        | 0%             | 1,141                   | 5%             |
| Aggregate Resources      | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Public Lands             | 596                      | 3%             | 596                     | 3%             |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>21,534</b>            | <b>100%</b>    | <b>21,534</b>           | <b>100%</b>    |

## Victor Township

The US Highway 12 corridor of Wright County is generally known for its strong agricultural character, and Victor Township is no exception. Like most of the rest of the corridor, the Township is an agricultural community with excellent soils and low population densities. Somewhat unique to Victor, however, is the relatively strong presence of seasonal/recreational homes on two of its many lakes. While most other lakes in the Township and in the corridor are Natural Environment lakes, Lake Ann and Lake Mary are Recreational Development lakes that give the Township some lakeshore development land use along with its agricultural uses. These dominate the geography east of County Road 6, while tillable land makes up most of the land to the west.

Victor Township’s land use plan was updated in 1998 and “was intended to explore the possibility of permitting limited residential growth if certain areas of the township are particularly well suited to such development.” As a result of this review, 450 acres of Major Growth Area was added west of Howard Lake and 240 acres of Agricultural/Residential was added south of Lake Ann and Emma. Some, but far less than all of that area has been developed since then. Victor Township is still dedicated to agricultural preservation, and the landscape and outlook in the Township has remained much the same.

For many reasons, the Township’s land use plan will not change with this update, with the exception of some modifications around the city/township border and the addition of Resource Lands, as appropriate. The Township’s main land use issue for this plan update relates to the city of Howard Lake and its plans for growth, especially considering the construction of the new Howard Lake School north of the Township hall and 1 ½ miles south of the city. Though Winsted is only ¼ mile south of the border, there is currently no growth pressure from Winsted that will need to be addressed in this plan.

| <b>Land Use Category</b> | <b>Current LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Future LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Agricultural             | 19,260                   | 95%            | 17,723                  | 87%            |
| Rural Residential        | 249                      | 1%             | 249                     | 1%             |
| Residential Large Lot    | 69                       | 0%             | 43                      | 0%             |
| Residential              | 117                      | 1%             | 112                     | 1%             |
| Transition Area          | 0                        | 0%             | 946                     | 5%             |
| Orderly Annexation Area  | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Major Growth Area        | 308                      | 2%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Commercial               | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Limited Industrial       | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Resource Land            | 0                        | 0%             | 930                     | 5%             |
| Aggregate Resources      | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Public Lands             | 323                      | 2%             | 323                     | 2%             |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>20,326</b>            | <b>100%</b>    | <b>20,326</b>           | <b>100%</b>    |

## Woodland Township

Woodland Township is also predominately rural and agricultural in nature, although the cities of Montrose and Waverly predominate along the north border. A very high percentage of the land in Woodland is classified as prime farmland or agricultural soils of statewide importance (92%) and also as cultivated (63%). The Township is committed to agricultural preservation. There is some limited residential development around Pooles Lake in the SE corner of the Township, mostly on large lots.

There are several lakes in Woodland Township, with all but Dog Lake (#178) being Natural Environment. Dog Lake is classified as a Recreational Development lake and has Oscar and Anna Johnson County Park on its north shore. A few newer developments on Pooles Lake include larger lot sizes with A/R zoning. The Town Board would like to augment and better utilize some roads and small, existing development areas on Lake Ida and Pooles Lake. A small area of “Residential Large Lot” is proposed for an underutilized road adjacent to a residential lakeshore area on Lake Ida. Difficult road access and the development pattern already established on Pooles Lake do present obstacles to continued development in this area, but the current designation as Rural Residential in the Land Use Plan map will allow for the use of Planned Unit Developments on some of the larger remaining parcels if the owners so desire.

Except for the Montrose and Waverly Transition Areas, and around Pooles Lake, virtually the entire Township is designated as Agricultural in the Land Use Plan. There are not any significant aggregate deposits in Woodland Township. There are 795 acres in public lands, including a large wildlife management area around Mud Lake. The current number of available building sites, based on 1 home per 40 acres, is estimated at 248 homes, which would take many years to use up at the rate of development in Woodland.

| <b>Land Use Category</b> | <b>Current LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Future LUP Acres</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Agricultural             | 18,109                   | 90%            | 15,461                  | 77%            |
| Rural Residential        | 869                      | 4%             | 812                     | 4%             |
| Residential Large Lot    | 13                       | 0%             | 40                      | 0%             |
| Residential              | 9                        | 0%             | 9                       | 0%             |
| Transition Area          | 0                        | 0%             | 1,490                   | 7%             |
| Orderly Annexation Area  | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Major Growth Area        | 284                      | 1%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Commercial               | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Limited Industrial       | 4                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Resource Land            | 0                        | 0%             | 1,476                   | 7%             |
| Aggregate Resources      | 0                        | 0%             | 0                       | 0%             |
| Public Lands             | 797                      | 4%             | 797                     | 4%             |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>20,085</b>            | <b>100%</b>    | <b>20,085</b>           | <b>100%</b>    |

### 2.3 Demographic Trends and Projections

Identifying and summarizing demographic changes over time are important land use planning tools. Analyzing changes in population size and characteristics helps develop population projections and helps forecast the need for various public services, capital improvements and real estate development.

Due to its proximity to the Twin Cities and St. Cloud metropolitan areas, Wright County has one of the fastest growing populations in the state. The US Highway 12 Corridor of the County is composed of Cokato, Franklin, Marysville, Middleville, Stockholm, Victor and Woodland Townships and the Cities of Delano, Montrose, Waverly, Howard Lake and Cokato. While nothing like the explosive growth seen in the Northeast Quadrant of the County, the Corridor has experienced steady growth from 1990 to 2008. During this time period, the population increased from 17,496 to 24,161 (or about a 32.3 percent increase). More growth has occurred in the cities than in the townships. In 2008, approximately 57 percent of residents lived in incorporated cities, compared to 43 percent living in townships.

The tables below show the historical population for the cities and townships in the US 12 Corridor.

| <b>POPULATION</b>             | <b>1970</b> | <b>1980</b> | <b>1990</b> | <b>2000</b> | <b>2008</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Southern Wright County</b> | 13,191      | 16,593      | 17,496      | 20,337      | 24,161      |
|                               |             |             |             |             |             |
| <b>Townships</b>              |             |             |             |             |             |
| Cokato                        | 754         | 947         | 1,100       | 1,238       | 1,409       |
| Franklin                      | 1,808       | 2,712       | 2,742       | 2,774       | 2,755       |
| Marysville                    | 1,508       | 1,944       | 1,839       | 2,097       | 2,094       |
| Middleville                   | 1,016       | 1,093       | 1,017       | 925         | 1,029       |
| Stockholm                     | 690         | 779         | 784         | 805         | 882         |
| Victor                        | 839         | 1,012       | 1,083       | 1,069       | 1,152       |
| Woodland                      | 876         | 1,098       | 1,091       | 1,137       | 1,133       |
|                               |             |             |             |             |             |
| <b>Cities</b>                 |             |             |             |             |             |
| Cokato                        | 1,735       | 2,056       | 2,180       | 2,727       | 2,747       |
| Delano                        | 1,851       | 2,480       | 2,709       | 3,837       | 5,359       |
| Howard Lake                   | 1,162       | 1,240       | 1,343       | 1,853       | 2,016       |
| Montrose                      | 379         | 762         | 1,008       | 1,143       | 2,498       |
| Waverly                       | 573         | 470         | 600         | 732         | 1,087       |

## Households

The number of households in the Corridor increased approximately 62 percent between 1990 and 2008. The household increase is almost double that of the population increase (32 percent) in the same time period. This discrepancy may be attributed to smaller household sizes in recent years, or new development activity. In 1990, the average Wright County household size was 2.95. The State Demographer estimated that the 2008 household size for Wright County is 2.69 persons per household.

| <b>HOUSEHOLDS</b>             | <b>1980</b> | <b>1990</b> | <b>2000</b> | <b>2008</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>US Highway 12 Corridor</b> | 4,760       | 5,500       | 7,049       | 8,911       |
|                               |             |             |             |             |
| <b>Townships</b>              |             |             |             |             |
| Cokato                        | 285         | 310         | 319         | 376         |
| Franklin                      | 452         | 746         | 889         | 958         |
| Marysville                    | 463         | 556         | 696         | 739         |
| Middleville                   | 317         | 335         | 312         | 355         |
| Stockholm                     | 231         | 240         | 258         | 298         |
| Victor                        | 280         | 279         | 355         | 399         |
| Woodland                      | 225         | 318         | 389         | 431         |
|                               |             |             |             |             |
| <b>Cities</b>                 |             |             |             |             |
| Cokato                        | 726         | 836         | 990         | 1,039       |
| Delano                        | 879         | 981         | 1,368       | 1,963       |
| Howard Lake                   | 489         | 511         | 735         | 834         |
| Montrose                      | 251         | 367         | 454         | 1,072       |
| Waverly                       | 162         | 21          | 284         | 447         |

## Average Annual Growth Rates

The average annual growth rate between 2000 and 2008 was 1.74 percent in the Corridor and most of that growth occurred in cities. Montrose had the highest average annual growth rate of 8.13 percent, followed by Waverly (4.03 percent) and Delano (3.4 percent). Three townships had decreasing average annual growth rates between 2000 and 2008. Franklin Township had (-0.07 percent growth rate), Woodland (-0.04 percent), and Marysville (-0.01 percent). Although most of the growth will be occurring in the cities, it is still important for the County to be aware of this growth and the impact it will have on the Townships in the US 12 Corridor.

| <b>AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE</b> | <b>1970-1980</b> | <b>1980-1990</b> | <b>1990-200</b> | <b>2000-2008</b> |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| <b>US Highway 12 Corridor</b>     | 2.32%            | 0.53%            | 1.52%           | 1.74%            |
|                                   |                  |                  |                 |                  |
| <b>Townships</b>                  |                  |                  |                 |                  |
| Cokato                            | 2.31%            | 1.51%            | 1.19%           | 1.30%            |
| Franklin                          | 4.14%            | 0.11%            | 0.12%           | -0.07%           |
| Marysville                        | 2.57%            | -0.55%           | 1.32%           | -0.01%           |
| Middleville                       | 0.73%            | -0.72%           | -0.94%          | 1.07%            |
| Stockholm                         | 1.22%            | 0.06%            | 0.26%           | 0.92%            |
| Victor                            | 1.89%            | 0.68%            | -0.13%          | 0.75%            |
| Woodland                          | 2.28%            | -0.06%           | 0.41%           | -0.04%           |
|                                   |                  |                  |                 |                  |
| <b>Cities</b>                     |                  |                  |                 |                  |
| Cokato                            | 1.71%            | 0.59%            | 2.26%           | 0.07%            |
| Delano                            | 2.97%            | 0.89%            | 3.54%           | 3.40%            |
| Howard Lake                       | 0.65%            | 0.80%            | 3.27%           | 0.85%            |
| Montrose                          | 7.23%            | 2.84%            | 1.26%           | 8.13%            |
| Waverly                           | -1.96%           | 2.47%            | 2.01%           | 4.03%            |

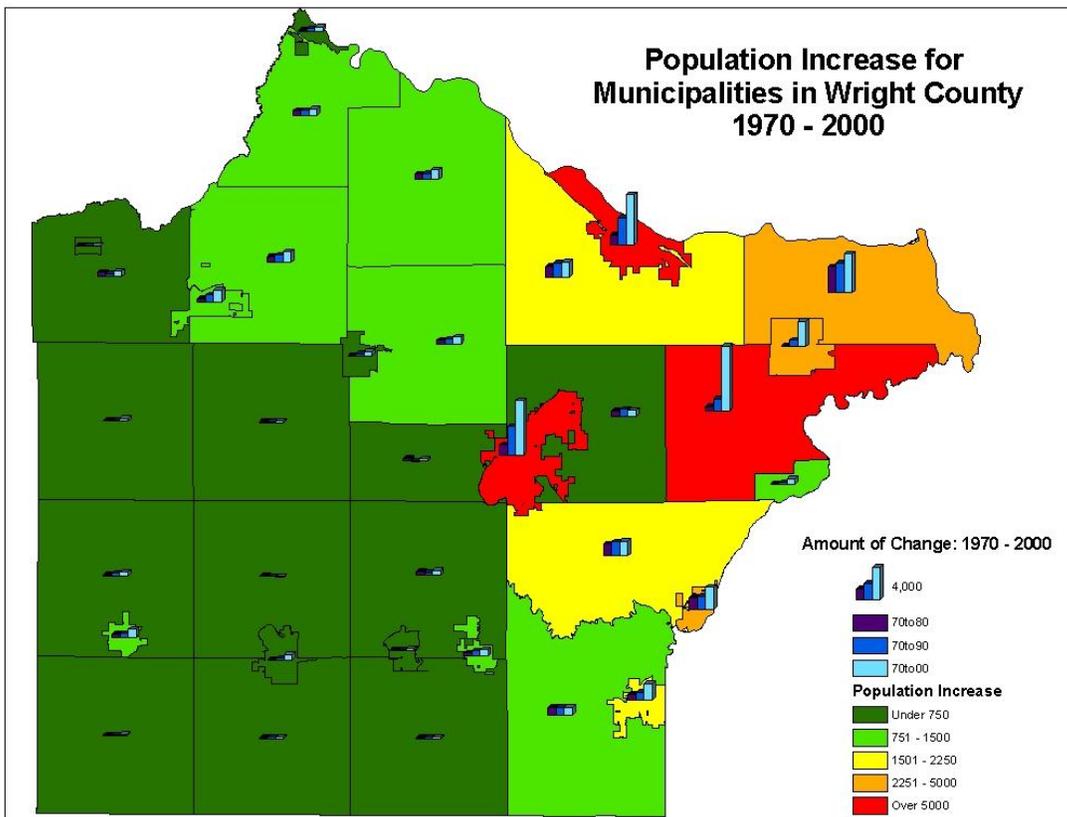
### Projections

The table below shows the population projections for the cities and township in the US 12 Corridor from 2010-2035. The Minnesota State Demographer projects an annual average growth rate of 1.52 percent for this area. However, since it is made up of predominately smaller sized cities and townships, future projections are greatly impacted by annexation and specific projects, thus making projections difficult and often unreliable.

| <b>State Demographer's Population Projections 2010-2035</b> |             |             |             |             |             |             |                         |                                   |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|   | <b>2010</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2020</b> | <b>2025</b> | <b>2030</b> | <b>2035</b> | <b>25 year increase</b> | <b>annual average growth rate</b> |
| <b>Southern Wright County</b>                               | 26,460      | 29,709      | 32,668      | 35,291      | 38,290      | 41,035      | 14,575                  | 1.52%                             |
|   |             |             |             |             |             |             |                         |                                   |
| <b>Townships</b>  |             |             |             |             |             |             |                         |                                   |
| Cokato  | 1,544       | 1,718       | 1,874       | 2,010       | 2,168       | 2,317       | 773                     | 1.41%                             |
| Franklin  | 2,878       | 2,962       | 3,036       | 3,086       | 3,156       | 3,211       | 333                     | 0.38%                             |

|               |       |       |       |       |        |        |       |       |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| Marysville    | 2,258 | 2,442 | 2,598 | 2,731 | 2,888  | 3,032  | 774   | 1.02% |
| Middleville   | 1,070 | 1,132 | 1,184 | 1,226 | 1,277  | 1,323  | 253   | 0.73% |
| Stockholm     | 927   | 993   | 1,048 | 1,094 | 1,149  | 1,198  | 271   | 0.89% |
| Victor        | 1,172 | 1,210 | 1,245 | 1,269 | 1,301  | 1,327  | 155   | 0.43% |
| Woodland      | 1,173 | 1,220 | 1,260 | 1,290 | 1,328  | 1,361  | 188   | 0.51% |
|               |       |       |       |       |        |        |       |       |
| <b>Cities</b> |       |       |       |       |        |        |       |       |
| Cokato        | 3,044 | 3,368 | 3,657 | 3,908 | 4,200  | 4,474  | 1,430 | 1.34% |
| Delano        | 6,035 | 7,140 | 8,169 | 9,106 | 10,163 | 11,179 | 5,144 | 2.15% |
| Howard Lake   | 2,282 | 2,592 | 2,874 | 3,125 | 3,412  | 3,685  | 1,403 | 1.67% |
| Montrose      | 2,932 | 3,600 | 4,219 | 4,786 | 5,412  | 5,923  | 2,991 | 2.45% |
| Waverly       | 1,145 | 1,332 | 1,504 | 1,660 | 1,836  | 2,005  | 860   | 1.95% |

The following graphic highlights the nature of population changes in Wright County from 1970 to 2000. This pattern continued through the years following 2000 until the economic recession in 2008. As noted earlier, the US 12 Corridor did not experience the kind of drastic changes felt in the northeast part of the County; with substantial growth limited primarily to the cities and Franklin Township. After the year 2000, there was more substantial growth especially in Montrose and Waverly than this map indicates.



## **2.4 Physical Features**

This section reviews and summarizes the various maps upon which the Land Use Plan is based and were developed using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software. These maps are very important planning tools because physical features of the land set limits, or give opportunities for growth and change. Since maintaining the rural feel of the US 12 Corridor was deemed very important, knowledge of the characteristics of the land and existing land use patterns is very important to determine where future growth and also protection efforts should occur. In some areas, features of the land prohibit development, while elsewhere, physical features may determine that an area is better suited for limited development.

The following narratives include a description of each map, the nature of its contents, and how it may be important for reviewing the Land Use Plan. Although there is an ever-increasing quality and precision of the data available, in most cases it has primarily served to confirm the validity of decisions made by the Township and County Boards in the past. Nonetheless, these maps help to highlight several areas where change is proposed, and especially to create and map the areas designated for Transition Areas and Resource Lands. Since agriculture continues to be the largest land use by land area and the primary economic engine in the US 12 Corridor, a longer discussion of this topic has been included in this Plan prior to those maps especially relevant to agricultural issues.

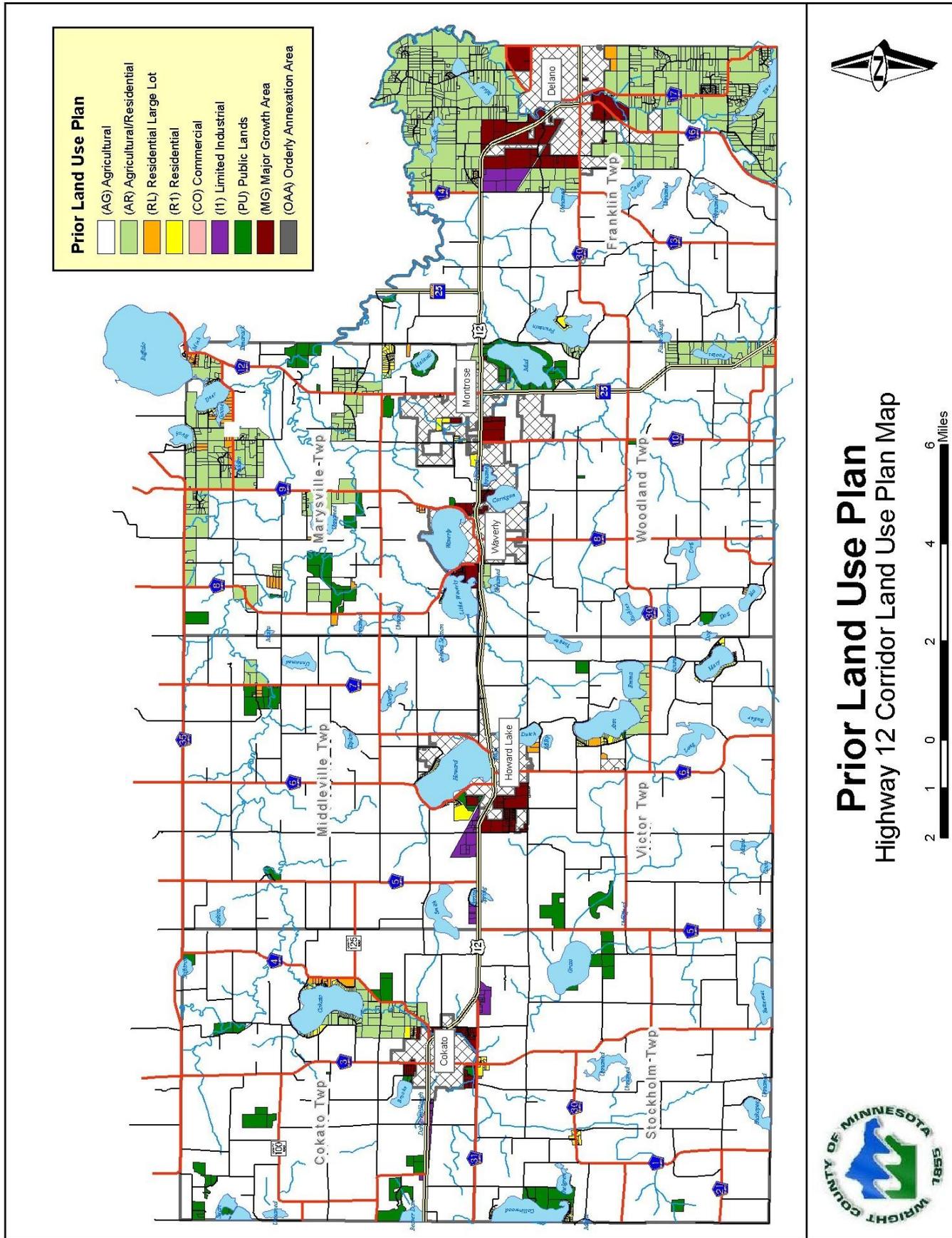
## **Prior Land Use Plan Map**

The prior land use map is simply the land use plan map in effect at the start of this review. This map was used as a starting point for the generation of the new US 12 Corridor Land Use Map. As noted and discussed at several points within this Plan, most of the land designated for rural development in this prior Plan has yet to be used or converted, and many of the 1 per 40 divisions still exist. It is very difficult to justify any major additions to areas set for rural development in the Corridor, especially in light of the very strong desire of most residents and Town Boards to preserve the rural character of the area and protect and preserve the ability for farmers to continue in agricultural pursuits.

