

Land Use Plan

Northwest Quadrant (NWQ) Land Use Plan

Albion, Chatham, Clearwater, Corinna, French Lake
Maple Lake, Silver Creek and Southside Townships

Shaping NW Wright County's Future



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

1.0 The Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan

1.1	Introduction.....	1
1.2	Plan Purpose	1
1.3	How to Use the Plan	3

2.0 Northwest Quadrant Profile

2.1	Overview.....	4
2.2	Township Characteristics.....	7
2.3	Demographic Trends and Projections	19
2.4	Physical Features	27
	Prior Land Use Plan Map	29
	Existing Land Use/Land Cover	33
	Existing Functional Classification.....	36
	Future Functional Classification	37
	Aerial Map.....	39
	Aggregate Resources Map.....	41
	Ecological Resources Map	43
	Metro Conservation Corridor Map.....	45
	Rare Natural Features Map.....	47
	Lakes and Wetlands.....	49
	Prime Farmland Soils Map.....	53
	Feedlot Map.....	55
	Steep Slopes	57
	Resource Overlay Map.....	59

3.0 Process, Review, and Public Participation

3.1	Overview.....	60
3.2	Open Houses	60
3.3	Special Committees	61
3.4	Final Open Houses, Other Public Input and Conclusion	64

4.0 Land Use Plan

4.1	Purpose/Introduction.....	65
4.2	Overall Goals and Policies.....	65
4.3	Specific Area Goals and Policies	71
4.4	Land Use Definitions	82
4.5	NWQ Future Land Use Plan Map.....	86

5.0 Administration and Implementation

5.1	Plan Administration	88
5.2	Implementation	89
5.3	“1 per 20” Land Use District	89
5.4	Transition Areas.....	90
5.5	Resource Land	91
5.6	Aggregate Resources	81
5.7	Conclusion	94

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1.0 The Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan

1.1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

1.2 Plan Purpose

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

address these topics in greater detail, but they are only included in this Plan in so far as they directly relate to land use issues. This NWQ 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 Albion, Chatham, Clearwater, Corinna, French Lake, Maple Lake, Silver Creek and Southside 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 NWQ 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 NWQ 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 spaces. The intent is not just to protect prime, cultivated land from conversion to other uses. Rather, the intent is to protect areas that are and can remain rural or "agricultural" or "open space" in nature. Small woodlots, pasture, wetlands and other rural land types are an integral part of agricultural and rural areas in the Upper-Midwest, in addition to cultivated fields. In the past, farms and agricultural lands, as well as open space were viewed by planners and developers as "idle" land, waiting for something "better" to happen. More recently, agricultural areas, as well as open space and natural areas have come to be viewed as much more important land uses, deserving the same special consideration as commercial, industrial and residential areas. Just as residential and industrial areas are kept separated to their mutual benefit, so the protection of agricultural areas can benefit all the citizens of Wright County, not just those actively engaged in farming. In addition, the citizens of NW 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 NWQ Land Use Plan. The Wright County Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission realize that, for a number of reasons, the County will continue to experience significant growth and development in the 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 NWQ Land Use Plan is to provide a decision making guide that will serve the best interest of current and future citizens of Wright County as a whole, by controlling, not hindering, the growth of the County in a manner that best serves the public health, safety and welfare.

