

Land Use Plan

**Northeast Quadrant (NEQ) Land Use Plan
Buffalo, Monticello and Rockford Townships**

July 31, 2007

Shaping NE Wright County's Future



**Wright County Office of Planning and Zoning
10 Second St. NW
Room 140
Buffalo, MN 55313**

Recommended on July 12, 2007 by the Wright County Planning Commission

As Adopted on July 31, 2007 by the Wright County Board

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Introduction

Wright County's Northeast Quadrant (NEQ) Land Use Plan is a vision of what the NEQ wants to be. 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 NEQ grows and changes with a strong vision for the future, Wright County decided to review and update the 1988 Land Use Plan.

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, private property owners, and developers in decisions related to land use planning in the NEQ.

The Wright County Land Use Plan is a plan that brings together various elements into a unified "big picture." It is not intended to provide a detailed development or natural resource plan. Rather, it provides a framework that can guide development in the future. Lastly, the NEQ 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.

How to Use the Plan

The NEQ Land Use Plan presents a vision for the future of the NEQ, and goals and policies to direct and manage growth. This plan provides very specific policy to lead and manage NEQ 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, this plan 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 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.

1.0 Northeast Quadrant Profile

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Local Government Units
- 1.3 Demographic Trends and Projections
- 1.4 Existing Land Use/Land Cover and Environmental Features
- 1.5 Map Analysis
- 1.6 Plan Purpose

1.1 Introduction

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. In 2000 it was estimated at 89,986. In percentage terms, Wright County has been the sixth fastest growing county in Minnesota since 1980 (53.3%), due partly to its location, but also to the attractive areas for residential development including 298 lakes over 10 acres in size.

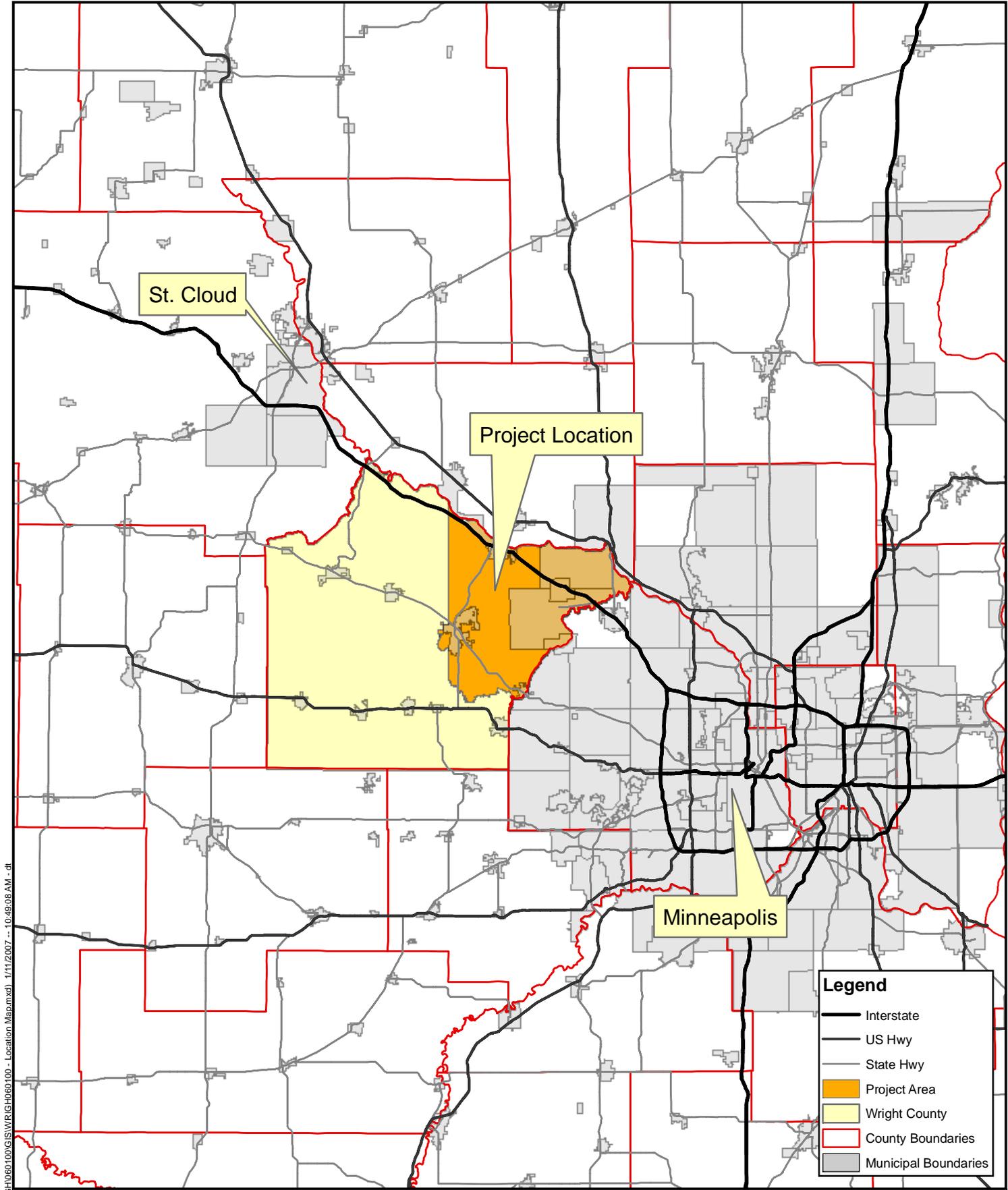
Wright County has traditionally been predominately rural in nature, but recently has become subject to the pressures for suburban development. Wright is the only County adjacent to Hennepin County that is not a part of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, but is inextricably tied to the Twin Cities economically, and is greatly affected by many of the same forces that affect the metropolitan region. In addition, a portion of Wright County is less than 20 miles from downtown St. Cloud, another growing urban area with a complete services base and a state university campus. The major interstate highway serving central Minnesota (I-94) passes through northern Wright County, and two other major trunk highways provide access to the metropolitan area through central (State Highway 55) and southern (U.S. 12) Wright County.

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 and has been to this day.

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 addition to these land uses, natural resource lands and aggregate resource lands have been highlighted and policies created to protect and preserve these lands.



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Regional Context Map

Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan

0 5 10 Miles



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Local Government Units

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, there are many governmental units within the NEQ that have an interest in land use planning. The Townships of Buffalo, Monticello, and Rockford, as well as the Cities of Albertville, Buffalo, Hanover, Monticello, Otsego, Rockford, and St. Michael all have a vested interest in land use planning. In addition to these entities, the Wright Soil and Water Conservation District plays a key role in land use planning. The Monticello Orderly Annexation Area Board regulates land use within an area of Monticello Township surrounding the City of Monticello. It was created by joint agreement between the County, City of Monticello, and Monticello Township.

The Wright County Planning and Zoning Office provides planning services and administers all land use regulations for the Townships in the NEQ.

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 NEQ, 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 development sprawl in the Townships.

In summary, the compilation of the NEQ Land Use Plan has not, and could not have been completed in a vacuum. The 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.

1.2 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. Many of the statistics discussed below indicate that the NEQ is rapidly growing and will continue to do so for the next several decades.

Due to its proximity to the Twin Cities metropolitan area, Wright County has one of the fastest growing populations in the state. The NEQ of the County is composed of Buffalo, Monticello, and Rockford Townships and the Cities of Albertville, Buffalo, Hanover, Monticello, Otsego, Rockford, and St. Michael. This section of the County has absorbed the majority of the population growth that took place between 1990 and 2005. During this time period, the population of the NEQ of Wright County more than doubled, increasing from 28,453 residents to 69,739 residents.

While population growth has occurred in the cities, population has actually declined in the Townships. This indicates two aspects of the type of growth occurring in the NEQ. First, cities are annexing land from the townships, partially capturing any growth the township may have had. Second, the character of the additional population is not rural and agriculturally based (directly engaged in farming). Population growth in this area does not appear to be connected to agricultural productivity. Population decline in the Townships has not been significant except in the case of Monticello Township, which lost 702 residents, or 17%, of its population between 2000 and 2005, due primarily to the annexation of two mobile home parks. (However, the population of the City of Monticello increased by over 3,000 people during this same period.)

Of the 69,739 residents of the NEQ of Wright County in 2005, 61,096, or 88%, lived in incorporated cities. Between 1990 and 2000, the cities of the NEQ experienced a combined average annual population growth rate of 8.2%. From 2000 to 2005, the average annual growth rate declined slightly to 7.8%. It is worth noting that the average annual population growth rate during the 1980s was just 4.8%. As of 2005, the most populous cities in the NEQ were Buffalo (13,290), Monticello (10,882), Otsego (10,800), and St. Michael (14,319). Otsego was incorporated as a city in 1991. Notable growth surges occurred in the 1990s in Albertville, where the population

increased by 189.4%, and St. Michael, which experienced a dramatic 263.1% increase in population in just ten years.

The following table shows the population change from 1990 to 2000 for Wright County as a whole and for Buffalo, Monticello, and Rockford Township. It also shows 2005 population projections from the State of Minnesota Demographer's Office.

Based on the local information, the estimates from the State Demographer seem to be low and this has been proven to be true historically.

Population Change

Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2005 Estimate
Wright County	68,710	89,986	110,836
Buffalo Twp	2,086	1,938	1,914
Monticello Twp	3,981	4,139	3,579
Rockford Twp	3,380	3,444	3,382

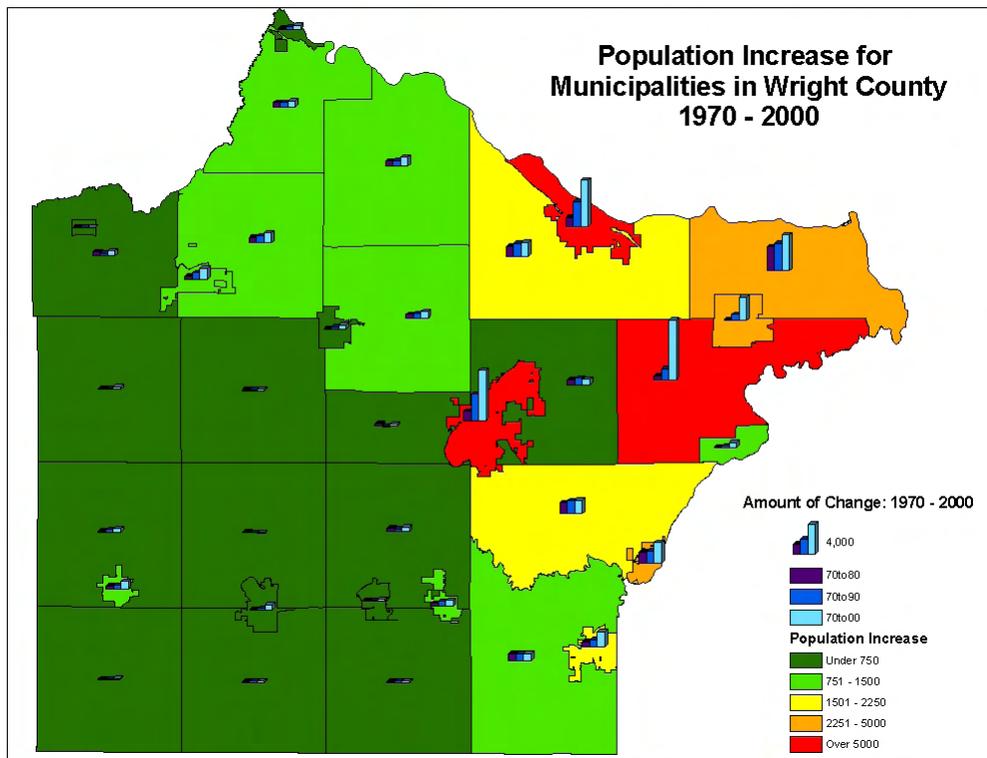
Household Change

Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2005 Estimate
Wright County	23,013	31,465	39,503
Buffalo Twp	658	622	625
Monticello Twp	1,195	1,318	1,166
Rockford Twp	1,035	1,138	1,164

The amount of households in Wright County has increased by almost 37 percent between 1990 and 2000. This increase is not proportionate to the increase in population, which increased by approximately 31 percent. The higher increase in households can be attributed to smaller household sizes in recent years. In 1990, the average Wright County household size was 2.95. In 2000, it was 2.83 persons per household.