Prior plans were organized around individual township maps, partly because the technology for detailed mapping (GIS, geographic information systems) was less advanced, and it was difficult to change scales and adequately show changes on a regional basis. New technology has greatly enhanced the ability to combine maps, or disassemble maps into parts. Data is compiled using GIS software, and can be as detailed as is necessary, on a parcel-by-parcel basis. This “prior land use map” is simply a combination of the several township and city maps in the US 12 Corridor from prior plans. Individual township maps will still be available to the townships for informational purposes and display.

The data from this map originates from the Wright County Planning and Zoning office. The last County-wide Plan update was completed and adopted in 1988. However, several townships have worked with the County to review and amend their land use plans since that time. These included Cokato Township (1993), Victor Township (1998), Woodland Township (1999), and Franklin Township (2004).

The Land Use Plan is a visionary document that sets out a direction for how a community should grow. It is important to keep in mind that it is not just a map, but also includes goals and policies that attempt to capture the vision and explain the philosophy of the County Board and its partner Townships and Cities for the future growth and development of the County. Reviewing this Plan periodically is essential to determine to what extent the Plan has been followed and if any modifications are necessary due to changing growth patterns or shifts in policy. While not universally accepted, the Wright County Plan has been generally recognized both within and outside of Wright County as being quite successful for finding practical ways to manage growth, protect the environment, limit sprawl, and provide for efficient and economical growth patterns in the face of unprecedented growth pressures over the last three decades. While individual land use decisions may often prove controversial in isolation, little evidence has been found to suggest that the basic direction and policies established by the County Board and Planning Commission over the years are in need of major change.



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## **Existing Land Use/Land Cover**

The land use/land cover data used in the US 12 Corridor land use update was created by the International Coalition for Land/Water Stewardship in 1990. The land use categories and the layer itself were interpreted using United States Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetland Inventory maps, United States Department of Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service low altitude aerial photography (primarily from 1990), and LANDSAT satellite imagery. The Coalition identified 20 categories/codes of land uses including, but not limited to: Urban and Industrial, Farmsteads and Rural Residences, Rural Residential Development Complex, Other Rural Development, Cultivated Land, Pasture and Hayland, Transitional Agricultural Land, Grassland, Grassland-Shrub Tree (Deciduous), Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Coniferous), Deciduous Forest, Coniferous Forest, Mixed Forest, Water, Wetlands, Gravel Pits and Open Mines, Bare Rock, Exposed Soil, Sandbars, and Sand Dunes, and Unclassified. Areas with characteristics that fit each category were identified using the above data sources, then digitized into a GIS system. Once digitized, each identified area was given the code value for the corresponding land use/land cover category.

The 1988 Land Use Plan also included a similar land use/land cover dataset. This data was created as part of a Wright County open space study through the Parks Department, and was completed by the Department of Horticultural Science and Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota. The data was derived from 1983 aerial photography and it utilized different classifications and grid sizes (10 acre) than the most recent information used for this Plan update.

The primary use of the most recent International Coalition Land Use/Land Cover data for the US 12 Corridor project was to identify the amount and percent of each category that is contained within the US 12 Corridor. This information helps to identify the predominant uses of the area, patterns of uses, where different uses were located, and areas of possible change that may form logical relationships with surrounding uses. As one of many different datasets used in the land use analysis of the Corridor, the Land Use/Land Cover layer helped in reviewing changes since the last update, the need for any land use policy changes, and will also assist in monitoring change over time from this point forward.

| Cokato Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table | Acres         | Percentage     |
|--|---------------|----------------|
| Cultivated Land  | 15,643.5      | 71.71%         |
| Deciduous Forest                                       | 1,506.4       | 6.91%          |
| Farmsteads and Rural Residences                        | 487.7         | 2.24%          |
| Grassland  | 2,381.8       | 10.92%         |
| Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)                       | 45.2          | 0.21%          |
| Gravel Pits and Open Mines                             | 34.9          | 0.16%          |
| Rural Residential Development Complexes                | 14.7          | 0.07%          |
| Other Rural Developments                               | 137.0         | 0.63%          |
| Urban and Industrial                                   | 116.7         | 0.54%          |
| Water  | 824.5         | 3.78%          |
| Wetlands   | 622.1         | 2.85%          |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                                     | <b>21,814</b> | <b>100.00%</b> |

| Franklin Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table | Acres         | Percentage   |
|--|---------------|--------------|
| Cultivated Land  | 12,981.7      | 47.55%       |
| Transitional Agricultural Land                           | 4.2           | 0.02%        |
| Deciduous Forest   | 4,011.0       | 14.69%       |
| Farmsteads and Rural Residences                          | 905.3         | 3.32%        |
| Grassland  | 6,555.4       | 24.01%       |
| Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)                         | 307.3         | 1.13%        |
| Gravel Pits and Open Mines                               | 12.2          | 0.04%        |
| Rural Residential Development Complexes                  | 178.7         | 0.65%        |
| Other Rural Developments                                 | 52.5          | 0.19%        |
| Urban and Industrial                                     | 32.1          | 0.12%        |
| Water  | 875.0         | 3.20%        |
| Wetlands   | 1,362.9       | 4.99%        |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                                       | <b>27,278</b> | <b>99.9%</b> |

| Marysville Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table | Acres         | Percentage    |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Cultivated Land  | 9,665.4       | 46.20%        |
| Deciduous Forest   | 2,034.3       | 9.72%         |
| Farmsteads and Rural Residences                            | 604.5         | 2.89%         |
| Grassland  | 5,979.7       | 28.58%        |
| Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)                           | 265.3         | 1.27%         |
| Gravel Pits and Open Mines                                 | 41.7          | 0.20%         |
| Rural Residential Development Complexes                    | 155.9         | 0.75%         |
| Other Rural Developments                                   | 27.5          | 0.13%         |
| Urban and Industrial                                       | 36.7          | 0.18%         |
| Water  | 965.5         | 4.62%         |
| Wetlands   | 1,143.1       | 5.46%         |
| <b>Total Acres</b>   | <b>20,920</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

| Middleville Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table | Acres         | Percentage    |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| Cultivated Land   | 15,051.1      | 68.54%        |
| Deciduous Forest  | 1,937.8       | 8.82%         |
| Farmsteads and Rural Residences                             | 535.7         | 2.44%         |
| Grassland   | 3,126.8       | 14.24%        |
| Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)                            | 122.3         | 0.56%         |
| Gravel Pits and Open Mines                                  | 15.2          | 0.07%         |
| Rural Residential Development Complexes                     | 42.6          | 0.19%         |
| Other Rural Developments                                    | 66.6          | 0.30%         |
| Urban and Industrial  | 3.2           | 0.01%         |
| Water   | 589.1         | 2.68%         |
| Wetlands  | 460.5         | 2.10%         |
| Exposed Soils, Sand Bars, & Sand Dunes                      | 7.7           | 0.04%         |
| <b>Total Acres</b>  | <b>21,959</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

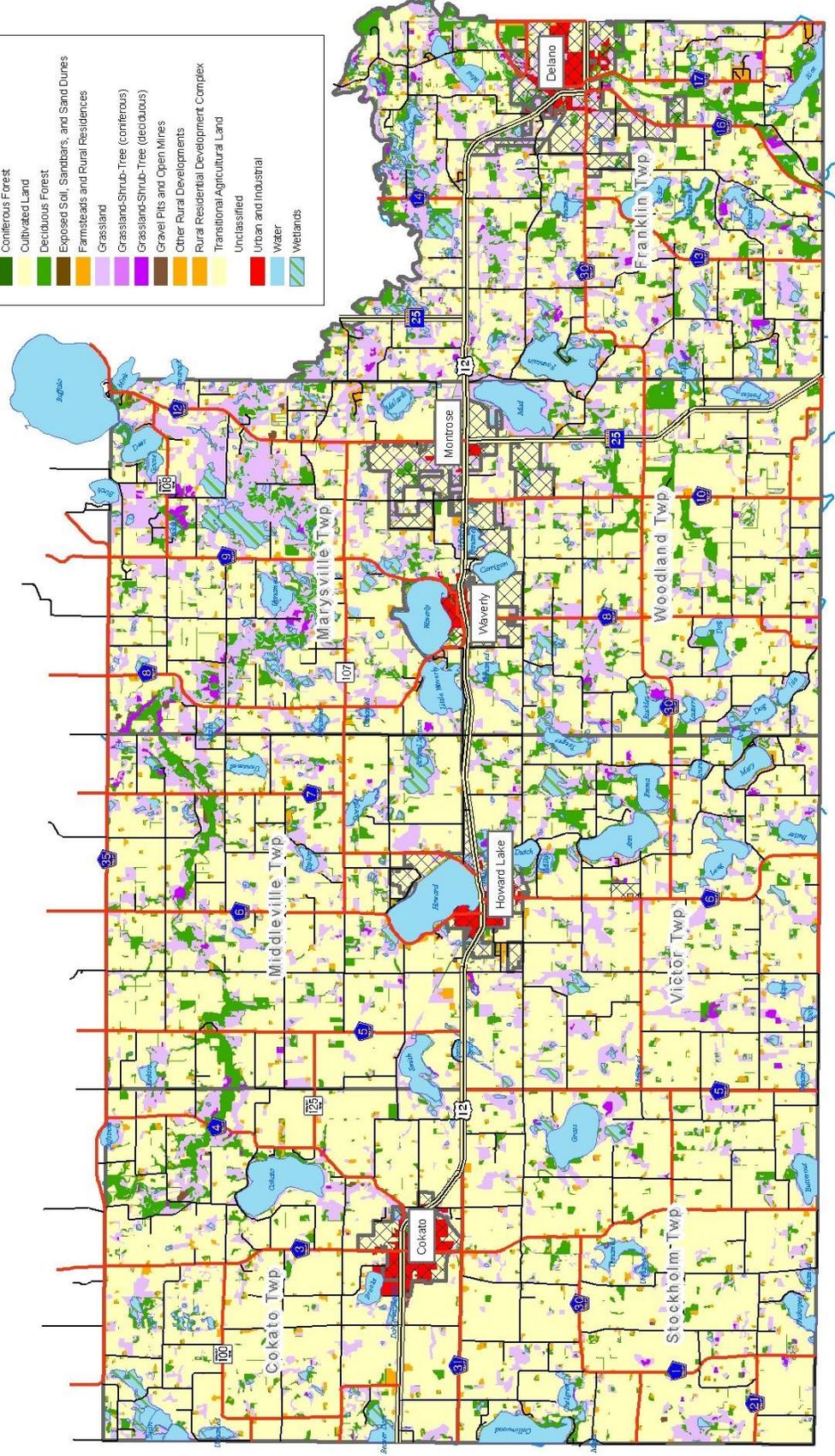
| Stockholm Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table | Acres         | Percentage    |
|---|---------------|---------------|
| Cultivated Land   | 17,757.9      | 77.86%        |
| Deciduous Forest  | 1,117.1       | 4.90%         |
| Farmsteads and Rural Residences                           | 492.8         | 2.16%         |
| Grassland   | 1,942.9       | 8.52%         |
| Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)                          | 92.1          | 0.40%         |
| Gravel Pits and Open Mines                                | 5.5           | 0.02%         |
| Rural Residential Development Complexes                   | 16.3          | 0.07%         |
| Other Rural Developments                                  | 53.9          | 0.24%         |
| Water   | 519.9         | 2.28%         |
| Wetlands  | 808.9         | 3.55%         |
| <b>Total Acres</b>  | <b>22,807</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

| Victor Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table | Acres         | Percentage    |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Cultivated Land  | 14,535.1      | 66.41%        |
| Deciduous Forest                                       | 1,371.4       | 6.27%         |
| Farmsteads and Rural Residences                        | 478.6         | 2.19%         |
| Grassland  | 3,181.9       | 14.54%        |
| Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)                       | 153.8         | 0.70%         |
| Rural Residential Development Complexes                | 108.1         | 0.49%         |
| Other Rural Developments                               | 23.3          | 0.11%         |
| Urban and Industrial                                   | 10.9          | 0.05%         |
| Water  | 1,272.6       | 5.81%         |
| Wetlands   | 751.0         | 3.43%         |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                                     | <b>21,887</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |

| Woodland Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table | Acres         | Percentage  |
|--|---------------|-------------|
| Urban and Industrial                                     | 22.8          | 0.11%       |
| Cultivated Land  | 13,469.8      | 63.20%      |
| Transitional Agricultural Land                           | 19.3          | 0.09%       |
| Deciduous Forest   | 2,113.1       | 9.91%       |
| Farmsteads and Rural Residences                          | 661.0         | 3.10%       |
| Grassland  | 3,436.6       | 16.13%      |
| Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)                         | 62.8          | 0.29%       |
| Rural Residential Development Complexes                  | 6.3           | 0.03%       |
| Other Rural Developments                                 | 32.5          | 0.15%       |
| Water  | 469.5         | 2.20%       |
| Wetlands   | 1,018.2       | 4.78%       |
| <b>Total Acres</b>                                       | <b>21,312</b> | <b>100%</b> |

**Land Use/Land Cover**

-  Bare Rock
-  Coniferous Forest
-  Cultivated Land
-  Deciduous Forest
-  Exposed Soil, Sandbars, and Sand Dunes
-  Farmsteads and Rural Residences
-  Grassland
-  Grassland-Stimub-Tree (coniferous)
-  Grassland-Stimub-Tree (deciduous)
-  Gravel Pits and Open Mines
-  Other Rural Developments
-  Rural Residential Development Complex
-  Transitional-Agricultural Land
-  Unclassified
-  Urban and Industrial
-  Water
-  Wetlands



# Land Use/Land Cover

## Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan Map



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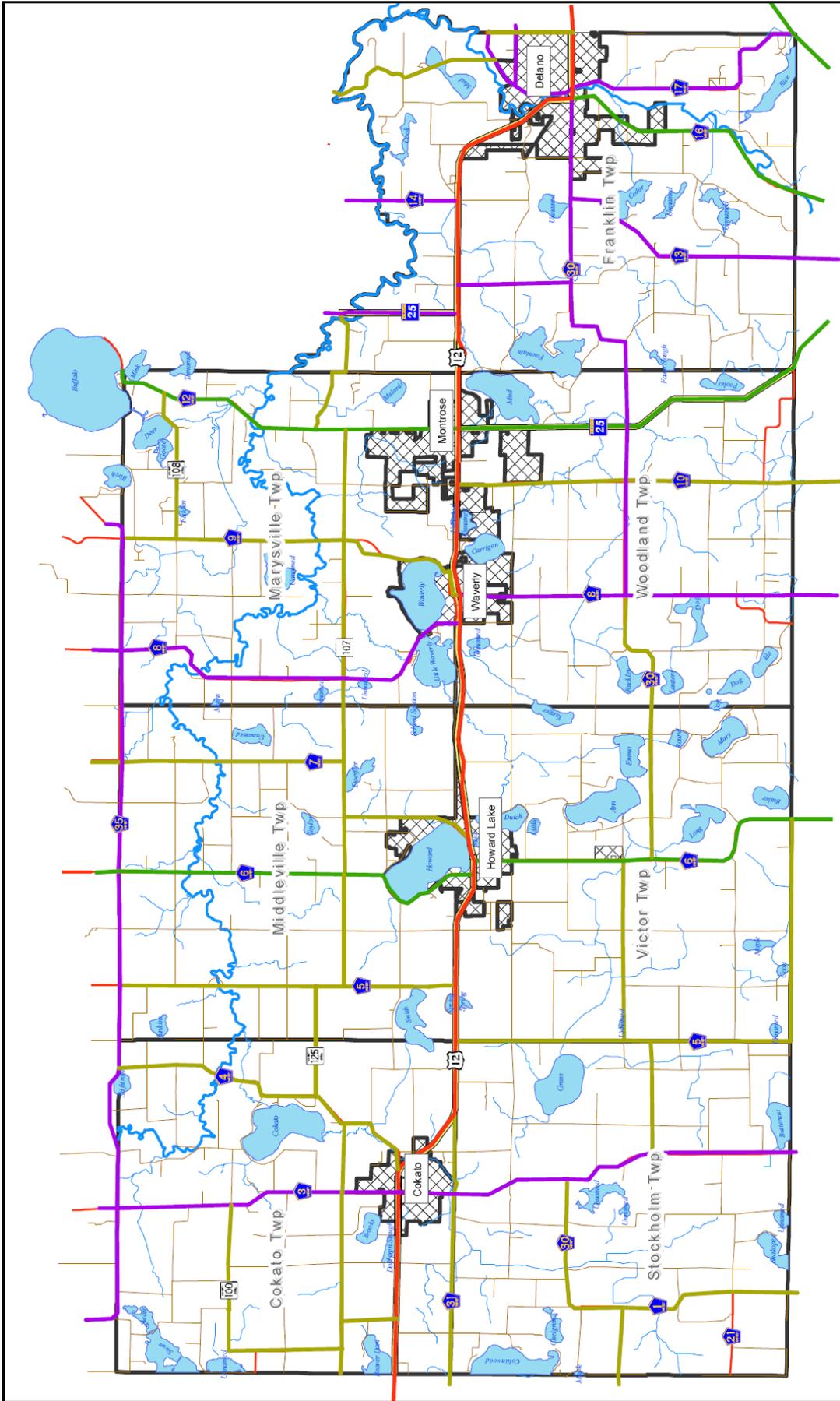
## **Transportation System**

The social and economic health of a community hinges on a transportation system that efficiently and effectively gives access to jobs, a labor force, goods and services. The interrelationship between roads and development is profound, as there is arguably no other public service that has such a great affect on development or that is so greatly affected by development.

The US 12 Corridor is transected east to west by US Highway 12, hence, the name of the planning area. While planning for the highway itself is left to the federal highway authorities, its direct route into the Twin Cities and eventual changeover to I-394 creates the potential for development and/or increased traffic in the Corridor. US 12 Corridor connects all 5 cities in the Corridor and is a major thoroughfare for commuter and local traffic.

Detailed planning of roads and land use may be needed in the Transition Areas, and will depend on cooperation between the relevant City, Township(s) and the County. Delano in particular has expressed a desire for more detailed planning and cooperation between the City and Franklin Township to provide for better local and through road routes. The South Fork Crow River and several large wetland complex areas present unique and difficult transportation issues for Delano and the surrounding area.