1.3 How to Use the Plan

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

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

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

2.0 Northwest Quadrant Profile

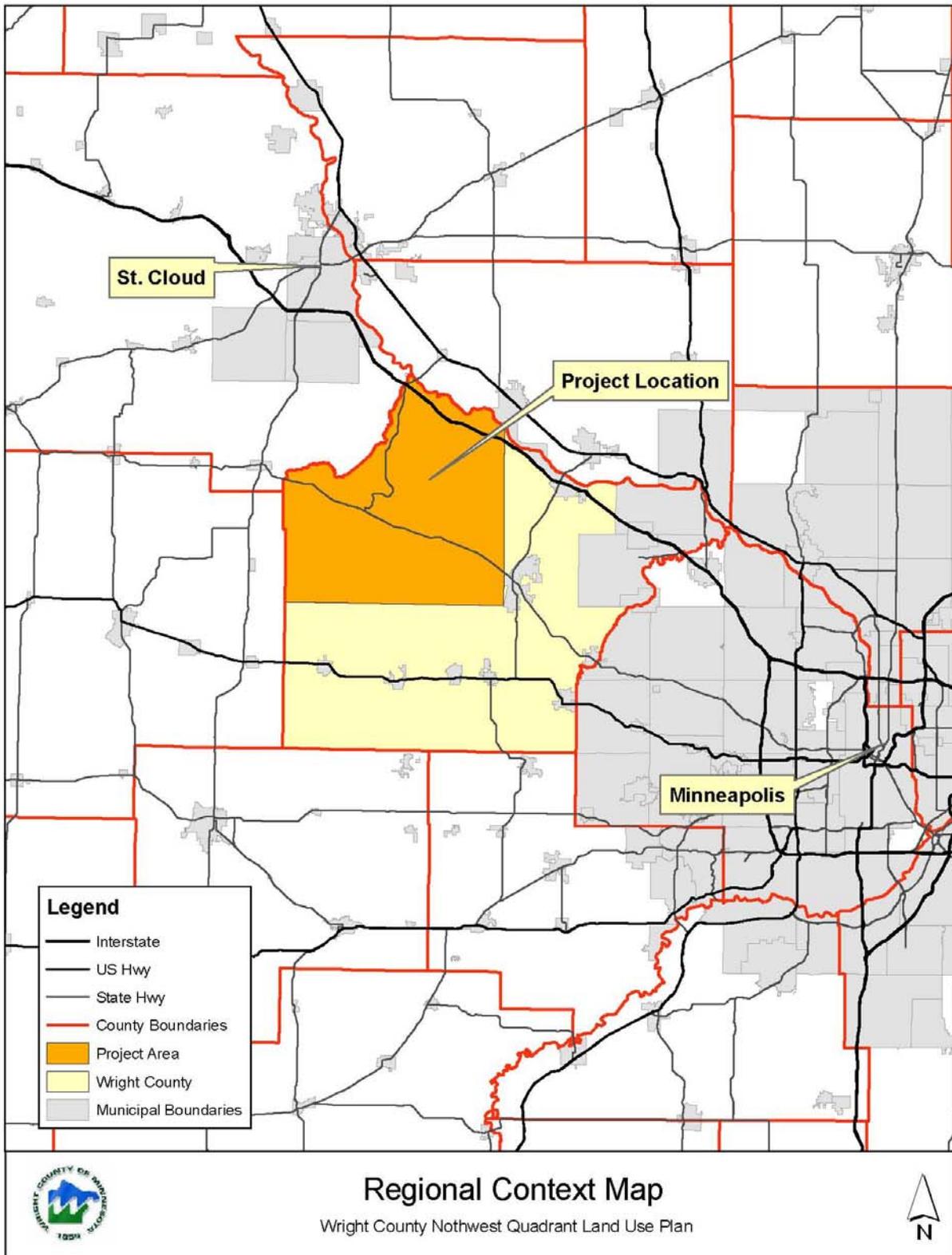
2.1 Overview

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

Wright County has traditionally been predominately rural in nature, but recently has become subject to pressures for suburban development. Wright is the only County adjacent to Hennepin County that is not a part of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, but is inextricably tied to the Twin Cities economically, and is greatly affected by many of the same forces that affect the metropolitan region. In addition, the Northwest Quadrant 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 at the request of its Townships and has remained in a partnership with its townships to the present. In 1978, Wright County adopted a Comprehensive Plan that specifically addressed agricultural preservation and protection, and also adopted strict agricultural protection ordinances, modeled after those being used in some outlying parts of the metropolitan region. The 1988 Land Use Plan also included an agricultural protection element, but provides significant areas for urban growth in and around existing cities and also large areas for exurban or rural growth in those areas unsuited to long term agricultural use.