In conclusion, the NEQ has experienced tremendous population growth over the past 20 years and this growth is expected to continue for the next several decades, which places even more importance on sound land use planning principles.

The following graphic highlights the population changes in Wright County from 1970 to 2000.



Population Projections

The population projections completed as part of the land use planning process indicate that the NEQ is going to see continued growth over the next 20 plus years. 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 of the NEQ. Overall, the NEQ is expected to nearly double its population from an estimated 66,349 residents in 2004 to 132,641 in 2020. As indicated throughout other areas of this plan the growth projected for the next 20 years is very significant.

The following table illustrates these changes for each jurisdiction in the NEQ.

Municipality	2004 est	2020 projected	16-year difference	Overall change	Annual Growth Rate
Buffalo Township	1,920	1,770	-150	-8%	-0.5%
Monticello Township	3,574	3,724	150	4%	0.3%
Rockford Township	3,383	3,338	-45	-1%	-0.1%
City of Albertville	5,368	8,997	3,629	68%	3.3%
City of Buffalo	12,735	24,750	12,015	94%	4.2%
City of Hanover*	2,188	3,521	1,333	61%	3.0%
City of Monticello	10,211	23,371	13,160	129%	5.3%
City of Otsego	9,893	36,536	26,643	269%	8.5%
City of Rockford*	3,785	5,703	1,918	51%	2.6%
City of St. Michael	13,292	29,857	16,565	125%	5.2%
NE Quadrant Total	66,349	132,641	66,292	100%	4.6%

* Indicates portions in Wright County only

Note: The Township estimates are based on the State Demographer's estimates and past trends and can be impacted greatly by annexation from cities. Projections for communities this small are very susceptible to change, and can be affected by specific projects. The Townships are actually expected to have growth in rural residential populations, but the overall impact of this growth, and the loss due to annexation is impossible to accurately predict.

1.3 Existing Land Use/Land Cover and Environmental Features

The NEQ is a predominately rural in nature. Traditionally, much of the land in the Townships has been used for agricultural purposes. The cities in the NE Quadrant have traditionally witnessed very steady growth, but over the last 20 years the growth has become rapid. Because of this rapid growth, cities have been annexing from the Townships. There are also significant natural and environmental resources in NE Wright County associated with the many lakes, wetlands, and woods in the area.

The tables below and the map on page 16 show the existing land uses within the NE Quadrant.

Buffalo Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table		
	Acres	Percent
Cultivated Land	8,879	48.9%
Deciduous Forest	2,472	13.6%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	536	2.9%
Grassland	3,336	18.4%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (deciduous)	128	0.7%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	92	0.5%
Other Rural Developments	41	0.2%
Rural Residential Development Complex	108	0.6%
Urban or industrial	82	0.5%
Water	2,003	11.0%
Wetlands	490	2.7%
Total Acres	18,169	100.0

Monticello Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table		
	Acres	Percent
Conifer Forest	63	0.2%
Cultivated Land	13,540	52.2%
Deciduous Forest	3,909	15.1%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	592	2.3%
Grassland	3,775	14.6%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (deciduous)	237	0.9%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	57	0.2%
Other Rural Developments	21	0.1%
Rural Residential Development Complex	475	1.8%
Transitional Agricultural Land	25	0.1%
Urban or industrial	26	0.1%
Water	2,252	8.7%
Wetlands	953	3.7%
Total Acres	25,939	100.0

Rockford Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table		
	Acres	Percent
Cultivated Land	10,434	46.1%
Deciduous Forest	3,219	14.2%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	728	3.2%
Grassland	4,902	21.7%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (deciduous)	321	1.4%
Other Rural Developments	74	0.3%
Rural Residential Development Complex	552	2.4%
Unclassified	22	0.1%
Urban or industrial	70	0.3%
Water	1,362	6.0%
Wetlands	927	4.1%
Total Acres	22,614	100.0

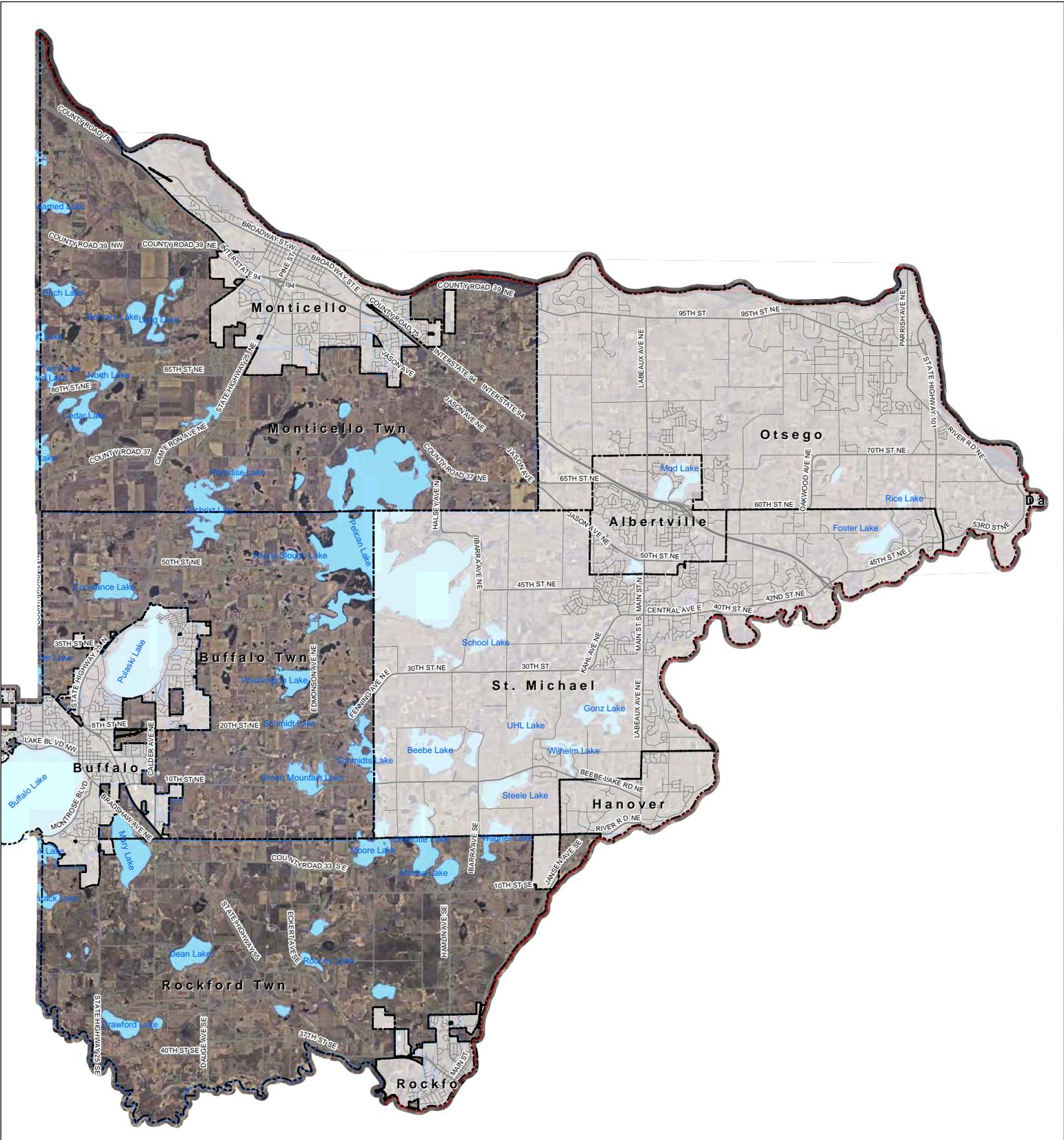
Map Analysis

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

The following is a list and description of the maps that were used to develop the future land use map for the NEQ.

Aerial Photograph

The aerial photograph was used to provide an aerial view of the NE Quadrant. For those experienced with such maps, many important land and water features and uses can be discerned from such maps.



Aerial Map

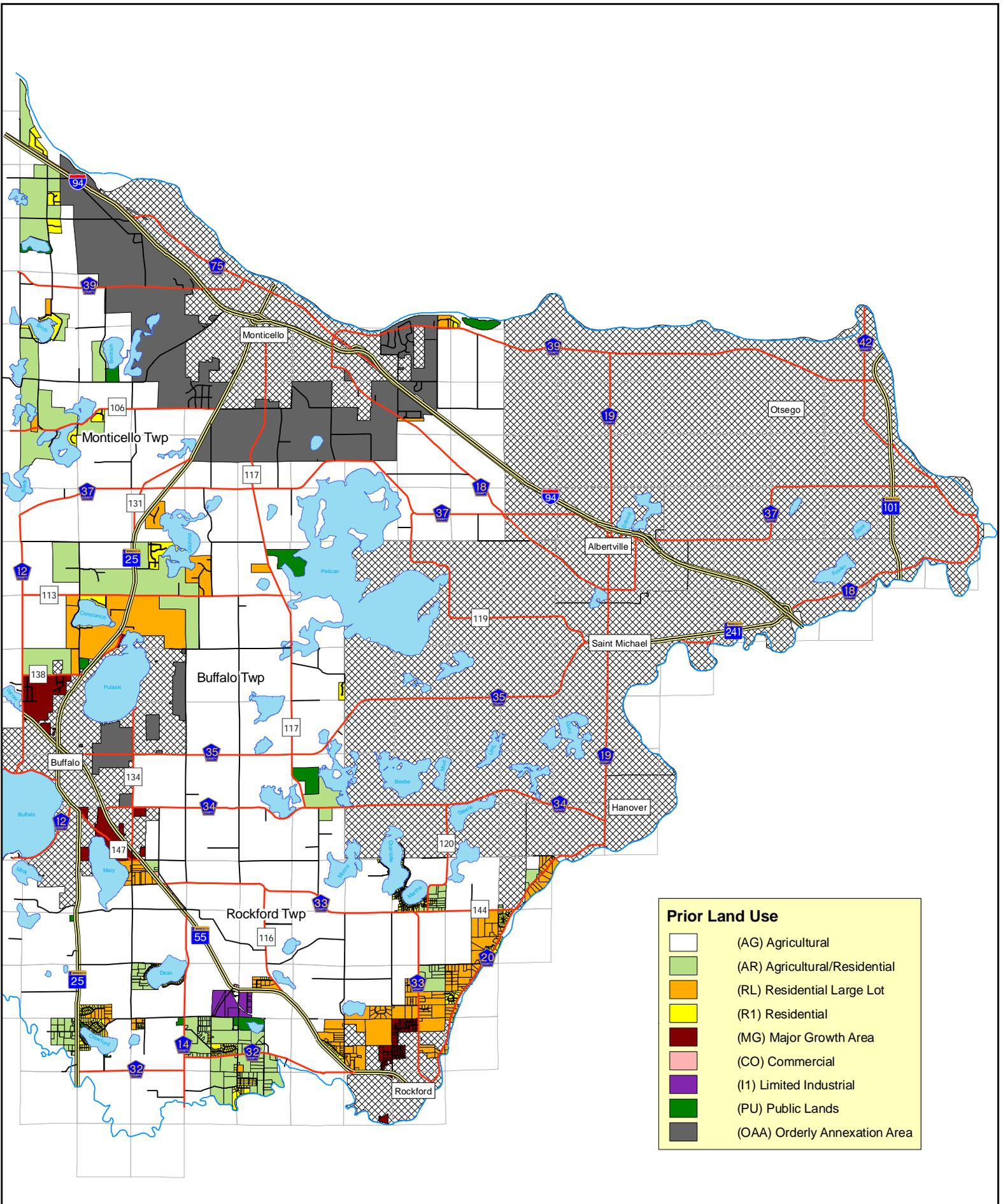
Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan



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Prior Land Use Map

The prior land use map indicates what the previous land use designations were for the NE Quadrant. This map was used as a starting point for the generation of the new NE Quadrant land use map. It simply shows the Township Land Use Plan maps existing at the start of the planning process in the context of the neighboring towns and cities.