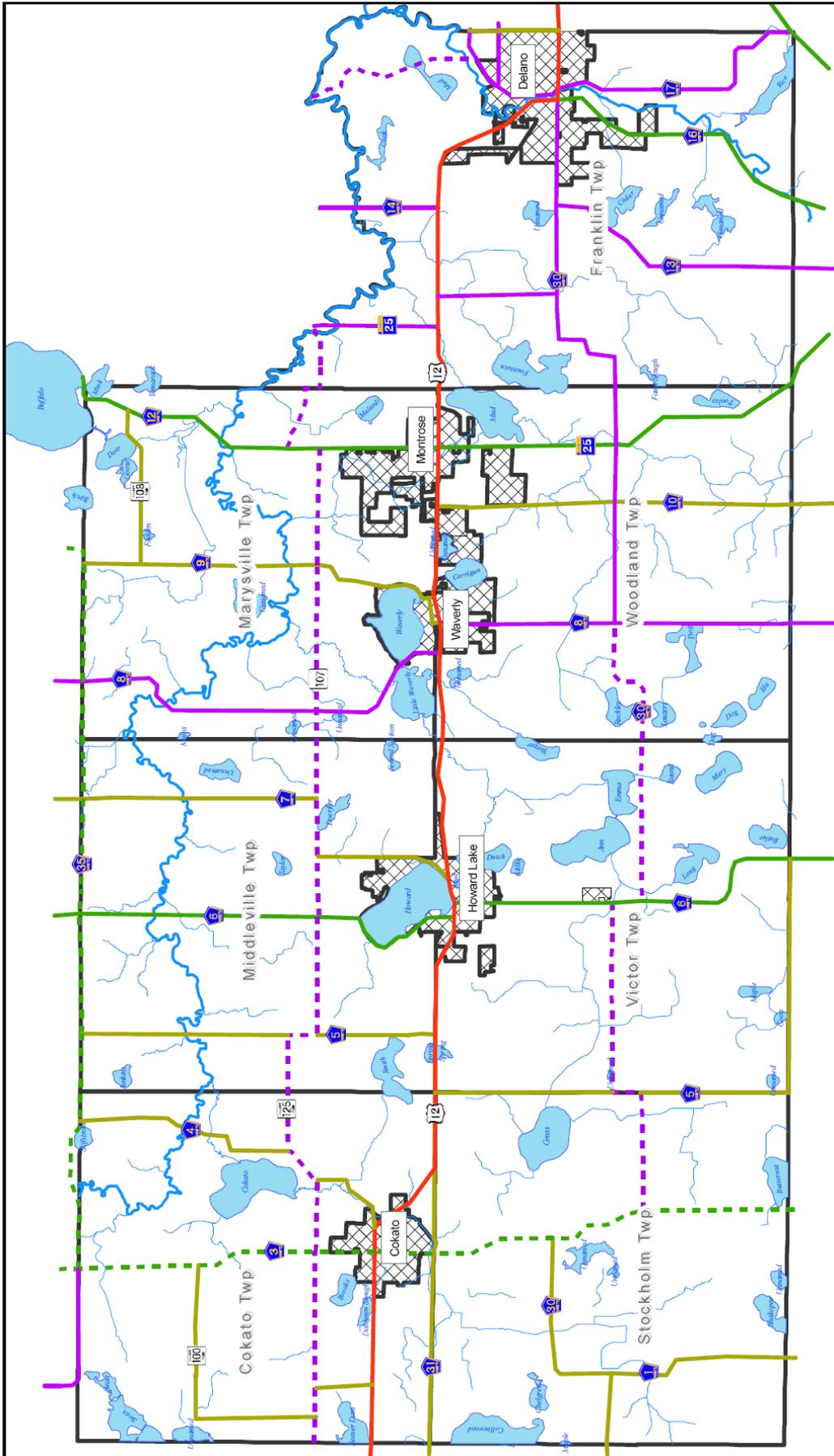
The following maps show the existing and future functional classification of roads in the US 12 Corridor and were obtained from the Wright County Highway Department. Given the fact that this Land Use Plan is primarily a low-density, agricultural preservation plan, the cities should remain the major traffic generators. As noted above, some specific areas may benefit from further planning, but this Plan does not indicate a need for major new transportation facilities to serve local needs. The County Highway Department has recommended some changes in functional classification, to improve efficiency of traffic movement. For the most part, local access and feeder roads are Township roads, and it has always been the intent that Townships can and should use the County Comprehensive Plan to assist in their road planning efforts.



# US 12 Corridor Existing Functional Classification

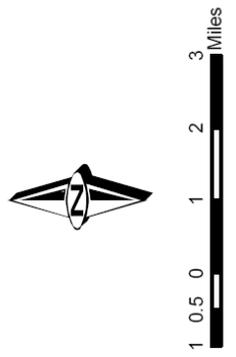
- Interstate Highways
- Other Principal Arterials
- Minor Arterials
- Major Collectors
- Minor Collectors





# US 12 Corridor Future Functional Classification

|  |                     |  |                           |
|--|---------------------|--|---------------------------|
|  | Principal Arterials |  | Proposed Minor Arterials  |
|  | Minor Collectors    |  | Major Collectors          |
|  | Minor Arterials     |  | Proposed Major Collectors |

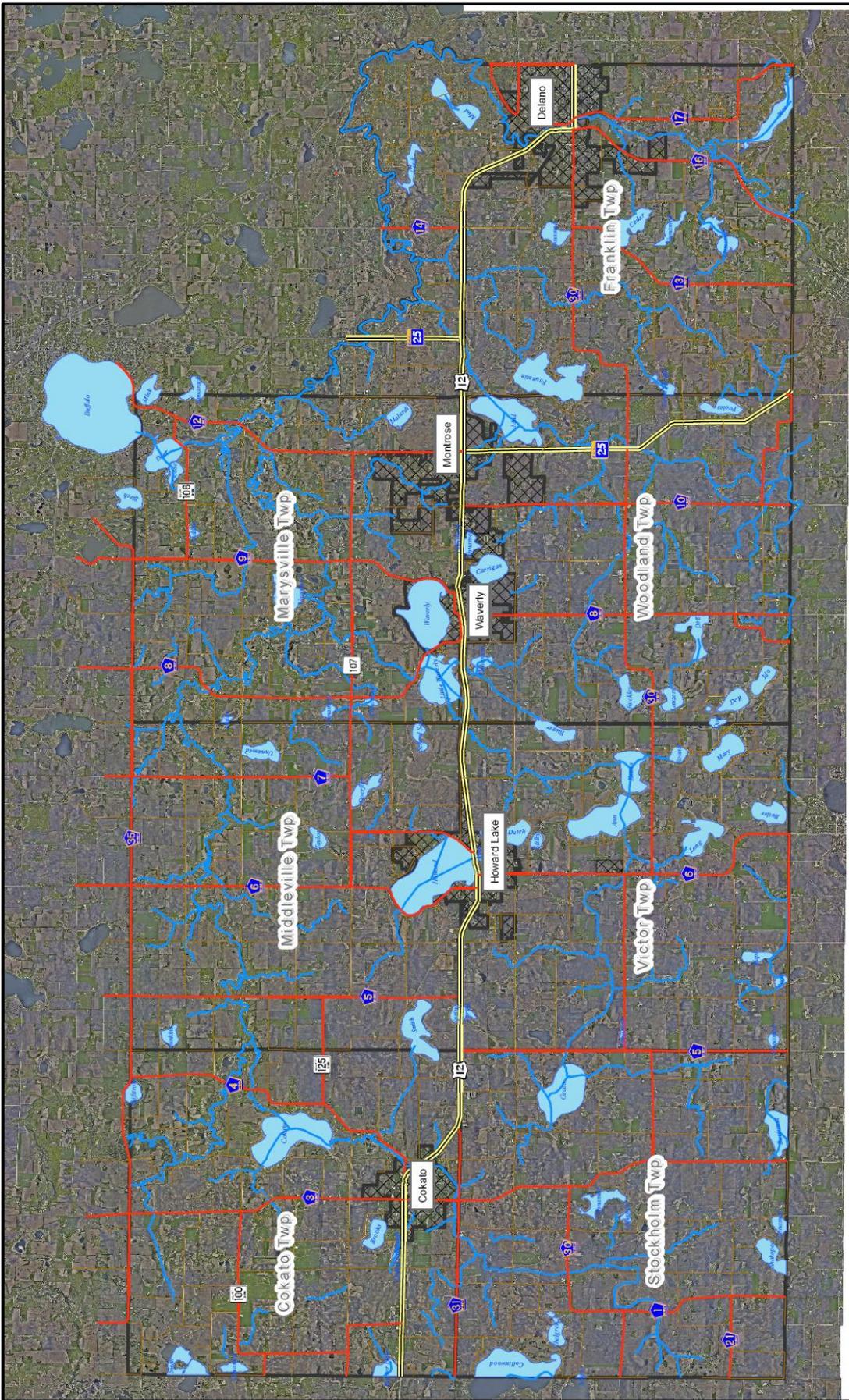


## **Aerial Photograph**

Aerial photography has been a useful tool for planners for decades. Planners use aerial photography to identify significant features such as lakes, roads, wetlands, agricultural areas, woodlands, structures, and other significant natural/environmental areas. Aerial photos, in conjunction with other data, can be useful to help identify relationships between many types of geographic features. This is accomplished by overlaying other mapped data on top of the aerial using a Geographic Information System (GIS). While aerials are useful even without a GIS system, the ability to layer information has exponentially increased the value of aerial photography. This layering allows planners to more quickly identify features and relationships, and prioritize those areas that need field verification. Another use of aerials is through historic comparison. Wright County has photography from previous years that can be compared to the latest version to get an idea of how the built and the natural environment has changed over time.

The aerial photography used in the US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Update was flown in 2005 and 2008. The 2008 photos were produced with a 6 inch pixel resolution (1 pixel per .25 square foot), which is an improvement over the 2005 aerials, which were produced at a 1 foot pixel resolution (1 pixel per square foot). The photographs were then geo-rectified to a specific coordinate system that allows them to be layered with other Wright County data. For example, the aerial photography was used as a base to identify likely areas to include in the new Resource Area district. Other data, such as wildlife/green corridors, wetlands, public lands, and soils, were layered over the aerial photography to show areas that may be suited for inclusion into the district. Aerials were also used to help determine possible changes to the existing Land Use Plan map. The photography allowed us to view existing developments, rather than just colors on a map. Existing uses were identified using the aerials and then compared to the land use districts and adjacent land uses.

Along with the aerial photographs taken in the spring of 2008, two-foot contour elevations were obtained at the same time. This relatively new dataset has dramatically increased the usefulness of existing data by allowing planners to see the land in three dimensions. The use of aerial photography has taken an increasingly important role in land use planning and zoning administration. As technology improves, the practical uses of aerial photography will likely increase.



# Aerial

Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



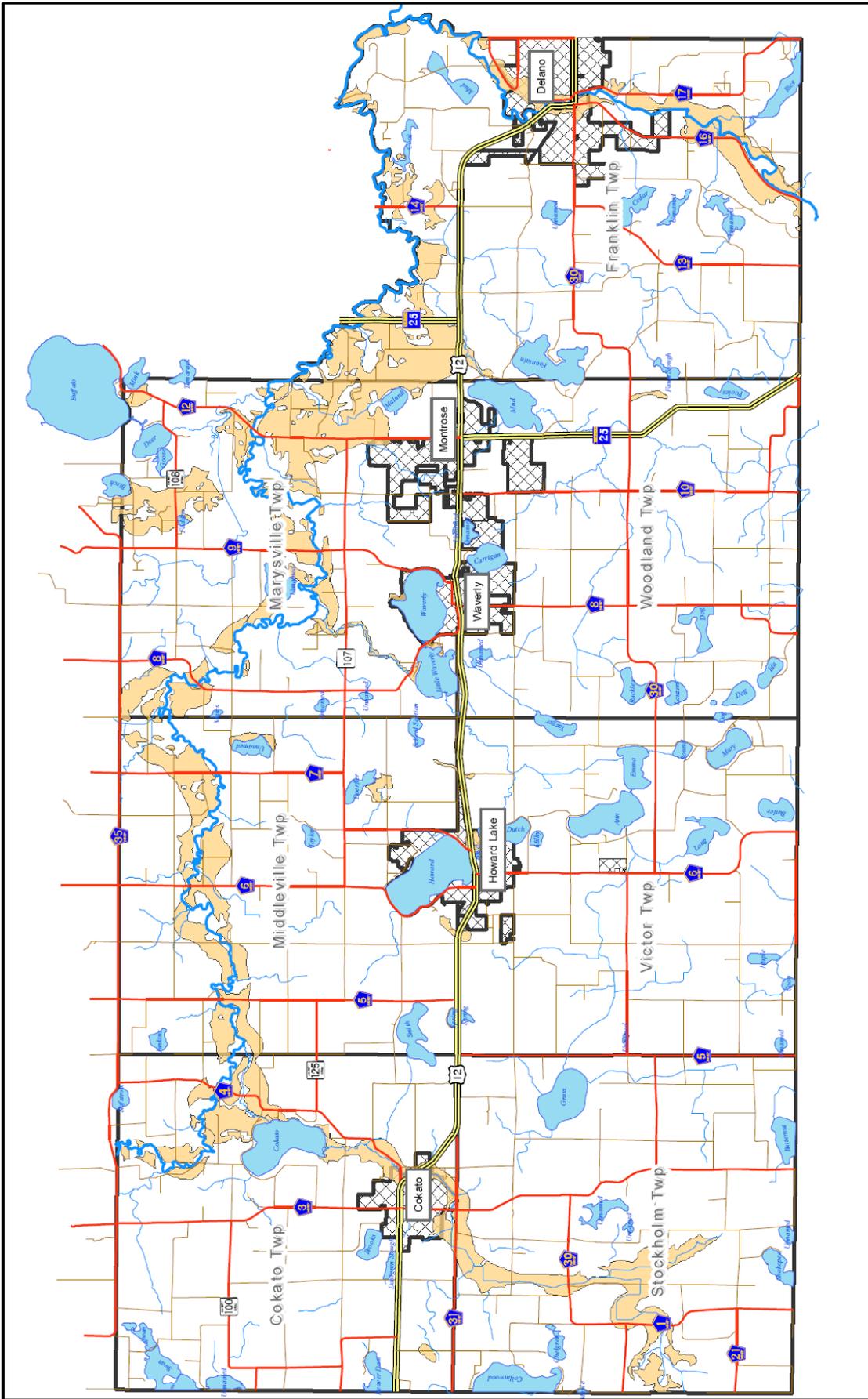
## **Aggregate Resources**

This map highlights the location of the aggregate resources located in the US Highway 12 Corridor of Wright County. State law and policy, and economic considerations require the County to consider the protection of aggregate resources when developing its planning programs. In the development of a future land use map, it is important to do what is possible to prevent conflicts between current and expected future mining operations and other land uses and residents. Having an inventory of potential aggregate resources is valuable in making many types of land use and zoning decisions. Other Chapters of this Plan provide more detail regarding aggregate resources and planning efforts, but these issues are more expansively developed and reviewed in the County's Northeast and Northwest Quadrant Plans.

The source of this data is from the publication "Aggregate Resources and Quaternary Geology, Wright County, MN" from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and authored by J.D. Lehr, 1991. "Aggregate resources were identified through study of aerial photographs, topographic maps and subsurface data, and by observation of surficial sediments in the field. The map was compiled and prepared using the cartographic tools available in geographic information systems."

While having mapped aggregate areas is valuable for planning purposes, the mapped data is limited to the extent that it shows only potential deposits and does not define depth or type of deposit. That type of detail, however, can be had by obtaining a copy of the full DNR document. Furthermore, conclusions on the exact location of deposits and their suitability for aggregate production must be validated by actual site investigations.

It is evident that the aggregate resources found in the US 12 Corridor are primarily riverine deposits located along the North and South Fork of the Crow River. While there are a few long-term, commercial mining operations in this part of the County, the types, amounts and locations of the deposits generally make short-term and job-specific pits more practical.



# Aggregate Resources Map

US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



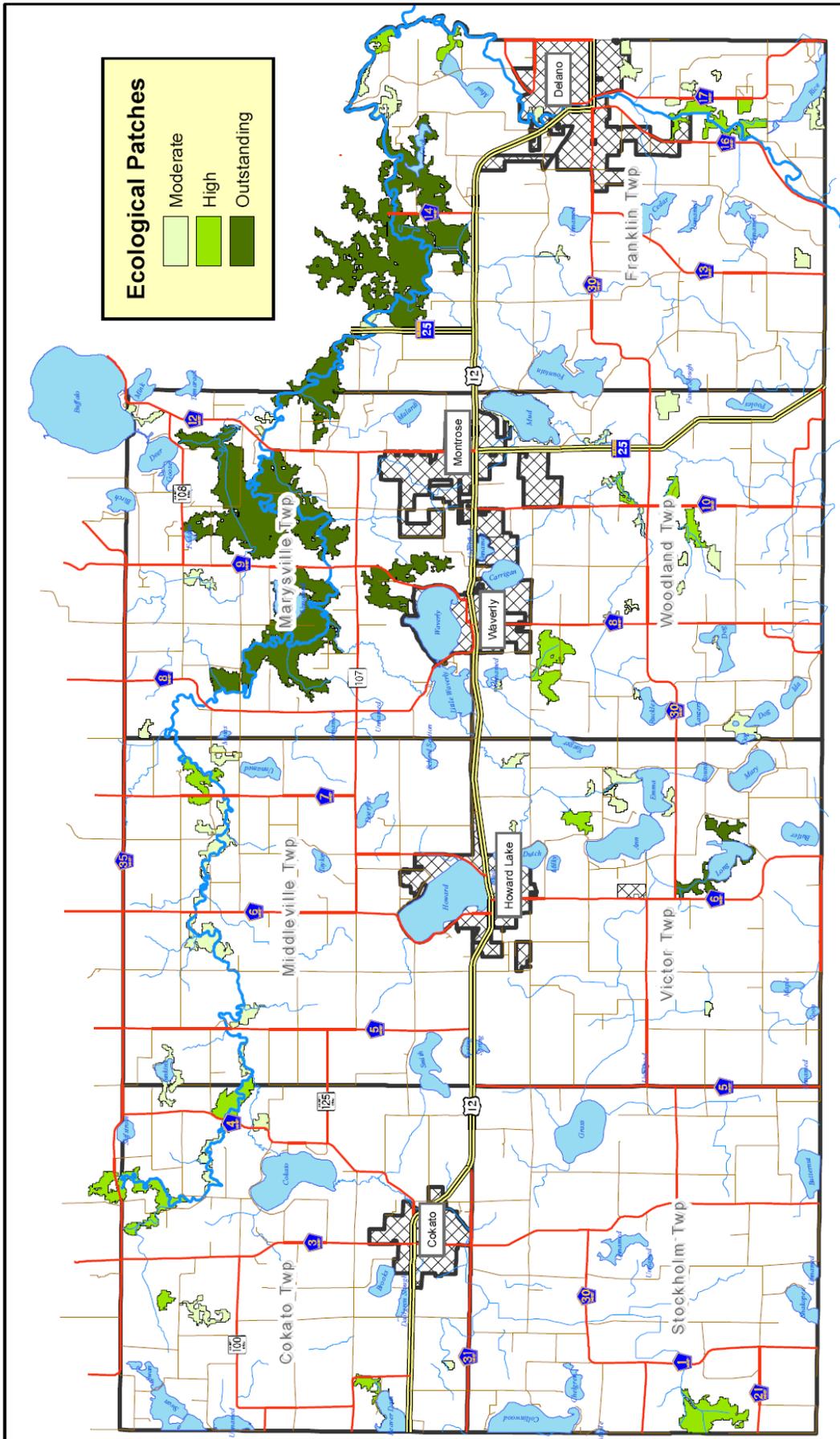
## **Ecological Resources**

The ecological resource map highlights ecologically sensitive areas in the US Highway 12 Corridor. The map is provided by the Department of Natural Resources, Ecological Resource Division and contains data from a number of different sources. It shows an analysis of significant terrestrial and wetland ecological areas in the County. Individual forest, grassland, and wetland models were integrated to identify and rank the terrestrial and wetland ecological areas. This was accomplished by examining important ecological attributes of the areas including size, shape, cover type, diversity, and adjacent land use. Different sources and models were used to make up the data or ecological patch which formed the Regionally Significant Ecological Areas Map for Wright County.

Some of these sources or models included the MN County Biological Survey of natural communities, models of Wildlife Lakes, data from the National Wetland Inventory, aerial photos and other extensive research data compiled by the DNR. The ecological patch or areas that were determined as significant are ranked by three categories (as shown on map): Outstanding, High, and Moderate. These ranks are used to communicate the significance of a site for native biological diversity to natural resource professionals, state, and local government officials, and the public.

"Outstanding" ranked patches contain sites containing the best occurrence of the rarest species, the most outstanding examples of the rarest native plant communities or the largest, most intact functional landscapes present. "High" ranked patches are sites containing very good quality occurrences of the rarest species, high-quality examples or rare native plant communities and/or important functional landscapes. "Moderate" ranked patches are sites containing occurrences of rare species and/or moderately disturbed native plant communities, and/or landscapes that have a strong potential for recovery.

Many of the areas identified on this map are areas that are now contained within the Resource Lands District or remain in a land use designation that would have low density development such as Agricultural. Through many exercises in Wright County both for past and present planning efforts, public sentiment runs very high in support of protection for rural areas, the natural environment and the ecological resources of Wright County .