The current Plan also addresses agricultural and open space preservation and continues to provide ample opportunity for rural development at 1 per 40 acre densities (Agriculture) and 1 per 10 acre densities (Rural Residential). In addition to these land uses, natural resource lands and aggregate resource lands have been highlighted and policies created to protect and preserve these lands.



As mentioned briefly in the introduction, there are many governmental units within the NWQ that have an interest in land use planning. The Townships of Albion, Chatham, Clearwater, Corinna, French Lake, Maple Lake, Silver Creek and Southside as well as the Cities of Annandale, Clearwater, Maple Lake, and South Haven 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 Clearwater Orderly Annexation Area Board regulates land use within an area of Clearwater Township surrounding the City of Clearwater. It was created by joint agreement between the County, City of Clearwater, and Clearwater Township.

The Wright County Planning and Zoning Office provides planning services and administers all land use regulations for the Townships in the NWQ. As this Plan is written, Corinna Township has adopted its own Land Use Plan, and begun to administer zoning and subdivision regulations. State law requires that any township doing so must be consistent with county regulations and as strict as or stricter than the County. While Corinna and Wright County have not yet agreed on how long-term administration issues will be resolved, there seems to be agreement that their respective Land Use Plans may coincide within the law.

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 NWQ, to varying degrees, have very substantial public and private investments in public services, economic development, infrastructure, and development plans and programs that the County does not desire to ignore nor counteract. To help protect these investments, and promote their wise and economical use, Wright County plans to enforce programs that will inhibit developmental sprawl in the Townships.

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

2.2 Township Characteristics

Albion Township

Albion Township is predominately rural and agricultural in nature, although a small portion of the northeastern corner includes the city of Maple Lake. A very high percentage of the land in Albion is classified as prime farmland or agricultural soils of statewide importance (89%) and also as cultivated (60%). The Township is committed to agricultural preservation. There is some limited residential development around the lakes in the Township.

There are several lakes in Albion Township with varying degrees of development. Granite and Rock Lakes are classified as Recreational Development lakes and they have predominantly older, small lot sizes. A few newer developments on Camp and Henshaw Lakes include larger lot sizes. A mixture of large (5-10 acres) and small parcels fill in the area between Swart Watts and Albion Lakes. These development patterns were primarily set in the 1970's before the County and Township started land use planning with an emphasis on agricultural preservation.

Except for the Maple Lake City Transition Area, and existing developed areas, virtually the entire Township is designated as Agricultural in the Land Use Plan. There are 657 acres in public lands, including a large wildlife management area surrounding Willima Lake. The current number of available building sites, based on 1 home per 40 acres, is estimated at 243 homes, which would take many years to use up at the rate of development in Albion over the past decade.

Albion Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	19771	96%	19317	93%
Rural Residential	0	0%	146	1%
Residential Large Lot	41	0%	50	0%
Residential	206	1%	206	1%
Transition Area	0	0%	299	1%
Orderly Annexation Area	0	0%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	0	0%	0	0%
Commercial	0	0%	0	0%
Limited Industrial	5	0%	5	0%
Resource Land	0	0%	0	0%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	0	0%
Public Lands	657	3%	657	3%
Total	20680	100%	20680	100%

Chatham Township

Chatham Township is less than half a civil township in size, but exhibits a wide variety of land uses. The east portion includes a few lakes with hilly topography and marginal agricultural soils. Nearly an entire section is included in the City of Buffalo in the northeast corner of the Township. The Township and City have a general agreement on city growth, which is shown as Transition Area in the Land Use Plan map. Due to the dramatic topography referred to as “Chatham Hills”, the City does not plan to expand services much farther into Chatham and is much more likely to grow in the opposite direction as noted in the Northeast Quadrant Plan.