Prior Land Use

- (AG) Agricultural
- (AR) Agricultural/Residential
- (RL) Residential Large Lot
- (R1) Residential
- (MG) Major Growth Area
- (CO) Commercial
- (I1) Limited Industrial
- (PU) Public Lands
- (OAA) Orderly Annexation Area



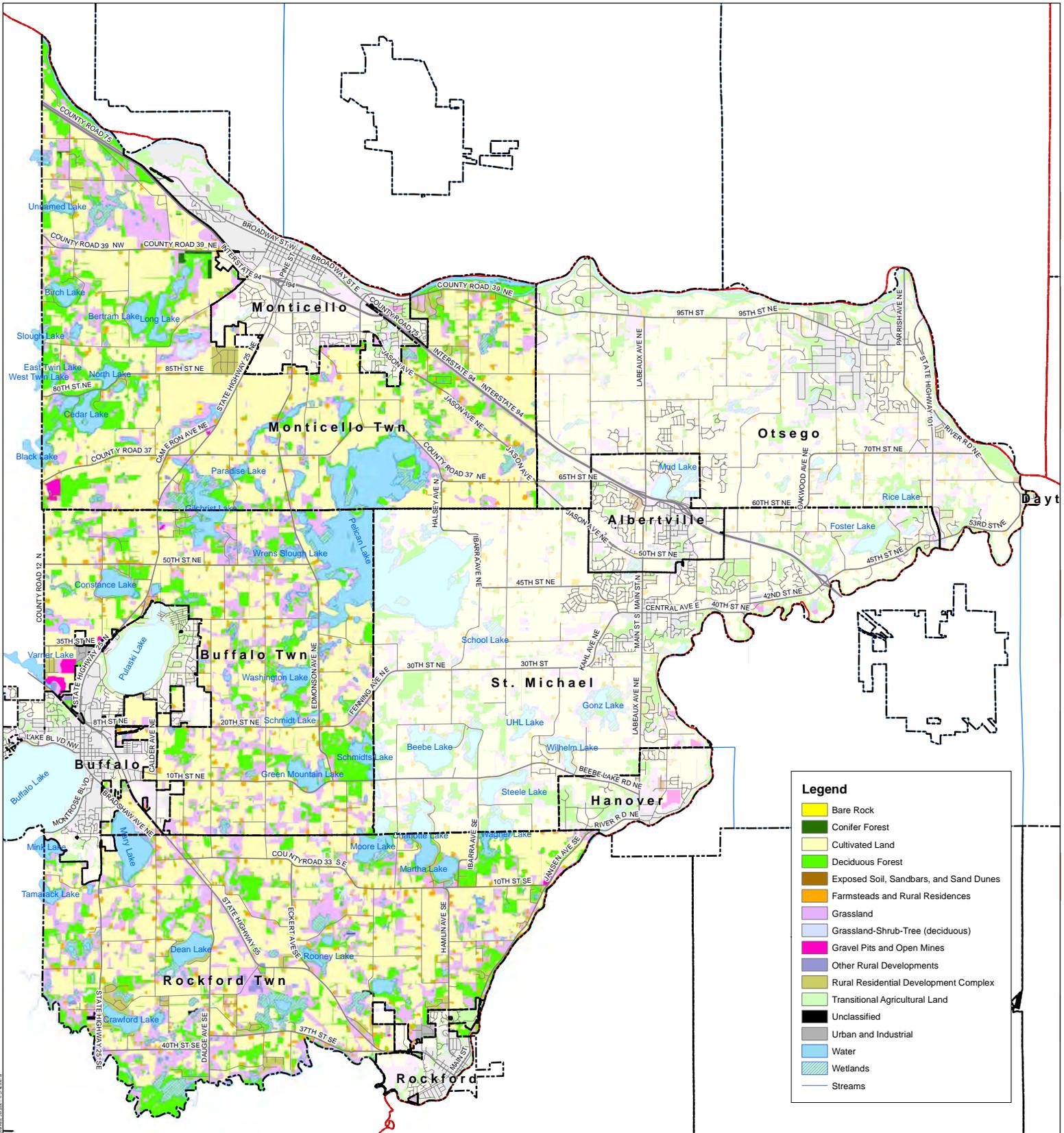
Prior Land Use Plan

Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan Map



Existing Land Use/Land Cover

This map indicated what the land use and land cover is for the NEQ. This map differs from the existing land use map listed above, in that it doesn't consider how the County has designated land uses, rather it shows what the actual land cover is. Some of the land use categories are cultivated land, deciduous forest, farmsteads and rural residents, grassland, gravel pits and open mines, rural residential development complex, water, and wetlands. There are several other categories but the aforementioned list gives a general overview of what the land use/land cover categories are.



Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan
Land Cover

0 3,000 6,000 9,000 Feet



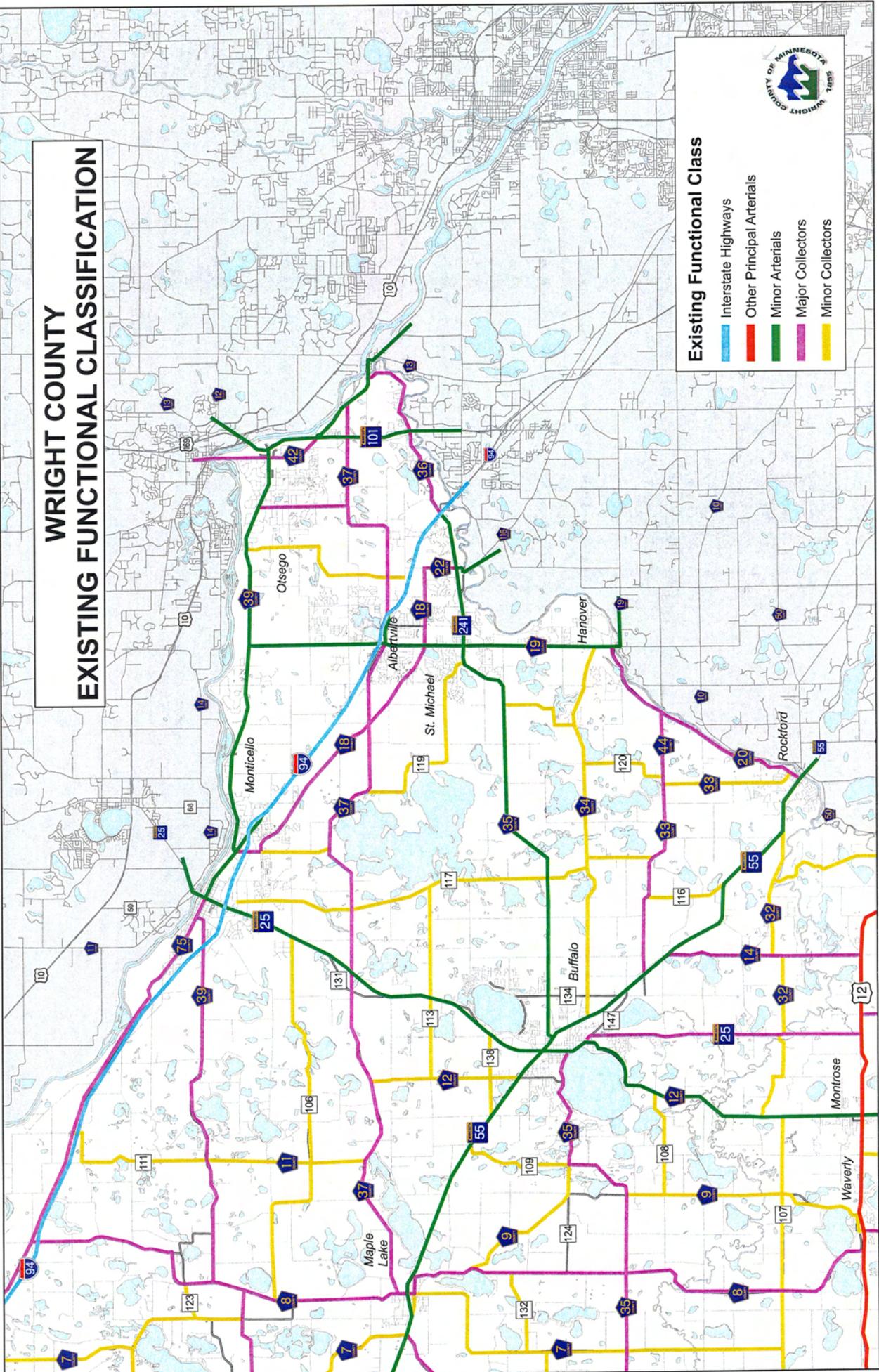
Existing Transportation System

The existing transportation system was referenced as the future land use map for the NEQ was being developed. Transportation is a very important component of land use planning and impacts from future development should take into account the affects they will have on the transportation system.

WRIGHT COUNTY EXISTING FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Existing Functional Class

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



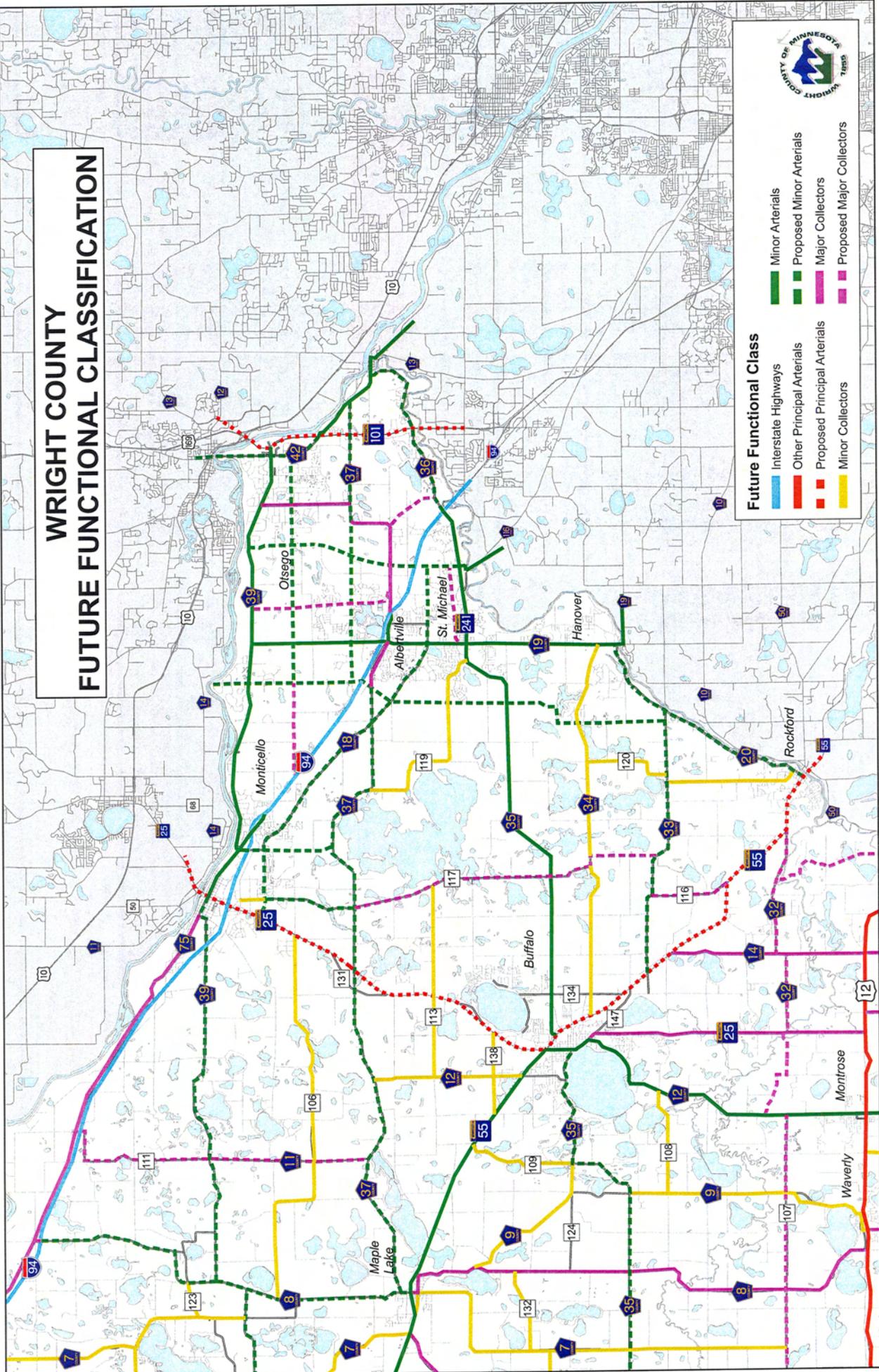
Future Transportation System

The future transportation system was also referenced as the future land use map for the NEQ was being developed. Transportation is a very important component of land use planning and impacts from future development should take into account the affects they will have on the transportation system.