# Ecological Resources Map

## US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



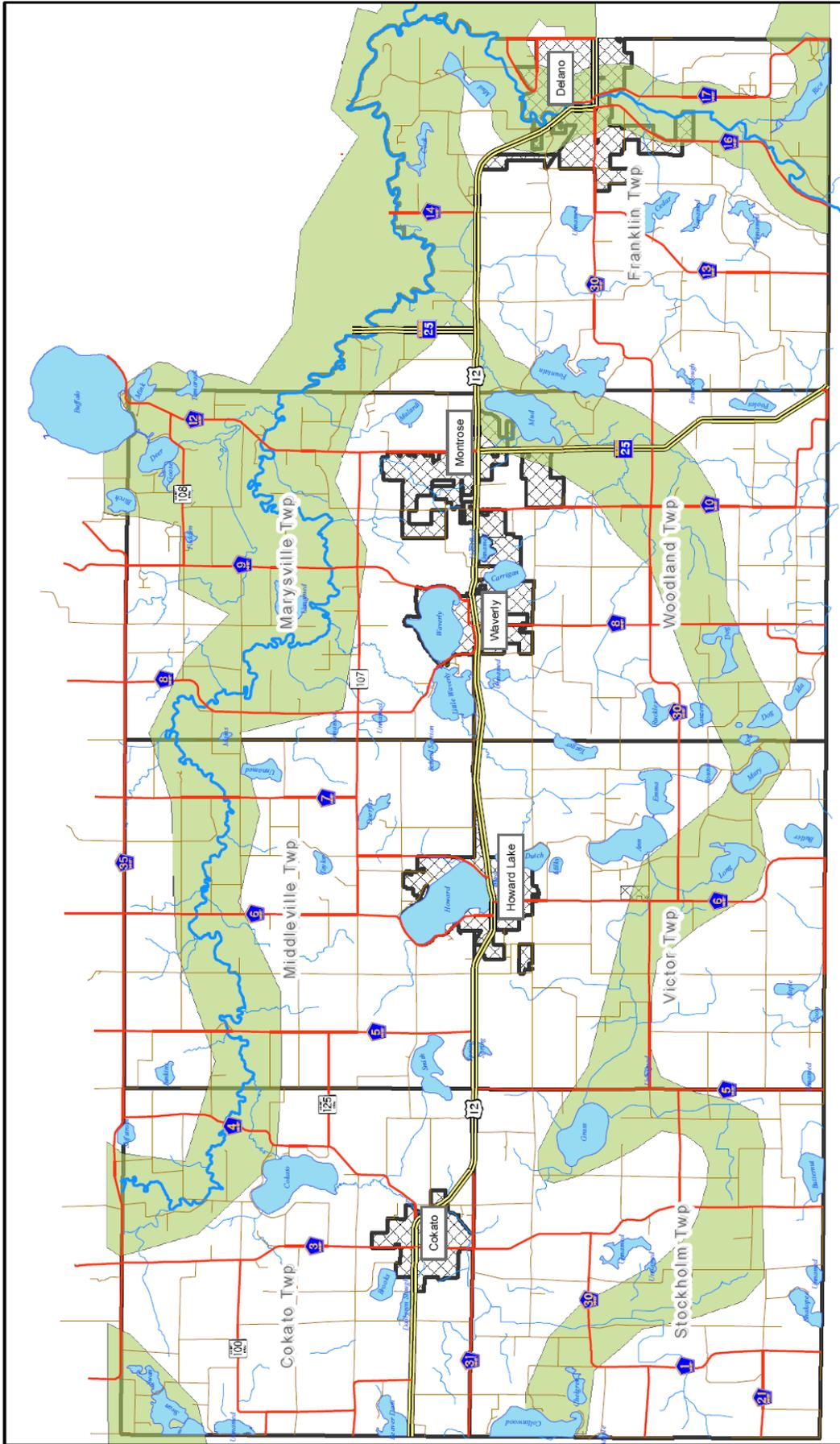
## **Metro Conservation Corridor Map**

The conservation corridor map comes from region-wide efforts by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and identifies a regional land and water network which includes significant natural areas, areas of high biodiversity, corridors that serve as connections between these significant areas. One goal of such mapping is to highlight these areas for land use planning purposes, with a thought to guiding any conflicting development to less sensitive areas. This project spanned several counties and it is also referred to as "green infrastructure" mapping.

Mapping this type of infrastructure opens a number of opportunities that might not otherwise be possible. These include:

1. Improved focus by partner organizations yielding more coordination and better conservation and development results;
2. More refined tools for local governments to identify parkland acquisitions, trail and transportation infrastructure alignments, trail connections between counties, and sites for open space protection and enhancement;
3. Opportunities to protect water quality;
4. Identifying habitat that protects biological diversity;
5. Reduced costs of public services such as storm water management and erosion control;
6. Protected view sheds that increase the attractiveness of the community;
7. Enhanced overall quality of life; and
8. Enhanced property values.

This map was created through a partnership between the County Parks Department and the Department of Natural Resources. The project was completed for 23 counties in Minnesota, which is also known as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Central Region. The map was used by the Natural Resources/Water Quality Committee as a guide for suggested Resource Lands and to help identify areas where very low intensity land uses should remain over the long term.



# Metro Conservation Corridor Map

US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



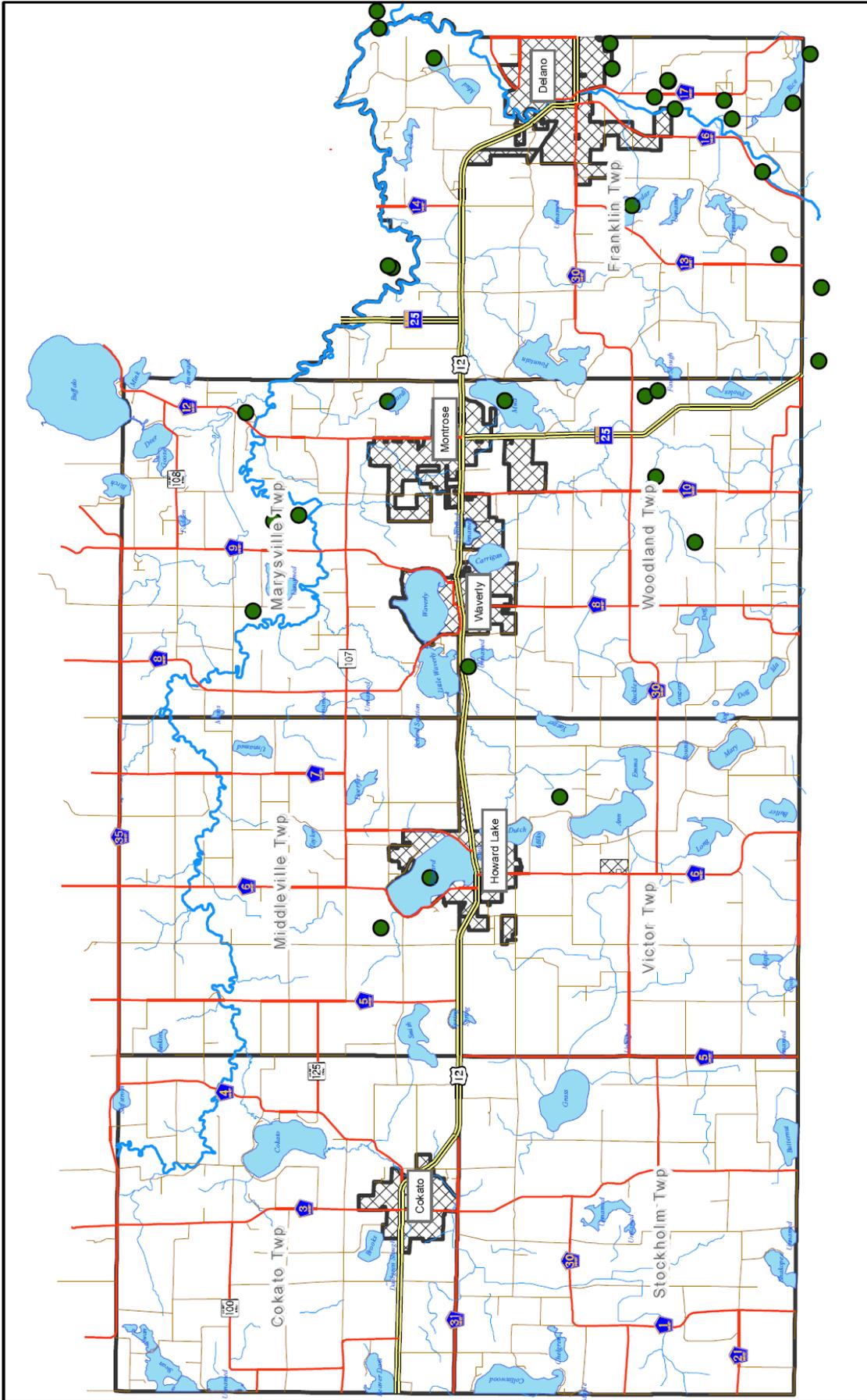
## **Rare Natural Features**

The rare natural features map highlights species and ecological communities located in the US Highway 12 Corridor that are rare or otherwise in peril. The map is provided by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Ecological Resources. The source of the data comes from the Natural Heritage Information System or the NHIS. This is a collection of databases that contain information on Minnesota's rare plants, animals, native plant communities, and other rare features. There are a number of data sources used to make up this database. One of the main sources of information for the NHIS database was created from a biological survey of Minnesota that was started in 1987 and is an ongoing project.

Many of the records have been added since the creation of the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS). The oldest records are from the 1800's, but confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the data set begins to diminish prior to 1987. However, from 1987 until the present the DNR has been continually updating this data. This county by county survey of rare natural features by the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS) is an ongoing survey, and has been completed for many counties in Minnesota, including Wright County. The base of the data was collected through the biological survey process but is continually updated through field work and public submission (through a rare feature reporting form). Some of the resources contained include plant and animal species, animal aggregations, native plant communities, and geologic features. The primary emphasis is on species and ecological communities that are rare or endangered. In order to protect the plant or animal in its natural setting, the DNR releases this map for illustrative purposes, and does not publish the exact location or nature of the rare species encountered and mapped.

As would be expected, these features are often concentrated in lands that are already protected from development in public ownership, such as the State and County Parks and wildlife management areas, but some are also in large, privately owned woodlots that have not been cleared for farming or otherwise developed. These areas, especially the public lands, are more easily and readily studied and surveyed for rare natural features. There are likely other occurrences of these plant and animal communities in the US Highway 12 Corridor, and are also worthy of protection.

This map was another one of the tools used to identify areas of the Corridor that are now contained within the Resource Lands District or remain in a land use designation that would have low density development such as agricultural. As noted elsewhere, public sentiment runs very high in support of protection for rural areas, the natural environment and the ecological resources of Wright County. Rare and vanishing natural features can be easily lost forever if not protected.



# Rare Natural Features Map

US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



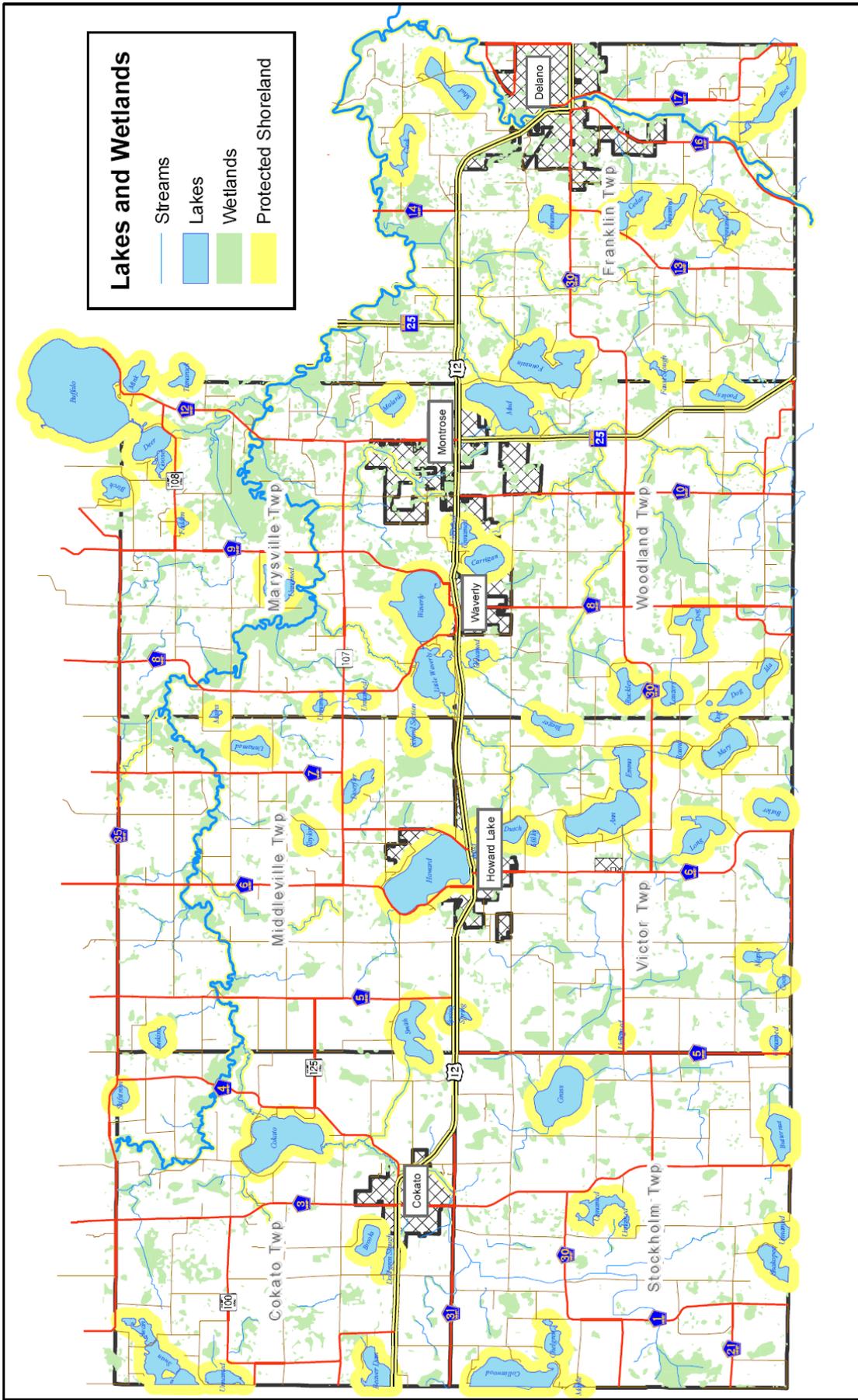
## **Lakes and Wetlands**

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Division of Waters (DNR) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) funded the database for the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). The NWI database was developed through interpretation of National Aerial Photography Program imagery (approximately 1:50,000 scale) in conjunction with limited field verification studies. US Geological Survey Quadrangle Maps and soil surveys were also used in the interpretation process. The source aerial photography was from 1979-1988. Ancillary data sources had variable dates. The interpretation and automation effort began in 1991 and was completed in early 1994. The data is maintained on a yearly basis. Lakes data was compiled by Wright County staff using multiple sources and is updated regularly.

All photo-interpretable wetlands are mapped. In the treeless prairies, ¼ acre wetlands are mapped, and in forested areas, small open water and emergent wetlands are mapped. In general, the minimum mapping unit is from 1 to 3 acres depending on the wetland type and the scale and emulsion of the source aerial photography. A detailed on-the-ground and historical analysis of a single site may result in a revision of the wetland boundaries established through photographic interpretation. In addition, some small wetlands and those obscured by dense forest cover may not be included in this dataset.

Most lakes, large wetlands, streams and rivers are buffered with a 1000 foot (300 for streams and rivers) shoreland district. These buffer areas define where shoreland regulations apply, and may trigger other rules that limit the way property can be used. In these areas, some uses may be prohibited entirely (new feedlots) and others may require more strict permitting conditions.

Lake and wetland information is important to planning efforts in the US Highway 12 Corridor. Water quality maintenance and improvement is essential to this economy and is clearly important to most residents in this area.



# Lakes and Wetlands Map

## US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



## **Agriculture in the US 12 Corridor**

More so than anywhere else in Wright County, agriculture is the predominant land use in the US 12 Corridor in terms of land area, and it remains a crucial economic engine. Most of the townships in this area have over 60 percent of their land mass in cultivation. Soil “quality” in the US 12 Corridor is mostly Prime or of Statewide Importance, especially south of US 12. Hobby farms, mostly horses, can be found anywhere, but especially scattered throughout Franklin Township and to a lesser degree in Marysville Township. Some areas of the Corridor, primarily along both forks of the Crow River, are not as suited for modern agricultural practices due to coarse soils and/or steep slopes.

Crop and animal agriculture producers in this area often include large tract landowners. Almost half the feedlots in the county are located in the US12 Corridor, including the seven largest feedlots in the county. Large machinery is used to efficiently plant and harvest the crops. This equipment will often take up the entire width of local roads and can impact roadbed longevity and traffic. Most of the small and mid-sized dairy operations will haul manure on a daily basis, usually to a temporary stockpile during the summer. There can be manure spreading after each cutting of alfalfa (3-4 times over the summer) and daily during fall to spring. Local and state feedlot rules include setbacks for manure application, but they apply chiefly to water quality protection.

The odors from feedlots and manure hauling may be found offensive by residential owners and cause nuisance complaints. Residential commuters may find that spring and fall include navigating around wide machinery on a regular basis. Township and County officials recognize the importance of agriculture to the economy and plan their road maintenance and regulatory efforts accordingly. Most townships, together with the County, are dedicated to recognizing the importance of agriculture and preserving it, and both new and old residents need to recognize that planning for these areas provides a higher priority on agriculture than suburban residential needs.

It is partly due to this dedication to preserving agriculture, as well as recognizing the inefficiencies of “suburbanizing” the countryside, that the County Board of Commissioners decided not to pursue plans to allow more residential density in the agricultural areas. This idea was proposed for discussion during review of the County Northeast Quadrant Plan as a “1 home per 20-acre” land use district. After study and lively debate, the County Board decided to stay with the land use districts in place. Some of the arguments against the “1 per 20” included that it may chop up existing fields and make it more difficult to use modern equipment. If the homes were split off on small acreage it would leave many more acres restricted with limited road frontage, especially the long 80s. The additional large parcels could also create many more driveways. Landowners would eventually be assessed more per acre for land in the 1 per 20 land use than they would in the AG because of the potential for an additional development. Finally, it was felt that if there are areas better suited to rural development, they should be designated Rural Residential as already allowed, rather than allowing more residential development in the Agricultural district.

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## **Prime Farmland Soils**

Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops and is also available for these uses (the land could be cropland, pastureland, forest land, or some other land use; but not urban built-up land or water). It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to acceptable farming methods.

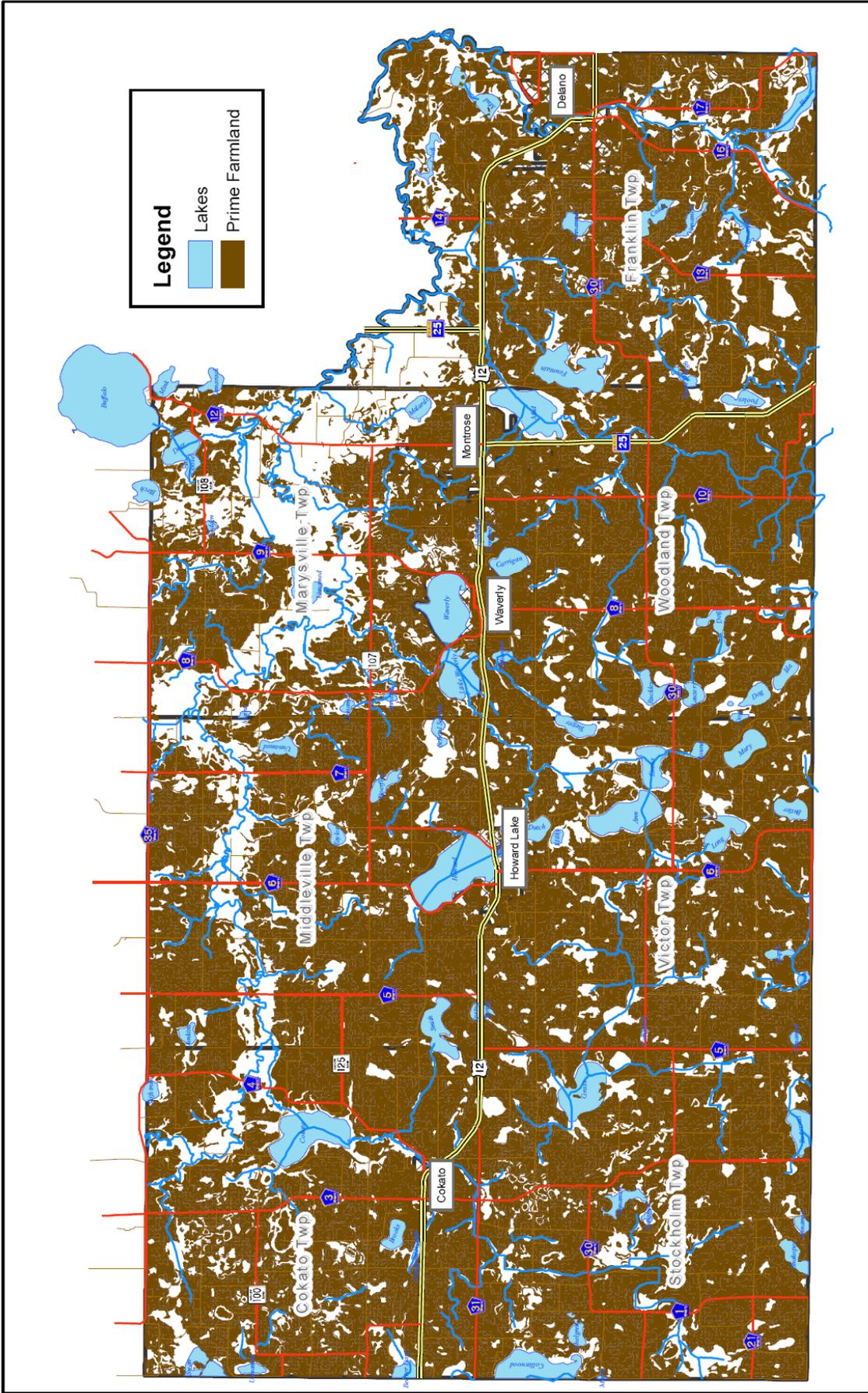
In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding.