Hills, wetlands and streams make small lot sizes and large farms more difficult in the eastern half of Chatham, so this area has been primarily designated Rural Residential in the Land Use Plan. The eastern part of Chatham already contains several large-lot developments, but approximately half of the area designated for Rural Residential development in the 1988 Plan has not yet been utilized. There are some older, small-lot developments adjacent to Rock Lake on the western edge of the township and on portions of Birch and Buffalo Lakes. The rest of the lakes in Chatham are designated Natural Environment and they often include large areas of wetland adjacent to the lakeshore.

Agriculture and larger farms are prevalent in the western half of the township. A significant percentage of the land in Chatham is classified as prime farmland or agricultural soils of statewide importance (68%) and also as cultivated (54%). The current number of available building sites, based on 1 home per 40 acres in the Agricultural District and 1 per 10 in Rural Residential Land Use designations, is estimated at 212 homes. Like most other townships in the Northwest quadrant, very few of the areas designated for development in the 1988 Plan have been utilized, and it is difficult to find justification for expansion of any residential districts in this Plan.

Chatham Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	6409	65%	6396	65%
Rural Residential	2927	30%	2708	28%
Residential Large Lot	130	1%	130	1%
Residential	150	2%	150	2%
Transition Area	0	0%	363	4%
Orderly Annexation Area	0	0%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	144	1%	0	0%
Commercial	2	0%	2	0%
Limited Industrial	0	0%	0	0%
Resource Land	0	0%	0	0%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	0	0%
Public Lands	23	0%	38	0%
Total	9785	100%	9785	100%

Clearwater Township

Clearwater Township is the northernmost Township in Wright County, bordered on the north by Sherburne County and the Mississippi River and on the west by Stearns County and the Clearwater River. Clearwater Township is primarily rural in nature but also contains some suburban development. The City of Clearwater was steadily growing prior to the 2008 recession and has a large area designated for orderly annexation area by agreement with the Township. This area has been used for the Transition Area in this Plan. An area southeast of the City has been chosen by the Minnesota Department of Transportation for an interregional connection and will eventually connect Interstate 94 to Highway 10 with a new river crossing in Sherburne County. This will have an impact on land use, especially as the City expands, but current plans do not include any new local access at this interchange.

The suburban residential development scattered throughout the Township is found primarily around lakes and rivers, and also along the main corridors of State Highway 24 and County Road 7. Clearwater Township includes the extreme north end of both Bass and Sugar Lakes, which have intensive lakeshore development containing very small lots. Such historic development also occurs with some attendant problems due to high density and small lots on Fish Lake. Rice and Sheldon Lakes are less intensively developed, while the other lakes in the Township are primarily smaller, undeveloped Natural Environment Lakes.

Both the Mississippi and Clearwater River corridors contain scattered development, which is somewhat limited by poor accessibility. The south central portion of the Township contains a large wildlife management area, which also encompasses a small Natural Environment Lake known as Long Lake. The combination of small lakes, existing wildlife areas, flood plains, areas of well-preserved woodlots and existing wildlife management areas led to the designation of three Resource Land districts in the Township.

Clearwater contains a relatively low percentage of prime farmland soils, but does include a large area of soils of statewide importance. Though irrigation is necessary in some parts of the township, agriculture is still a vital part of the economy. Most of the area will continue to remain rural in nature, and only a very small percentage of the areas that were designated for Rural Residential development in the Township's 2002 plan update have been converted. Based on this potential and on past trends, very little change is proposed for the Township.