WRIGHT COUNTY FUTURE FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

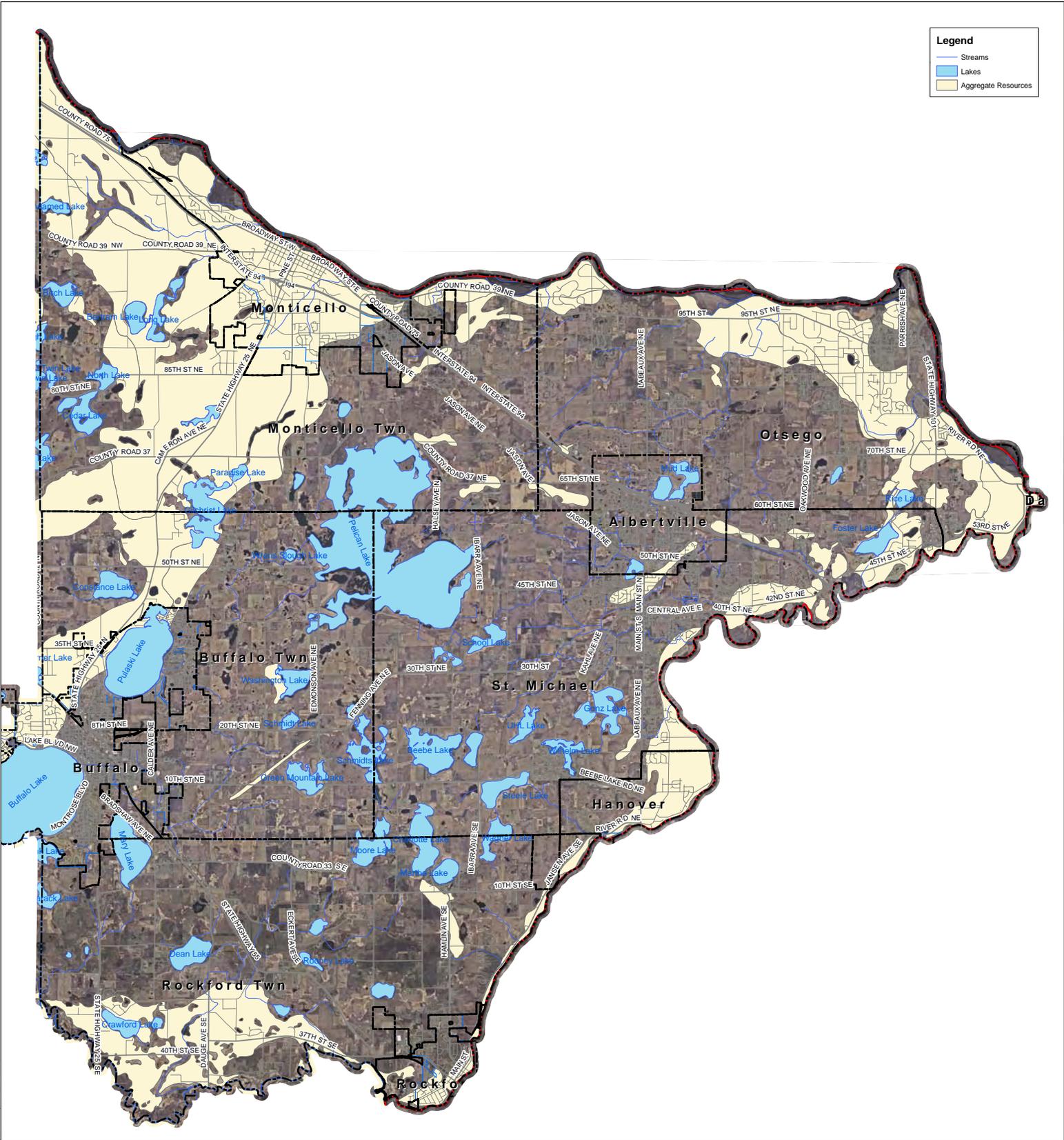


- Future Functional Class**
- Interstate Highways
 - Other Principal Arterials
 - Proposed Principal Arterials
 - Minor Collectors
 - Minor Arterials
 - Proposed Minor Arterials
 - Major Collectors
 - Proposed Major Collectors



Aggregate Resources

This map shows where all of the aggregate resources are located in the NE Quadrant. When developing the future land use map the goal was to protect aggregate resources for future use by not having intense development hinder future aggregate mining operations. Please refer to chapter 3 for detailed policies regarding aggregate resources.



Legend

- Streams
- Lakes
- Aggregate Resources



Aggregate Resources Map

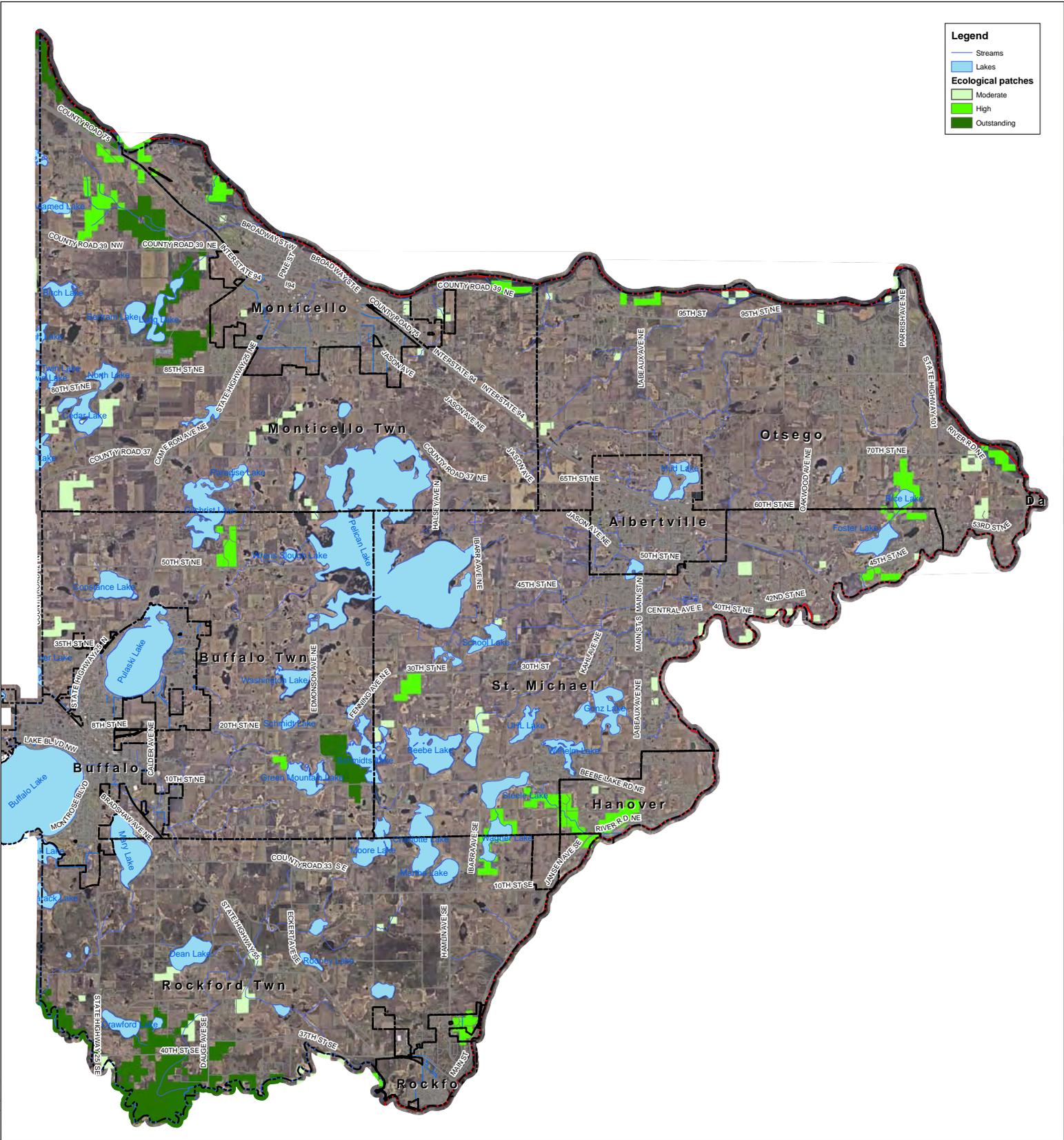
Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan



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Ecological Resources

This map highlights all of the ecologically sensitive areas in the NE Quadrant. During the public involvement process many residents said the ecological resources of Wright County were important to them. This map was used to determine the best land use for areas with ecological resources. Typically, low density development such as resource land or agriculture was designated for areas that have ecological resources present.



Legend

- Streams
- Lakes
- Ecological patches**
 - Moderate
 - High
 - Outstanding



Ecological Resources Map

Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan



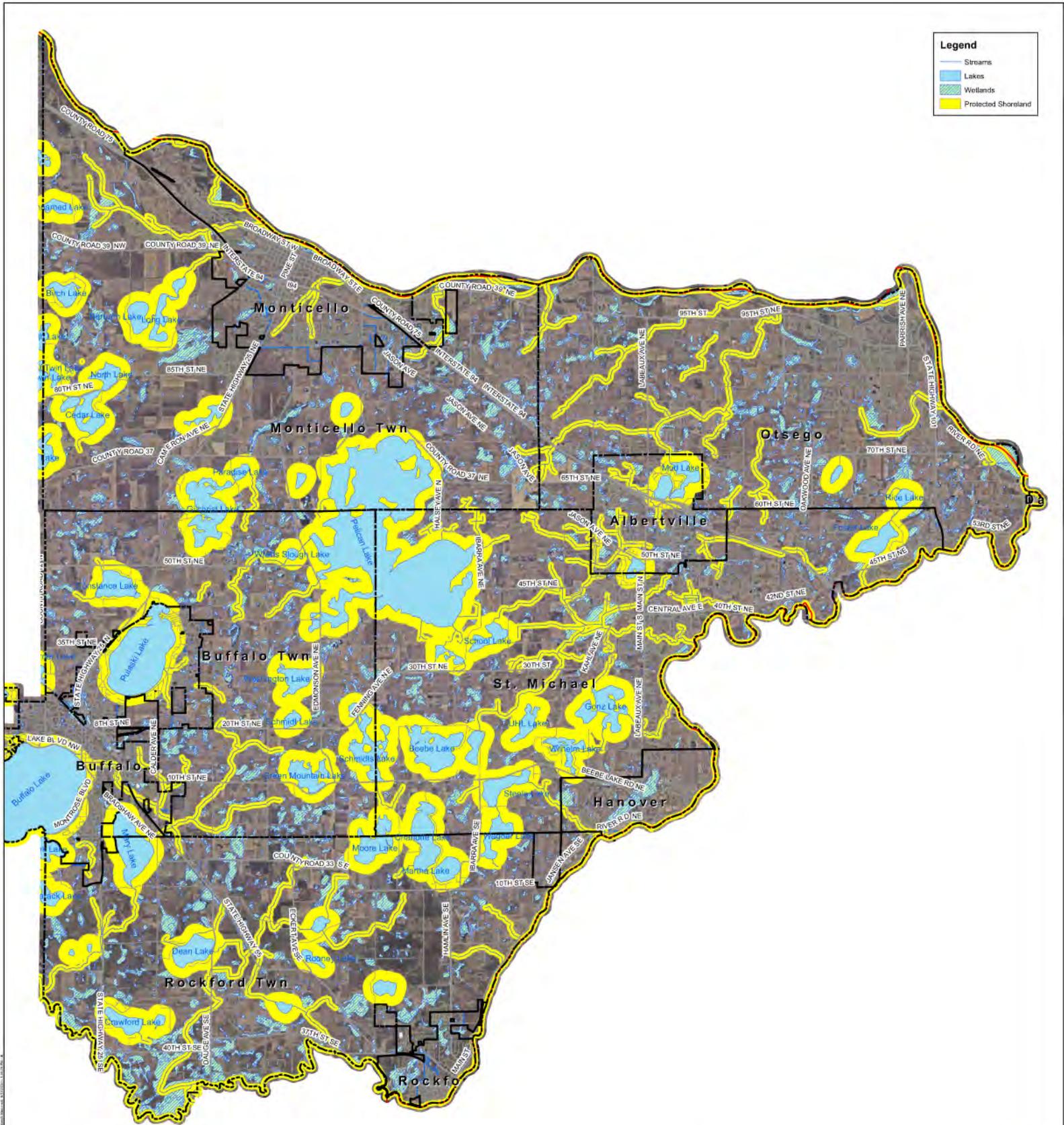
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Lakes and Wetlands

This map simply indicates where the lakes and wetlands of NE Wright County are located. This information is helpful when determining land uses for specific areas.