### **Prime farmland in Minnesota generally includes:**

1. All capability class I soils.
2. All soils in capability subclass IIe and IIIe on 2 to 6 percent slopes.
3. All soils in capability subclass IIs on 0 to 6 percent slopes.
4. Those soils in capability subclass IIIs with >4 inches available water capacity above a depth of 1 meter and with surface features conducive to seedling germination and survival (dominantly those with textures of sandy loam or finer.)
5. Those soils in capability subclass IIw and IIIw with appropriate qualifying codes.

Soils data is obtained from the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) county soil survey information. Specific National Cooperative Soil Survey standards and procedures were used in the classification of soils, design and name of map units and the location of special soil features. Digital soil surveys were published beginning in 1998 and updated in 2003 by NRCS soil scientists.

Areas classified as prime farmland are particularly valuable for long-term agricultural production. Development proposals may be altered or denied if they conflict with the County's goals for preserving prime, productive agricultural land. There is a finite quantity of quality farmland that requires a minimum of inputs (water, fertilizer, etc). Together with other data, this map is very useful in defining areas most worthy of agricultural preservation efforts.



# Prime Farmland Soils Map

Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



## **Feedlot Map**

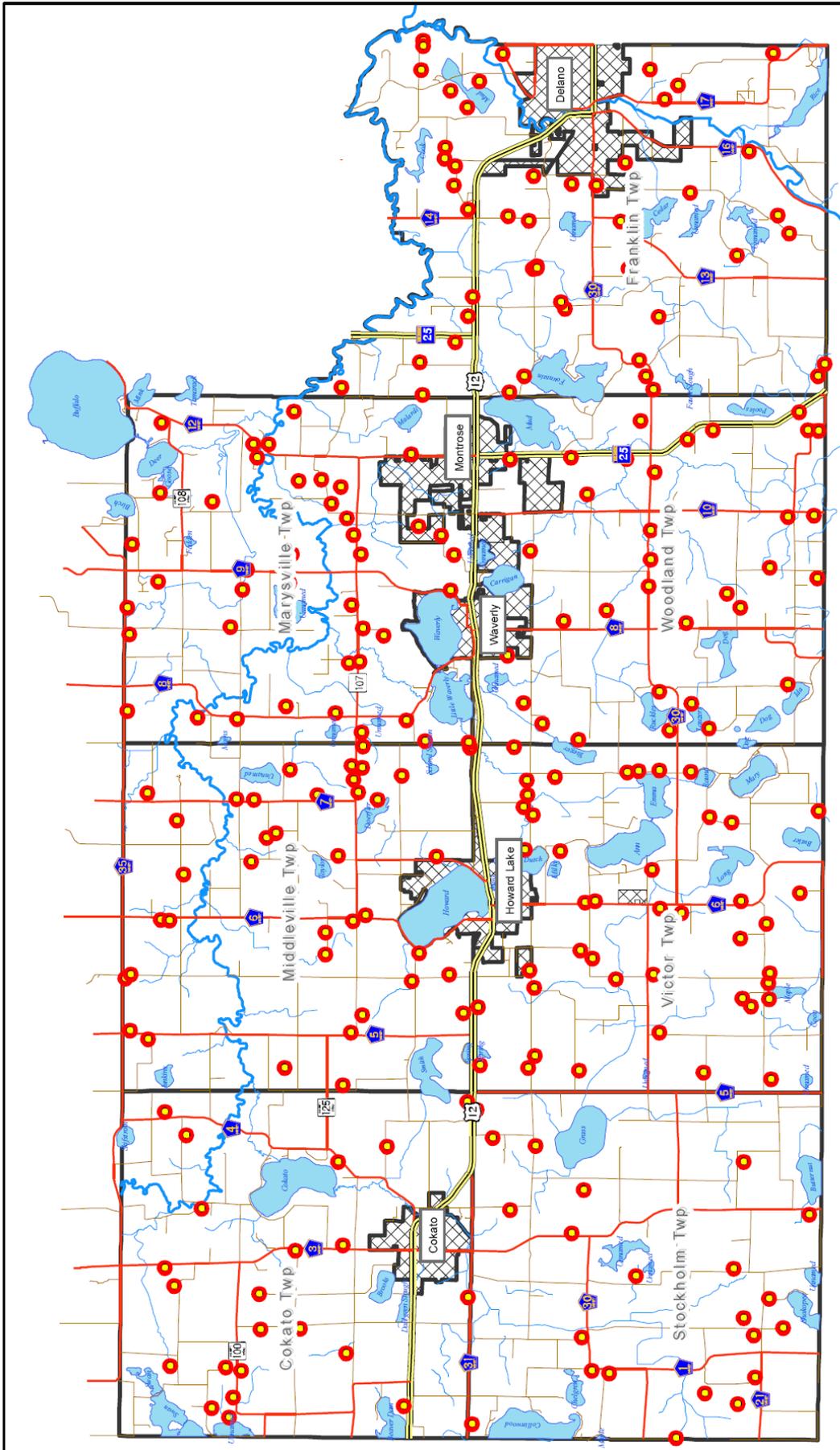
Feedlot data is gathered on a four-year rotation with the most recent update in 2010. The location of each feedlot is marked using the air photo (and a site sketch if available) to outline the lots and buildings used for animal containment. A 500 foot buffer is placed around this outline if the feedlot contains 10 or more animal units, but less than 500 animal units. Feedlots with 500 or more animal units will have a 1000 foot buffer. Feedlots with 10 or more animal units are required to be registered with the county.

Allowing residential development too close to a feedlot can cause conflicts. Odor, flies, noise and safety concerns expressed by residential inhabitants may cause feedlots to be thought of as a nuisance instead of a natural part of the rural landscape. The infrastructure and ongoing costs associated with animal agriculture necessitate the protection of the feedlot areas from the nuisance complaints often brought on by the close proximity of residential dwellings. Long range planning should allow for the continued existence of those feedlots that are currently registered and should show areas where new feedlots may be established without fear of future residential encroachment.

The feedlot registration process involves a two page form sent to the producer. The second page of the 2010 registration update asked for the producer to give the number and type of animals they have maintained at any one time in the past 5 years. A producer may re-register by returning the registration form, or their information is automatically updated when the Wright County Feedlot Program Administrator does a site inspection.

The US Highway 12 Corridor currently includes the seven largest feedlots in Wright County. The largest feedlot currently may have up to 2058 animal units. An expansion of a feedlot in a Residential or Resource Land use area requires a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and any feedlot over 500 animal units requires a CUP. Existing feedlot locations are taken into consideration when designating new Residential districts or Resource Land. Areas with existing feedlots are not generally considered to be appropriate for designation as Residential or Resource Land.

While new feedlots are still being established, most of those fall into the hobby category with horses as the predominant species and 10-20 animal units for those large enough to register. Traditional feedlots (dairy, beef and hogs) are slowly becoming larger as the producer includes or passes the business on to a son or daughter. Those without anyone to take over the business tend to close their feedlots as they retire. Though this trend is likely to continue in the rural areas of Wright County, animal agricultural production remains an important economic endeavor.



# Feedlot Map

US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan

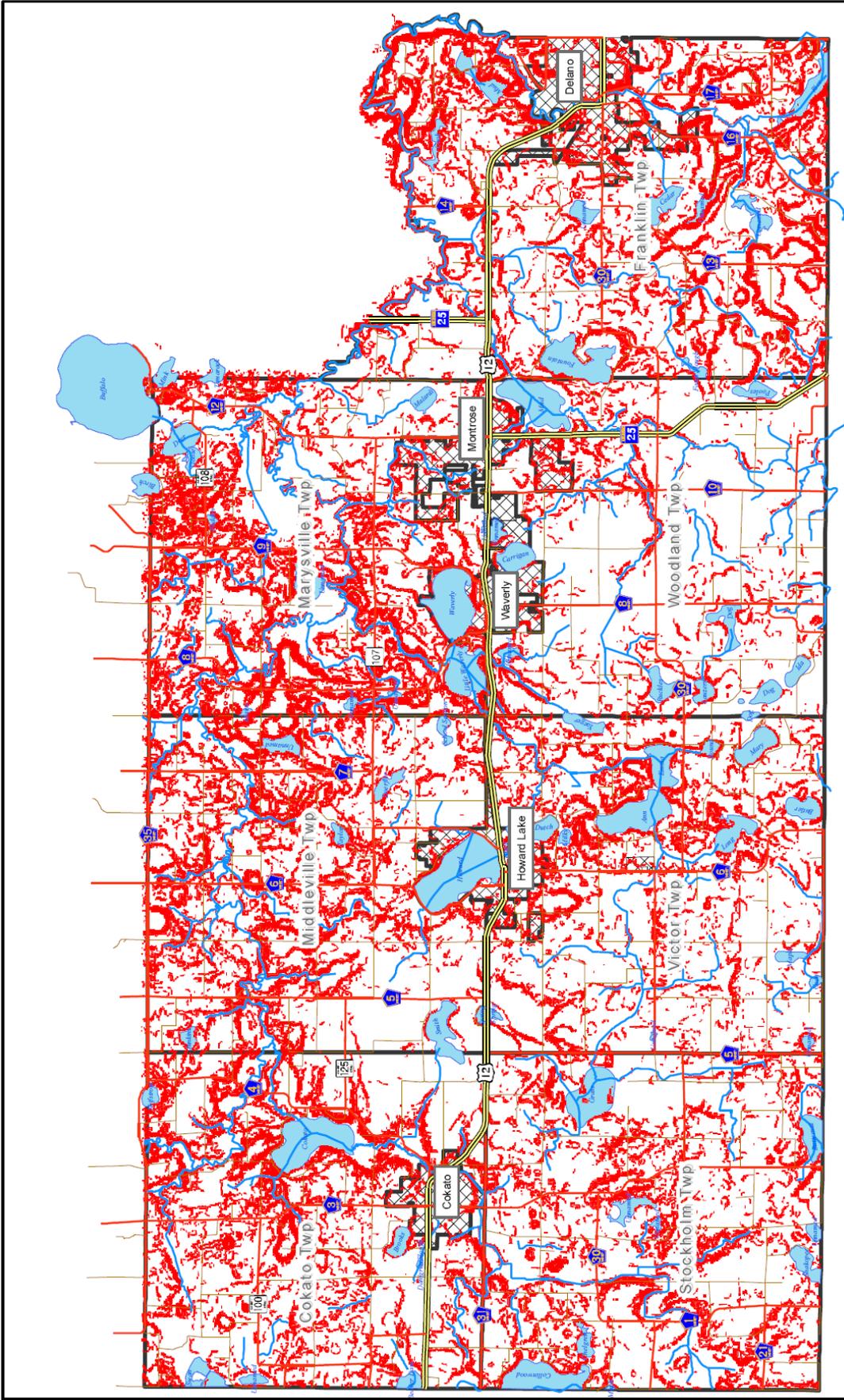


## **Steep Slopes**

Steep slopes are topographic features that are defined as having a slope of 12 percent or greater. The Steep Slopes layer was created using contour elevation data for the County. These elevations were then analyzed to find areas with slopes of 12 percent or greater. With the County's new topography data, an even more accurate assessment of steep slopes is possible.

From a land-use standpoint, steep slopes are an indicator of areas that may not be suitable for intense residential or agricultural activities. Steep slopes in shoreland areas are especially important to recognize, where intense development not only compromises the integrity of these slopes, but once compromised, leads to decreased lake water quality through erosion and siltation. In an agricultural setting, steep slopes may be difficult to farm and may not be overly productive, as these features are generally comprised of erodible soil types.

In general, steep slopes should be protected from wind and water erosion as a means of improving both water and environmental quality. Areas designated as steep slopes are environmentally sensitive, and development proposals may be altered or denied if they conflict with the County's goals for protecting these features, as far as practical, in their natural, stable state. Development on or near such areas may be required to provide larger lot sizes, enhanced setbacks or other conditions to protect the sensitive features. In general, development activity should take place in harmony with the existing, stable, natural environment. Development proposals should be adapted to suit the natural landscape, rather than altering the land to suit the development.



**Steep Slopes Map**  
 Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan

2 1 0 2 4 6 Miles

## **Resource Overlay Map**

The Resource Overlay map combines several different resources onto one map. The maps and/or resources overlaid onto this map include streams, lakes, wetlands, protected shoreland, farmland preserve, prime farmland, aggregate resources and ecological patches, which are significant terrestrial and wetland ecological areas.

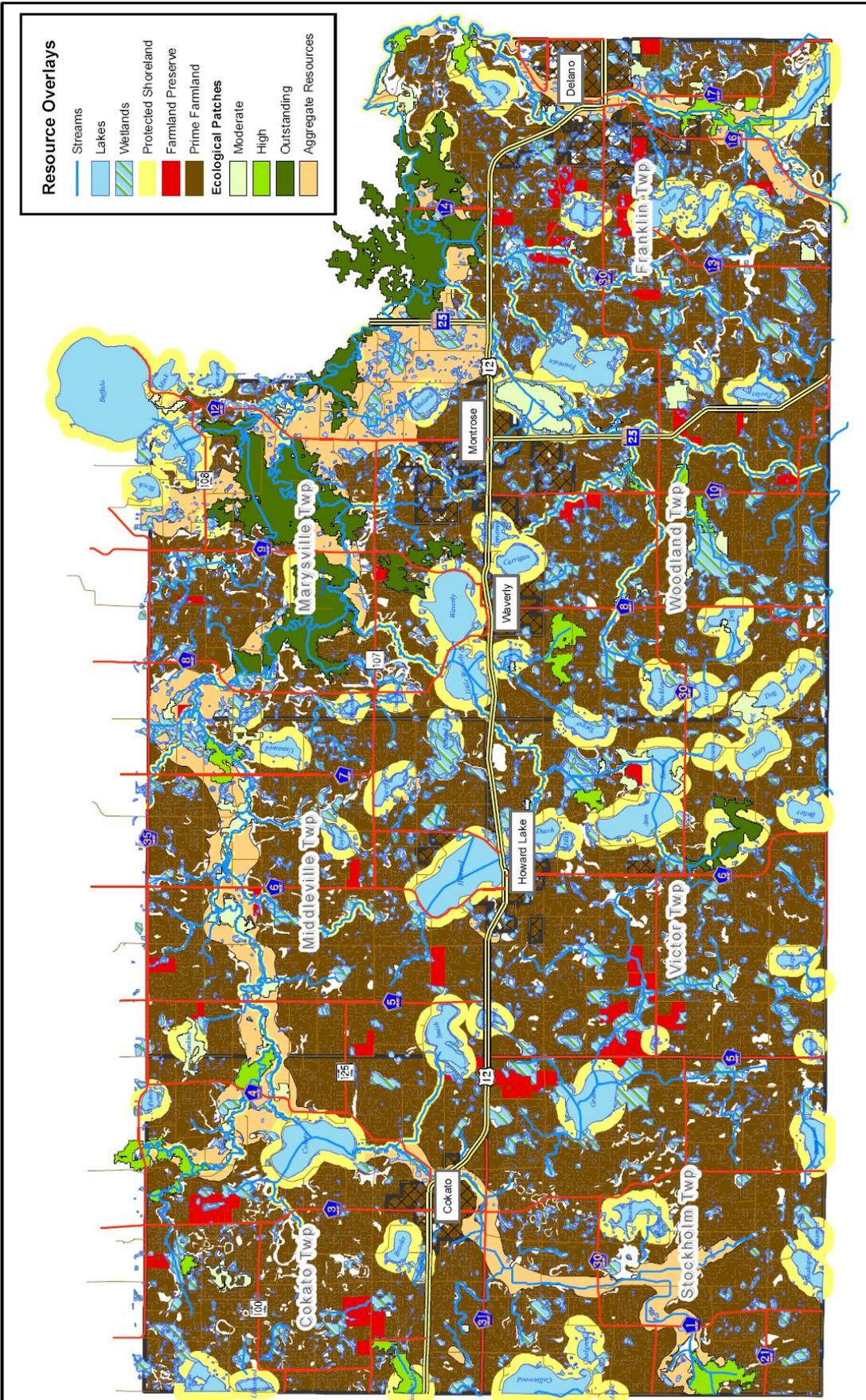
The streams, lakes, and wetland data is a compilation of data analyzed and collected by the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Waters, US Fish and Wildlife Service and Wright County. Most of the wetland data originated from the US Fish and Wildlife Services National Wetland Inventory (NWI).

Farmland Preserve is a state program that will provide a property tax reduction for agricultural lands. The land must be in an area zoned agricultural or rural residential in the County Land Use Plan. The land must be at least 35 acres and remain in the program for eight years minimum. The purpose of the program is to provide incentives to preserve and conserve farmland and agricultural areas and to encourage good planning and prevent land use conflicts in rural areas.

The prime farmland soils map shows the areas that contain the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics to produce high yields of crops. This overlay map aids in identifying areas that should remain in a low density land use designation to promote agricultural production. The data found on this overlay is provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) which is a division of the U. S Department of Agriculture. It includes a variety of information on the physical and identifying characteristics of mapped soil bodies, as well as information related to the suitability of the soil.

Aggregate resource map shows where the aggregate resources are located within Wright County. Such resources may include sand, clay or gravel deposits, but are primarily geared to sand and gravel. Having this inventory aids in the development of the land use map by protecting the aggregate resources for future use by not having intense development hinder future aggregate mining operations. The data used to create this overlay was compiled and provided by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The ecological resources overlay map highlights ecologically sensitive areas in the US Highway 12 Corridor. This map shows an analysis of significant terrestrial (ex. forests and grasslands) and wetland ecological areas in the County. These areas are ranked as Moderate, High, or Outstanding significant importance based on a set of criteria. The data is provided by the Department of Natural Resources. Many of the areas identified on this map are areas that are now contained within the Resource Lands District or remain in a land use designation that would have low density development such as Agricultural.



# Resource Overlay Map

## Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan



## **3.0 Process, Review, and Public Input**

### **3.1 Overview**

The US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan is the final phase in a three-step process to completely update the comprehensive land use plan for Wright County. Though spearheaded by Wright County Planning and Zoning staff, the plan could not have come together without the initial assistance of the consulting firm of SEH, Inc. which was instrumental in the development of the first two phases, the NEQ and NWQ plans. Of course, guidance by the Wright County Planning Commission was critical, as those members are designated by law and the elected County Board of Commissioners to steer planning efforts in the County. Furthermore, multiple meetings with the corridor's seven townships and city officials, several "open house" meetings for public review and comment, as well as other comments received from landowners via mail and the website established for the planning effort, all gave County staff valuable direction and the information necessary to aid in the drafting of this plan.

There were many opportunities for public, city and township involvement during this planning process. First, there were two well publicized "kickoff" open houses held in April, 2010 at the Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted School and Montrose Community Center. County Staff met with representatives of each city and its adjacent township(s) during the summer of 2010 to discuss and finalize policies and maps for transition areas and annexation agreements. Also during that time, frequent visits were made by County planning staff to monthly meetings of the townships in the corridor to give updates on the planning efforts and to listen to suggestions. As work on the Plan was being finalized in the late autumn of 2010, preliminary findings and proposals were presented at four more "open house" meetings. Though the whole plan was presented, there was extra time given to the review of the Resource Lands and Transition Areas. These well-publicized meetings were held in the Franklin, Woodland, Marysville and Cokato Township Halls.

### **3.2 "Kickoff" Open House Meetings**

To kick off the Plan, two open houses were held in April of 2010. These were set up to share with the public the preliminary findings and background data on population growth, transportation, natural resources, gravel mining, parks and recreation, past and current planning efforts and other important factors impacting the lives and aspirations of the people who live and work in Wright County. The open house participants were also given the opportunity to complete a survey, the results of which are available by request to the Planning and Zoning Office.

US Highway 12 Corridor residents that completed the survey generally agree that a long range plan is necessary to preserve natural resources, improve lake quality and control growth in the townships. They also agree that agriculture is an important component of Wright County's economy. While the survey is a fair representation of thoughts and opinions of those that participated, it is not, nor was it ever presented as a scientific or

statistically valid survey. It was a very useful resource, however, in that the township and city officials who attended the meetings, as well as the many citizen participants with a wide variety of interests, did confirm support for the general policies adopted by the County Board for planning purposes. The preservation of agriculture, as well as natural resource areas, rated very high on the surveys, as did the desire to preserve the rural nature of the townships by limiting development and encouraging growth to occur primarily in the cities.

The initial open houses included presentations and displays by representatives from the Wright County Planning and Zoning Office, along with numerous other agencies that have an interest in planning and conservation efforts. These included the Wright Soil and Water Conservation District, Wright County Parks Department, the Wright County Highway Department, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Maps and information were available about aggregate (gravel) resources, the County Agricultural Preserve program, conservation best management practices, conservation and natural resource data, feedlots, highways and traffic issues, individual sewage treatment systems, lakes and wetlands, parks and the current Land Use Plan.

Not all attendees signed in at these meetings, and the “open house” nature of the meetings encouraged people to come and go as they pleased. Therefore, attendance estimates based on sign-up sheets are slightly low. The open house at the Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted High School on April 27, 2010 had 57 signed attendees, while 40 people signed in at the open house at the Montrose Community Center on April 29, 2010. At these meetings, a presentation was given that summarized land use policy in Wright County, and outlined some of the main issues that exist in the US Highway 12 Corridor. No new land use changes or proposals were presented. Basic parcel maps of each township were available for residents to mark locations of interest and to make comments. The comments from all the open houses were transcribed for presentation to the Planning Commission. As noted above, attendees also had the opportunity to complete a survey. The purpose was to derive, as well as possible, a sense of the concerns and hopes of the public for the future of the area. For these reasons, the response to the open house was an important guide for County Staff in the preparation of the Plan, since it was clear that landowner sentiment favored maintaining a rural atmosphere and protecting the environment and natural resources.