Legend

-  Streams
-  Lakes
-  Wetlands
-  Protected Shoreland



Lakes and Wetlands Map

Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan



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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.

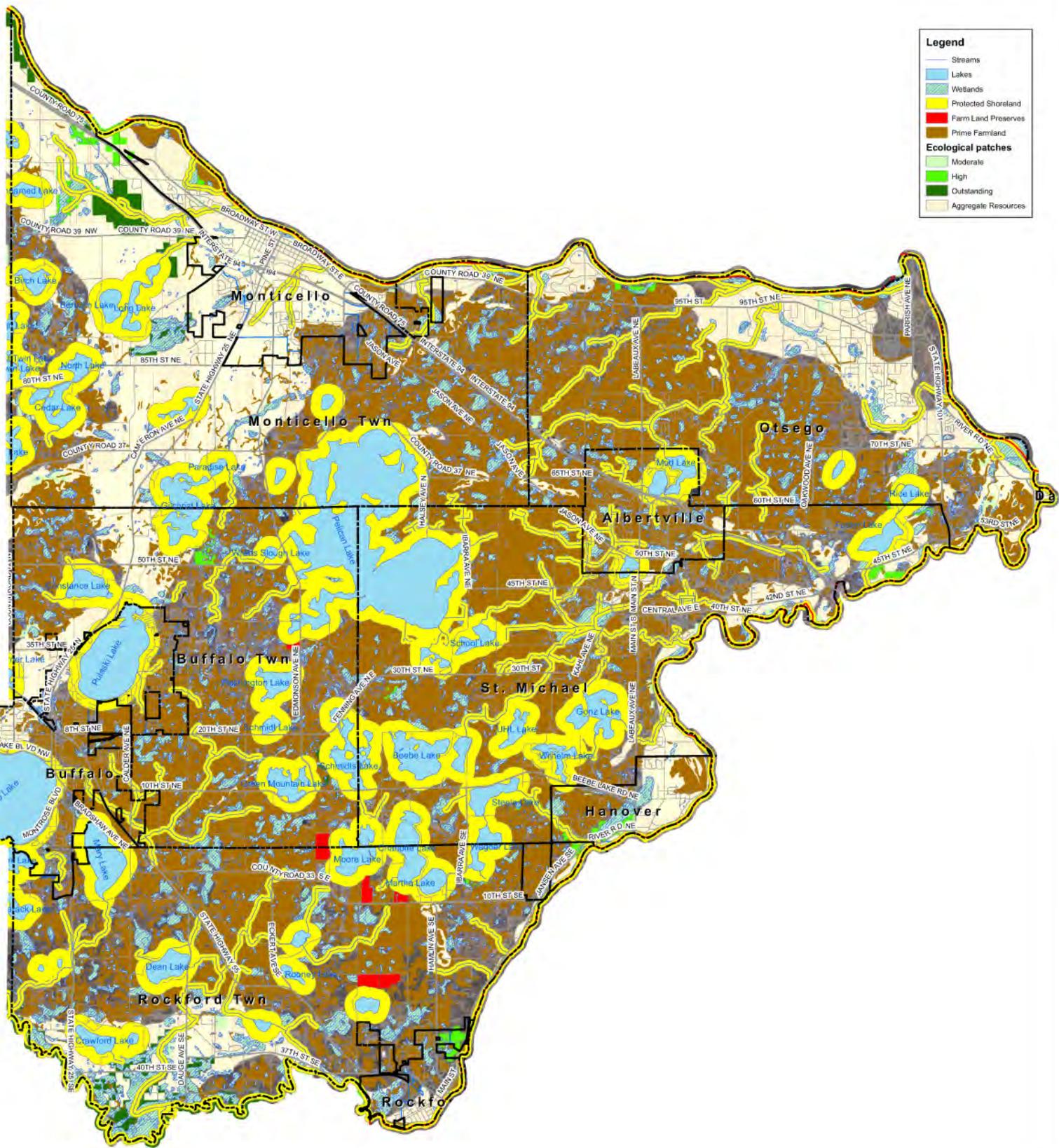
In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively 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.

Resource Overlay

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, and also includes ecological patches of moderate, high, and outstanding ecological resources. This map is an important tool because all of the resources can be looked at collectively.



Legend	
	Streams
	Lakes
	Wetlands
	Protected Shoreland
	Farm Land Preserves
	Prime Farmland
Ecological patches	
	Moderate
	High
	Outstanding
	Aggregate Resources



Resource Overlay Map

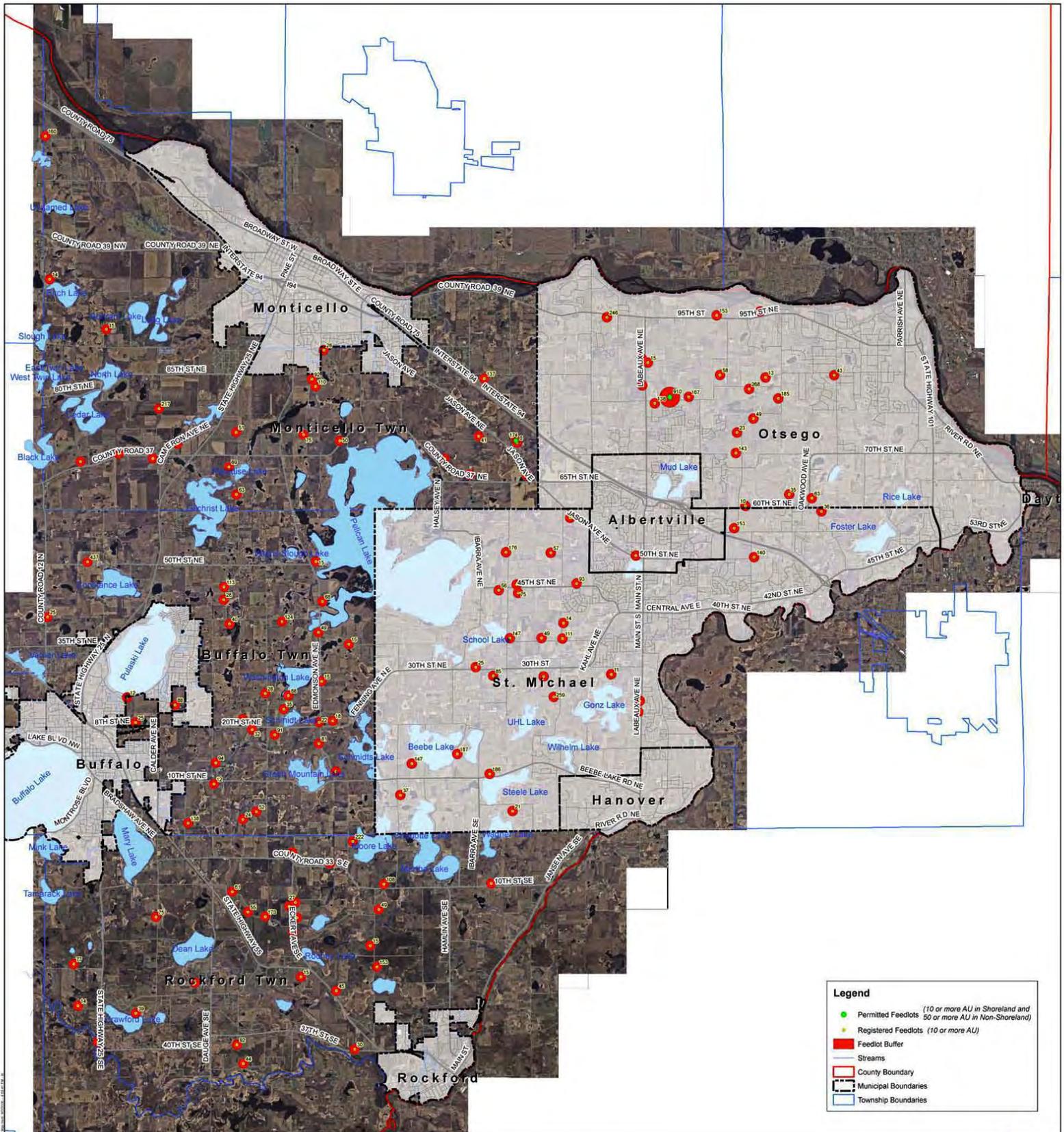
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Feedlot Map

The Feedlot Map indicates where all of the feedlots are located in NE Wright County. It is important to note where these feedlots are located so as not to locate inappropriate uses too close to feedlot operations.



Feedlot Map

Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan

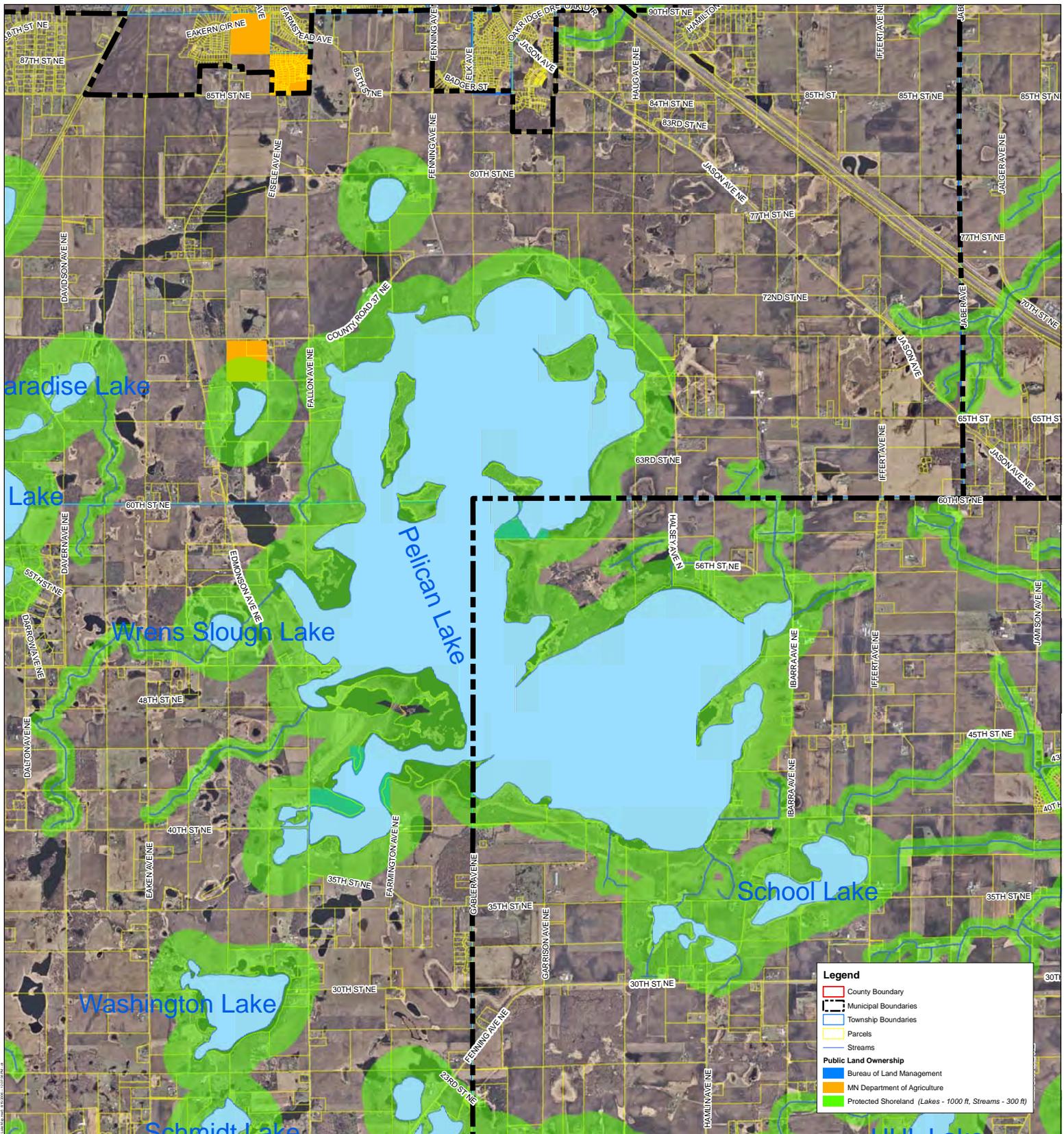
0 3,000 6,000 9,000 Feet



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Pelican Lake Map

This map highlights the Pelican Lake area and includes a shoreland buffer area in which development should be limited. The Pelican Lake area is important because of its high environmental quality, particularly as it relates to waterfowl production and habitat.



Pelican Lake Area

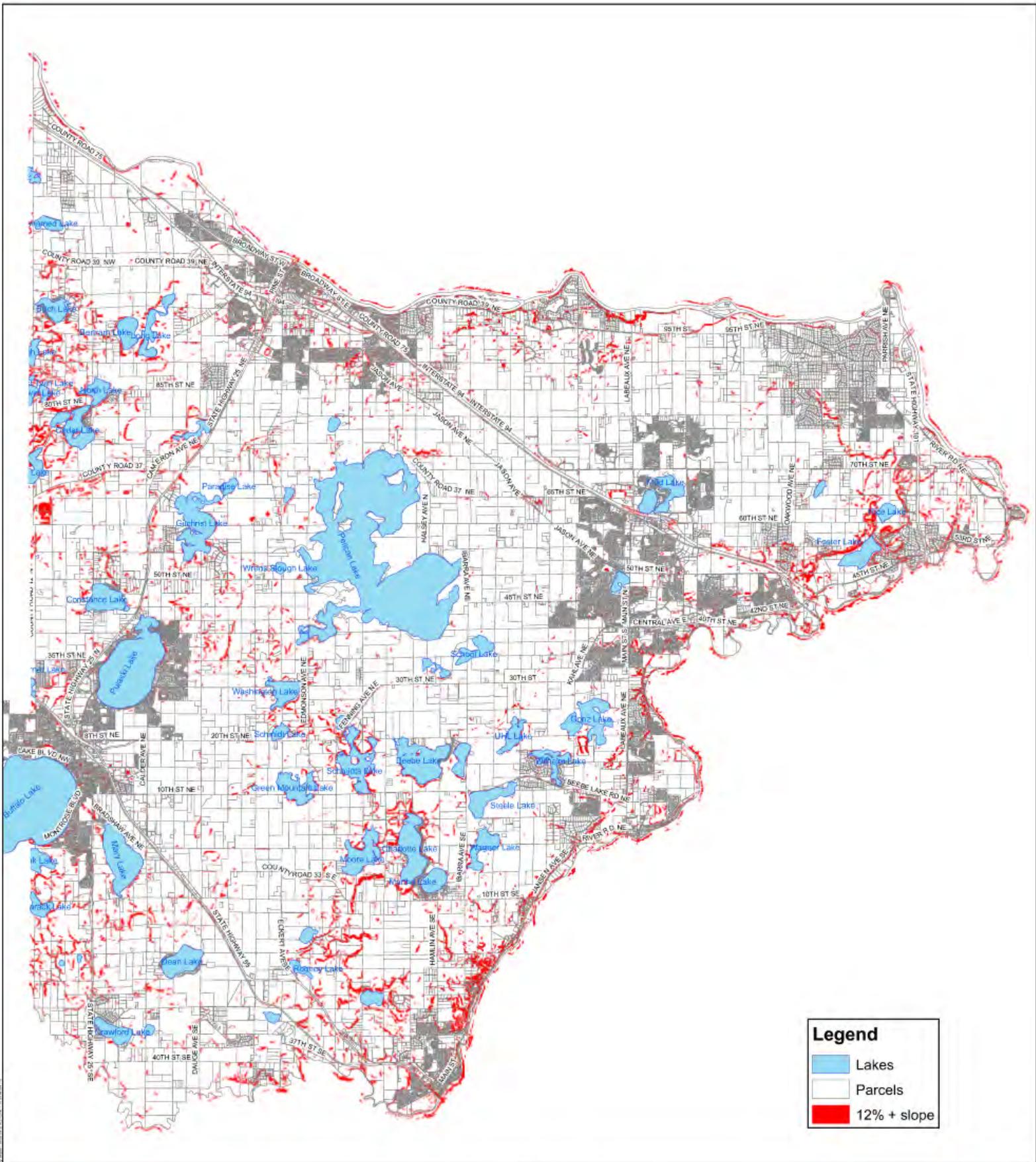
Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan



Ekola & Associates, LLC

Steep Slopes

The steep slope map indicates slopes that are 12 percent or greater. Development on steep slopes should be prohibited as there is a great chance for soil erosion on these slopes.



Legend

- Lakes
- Parcels
- 12% + slope



Steep Slopes
Wright County Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan

0 10,000 Feet



Ekola & Associates, L.L.C.

2.0 Plan Purpose

The purpose of this NEQ Land Use Plan is to provide an objective study of the NEQ'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, water resources, 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 NEQ 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 Buffalo, Monticello, and Rockford 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 NEQ 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 majority of the unincorporated land area in the NEQ is agricultural and/or open space in nature, a major thrust of this Land Use Plan is toward the protection and preservation of agricultural and open space land. 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 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. In recent years, agriculture and agricultural, 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 NE Wright County have placed a high value on 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 NEQ 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 for the foreseeable 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 NEQ 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.

3.0 Public Process

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Task Force
- 3.3 SWOT Analysis Workshop
- 3.4 Public Meeting #2
- 3.5 Additional Public Input
- 3.5 Conclusion

3.1 Introduction

There were several opportunities for public involvement during this planning process. First, there was a large public meeting held in March 2006 to discuss strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) in the NEQ. There also was an additional public meeting in August 2006 where the public had an opportunity to comment on the development of the plan. In addition to the public meetings mentioned above, there were approximately twelve Task Force meetings that citizens attended. Lastly, a project website facilitated citizen input and the ability to review documents online.

3.2 Task Force

The NEQ Land Use Plan Task Force played an integral part in the development of this Land Use Plan. The Task Force typically met the first Monday of every month from February 2006 through January of 2007. The different components of the Land Use Plan were discussed at great length at these meetings and the recommendations of the Task Force developed the “draft” plan that was submitted to the Wright County Planning Commission for review. The first several Task Force meetings allowed for public comment and participation, however as time progressed it was more productive to limit the meeting discussion to Task Force members and have the public comment through letters or the project website.

3.3 SWOT Analysis Workshop

A SWOT analysis meeting was held at the Rockford Town Hall on March 23, 2006. The purpose of the meeting was to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the NEQ. The meeting participants were given a presentation that outlined the goals of the meeting and a description of the SWOT analysis process. Strengths and weaknesses are considered internal factors and opportunities and threats are considered external factors.

SWOT Analysis Process

Participants were broken down into small groups of eight to ten people, and each table was facilitated by staff or a Task Force member. Participants were asked the following questions to determine the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the project area (SWOT Analysis):

First answer the following questions individually, jot down short phrases to summarize your thoughts.

Next, using the small group discussion process, go-around your table and ask each member of your table to share one of their thoughts for each question.

Third, discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as a small group.

STRENGTHS – Why do you live in the NEQ? What do people enjoy doing here? What types of development (rural, urban) are worth encouraging? What are the benefits of agriculture and the natural environment?

WEAKNESSES – What improvements are needed in the NEQ? Why wouldn't someone want to live here? What jobs, if any, are available for Wright County and neighboring residents?

OPPORTUNITIES – What is unique here? What, if any, positive impacts does growth have on your community? Are there any untapped resources to assist reaching goals? Are there ways to work together with your neighboring communities?

THREATS – What obstacles does your community face? What, if any, negative impacts does growth have on your community? If nothing were to change, is there something that will become worse? Are there changes happening elsewhere that will impact your community?

The following are the results, with responses listed in order of the number of votes received by participants. Only those responses that receive votes are listed here; many other responses were received and catalogued.

Meeting Summary – Themes

The following were the major themes that came out of the SWOT Analysis workshop:

- **Rural Lifestyle and Quality of Life**
 - Lower density, rural lifestyle

- Privacy
 - Open land/greenspace
 - Small towns/small communities
 - Low Crime
 - Good area for families
- **Green/Open Space Preservation**
 - Open space associated with agriculture
 - Importance of setting aside land for open space preservation
 - Preserve remaining “big woods”
 - Outdoor recreational activities
- **Access to Quality Jobs**
 - There is a lack of quality, high paying jobs
 - There is a need for more industrial jobs
 - Easier, more direct access to jobs
- **Balance Annexation and Development Planning and Coordination**
 - Growth should be driven by personal values, not just by money
 - Carefully plan and implement annexation
 - Focus on long range and coordinated planning
 - Proper planning will preserve NE Wright County character

- **Transportation**

- Residents value good access to local and regional transportation system
- If not resolved, congestion will continue to worsen
- Transit is lacking in the area

- **Proximity to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area**

- Rural area with access to Metro area
- The Metro area provides higher paying jobs
- Real estate/property values continue to rise
- NE Quadrant is close to shopping and entertainment

The SWOT Analysis was completed at the start of the planning process, and was very well-attended by a wide variety of people from the entire NEQ. There were no proposals for land use at this time, and 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 SWOT analysis has been the primary guide for County Staff and the Consultant Team in the preparation of the Plan. A more detailed review of the raw data results is included as an appendix.

3.4 Public Meeting #2

The second public meeting was held on August 16, 2006 in Monticello. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on project progress and to gain additional input. Attendees were broken up by Township and asked to answer the following questions:

1. What land use categories should be included in your township?
2. What land use categories should not be located in your township?
3. What specific natural resource features should be protected in your township or area?
4. What specific areas in your township should be protected for outdoor recreational activities (hunting, boating hiking, bird watching, etc.)?
5. What specific areas in your township area should be protected for large-scale agricultural uses (animal and cropland)?
6. What specific areas in your township should be protected for small-scale agriculture (hobby farms, commercial gardening, organic food producers, etc.)?
7. What specific areas do you think should be developed into rural residential development?
8. What specific areas do you think could be developed for commercial or industrial land uses?
9. What specific areas do you think should be considered major growth areas for the adjacent cities?

As might be expected, this meeting was not as well attended as the “plan kick-off” SWOT Analysis meeting. The purpose was not to gauge overall public sentiment, but rather provide an update and opportunity for review and more specific comment on the planning process. The majority of those in attendance were local officials and landowners with specific concerns. Such input and review is very valuable and was also taken into consideration in the preparation of this plan. As with the SWOT Analysis, further detail is included in an appendix.