### **3.3 The Five Cities in the US 12 Corridor - Transition Area Development**

Representatives of each of the five cities and their adjacent townships in the US12 Corridor met with County staff at least once during the summer of 2010. Because staff correctly anticipated very little controversy, committees were not officially formed to deal with the Transition Areas, as in the NWQ and NEQ plans. (City growth issues were very controversial in the NEQ plan but grew progressively less so in the NWQ and US12 Corridor plans.) Each of the groups in the US12 Corridor was successful in amicably establishing a mutually agreeable Transition Area boundary. At each of these meetings,

County staff reviewed the policies for city and township development and especially for the Transition Areas, as further explained in Chapter 4, with township and city officials.

The first such meeting was held with city officials from Howard Lake and Victor and Middleville Township board members in the Howard Lake City Hall on August 3, 2010. The City and Townships had already discussed annexation issues in the past and they did not include very large or expansive areas. After reviewing County policy and concerns, all agreed on a Transition Area that coincided with previously discussed annexation agreements between the parties.

Cokato City officials met with County staff and Stockholm Township on August 4, 2010. Unfortunately, the Cokato Township representative could not attend the meeting, but the results were reviewed and approved by the entire Cokato Township Board at a later township meeting. The City of Cokato does not plan major expansions, and is somewhat limited by the capacities of its sewer and water systems. No growth to the south into Stockholm Township is anticipated in the foreseeable future, but planning for future growth, especially to the north and east into Cokato Township is important to the City. The Transition area developed very closely coincides with future City planning efforts.

Representatives from Franklin Township and Delano met in the Delano City Hall on September 16, 2010 and discussed Delano's extraterritorial land use planning within the context of the County's Transition Area. Delano's future traffic issues and industrial development were important topics of discussion, beside the development of an agreeable Transition Area. Both the County and Township agreed to work alongside the City to allow it to expand efficiently, and to help create an aesthetic gateway to the City where the Township and City both have plans for a future industrial park on the west side of town. Delano officials voiced strong concerns about the need to plan for future growth outside city limits, as has been expressed before in the City's extraterritorial planning documents, which describe a much larger area than Franklin Township is willing to acknowledge. These topics, and the need for future work to address the issues raised, will be further discussed in the implementation section of this Plan (Chapter 5).

Because they share a sewage treatment plan and growth issues are closely related, representatives from the Cities of Montrose and Waverly met jointly with County staff and township officials from Marysville and Woodland on September 17, 2010. Both cities had reached orderly annexation agreements with the adjoining townships during the economic and development boom at the turn of the century. These included very expansive areas that may prove over-inclusive in light of the severe economic downturn in more recent years. The policies for Transition Areas limit growth and development of agricultural feedlots and several exist within these annexation agreement areas. Therefore, County staff asked Waverly and Montrose to consider Transition Areas smaller than the very large land areas included within the pre-existing annexation agreements between the Cities and Townships. In recognition of the changed economy, the potential impact on feedlots, and agreement by the Townships that the surrounding area will remain Agricultural rather than be developed into large lots, the Cities did agree to the more limited Transition Area included in this Plan.

### **3.4 Final Open Houses, Other Public Input and Conclusion**

In addition to the public input opportunities listed above, there was also a project website that was used to both gain input from concerned citizens and to distribute information about the US Highway 12 planning process. County staff also received letters, phone calls, and visits from concerned citizens that wanted to gather information or provide input on the planning process. Any information received from residents was presented to the Planning Commission, frequently and on a regular basis, for their review.

State law requires that the County Planning Commission hold a public hearing prior to making a final recommendation on the Plan to the County Board of Commissioners. Prior to that hearing, four final “open house” meetings were held. There were meetings on November 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in the Franklin and Woodland Township halls and on December 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> in the Marysville and Cokato Township halls, respectively. The staff presentation included a summary of the land use planning process and highlighted the Resource Lands and Transition Areas. Landowners whose property was selected for inclusion in the Resource Lands district were personally invited, and each area was reviewed in detail, as was the rationale for the Transition Areas. Large, paper maps of the proposed land use plan for each Township were also displayed. County staff presented the entire, proposed US12 Corridor Land Use Plan and its background and development with a speech and slide presentation. Planning and Zoning Office staff were available at all the meetings to answer questions and record comments before and after the presentation. Attendance varied, but approximately 30 people attended each of the meetings.

All of the various sources of input and review were vital to the development of the US Highway 12 Corridor Land Use Plan. It is impossible for any governmental unit to prepare a useful and practical plan that will satisfy everyone. Some people want to develop their land while others do not want to see any new development at all. Some people believe that gravel is a valuable resource that should be mined wherever it is found, and others believe that mining should only be allowed in small, prescribed areas with extensive regulation and oversight. Some people believe that government has an obligation to regulate the use of private property for the good of the community, and others believe that private property rights should not be infringed for any but the most critical reasons. Citizen involvement is a vital component of any planning process. Without this valuable input, the development of this Plan would not have been possible. At the end of the process, however, it is the difficult task of the Planning Commission and County Board to find the proper balance between the desires of individuals and the good of the County as a whole and decide upon a Comprehensive Plan for the County.

## **4.0 Land Use Plan**

### **4.1 Purpose/Introduction**

The purposes of land use planning are:

- To identify opportunities and constraints to development.
- To identify and take into consideration land use preferences of residents and landowners.
- To protect sensitive and natural areas including open space.
- To devise practical implementation tools to guide future growth and change to realize planning goals and policies.

The Land Use Plan guides the future physical growth of the US 12 Corridor, and provides direction as to what should be preserved. It is based on the existing land use pattern, projections for future growth, and the input of Wright County residents, property owners, and elected and appointed officials.

The goals and policies of this chapter build upon the Planning Principles stated in previous chapters, as well as input from the public and city and township officials in the US 12 Corridor. The principles are the fundamental tenets upon which this Land Use Plan is built. The goals and policies are more specific.

Goals are idealized end results that this Plan strives to accomplish in managing future growth and protecting natural resources, aggregate resources, and open space. Policies represent the official position of Wright County with respect to implementing the Land Use Plan. Policies also indicate the actions that the County and others must take to achieve the goals.

### **4.2 Overall Goals and Policies**

These major goals and policies serve as the framework within which this Plan must be reviewed and used as a decision making tool. Certain policy statements flow from these goals to serve as more specific guidelines. In most cases, the policy statements are an obvious complement to the goal. In other cases, inherent assumptions and discussion of the policy is necessary, as follows:

**MAJOR GOAL 1: To make the most efficient and economical use of public funds and investments.**

Policy Statements

- An expensive level of urban services will not be provided outside incorporated areas by County or Township governmental units unless absolutely necessary to protect public health or safety.

*The provision of urban type services in rural areas is prohibitively expensive, and unnecessary for the primary land use in the area, which is agriculture. Residents who move to rural areas should expect to adapt themselves to the rural lifestyle, and not expect the community to change to suit their needs.*

- Land uses that require or should be served by a high level of urban services will be encouraged to locate within cities or the Transition Areas, and prohibited in Agricultural and rural areas.
- Land subdivisions and other development activities in the Transition Areas should be developed in such a way as to provide for future service provisions and potential "re-divisions" in case annexation into the adjoining city takes place in the future.
- "Strip development" and development with multiple access points will not be allowed along major highways. Frontage roads or other measures will be required where development does take place next to major highways. Location next to a major highway shall not be automatic justification for commercial, industrial or high-density residential development.

*Public roads and highways are perhaps the most expensive service provided by the various governmental units. The public pays a substantial price for good roads, and adjoining landowners are compensated for lands lost to major highway construction. This public investment should not be used as automatic justification for intense development along all such highways by adjoining landowners. Such development inevitably leads to safety problems, intensifying traffic levels and demands for further, very expensive road improvements. The road improvements lead to further pressure for more intense development, and a counterproductive cycle ensues. The cycle can only be broken if strip development is restricted and developers are required to pay for traffic and safety improvements as development takes place.*

- All new lots created must have frontage on an existing public road as determined by the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations.
- When new subdivisions (and other activities that require public services) are proposed, the developer will be required to provide the necessary roads, and may be required to meet other conditions to off-set the need for public services.

- The County should work with school districts as much as possible on planning issues, including future siting of schools and other applicable issues.

**MAJOR GOAL 2: To provide a wide range of opportunity for urban and rural development.**

Policy Statements

- The County will encourage cities and townships to cooperate on development plans for the Transition Areas, and encourage urban and suburban development of these areas.

*The County encourages cities and townships to work together on orderly annexation agreements. The County also supports orderly annexation and will help manage what happens inside of the orderly annexation area before annexation actually occurs.*

*While cities and townships are traditionally at odds over annexation issues, cooperation in the planning for areas adjacent to existing cities is essential to future growth in the County. Many cities are nearly fully developed within their corporate limits, and can have reasonable expectations for growth that can only proceed smoothly with township help. Cities, on the other hand, must realize that townships have legitimate concerns about their tax base, much of which is often located in developed areas next to the cities. City demands for annexation should be tempered by an analysis of their reasonable need for land. Development proposals in unincorporated Transition Areas should consider the potential problems that future annexation may pose.*

*In addition, the County should encourage cities and townships to work on orderly annexation, support orderly annexation plans and agreements, and manage what happens in these areas prior to an orderly annexation agreement.*

- Development will only be allowed in accord with the Land Use Plan Map, which follows.

*At first glance, this statement may seem to conflict with the goal, but this should not be true over the long run. The Plan provides ample opportunity for a wide variety of growth and development. By adhering to the Plan, the County can provide certain stability and ensure that a wide variety of lifestyles and land use areas will be available. Farmers in agricultural areas can gain assurance that they will be able to continue to farm and perhaps expand their operations without fear of being surrounded by residential development. Developers and purchasers looking for rural home sites can be assured that there are other areas that can be developed. The variety and uniqueness of different areas can best be maintained through adherence to the Plan. Without any such guidance and difference between rural areas, the entire County is left open to potential*

*development, most likely in a checker board pattern that will eventually fill in to become a uniform rural sprawl.*

- The County should serve as a facilitator for orderly annexation agreements and potential merger situations.

**MAJOR GOAL 3: To protect agricultural lands from encroachment by incompatible land uses.**

Policy Statements

- The County will not adopt rules or ordinances that restrict normal farm practices in agricultural districts unless directly related to public health or safety.
- In the Agricultural District, existing County policy of maintaining an overall density of one residence per 40 acres will be maintained.

*Farming is a risky business, with high capital costs, especially for young farmers without land, or anyone trying to expand or start an operation. A stable environment is essential for farming, as major investments cannot be made without some assurance that the agricultural nature of the area will not change in the short term. Farmers cannot compete with speculators and developers for land, so it is essential to provide areas where it is known that development will not be allowed.*

- The County will continue to employ the Farmland Preservation Property Tax Credit program in accord with the Minnesota Agricultural Land Preservation Policy Act.
- "Spot zoning" and scattered residential subdivisions will not be allowed in the Agricultural District.

*As has been demonstrated throughout this Plan, there is no need for development in the Agricultural District. Not only does this Plan provide ample opportunity for development in the County, but most of the development that occurs is related to employment in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, which also has ample room for future growth.*

- The County will discourage the provision of expensive urban services, and especially those that are financed by special assessments on land in the Agricultural District, unless essential to the protection of public health and safety.

**MAJOR GOAL 4: To protect, preserve and enhance the quality of the natural environment and require development to take place in a manner that makes wise use of Wright County's resources without degradation.**

Policy Statements

- The County will promote the use of soil conservation management principles by all landowners. Farmers who obtain tax benefits under the Farmland Preservation Program and all development proposals will be required to abide by sound soil conservation principles.
- Residential development in rural areas will only be allowed where on-site hydrologic and soil tests substantiate the suitability of the land for sewage treatment systems over the long term. Where tests indicate that only nonstandard systems will function properly, larger lot sizes may be required or, in severe cases, proposals may be denied.
- Steep slopes, wetlands, unstable soils and other sensitive environmental features will be protected, as far as practical, in their natural, stable state. Development on or near such areas may be required to provide larger lot sizes, enhanced setbacks or other conditions to protect the sensitive features.
- Unless otherwise provided in the Land Use Plan map, only single-tier riparian development will be permitted on lakes determined to be suited to residential development.

*Lakeshore and shoreland areas are very desirable for residential development due to the scenic vistas and recreational opportunities. Second-tier and multi-tiered development around the lakes creates non-riparian lots near the lake with or without direct access to the water. Such development leads to crowding on the lake, potential pollution from over use, a concentration of sewer systems and destruction of the scenic values that made the area attractive in the first place.*

- Development of lakeshore property shall abide by State Shoreland Management Rules to maintain, as far as practical, a natural shoreline and natural views of shoreland areas from the lake's surface.
- The intensity of development in rural areas shall be restricted so as not to overload natural surface drainage systems. Where development is proposed that will add significant impervious surface areas or interfere with natural drainage systems, the developer will be required to provide facilities to compensate for any negative impacts.
- Mining and other commercial or industrial endeavors shall be required to shield adjoining property from deleterious effects.

- In accord with County policies and regulations, the use of planned unit development (PUD) and residential PUD concepts will be encouraged where such developments provide enhanced environmental protection, protect natural features and result in a better overall design than would result from standard subdivision practices.
- In general, development activity should take place in harmony with the existing, stable, natural environment. Development proposals should be adapted to suit the natural landscape, rather than altering the land to suit the development.

*It is impossible for any development to occur without some alteration of the land. However, it is often possible, through innovative or alternative design considerations, to suit the development to the existing natural conditions. Unnecessary alteration is expensive, and can lead to a variety of unforeseen problems through the disturbance of natural soil, drainage or other systems.*

**MAJOR GOAL 5: To enhance the strength of the Wright County economy by supporting local industry and attracting quality jobs, enhanced tax base and new capital to the region.**

Policy Statements

- Support existing industry and assist them with expansion opportunities when applicable, and implement a business retention and expansion process.
- Work to attract new industry to the community by actively marketing the US 12 Corridor.
- Work cooperatively with townships and cities in the US 12 Corridor to attract new businesses to the area.

**MAJOR GOAL 6: To make improvements to the transportation system that balance travel, desired land uses, and environmental factors by facilitating movement to and from regional highway facilities and supporting current and planned land use patterns.**

Policy Statements

- Coordinate and plan road improvements with appropriate road authorities including identification of jurisdictional responsibilities and collaborative financing mechanisms.
- Require new development to provide an adequate system of local streets while limiting direct access to major thoroughfares in order to maintain safe and efficient operations on these roadways.

- Require the dedication or preservation of right-of-way consistent with appropriate right-of-way standards when property is platted or subdivided, and work with landowners/developers during the site planning and platting process to implement safe and efficient roadway design.
- Plan, design, and construct transportation improvements that respect the natural environment and reflect the aesthetic character and values of the citizens of the US 12 Corridor while managing and shaping growth consistent with the land use policies of this Plan.
- Plan an infrastructure improvement, maintenance, and replacement program that maintains the existing roadways, while promoting orderly development in new areas.
- When necessary, utilize the US 12 Corridor Wright County Transportation Plan.

### **4.3 Specific Areas Goals and Policies**

#### **Overall Policy Statement**

The County's position on land use in the US 12 Corridor is that urban development should occur within the cities of the Corridor and the area outside these cities remain rural in nature with agriculture being one of, if not the primary land use.

#### **Specific Policy Areas**

- Rural Areas – This encompasses the rural, agricultural, aggregate resources, and resource land area of the US 12 Corridor. These areas will remain rural in nature and will be managed to provide, to the extent possible, an environment where agriculture is viable over the long term. For the purposes of the County Plan, the Rural Area includes resource lands and aggregate resource lands.
- Cities – The Cities of the US 12 Corridor should be the focal point for growth because cities provide a wide variety of public services, employment, and business opportunities that rural areas often lack. The County's policy has been, and will continue to be, to support and direct growth to the cities in the Corridor. The individual cities are responsible for planning and implementing land use controls within their own borders.
- Transition Areas - Designates areas adjacent to cities where a combination of uses in an urban or near-urban environment is likely to develop over the long term. The purpose is to provide a buffer between urban and rural areas, and promote cooperation between affected cities and townships in making land use decisions.

## **Rural Policy Areas**

The rural areas encompass the unincorporated area of the US 12 Corridor. Traditionally, much of this land has been used for agricultural purposes and still continues to be used for agricultural purposes today. Urban services are not planned for these areas before 2020, and most areas will not be served with urban services in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the principal land uses in these areas will include agriculture, rural residential and resource lands.

**Goal:** To preserve and protect the rural open space character of the townships, including agriculture, rural residential, and resource lands in order to maintain a viable economy, and maintain a sustainable land use pattern that recognizes the sensitivity of the natural environment.

Objectives:

- Preserve the “open space” character of the community;
- Preserve productive agricultural land in farmable parcels, and;
- Manage land use so that urban services will not need to be extended into the rural area, and so that existing service levels (on-site sewers, gravel roads, etc) will meet service needs.

## **Rural Area Service and Development Policies**

The public services existing and planned in the rural area are those necessary to support agriculture, aggregate resources, and rural residential development – on-site sewer, private wells, and, often, gravel roads. It is very likely that urban services (sewer, water, urban design streets) will not be available in this area prior to 2020, and in most areas, urban services will not be available until after 2020, if ever. Much of the land in the rural area is served by gravel township roads, or hard-surface roads with a rural design. The maximum optimal capacity of such rural roads is typically 200 average daily trips (ADT), and in some cases, much less. The County and State highways are designed to carry larger volumes of traffic at high speeds. Proper spacing and design of private access is critical to protecting the capacity and providing safer roads. The rural area also contains many natural resources such as lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, valleys, ravines, woods, bluffs, etc. that can be adversely affected by more intensely developed land uses.

### **Rural Area Policy 1: Principal Use**

The principal long term uses of land in this area will be rural in nature for the foreseeable future. This means agricultural uses will be protected and encouraged, residential development will be at very low densities in designated areas, and other uses such as aggregate mining will be permitted subject to regulations that prevent conflict with the goal of preserving the rural area. Land uses that will require service levels greater than

those that are generally provided in a rural agricultural area should not be allowed. Uses of this nature will be directed to the urban areas where the needed services are available.

### **Rural Area Policy 2: Residential Land Uses**

There are two primary residential densities allowed in the rural policy area based on the land use designations. The Agricultural District, Aggregate Resource Area, and Resource Lands allow one dwelling unit per quarter-quarter section (40 acres). The Rural Residential District allows one dwelling unit per 10 acres, with some opportunity for slightly higher density with a PUD. These densities should be followed to retain the rural character in Wright County.

### **Rural Area Policy 3: Other Land Uses**

In addition to rural land use, including agricultural, aggregate resources, rural residential, and resource lands, there are other classes of land use that must be addressed in the rural area – essentially non-agricultural, non-residential land uses. County policy generally directs most non-agricultural uses, particularly commercial, industrial, retail, and institutional to the cities. However, the future land use map identifies a few areas where limited industrial and commercial land uses are permitted.

### **Rural Area Policy 4: Service and Development Standards**

The following standards are intended to ensure that land uses in the unincorporated areas of the US 12 Corridor are compatible with a rural area and the level of services available in that area.

- Proposals must be thoroughly reviewed in cases where the approval of a change in land use would raise traffic on a rural road substantially above its capacity. Also, individual land uses that will generate high levels of traffic and/or heavy vehicle traffic should be required to participate in the upgrading of facilities.
- Residential development, including those occurring as a result of transfer or grouping of one per 40 eligibilities, must be served by a public road. If the road may ultimately serve a large number of units, or if the area is planned to be served by hard surfaced roads, the design should be adaptable to hard surfacing. Design of the road should reflect long term plans for roads as shown in the County Transportation Plan.
- In most instances there should be no more than one access from a residential area to an existing public road, nor should individual lots have more than one access to a public road.
- Development standards should include regulations to prevent erosion and sedimentation during and after construction.
- Lakes, wetlands, streams, bluffs and other sensitive natural features shall be protected from the adverse impacts of construction and development.

- Land use changes and development should be designed so as to minimize disturbance of natural systems. Building sites should remain in their natural state to the greatest extent possible.
- Except to solve existing problems in preexisting residential areas of high density, (such as lakeshore areas) the use of community septic systems for new development will be discouraged.

### **Resource Area Policies**

The Resource Land classification identifies lands that have unique environmental features or natural resources. The intent of this district is to highlight these areas as being special, unique and worthy of protection for future generations. While the US12 Corridor is the prime agricultural area of Wright County, it also includes many unique environmental features and natural lands, especially along the two forks of the Crow River.