3.5 Key Interviews

Interviews with key stakeholders were also conducted during the land use planning process. The interviews were completed over the telephone by staff at SEH, Inc. The interviews were done in order to:

- Obtain a wide variety of input from both Township and City representatives.
- Obtain candid input that may be difficult to receive in a public meeting.
- Ensure that the consultants, SEH and Ekola and Associates, have a full and consistent understanding of the issues facing the NEQ.

The following questions were asked:

Community of Organization Context:

- What are some major issues in northeastern Wright County?
- What major projects, public or private, are planned and underway?
- What are the primary roles of your organization?
- What are your organization’s major goals and policies regarding future growth and development?
- What should be the County’s role on these issues?

Land Use: Protection, Conservation, Growth and Development

- Should the County preserve and protect open space areas and natural resources features?
- If yes, what areas should be preserved? Please be as specific as possible. Why should these sites be protected? How should they be protected?
- Should the County adopt land use policies that encourage and promote the preservation of its agricultural land?
- If yes, what areas should be protected? Again, please be specific. Why should these areas be protected? How should they be protected?
- Should the County adopt land use policies that guide the location of rural residential development and feedlots in order to minimize land use conflicts?
- If yes, in what areas should rural residential be located? Why should these sites be developed?
- Should the County encourage residential, commercial and industrial development to locate within cities where public utilities are most likely to be available?

Transportation System

- Does the highway system in the County provide adequate access or traffic flow?
- If no, what generally should be done to improve access or traffic flow?

- Are there specific sites or areas in the northeast quadrant of Wright County that have traffic safety problems?
- If yes, please list specific problems and locations:
- Are there groups of people that have special transportation needs in the County that are currently not met?
- If yes, what groups and how and where would you suggest that service be provided?
- Other transportation comments:

Intergovernmental Cooperation and Implementation

- How should the County work with cities and townships to guide growth and land development activities?
- What intergovernmental relations and procedures are working well? What is not working well?
- How should we address these issues? Are there any specific projects or programs that you feel should be implemented by the County to address these issues?

The following people were interviewed:

- Lauren Bodin – City of Buffalo
- Shannon Bye – Monticello Township
- Dan Buchholz – City of Hanover
- Nancy Carswell – City of Rockford
- Greg Eckblad – Rockford Township
- Ken Felger – Rockford Township
- Larry Kruse – City of Albertville
- Dan Licht – City of Otsego, Planning Consultant
- Don Schmidt – Buffalo Township
- Judy Weldele – Buffalo Township

The following people were scheduled to be interviewed but the interviews did not take place for various reasons:

- Joseph Doyle – Monticello Township
- Jeff O'Neill – City of Monticello
- Marc Wiegler – City of St. Michael

The interviews were one of many tools used along with the other public involvement items listed above, that allowed Wright County and the consultants to gauge public sentiment regarding land use and development issues in the NEQ.

3.6 Additional Public Input

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 NEQ Planning process.

In addition, County staff received letters, phone calls, and visits from concerned citizens that wanted to provide input on the planning process.

3.7 Conclusion

All of the public input listed above has facilitated the development of the NEQ Land Use Plan. Citizen involvement is a critical component of any planning process. Without this valuable input the development of this plan would not have been possible.

4.0 Land Use Plan

- 4.1 Purpose/Introduction
- 4.2 Overall Goals and Policies
- 4.3 Specific Rural, Cities, and Transition Areas Goals and Policies
- 4.4 Land Use Definitions
- 4.5 Future 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 NEQ, as well as 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 the previous chapter, as well as input from the public and the NEQ Task Force. 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 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 Major Growth 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 provision and potential "re division" 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 offset 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 and 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 as outlined in Chapter IV.

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 Agricultural Districts, 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 Agricultural Districts.

As has been demonstrated throughout this plan, there is no need for development in Agricultural Districts. 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 Agricultural Districts, 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 create 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 which 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 (P.U.D.) and residential P.U.D. 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. It is often possible, however, through innovative or alternative design considerations to better suit any development to 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 NEQ.
- Work cooperatively with townships and cities in the NEQ 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 support 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 NEQ 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 NE Wright County Transportation Plan, as well as the Highway 55 Corridor Coalition.

4.3 Specific Rural, Cities, and Transition Areas Goals and Policies

Overall Policy Statement

The County's position on land use in the NEQ is that urban development should occur within the cities of the NEQ 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 area encompasses the rural, agricultural, aggregate resources, and resource land area of the NEQ. 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 this Plan, this section includes resource lands and aggregate resource lands.

- Cities – The Cities of the NEQ 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 NEQ. 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. 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 NEQ. 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, aggregate resources, rural residential and resource lands.

Goal: To preserve and protect the rural open space character of the townships, including agriculture, aggregate resources, 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;
- Manage aggregate resources;
- 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 ADT (average daily trips), 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, either immediately or over the long term, service levels greater than those needed 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, aggregate, and resource lands area allow one dwelling unit per $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ section (40 acres). The rural residential district allows one dwelling unit per 10 acres, with some opportunity for slightly higher density with a planned unit development (PUD). These densities should be followed to retain 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 is another class of land uses 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 NEQ 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 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 or natural resources. The intent of this district is to highlight these resource lands as being special, unique, and worthy of protection for future generations. The housing density allowed would be one unit per 40 acres just as it is in the Agricultural District. Agriculture would be an allowable use in this district, as would most uses in an Agricultural zone, provided that there is minimal impact on the resource. Conditional uses should be reviewed with the intent of protecting the resource and 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 Agricultural which is one unit per 40 acres. The existing Special Protection Shoreland Zone surrounding Pelican Lake should be maintained, and the City of St. Michael is encouraged to adopt similar measures in that jurisdiction.

Resource Land Policy 3: Siting

The siting of buildings when development occurs on resource lands should be done so as to minimize the impact on the resource as much as possible.

Aggregate Area Policies

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 rises 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. 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 conflict 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 soil erosion, sediment, dust, and noise control plans, as well as making 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 activities on sites include the replacement of topsoil and plantings to retard soil erosion, to the extent that the site "will not adversely affect the surrounding land or future development." The County should also study this issue further and determine if gravel mining should be considered an interim use rather than a conditional use permit. 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 most instances mining will severely limit 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. 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 close 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 addressed. Such a plan should identify neighbors and neighboring land uses, the potential for impacts and the nature of the impacts foreseen, and proposals to mitigate 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 area shown on the future land use map. 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 what it can be used for. It would be helpful if Wright County could utilize the gravel tax money for gravel pit restoration on abandoned gravel pit sites, but only after exhausting all possible means to require the landowner or operator to comply with the reclamation requirements.

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. The NEQ is expected to grow from an estimated 66,000 persons in 2004 to 133,000 by 2020, which is about a 100 percent increase in population.

A population increase of this magnitude 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 demands is to direct the development to areas where services already exist – the incorporated areas of the NEQ. This County has historically directed growth toward cities with its agricultural-based land use plan. 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;
- 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 NEQ.

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 impact on not only 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 NEQ of Wright County is expecting significant growth over the next 15-20 years. 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.

The cities of the NEQ 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 result from that process as 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 urban densities such as residential densities of at least two units per acre or higher.

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.
- Limited opportunities for landowners in the Transition Area who so 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 such time as 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 for these areas that will specify land use policies and plans. 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. 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. 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 which 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 an unsewered area) 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 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. 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 which do not require urban services. Purpose is to provide for certain industrial uses which 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 are otherwise appropriate and land near urban areas with a high suitability to industrial use. Appropriate zoning includes the I-1 district.

Transition Areas The NEQ of Wright County is expecting significant growth over the next 15-20 years. 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.

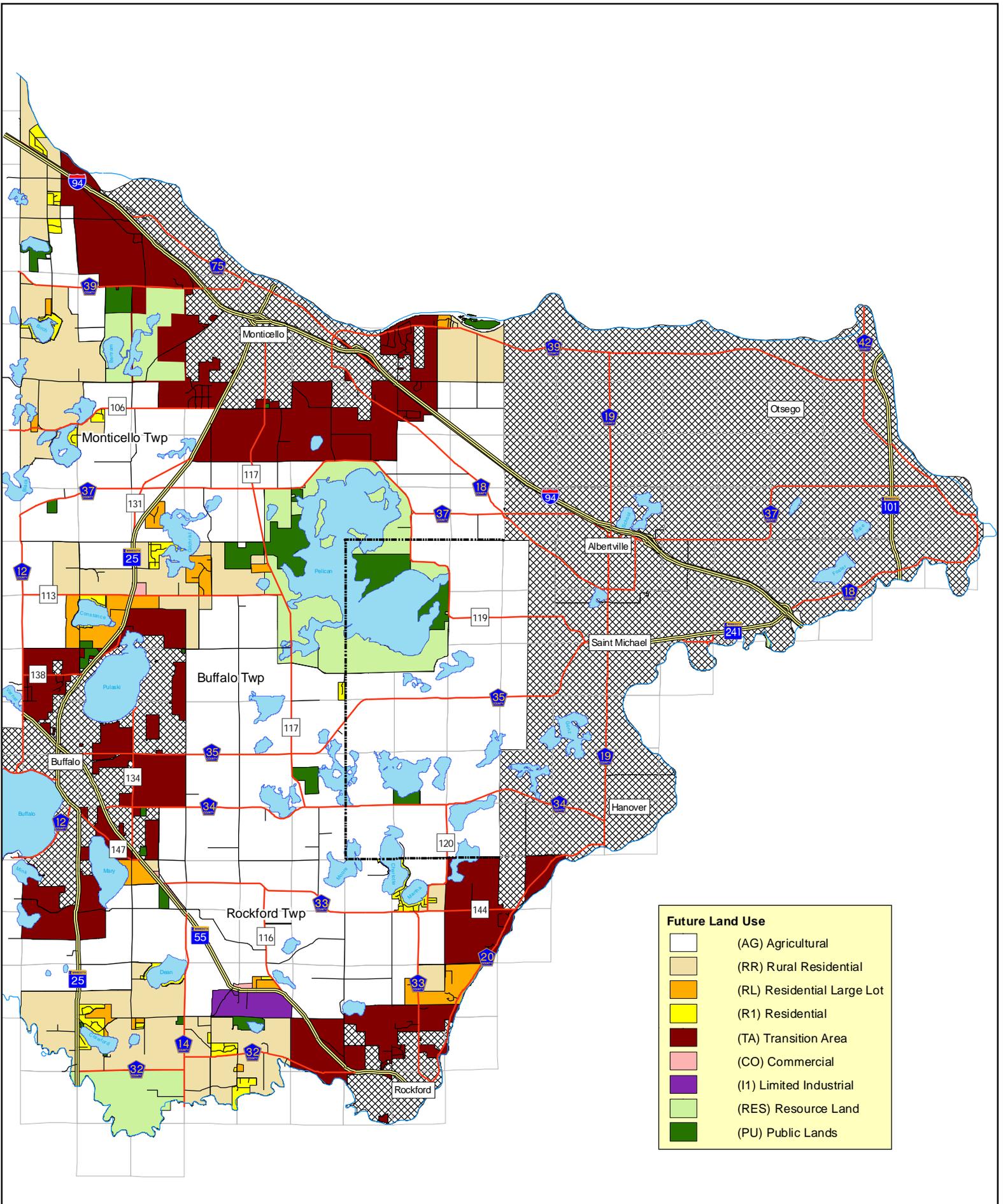
Resource Land This land use classification identifies land that has unique environmental or natural resources. The intent of this district is to protect these resource lands as being special and unique. The housing density allowed would be one unit per 40 acres just as it is in the Agricultural District. 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 Future Land Use Map

The following map illustrates graphically the future land uses of the NEQ of Wright County. The definitions in the previous section correspond with the future land use map and should be referenced to determine the definition of each land use category.



**Northeast Quadrant Land Use Plan Map
Adopted July 31, 2007**



SEH
Ekola & Associates, LLC

5.0 Administration and Implementation

- 5.1 Administration
- 5.2 Implementation
- 5.3 “1 per 20” Land Use District
- 5.4 Transition Areas
- 5.5 Resource Land
- 5.6 Aggregate Resources
- 5.7 Conclusion

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 minor 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.

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. Further, both ordinances provide for penalties for violations.

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 Specialist, and the Building Inspector. 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, meeting with and advising the public on planning and zoning questions 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 for these items to be implemented as official county policy.

5.3 “1 per 20” Land Use District

The idea of creating a new, 1 unit per 20-acre land use district surfaced during Task Force meetings while discussing the future of the rural area. It has been offered as a possible compromise between the Agricultural residential density (“1 per 40”) and the residential districts. There is currently not a zoning district that allows this density. The County would have to create a new zoning district that would fall in-between the existing Agricultural/Residential (A/R) zone (1:10) and the General Agricultural (AG) zone (1:40). As might be expected, there are differing opinions on the validity of the need for and impact of this proposal. In general, it can be stated that Buffalo and Rockford Township representatives support the concept, while Monticello Township and the City of St. Michael do not. The other cities represented did not express strong reservations either way. This issue has been discussed at length at Task Force meetings but needs further study to determine the potential impacts, as well as further public review.

Advocates of “1 per 20” suggest that the County’s NEQ has urbanized already to the point where it may not be practical to try to protect farming by limiting residential development to “1 per 40”. They suggest that the NEQ is unique due to its location adjacent to the Twin Cities Metro Area, as well as the multiple points of highway access to the metro. With an aging farm population, rising real estate values and the difficulty posed by many tax laws to transfer farmland as farmland, it has been suggested that farmers actively involved in commercial farm operations need more options for the use of the

land than current AG zoning allows. Some feel that a new “1 per 20” district may offer hope of preserving the rural atmosphere while allowing the conversion from commercial agriculture to more non-traditional forms of farming, horse operations, vineyards and other specialty crops, mixed with residential development that will still be at a relatively low-density.

On the other hand, there are also concerns about the potential impact this proposal may have, both in the NEQ, and Countywide. Further divisions and residential development in agricultural areas can make modern farming practices more difficult, and raise conflicts between residents and farms. The concept potentially doubles the residential density, as compared to the current Agricultural District, and in areas where the level of services needed by a growing population may not be adequate. Another concern is that the potential for further development in agricultural areas will act primarily to increase the property values and pressures on farmers to sell residential lots, thus hastening the loss rather than preserving farmland and increasing the pressure for the land division and development in the rural area.

If this concept were to become reality, the term “Rural” may be the way to describe it. The Agricultural District could remain as it is today (1:40) and the Rural Residential District would also remain the same (1:10). Therefore, a new “Rural” District could describe land that is not necessarily suited to long-term agricultural uses, but is also located so as to not be suited to be developed as densely as the Rural Residential areas. Most likely, the current Agricultural District in the Plan would be divided further into separate Agricultural and Rural districts. Further study would allow specific criteria to be set for this land use district, but some uses that may be appropriate include: equestrian operations, berry farms, orchards, vineyards, organic farms, hobby farms, and other related uses as well as traditional agricultural uses. It should also be noted that most cities in the NEQ agree that 1:20 density will not harm future expansion of cities, while anything denser than 1:20 would or could harm future city growth. However, it is also important to note that if the County implements a 1:20 land use district it may increase the pressure on cities and all townships that currently have 1:40 land use districts to convert to 1:20 in the future.

The recommendation for the 1:20 land use district is that further study and public involvement be completed in the next 12 to 18 months. If a new “Rural” District is created, this plan will need to be amended to split the Agricultural district, or some other implementation plan developed. There is

currently not a zoning district that can facilitate this type of development, and that should be drafted and reviewed before such a plan is implemented. Specific criteria should also be created that sets forth criteria for land that is going to be in the 1:20 “Rural” District. After this concept is further studied and if it is deemed appropriate by the County Board and all affected Townships, a new zoning district would have to be added to the County zoning program to facilitate this type of land use.

5.4 Transition Areas

The NEQ of Wright County is expecting continued, significant growth for the foreseeable future. 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 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.

The development of the Transition Areas has been perhaps the most difficult aspect of the planning process. Historically, there has been animosity and conflict between some cities and townships regarding annexation. Monticello Township and the City of Monticello resolved a long-standing and very contentious dispute by developing an Orderly Annexation Area (OAA) Agreement to help plan and manage growth in and around the City of Monticello. That agreement was completed prior to this Plan. This Plan recommends that other cities and townships create OAA’s in order to plan and manage growth at the edge of township and city boundaries. Such agreements can offer stability and assurance to both units of government and the landowners in the transition areas, by establishing criteria, rules and conditions for annexation and development to occur. Otherwise, every annexation proposal is ad hoc, with no ability to predict an outcome based on established criteria other than the vague direction in state law.

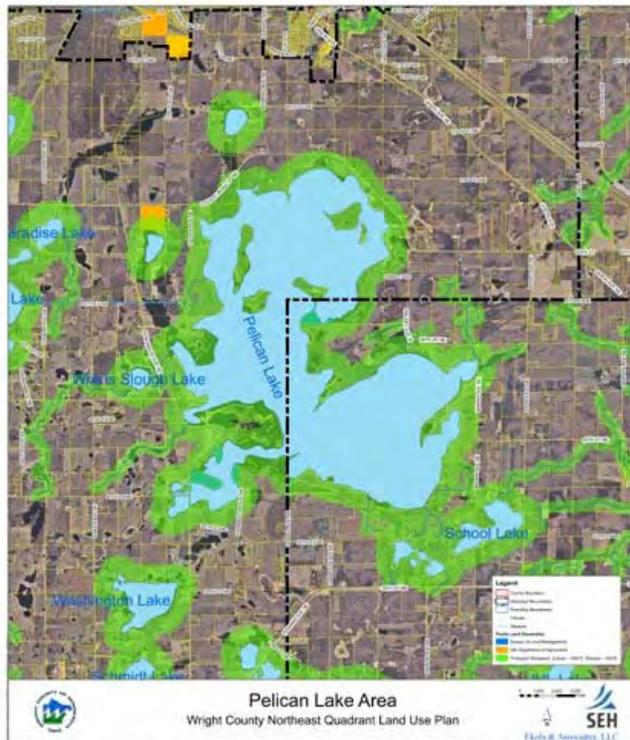
It is important to note that until an OAA is established, this Plan proposes that existing zoning for the Transition Area will remain in place. Such policy is meant to avoid a rush of large-lot development that might precede any agreement and harm the long-term interests of the community. It is also 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 OAA's 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.

Rockford Township has voiced a concern that if land outside City limits is currently zoned low density (1:40), then the Cities of Rockford and Hanover may have little incentive to facilitate an OAA because the land will remain undeveloped and ready for urban development anyway. On the other hand, both cities have expressed a long-standing interest in an OAA agreement, because it provides better assurance for infrastructure planning, assures both landowners and potential developers that terms and timing for annexation are set, and avoids the potential controversy that can occur with annexation. County policy will be to encourage and assist both Townships and Cities to reach such agreements as soon as possible after completion of this Plan. If such agreements are simply not possible, then the County Board will have to consider the need to amend the Plan again, most likely in conjunction with final decisions regarding the "1 per 20" issue.

5.5 Resource Land

“Resource lands” have been identified on northeast study area maps. Significant units of resource lands have been designated along the Crow River in Rockford Township and Bertram Lake in Monticello Township. However, the largest unit is around Pelican Lake. The intent of the Resource Lands District is to highlight the designated areas as special, unique, and worthy of protection for future generations. The Task Force voiced concern that too much development in these areas will forever alter, if not destroy important local natural assets. These areas can be protected with density restrictions, without significantly altering their current and traditional economic viability, which is 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 the natural resources.

Wright County should further study the “resource lands” identified through 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 resource lands to be purchased for future county parks or natural areas. In addition to lakes and wetland areas, there are still elements of the “Big Woods” in the northeast quadrant, and these have potential as future parks and natural assets also, though in smaller units.



But most importantly, and in the very near term, the County should focus attention on the vicinity around Pelican Lake. This area is still open and rural, but rapid urban development is approaching on all sides. This urban development is apparent from the growth in the cities of St. Michael, Monticello and Buffalo. In the Pelican Lake area, the County should work together with the adjacent cities and townships to develop common “resource land” goals, to designate common land uses, to establish density and preservation strategies, and to devise common administrative mechanisms. Currently, the County shares the land use jurisdiction of the Pelican lake area with the City of St. Michael. Both of these entities have shown a willingness to work together to protect this important natural feature. In addition, the County should consider partnering with organizations such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other conservation minded organizations to purchase and protect additional lands in the area as either parkland or wildlife-oriented open space.

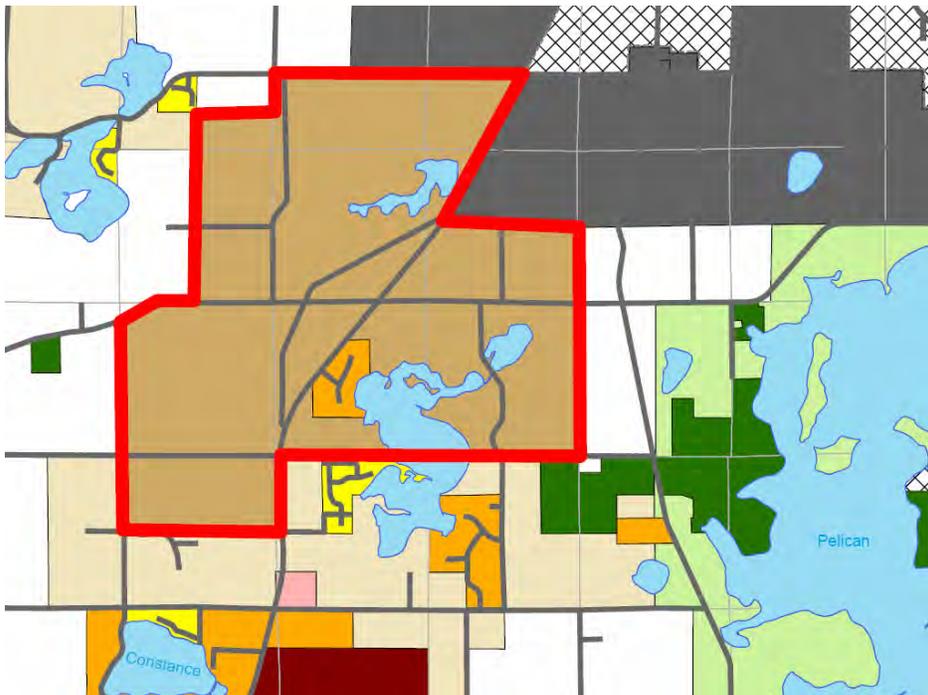
5.6 Aggregate Resources

Aggregates and gravel are used as base materials for both building foundations and roads. Although they are a basic, relatively low-value natural resource, 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 rises 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.

A more detailed planning/environmental study such as an Alternative Urban Area-wide Review (AUAR, which is a detailed environmental/land use study) or some similar study should be completed for the Aggregate Resource Area shown on the future land use map. Such a 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. This study could be a partnership between the County, Townships, and Cities in the affected area with the purpose of developing a more detailed plan for the Aggregate Resource area. The further study should also review specific mining concerns such as: testing of material that is

hauled back to gravel pits, and assessments or impact fees for road and other necessary improvements such as mine reclamation, and possible changes in the State “Gravel Tax” to address the negative impacts of mining. Until a more detailed study is completed, the existing zoning will remain in place.

The following map highlights the Aggregate Resource Area in a red outline. For reference purposes, this area lies between the cities of Buffalo and Monticello along Highway 25.



(Upon final adoption of this Plan by the Wright County Board of Commissioners on July 31, 2007, the motion adopted by the Board removed the (AGR) Aggregate Resources District from the Land Use Plan map (Page 75), pending further study. The Board did not make any text changes to the Plan, and indicated that an AGR district may be re-established upon future amendment. The following illustration, therefore, is for informational purposes only, as there is not a specific area designated AGR on the official land use plan map at this time (August, 2007).

5.7 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. If necessary, revisions and amendments should be made to ensure the Plan works as the NEQ continues to evolve and change. 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 NEQ and Wright County such a desirable location in the first place.