Wright County recognizes the relationship between water quality and property value (see Overall Major Goal 4). It is collectively their mission to protect, preserve and enhance the quality of the natural environment and require development to take place in a manner that does not degrade our resources. The County will spend resources, where available, to stop the degradation and improve water quality and will work with other agencies, such as the Wright County Soil and Water Department along with various Watershed Districts to accomplish this.

Another way to control the negative impact on our shorelands is to avoid second-tier or multi-tier development around the lakes. Creating a tier of non-riparian lots could potentially pollute surface waters by increasing impervious coverage, adding more and faster storm water runoff, and by adding to the general use of the water resource. The County will help facilitate the purchase of lands from willing sellers for buffers and wetlands that facilitate clean water and help improve the quality. The County also follows state shoreland regulations and has been traditionally more restrictive than the DNR standards to stay consistent with the mission of the County. The housing density allowed would be one unit per 40 acres just as it is in the Agricultural District. One exception, as Policy #6 states, is if the land was previously in the Land Use Plan for Agricultural Residential (now renamed Rural Residential), the potential for limited development would still occur within the conditions set forth. Agriculture would be an allowable use in this district, as would most uses in the Agricultural District, provided that there is minimal impact on the resource (see Policy # 5). Conditional uses should be reviewed with the intent of protecting the resource and the environment.

### **Resource Land Policy 1: Protection**

This district is set up to help landowners with protection of natural resource areas that can be preserved. The County and landowners should also strive to work with agencies such as the MNDNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wright SWCD, and other relevant agencies in improving water quality and protecting woods and water resources. The County will encourage the purchase of land from willing sellers by private or public agencies whose intent is to protect and preserve the resource.

### **Resource Land Policy 2: Density**

The density of development should be similar to the Agricultural District which is one unit per 40 acres, except as noted in Policy #6.

### **Resource Land Policy 3: Siting**

When development occurs on Resource Lands, it should be done so as to minimize the impact on the resource as much as possible.

### **Resource Land Policy 4: Mining**

All mining or extraction of material will be prohibited in these designated Resource Land areas.

### **Resource Land Policy 5: Feedlots**

Feedlots must have less than 10 animal units in the Resource Land District. Any existing registered feedlot with 10 or more animal units in the Resource Land District will require a CUP for expansion.

### **Resource Land Policy 6: Development**

Allow areas that were designated Agricultural Residential in the previous Land Use Plan to still have some development options, which would be limited to a Planned Unit Development to preserve the natural resource in that area.

## **Aggregate Area Policies**

### **There are currently no Aggregate Resource Areas proposed for the US12 Corridor.**

These districts are meant to provide planning for very large land areas where gravel mining is or may become the predominate land use. (At this writing the only area proposed in the County is within Southside Township.) Because mining regulations may change in a manner that could affect future mining projects outside the Aggregate Resource Area, the following review and discussion from the County NWQ Plan is included.

Aggregates and gravel are used as base materials under foundations and roads. Although they are basic, low-value natural resources, the availability of gravel and construction aggregate is essential to the construction industry, and consequently, economic growth. A major challenge associated with their production is the cost of transportation. Because aggregate and gravel are low-value materials, the net cost of production raises quickly

when accounting for transportation costs. Although local market conditions vary, it is generally not cost-effective to haul aggregate more than 20 miles from its mining site. Many localities nationwide have already experienced shortages of construction aggregate. In fact, it has been estimated that the seven-county metro area will run out of easily accessible gravel by 2029. The ultimate reason for this is urbanization, which on the one hand increases the demand for construction aggregates, and on the other, tends to remove aggregate-bearing lands from production through land development and zoning decisions that preclude mining. When sources of aggregate are eliminated locally, and become more remote from places of need, the costs of construction rise significantly. In high growth areas with rising land values, this creates land use conflicts between the development and mining industries. Often these interdependent industries compete for use of the same land. How can this conflict be turned into opportunity?

Wright County's Zoning Code addresses gravel and aggregate mining within the framework of nuisance abatement. It requires erosion, dust, and noise control plans, as well as aesthetic enhancement to the appearance of the mining site. The code also dictates that rehabilitation of mining sites shall occur within one year of cessation of mining operations. Rehabilitation requirements include proper grading, the replacement of topsoil, and plantings to retard soil erosion, to the extent that final product does not "adversely affect the surrounding land or future development." The County should study this issue further and determine if gravel mining should be considered an interim use rather than a conditional use. The issue is regarding if a time limit can be put on a conditional use permit.

Reclaimed mining sites can be used for many types of development. Examples of golf courses, parks, residential, commercial, industrial and institutional land uses on reclaimed land are abundant. However, in a rural setting like Wright County, for various reasons, reclamation will more likely come in the form of agricultural land, wildlife land or open space. Furthermore, mining severely limits the use of on-site sewer systems for development, so that municipal utilities are needed for re-use. A land use plan creates the opportunity to both protect gravel and construction aggregate resources for extraction as well as plan for the end use intended for the mining area.

State law requires the County to incorporate aggregate resources and their protection into land use planning. Minnesota Statutes Section 84.94, Aggregate Planning and Protection, states that the purpose of this law is to "protect aggregate resources; to promote orderly and environmentally sound development; to spread the burden of development; and to introduce aggregate resource protection into local comprehensive planning and land use controls".

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 1: Density**

The density in the aggregate area should be one unit per 40 acres in order to minimize conflicts between residential areas and aggregate mining operations.

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 2: Reclamation**

Reclamation plans for new mining are required to be submitted to the County that address how the gravel pit will be reclaimed when it is closed. County regulations should be reviewed and enhanced to require more detailed end use plans, financial requirements (such as escrow or bonding) to ensure reclamation, and updated standards for screening and environmental protection.

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 3: Timeframe**

A timeframe of how long the pit will be active should be submitted to the County so the County can properly plan for when the gravel pit may be reclaimed. Many current mines have little or no incentive to finish mining and restore the pit.

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 4: Nuisance Mitigation**

When a gravel pit is proposed, a nuisance mitigation plan should be submitted to the County that addresses how any nuisances to adjacent properties will be mitigated. Such a plan should identify neighbors and neighboring land uses, the potential for impacts and the nature of the impacts foreseen, and proposals to diminish any such impacts. Such a plan should be available for review by nearby property owners and residents before and during the County's review of any mining proposal.

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 5: Further Study**

A more detailed planning/environmental study such as an Alternative Urban Area-wide Review (AUAR, which is a detailed environmental/land use study) should be completed for the Aggregate Resource Areas. This study will provide more detailed information for the specific gravel areas within the area outlined on the future land use map and will provide more detailed information for the County, landowners, and aggregate operators as aggregate mining continues in the future.

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 6: Changes in State Law**

The County should monitor the State law regarding the gravel tax money and for what purposes it can be used. Given recent changes in the law, it is apparent that there may be opportunities to utilize the gravel tax money for gravel pit restoration, road improvements, or transportation studies.

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 7: Ordinance Changes**

The County should reevaluate its ordinance to consider establishing new permitting requirements, environmental review procedures and performance standards to regulate gravel mining inside and outside the Aggregate Resource Areas. Items to be considered should include distinguishing between long term and short term activities, reclamation requirements, screening, hours of operation and financial guarantees.

### **Aggregate Resource Policy 8: Future Uses**

As part of the "further study" noted in policy 5, plans for future land uses, after mining and reclamation is complete, should be developed. In effect, more detailed studies should result in a long term land use plan for the Aggregate Area itself.

## **Cities Policy Area**

Over the past two decades Wright County has witnessed rapid growth in conjunction with the growth of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The Twin Cities is expected to grow by an additional one million people by the year 2020. Wright County will continue to see a significant amount of growth over this timeframe and the cities will accommodate the vast majority of the growth in Wright County.

Substantial population increases will result in a substantial increase in demand for sewer, water, transportation, and other public services. The most economically efficient way to meet the increased service demand is to direct development to areas where services already exist – the incorporated areas of the US 12 Corridor. This County, with its agricultural-based plan, has historically directed growth toward cities. This Plan will continue to direct growth towards the cities because new residential development is more efficiently served when it occurs in established urbanized areas that already have infrastructure in place.

**Goal: Wright County strives to maintain healthy, vital cities.**

Objectives:

- Clear distinction between urban and rural areas;
- Provide an environment in which cities can grow efficiently;
- Provide for efficient provision and use of urban services;
- Maintain community identity, and;
- Encourage creation of jobs and growth of economic development.

### **Cities Policy 1: Focus of Growth and Investment**

In order to accommodate future growth, while minimizing the conversion of rural land to urban uses, and to promote efficient provision of public services, most future non-agricultural growth and associated public investment will be directed to the municipalities of the US 12 Corridor.

### **Cities Policy 2: Planning**

The County supports the reasonable growth of cities in the County within the framework of coordinated local and county comprehensive planning.

### **Cities Policy 3: Service Level**

The County will support growth that can be accommodated within existing or reasonably planned service capacities of the cities. Growth beyond the service capability of the city has potential for adverse impacts, not only on the city, but also on surrounding areas and

the County as a whole. The County will cooperate with cities whenever possible to ensure adequate levels of public services. The service levels should be maintained at a level that adequately serves the residents. The County and cities should continue to plan jointly in the future to ensure sound planning.

#### **Cities Policy 4: Annexation**

The County will support annexation of land to a municipality if:

- The annexation is consistent with the municipal and County Land Use Plans;
- The area to be annexed is a logical expansion of the municipality;
- It is demonstrated with specific plans that development at urban densities is imminent;
- Municipal services (central sewer and water, paved roads), provided by the annexing municipality, will be available at the time of development;
- Planning for stormwater runoff and protection of natural resources will be completed prior to development, and;
- The annexation of additional land is necessary to accommodate development, and the supply of developable land within the city is limited.

#### **Transition Areas**

The County has historically adopted policies supporting the concept that most growth be directed toward the cities. In order to accommodate this continued growth pressure, cities will need to annex land and provide municipal services to this land. While the County is not advocating more annexation than is needed to accommodate a reasonable amount of growth, establishing transition areas is crucial to properly manage the land at the urban/rural fringe. Management of these areas consists of identifying and designating areas to economically and efficiently accommodate growth pressures. The proper management of these areas will avoid premature annexation, prohibit large lot residential development that would make provision of municipal services unnecessarily expensive, and limit the possibility of incompatible future land uses.

The cities of the US 12 Corridor have already completed or are in the process of developing their comprehensive plans to guide the use of land and the installation of utilities in the future. As part of the comprehensive planning process, the cities have analyzed their land use requirements and public utilities systems needed to serve projected growth. It should be noted that the County has reviewed the cities' comprehensive plans and in some instances notes that the growth plans and projections are overly aggressive based on past trends and availability of sewer capacity without major wastewater treatment plant expansions. In some cases, the annexation areas

proposed are significantly larger than land needs described within the same plan. In an attempt to mediate the natural conflict between a township's natural resistance to losing land to a city, and these city growth projections, this planning process has asked cities to look as close as possible at limiting future growth projections to realistic abilities to service and develop the land. This Plan includes areas that resulted from that process, and are designated "Transition Areas". Wright County will manage these lands in accordance with the policies set forth in this section. Coordination between the County, townships, and cities is encouraged, and can alleviate potential problems and allow efficient urbanization at the proper pace.

From the city's perspective, in general, no new development should occur in these transition areas except as part of the annexation process. Alternatively, some limited development may be possible if a plan is submitted and approved by a joint planning board or other appropriate mechanism that includes input from the Township, City and the County. Such a plan would have to show in detail how the larger tract could be re-subdivided into urban-sized lots when sewer and water services become available and if the houses are appropriately located on the smaller, future lots. In order to justify such regulations, cities have an obligation to annex land only when municipal sewer and water services (and all urban services) are ready to be provided soon. Further, cities should be responsible to limit the need for extensive land areas by requiring residential densities of at least two units per acre or higher and other urban-type densities for other uses.

**Transition Area Goal: Provide for the efficient urbanization and the economical extension of public services to developing areas.**

*Objectives:*

- Define realistic areas cities can efficiently service for future expansion within the time frame of this Plan.
- Avoid premature annexation.
- Manage expansion areas - prohibit large lot residential and land uses not compatible with future use.
- Provide limited opportunities for landowners in the Transition Area who desire to develop their land in a manner that will not be a detriment to future urban growth and associated municipal utilities.

*Policy: Designation of Transition Areas*

Lands that can be demonstrated within a city's comprehensive plan as realistically ready for municipal services and development by 2020 will typically be placed in the Transition Area. The County has reviewed adopted plans, past trends and sewer availability when designating these areas.

*Policy: Level of Service*

The level of service in transition areas should remain the same as the rest of the rural area in the Township until the land is annexed into a municipality.

*Policy: Management*

The Transition Areas shall be managed to accommodate urbanization in accordance with the comprehensive plan of the affected city. Ideally, the City and affected Township will adopt detailed orderly annexation agreements that will specify land use policies and plans for these areas. The following suggestions are recommended for consideration in the development of such agreements.

- Large lot and other rural development patterns should be avoided. If such development is allowed prior to annexation, it should only be allowed subject to a thorough review of specific plans for redevelopment when urban services are available.
- Annexed areas should be developed as soon as possible. New annexations should not be allowed if there is an inventory of annexed land that has not yet been provided with services or developed.
- Storm water planning and related water management planning should be completed in Transition Areas prior to the beginning of development.
- New animal agriculture operations will be prohibited within Transition Areas and expanded animal agricultural operations will be restricted.
- Cities should develop concrete plans to address existing rural subdivisions that will be surrounded by urban expansion, so that residents can gain an insight into the plans and costs for providing urban services as they face eventual annexation.
- The County, cities, and townships should look to cooperatively use right-of-way for trunk sewer lines, water lines, etc.
- Zoning changes will not be allowed until an orderly annexation agreement is reached. The orderly annexation agreement should designate which type of development will be allowed in the interim.

#### 4.4 Land Use Definitions

A major purpose of this Land Use Plan is to provide a guide for future decision-making by County Officials. Most land use decisions deal with incremental changes in zoning and land uses proposed by individual property owners. Often, such decisions seem not to be crucial, nor overly important when viewed in isolation. However, the precedents set, policies established and accumulated effect over time of many such decisions can lead to unexpected and undesirable results. Most, if not all of the land use and environmental problems in Wright County have resulted from decisions, or the absence of decisions made during times past, when little or no effort was made to regulate land use and development.

It is often too easy to become overly involved with the details and emotions of individual land use cases, and to lose sight of the overall goals and purposes of regulating land use. The Land Use Plan is meant to serve as the primary framework within which land use decisions should be made. Zoning proposals will be evaluated primarily by their conformance to the Land Use Plan. It is not meant to be totally inflexible, as rare and unusual circumstances may justify occasional departures from the plan maps. However, consistent or simply convenient departures from the Plan without adequate justification will eventually defeat the purpose and goals of the Plan. Deviations from the Plan should only be made in the public interest, and not to benefit an individual or small group.

The following definitions of the districts on the maps shall be used in making future decisions to carry out the Land Use Plan, and to review specific proposals. (Incorporated Cities, Public Lands and Lakes are self explanatory).

**Agricultural** Designates those areas appropriate to remain in agricultural use over the long term. The purpose is to both preserve productive farmland for the future and to protect agricultural activity from encroachment by other activities. Existing land types may include productive farmland, pasture, farm woodlots, wetlands and other agricultural or open lands. Appropriate zoning will generally include only the Agricultural District. Rezoning to other districts will be considered only in rare and unique circumstances, or for riparian lots on shorelands especially suited to residential development.

**Rural Residential** Designates those areas where a combination of agriculture, hobby farms and very large lot residential areas is deemed appropriate. The purpose is to provide a buffer between agricultural and other uses, and also to provide housing opportunities in a rural environment where large lot sizes and the rural atmosphere will be maintained. Existing land types may include large wooded areas, non prime farmland, pasture and other lands in areas not well suited to long term agricultural uses. Appropriate zoning may include Agricultural, Agricultural Residential, or, in unique circumstances, R-2(a). Rezoning from Agricultural to Agricultural Residential will be considered on a case by case basis, and not considered to be automatic, with the need for residential land, effect on nearby agricultural operations, the timing of the proposal in light of land uses in the area, and plan policies being prime considerations. Rezoning to R-1 or R-2 will only be considered for riparian lots on shorelands especially suited to

residential development. Rezoning to R-2a may be appropriate in unique circumstances such as: infill for areas that are already developed in a similar manner; adjacent to developed areas with smaller lot sizes to serve as a transition, and; other unique situations which do not establish R-2a as a new zoning district in a previously "undeveloped" area.

**Residential Large Lot** Primarily designates those areas that have already been converted to a rural/suburban, residential environment with lot sizes ranging from two to ten acres due to past decisions. Undeveloped lands that are surrounded or nearly surrounded by such patterns may also be included in this district. Existing land types may include large wooded areas, non-productive farmland near existing developed areas, infill on lands near highly developed lakeshore areas and other areas where large lot development may occur without posing a threat to the environment, or long term agricultural uses. Appropriate zoning may include Agricultural, Agricultural Residential, R-2(a) and, in special cases, R-2. Rezoning from Agricultural to residential districts will generally be considered appropriate for large lot (R-2a) proposals and for smaller sizes (R-2) in cases where existing development trends or environmental factors are appropriate. Rezoning to R-1 will only be considered for riparian lots on shorelands especially suited to that type of residential development, or for small areas of "infill" which are predominately R-1 already.

**Residential** Designates existing residential areas that are already characterized by relatively small lots (for unsewered areas) and those limited undeveloped areas deemed appropriate for conversion to similar use. Most areas currently exist as a result of lakeshore development prior to any zoning or environmental regulation, and other isolated areas exist that developed with small lots historically. In general, due to the environmental and health impacts of developing areas with small lots and on-site sewage treatment, such development will be discouraged. However, in certain limited cases, such as riparian lots on general development and recreation development lakes, or "infill" in areas that are surrounded by similar development, some expansion of residential areas can be allowed. Rezoning from Agricultural to residential districts will generally be considered appropriate in this district, depending on environmental factors. Rezoning to R-1 will only be considered for riparian lakeshore lots, or as "infill" where most surrounding land is already zoned R-1. Multi-family structures are not allowed in areas without municipal sewer and water services.

**Commercial** Designates existing commercial areas and undeveloped land well suited to commercial development that does not require a significant level of urban services. The purpose is to provide for limited commercial development in areas that are especially well suited to such use. Existing land types may include areas near major highway interchanges, existing service centers (unincorporated communities) or adjacent to urban commercial areas. Appropriate zoning may include the B-1 or B-2 district.

**Limited Industrial** Designates existing industrial areas as well as undeveloped land considered especially well suited to industrial uses that do not require urban services. The purpose is to provide for certain industrial uses that may not be appropriate in urban areas, or are near urban industrial areas, or on land especially well-suited to industrial

use. Existing land types may include areas near major highway interchanges, land with access to rail lines, and land near urban areas with a high suitability to industrial use. Appropriate zoning includes the I-1 district.

**Transition Areas** The County has a policy that most growth be directed toward the cities. In order to accommodate this continued growth pressure, cities will need to annex land and provide municipal services to this land. The County is not advocating more annexation than is needed to accommodate a reasonable amount of growth. The purpose in establishing the Transition Area is to properly manage the land at the urban/rural fringe. Management of these areas consists of identifying and designating areas to economically and efficiently accommodate growth pressures. The proper management of these areas will avoid premature annexation, prohibit large lot residential development that would make provision of municipal services unnecessarily expensive, and limit the possibility of incompatible future land uses. In an ideal situation, orderly annexation agreements would be developed that would provide more detailed plans for the Transition Areas.

**Flood Prone Areas** Designates areas subject to flooding. Existing land types are generally undeveloped, and vary from agricultural fields to permanent wetlands. In most cases, Flood Plain overlay zoning exists and will not change. Rezoning to residential districts will only be considered in those areas that are not subject to flooding, have public road access routes that do not flood and are adjacent to or surrounded by residential designation in the Land Use Plan Map for the area.

**Resource Land** This land use classification identifies land that has unique environmental or natural resources. The intent of this district is to protect these resource lands as being special and unique. The housing density allowed would be one unit per 40 acres just as it is in the Agricultural District, except for those lands governed by Policy #6 in the Resource Area Policies Section. Agriculture is an appropriate zoning district for this land use category. Any uses in this district may be subject to special review because of the natural resources in these areas.

**Aggregate Resources** This district is designated for areas that have high concentrations of aggregate resources and active mining operations. The purpose of the district is to identify areas where mining is likely to continue to be a significant use in the future, subject to review and regulation by the County. Existing, legal land uses will not be restricted, and housing will continue to be allowed in this area at agricultural densities (one per 40 acres), pursuant to current zoning. Landowners should consider the placement of any new residential sites, to ensure that the placement does not interfere with potential mining activities or is located such that future mining on nearby lands will not unduly impact the residential site. The review of other development proposals, such as residential clusters or conditional uses other than mining, should also consider potential mining operations. Agricultural zoning would continue to be appropriate for this district.

#### **4.5 US 12 Corridor Future Land Use Map**

This map shows the proposed future land uses of the US12 Corridor of Wright County. Each of the land use designations on the map has a corresponding definition in this document. Any major changes in policy from the previous Plan are often most easily identified on the new Land Use Map. Because of this, it is usually the most referenced map and page within the entire Plan. However, it could not withstand long or deep scrutiny without the support of many other types of data referenced in this document, the support of the Townships and Cities, the hard work and study of the many city, township and county officials working on the Plan, and several methods of public review and comment used to help develop the entire Plan.

After thorough review of land use change and activity in the US 12 Corridor, data analysis, public input and review, and meetings with city officials and every Township Board at least once and often several times, it was evident that major policy changes to the Plan were neither desired nor necessary. County policies that promote growth and development within cities while supporting agricultural and rural preservation, and protection of the natural environment continue to enjoy widespread support.

Most of the areas designated for limited residential development in prior planning efforts have yet to be developed, and therefore, major expansions or changes to the existing land use districts do not seem to be necessary. A few minor changes to the size of Rural Residential areas did occur, primarily as infill for areas surrounded or nearly surrounded by similar land uses. The only major changes in the US 12 Corridor from the previous Land Use Plan come with the addition of one new land use designation and the combination of two previous designations into one. “Resource Lands” have been added and are discussed in greater detail elsewhere. The “Transition Area” was created to combine the previous “Major Growth” and “Orderly Annexation Area” designations, and is also more thoroughly discussed elsewhere.

Resource Lands were added in strategic locations in the corridor for several reasons, as described elsewhere. Relatively small areas of additional Rural or Large Lot Residential were added in Marysville, Stockholm, and Woodland Townships, and in each case these serve as minor expansion of existing developed areas and to serve as a buffer or transition between developed and rural lands. All of the Cities in the Corridor, together with their surrounding Townships, have come to agreements on the newly designated Transition Areas for County Planning Purposes.



## **5.0 Administration and Implementation**

### **5.1 Plan Administration**

In so far as Wright County has previously enacted a zoning ordinance, which includes provisions for agricultural protection, many of the provisions of this Plan can be implemented through continued administration of existing zoning. Some changes in the zoning ordinance may be necessary as a result of this Plan, and the “implementation” section discusses the potential for more substantial changes. Concurrent with work on this Plan update, new County Subdivision Regulations, which have not been reviewed or updated since 1979, are being developed. Unfortunately, those subdivision regulations have been held pending completion of proposed, revised Minnesota Shoreland Management Regulations which the Minnesota DNR was to have completed in 2009, but are still pending at the beginning of 2011.

The Wright County Zoning Ordinance is an ordinance adopted by the County Board of Commissioners. It is adopted to regulate the use of land in Wright County by zoning districts, including the regulation of the location, size, use and height of buildings, the arrangement of buildings on lots and the density of population for the purpose of promoting the public health, safety, order, convenience and general welfare and to carry out the goals and policies of the Land Use Plan. The Wright County Subdivision Regulations control the divisions of land within the County. The regulations provide for the preparation of plats, the installation of streets, roads and other improvements, and establish procedures for approval and the recording of plats. Both the Wright County Zoning Ordinance and the Subdivision Regulations apply to all areas of the County lying outside the incorporated limits of municipalities.

Several groups and County staff carry out the direct administration of planning and zoning activities in Wright County:

**County Board of Commissioners** The County Board consists of five elected officials who share the ultimate responsibility for the operation of the County Government. They adopt the plans and ordinances that govern land use in the County, appoint the various boards, make final decisions regarding zoning district designations and set the budget for the Planning and Zoning Office. The Board generally meets every Tuesday.

**Planning Commission** The Wright County Planning Commission is a seven-member board appointed by the Wright County Board of Commissioners. The Planning Commission conducts all public hearings pertaining to requests for amendments to the Wright County Zoning Ordinance, zoning district changes, conditional use permits and platting of property. Only on conditional use permits is the Planning Commission the final authority. On other matters, the Commission is advisory to the County Board.

**Board of Adjustment** The Wright County Board of Adjustment is a five-member board appointed by the Wright County Board of Commissioners. The Board of Adjustment has

a number of responsibilities, as enumerated in state law and in Section 502.2 of the Wright County Zoning Ordinance. In general, the Board of Adjustment hears appeals from administrative zoning decisions, interprets the Zoning Ordinance when necessary and has the exclusive power to issue variances from the letter of the Zoning Ordinance. All decisions made by the Board of Adjustment are final, except for appeal to District Court.

**Planning and Zoning Office** The Wright County Planning and Zoning Office is located at the Courthouse Annex in Buffalo. Located within the Office are the Planning and Zoning Administrator and support staff, Environmental Health Specialists, and the Building Inspectors. The Office is responsible for general administration of planning and zoning in Wright County, issuing building permits and reviewing permit applications, water quality testing, issuing sewer permits, providing technical advice to various boards, meeting with and advising the public on planning and zoning permits and, in general, carrying out the day to day administration of planning and zoning in the County.

## **5.2 Implementation**

The following sections highlight specific issues that require further study, action by others, or other follow-up as part of implementing this Plan. These issues were raised or considered as a part of this land use planning process but may not be suitable for immediate action. The more general nature of an area-wide plan may not be the proper vehicle to pursue the level of detail necessary to properly address these matters. Also, in most instances, the items in this section are new concepts that the previous Land Use Plan and implementation tools already in place for the County do not address adequately. More specific study, public discussion and implementation tools need to be completed before these items can be implemented as official county policy.

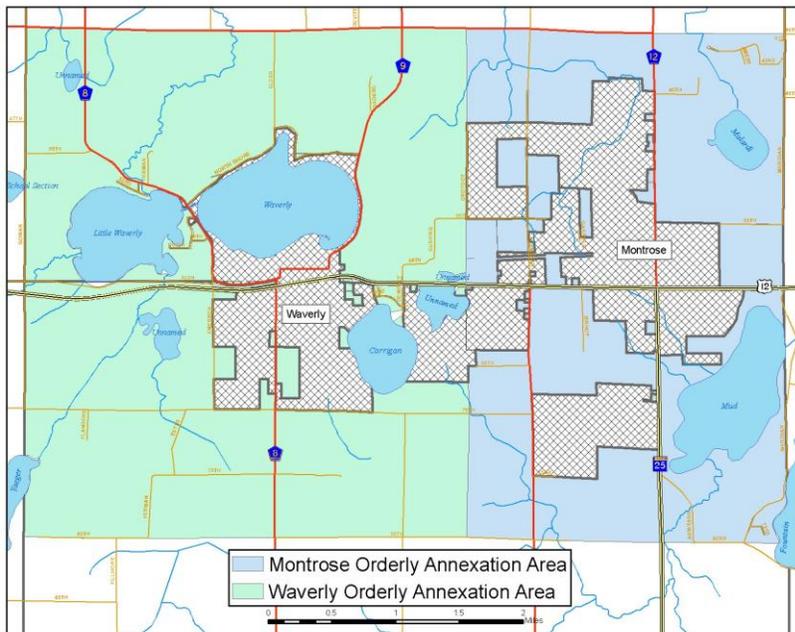
## **5.3 Transition Areas**

The US 12 Corridor of Wright County is expecting continued growth pressures for the foreseeable future, despite the general economic downturn in effect as this Plan is written. The County has a long-standing policy that most growth be directed into the cities, where adequate services can and should be provided. In order to accommodate this continued growth pressure, cities will need to annex land and provide municipal services to this land. The County is not advocating more annexation than what is needed to accommodate a reasonable amount of growth. The purpose in establishing the transition areas is to properly manage the land at the urban/rural fringe. Management of these areas consists of identifying and designating areas to economically and efficiently accommodate growth pressures. The proper management of these areas will avoid premature annexation, prohibit large lot residential development that would make provision of municipal services unnecessarily expensive, and limit the possibility of incompatible future land uses.

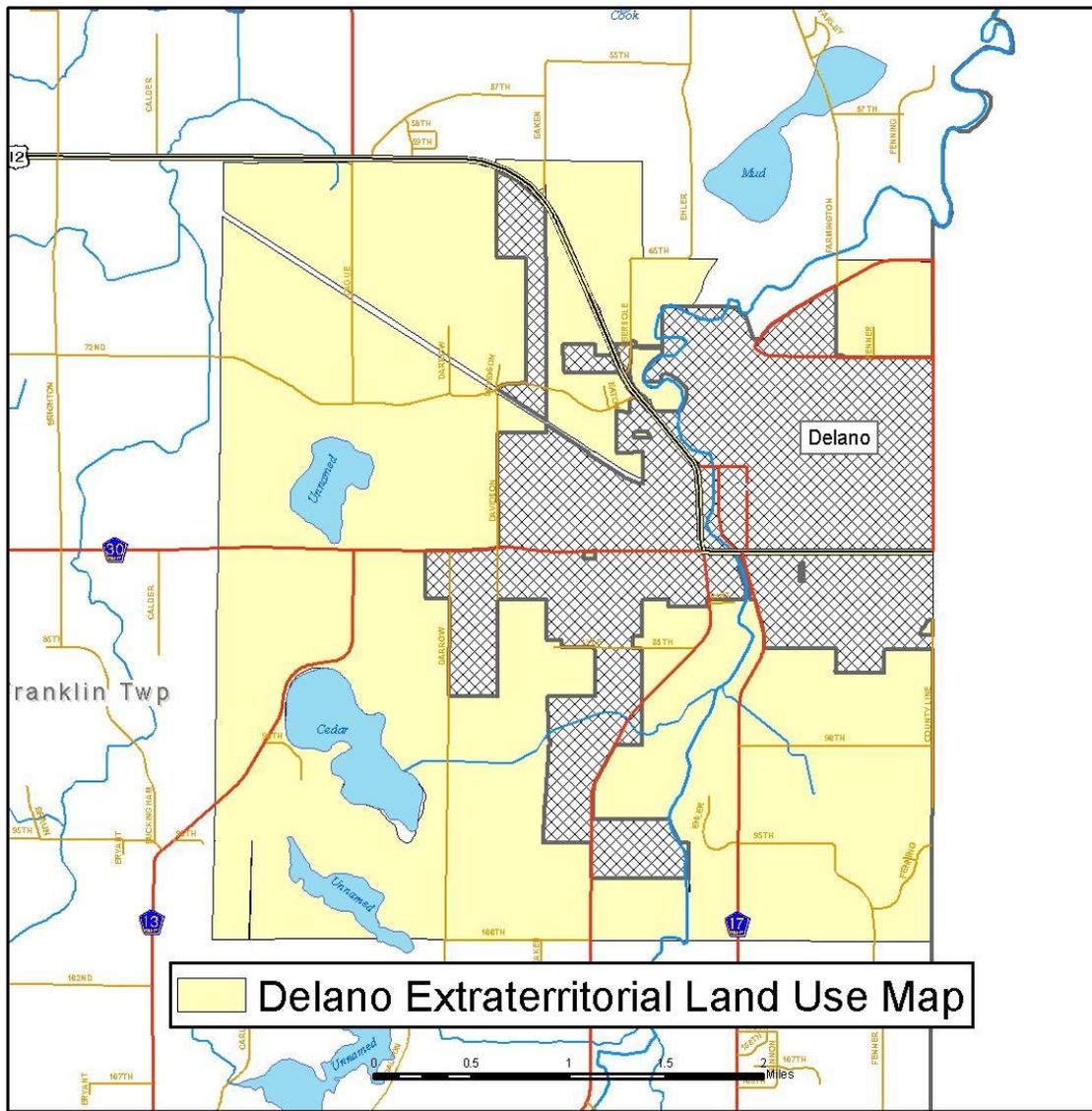
It is important to note that until an Orderly Annexation Area (OAA) is established, this Plan proposes that existing zoning for the Transition Area will remain in place. Such policy is meant to avoid a rush of large-lot development that might precede any agreement and harm the long-term interests of the community. It is also meant to avoid any zoning decisions by the County that might prejudice any party in the negotiations necessary between a city and township to reach an OAA agreement. Therefore, the existing zoning will govern land use in Transition Areas prior to OAAs being established. Concepts, such as cluster development that includes plans for future city utilities, could be agreed upon during the OAA negotiation process. For land on the outer edge of the Transition Areas furthest from the City, clustering could allow some development in the interim period before the land is actually ready to be developed and served with infrastructure by the city. It is imperative that when urban growth reaches rural development or cluster development that these developments be annexed into the city and served by city infrastructure. If this does not happen, a haphazard and inefficient development pattern will emerge, as it already has in some areas due to a lack of planning, or poor planning, in the past.

As noted in Chapter 3, the Transition Areas for Montrose and Waverly are smaller than the areas subject to orderly annexation agreements with the Townships of Marysville and Woodland. The following map depicts the actual area subject to these agreements, which are also partially described in an extensive “Alternative Urban Areawide Review” which has been completed by the City of Montrose. A small area described in this review lies in the Township of Franklin, but Franklin Township has no annexation agreement with Montrose, and the City has

agreed that any growth into Franklin Township now lies in the very distant future. The reasons for a smaller Transition Area for these cities, as mentioned in Chapter 3, include the economic downturn in recent years, the extensive areas of undeveloped land already annexed by the cities, and the concern for agricultural operations, and especially livestock feedlots, which lie in the outlying areas of the adopted orderly annexation agreements.



The City of Delano expressed concerns about the limiting of its extraterritorial planning area and the potential for industrial development in Franklin Township as part of discussions regarding the Transition Area. Valid concerns about the limitations of County regulations regarding industrial development are discussed below. Franklin Township is not willing to agree to a Transition Area as large as the “extraterritorial planning area” that has been developed by Delano as part of its own planning projects. (See map, below.) Considering, again, the change in economic conditions, and expressing a desire for better cooperation between the City and Franklin Township, Delano officials did agree to the Transition Area in this plan as being practical for the next 15 to 20 years. This agreement is partially based on the Township and County decision to keep the existing Agricultural areas and policies for lands west of the City, as well as commitments by the County and Township to work with the City on transportation issues and to develop new and better standards for rural industrial areas.



## 5.4 Rural Industrial Development

While Wright County generally promotes the location of commercial and industrial development in cities rather than township areas, both Franklin Township (for an area along US Highway 12) and Rockford Township in the NEQ Plan (for an area along State Trunk Highway 55) had strongly advocated for the establishment or expansion of “rural industrial parks” within plans completed prior to this project. Much smaller commercial or industrial areas also exist within other townships as a result of historical factors, or at freeway interchanges. The primary argument for these new and fairly large “rural industrial parks” includes the need for larger land areas and outdoor storage by many businesses which may not need the extensive infrastructure (and resulting expense) of city industrial parks. Examples may include firms such as trucking and transport companies, contractor yards, storage facilities, large equipment storage sites and similar businesses. The “down side” of such rural industrial parks include the possibility that some developers may simply be looking for an area that is cheaper and/or less restrictive than city areas where less attractive or otherwise undesirable businesses may locate. As a practical matter, neither the proposed area in Franklin Township, nor the newly developed, expanded industrial park in Rockford Township has seen any development in the past several years. This is partly due to the economy.

Delano has properly noticed that the limited experience with industrial development and the age of County regulations result in greatly different standards, especially regarding aesthetics and screening requirements, between County and City industrial development regulations. As the Franklin Township proposed industrial area lies on US Highway 12 at the westerly border and “entrance” to Delano, the City has voiced concerns that its development may result in a detriment to the City and wider community. Therefore, the County has agreed that it needs to review its zoning ordinance, and to include changes in any new subdivision regulations, to address the need for up-to-date and practical performance standards to apply to development that may occur in these rural industrial areas. Screening and aesthetic standards, as well as improved regulations to protect the environment and especially storm water runoff, should be incorporated into new and amended County ordinances. Such work should be completed in concert with the affected townships and cities, as well as with the Wright Soil and Water Conservation District and potentially impacted landowners.

## 5.5 Resource Lands

"Resource Lands" have been identified and designated in several locations within the US 12 Corridor, especially along the flood plain of both the North and South Forks of the Crow River. As noted elsewhere in this plan, the intent of the Resource Lands District is to highlight and promote the designated areas as special, unique, and worthy of protection for future generations. These areas can be protected with density restrictions without significantly altering their current and traditional economic viability, which is often anchored in agriculture. In addition, the County will encourage the purchase of such lands from willing sellers by any public agency whose goal is to protect these natural

resources. These areas were extensively reviewed in the final “open house” meetings held in the late autumn of 2010, and for the most part the concept gathered significant support from those who attended the meetings. Many attendees owned land in these areas. As the plan is being finalized prior to the final public hearing, any landowner who had requested that his or her land be removed from the designation has had that request honored by the County Planning Commission.

It should also be noted that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has done extensive work with private property owners and Ducks Unlimited on Smith Lake, a shallow, “natural environment” lake on the border of Cokato and Middleville Townships. The project is an effort to improve water level management capabilities and habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife. The nature of the lands surrounding the lake, most of which is tillable farmland, did not fit the nature of lands generally considered for inclusion within the Resource Lands designation of this Plan. However, as work on the project continues in 2011 and the future, its success may very well result in consideration of surrounding lands for Resource Land designation in future Plan amendments.

Wright County should further study the Resource Lands identified throughout this planning process, and keep abreast of any methods available to preserve the natural features of these areas. The County should determine if it is feasible for any of these areas to be purchased for future county parks or natural areas. In addition to the designated Resource Lands, there are other elements of the "Big Woods" and grasslands/prairies (some of which are reclaimed gravel pits) in the US12 Corridor, as well as the Smith Lake area described above. These may also have potential as future parks or natural areas as well as joint projects with private property owners interested in conservation projects. Furthermore, these natural features should be considered in the review of any future development proposals.

## **5.6 Aggregate Resources**

No Aggregate Resource Areas are included in the US12 Corridor Land Use Plan, and the result of work with the Town Board and landowners in Monticello Township in the NEQ have resulted in no changes to include an Aggregate Resource Area in Monticello Township for the NEQ Plan. (See relevant discussions and review in the NWQ and NEQ Plans.) Therefore, the only Aggregate Resource Area for Wright County for the foreseeable future will lie within Southside Township in the NWQ. The County will concentrate its efforts on new gravel mining regulations, especially as it relates to mining in an Aggregate Resource Area.

However, since the regulations are likely to result in limitations on mining outside the Aggregate Resource Areas, other landowners and communities will be affected by changes and a County-wide effort will be necessary. Some township officers in the US 12 Corridor have expressed a concern that overly restrictive policies may make it difficult for townships to obtain gravel needed for road maintenance and improvement at the township level. County officials will need to keep this concern in mind as work progresses on the review and amendment of County mining regulations.

## 5.7 Agricultural Districts and Zoning

There was extensive discussion during the NEQ Plan and some talk during the NWQ Plan process of changing the density of residential development in the Agricultural District and Zone, or creating a new Agricultural District and Zone, to allow residential development at a density of “1 per 20”. (Current Agricultural policy and zoning ordinances establish a residential density of one house per forty acres.) There was very little or no advocacy of this concept within the review and development of the US 12 Corridor Plan. However, further review and a decision on this matter by the County Board of Commissioners had been put off during the prior plans, until work on the US 12 Corridor Plan was under consideration.

This and other issues were brought to a joint meeting of the County Board of Commissioners and the County Planning Commission held on November 23, 2009. Planning and Zoning staff were looking for direction as preparations were made to begin work on the US 12 Corridor Plan, and conducting a formal review of work already completed in the NEQ and NWQ and issues raised during those plans. Topical papers and data prepared by staff included the “pros and cons” of the “1 per 20” issue and development information including residential development potential under current plans and zoning for all the townships in the County. The “1 per 20” issue was thoroughly discussed and debated. Although a minority of the members of both the County Board and Planning Commission felt the issue should be pursued, a strong majority consensus emerged that directed staff not to pursue the matter further or propose any changes to residential density in the agricultural districts. The minutes of this meeting are available on the County website.

Another issue regarding residential development in Agricultural areas that was briefly discussed during prior plan work and resurfaced during review of the US12 Corridor is the possibility of a “transfer of development rights” (TDR) program. Such a program would allow the sale or transfer of development rights between property owners, or between lands under common ownership but not contiguous. Potential problems with such a program include the gain or loss of housing between townships, the need for extremely accurate and extensive record-keeping, and the possibility of high density housing concentrating in certain rural areas. However, if carefully implemented, such a program could result in better protection of the best farmland in some areas while moving limited development into areas where it is better suited. If the overall density of housing in the rural area was not increased, such a program could be beneficial, and could possibly be implemented through zoning changes that would not require amendments to the Land Use Plans. This is another significant area that warrants further review and study by the County when work on the Land Use Plans is completed.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

Implementing the recommendations of this Plan, as well as the findings of the further study items outlined above, will be critical to the success of this Plan. A regular review of the Land Use Plan by the County Board and its Planning Commission is also necessary to ensure the Plan is meeting the needs of the County and its residents. As the US 12 Corridor continues to evolve and change, revisions and amendments should be made, if necessary, to ensure the Plan works. However, as stated elsewhere, such changes should only be made to address the needs of the entire community, as no Plan should be altered haphazardly to suit the needs of one proposed project, development or special interest. Wright County includes many precious natural resources, and lies in an area that will continue to grow and prosper. It is the sincere hope of all involved in the development of this Plan that such growth and change will occur with respect for the natural amenities that make the US 12 Corridor and Wright County such a desirable location.