Clearwater Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	8170	57%	6503	46%
Rural Residential	3085	22%	3123	22%
Residential Large Lot	239	2%	329	2%
Residential	283	2%	283	2%
Transition Area	0	0%	1573	11%
Orderly Annexation Area	1573	11%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	0	0%	0	0%
Commercial	32	0%	32	0%
Limited Industrial	8	0%	8	0%
Resource Land	0	0%	1532	11%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	0	0%
Public Lands	792	6%	799	6%
Total	14182	100%	14182	100%

Corinna Township

Corinna Township is in the northwest corner of Wright County and is bordered by Clearwater Lake and Stearns County on the northwest. Including the largest, Clearwater, five “general development” lakes dominate the character of the Township with attendant seasonal and suburban development: Sugar, Cedar, Bass and Pleasant. The City of Annandale borders the south shore of Pleasant Lake, and the planned growth area for the City includes the southwest corner of Corinna. In general, the landscape in Corinna Township is not as severe as the steep slopes and wooded hills in western Southside or French Lake. There are large areas of prime farmland soils in the east and southern parts of Corinna, and farming is still an important land use in the township.

The Township is characterized by a wide diversity of land uses. The proximity to State Highway 55 does provide access for some commuters and there is an extensive suburban area between Cedar Lake and Annandale along County Highway 6. Similar areas have developed around the north shore of Clearwater Lake up to Bass Lake, and surrounding Sugar Lake extending to Indian Lake, though these areas retain more of the lakeshore-recreation nature than the suburban-style development along Highway 6. There is significant commercial development along the north side of Highway 55 from Highway 6 into Annandale, along with some scattered, lake-oriented businesses along Highway 24 as it winds around Clearwater Lake. Significant farms exist throughout the Township, particularly in the areas east of Hwy 24 and west of Sugar Lake, and where the better soils are located in the large area east of Cedar Lake. The largest livestock feedlot in the NWQ is located in Corinna Township.

There is some evidence of aggregate resources in the Township, primarily in the areas east of State Highway 24 and north of County Highway 39. It does not appear that there is enough rock in these deposits to make large scale mining commercially viable. As this

report is written, Corinna Township has adopted rules prohibiting any mining except as short-term, temporary operations. If the County follows the recommendations of the Aggregate Committee reviewed elsewhere in this Plan, those Corinna policies should match well.

Corinna Township has also adopted a “Corinna Township Comprehensive Plan”, which places most of the township into a “rural preservation” designation. Based on correspondence and meetings between County and Township officials, there is no need to expand any of the residential areas in the County Land Use Plan for Corinna Township, and the other proposed land use districts have been adjusted to the satisfaction of the Township Board. Since the Corinna Township portion of the Wright County Land Use Plan was updated in 1998 and very little of the areas requested then by the Township to be designated for Large Lot or Rural Residential development have been utilized, the designation of new Resource Lands and a Transition Area for Annandale are the primary changes proposed at this time.

Corinna Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	8993	59%	7287	48%
Rural Residential	1386	9%	1443	9%
Residential Large Lot	1921	13%	1885	12%
Residential	1337	9%	1284	8%
Transition Area	0	0%	999	7%
Orderly Annexation Area	0	0%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	682	4%	0	0%
Commercial	55	0%	65	0%
Limited Industrial	50	0%	105	1%
Resource Land	0	0%	1341	9%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	0	0%
Public Lands	929	6%	944	6%
Total	15353	100%	15353	100%

French Lake Township

French Lake Township is located on the western edge of Wright County and is bordered by Meeker County on the west. The North Fork of the Crow river winds through the southern portion of the Township and the northern portion includes several lakes. In the northwestern corner, Stanley Eddy County Park encompasses a large portion of the area and includes some lakeshore on Pickerel Lake and Lake Moses, both Natural Environment Lakes. There is also a small County Park in the southeast portion of the Township named Carl Johnson County Forest, which includes an extraordinary stand of hardwood forest adjacent to the Crow River. Unfortunately, there are also two closed landfills in French Lake Township, as described in the following section.

French Lake Township is considered a transition area between the prime agricultural areas that dominate the southwest part of the County and the more intensively developed lake region around Annandale and to the north. The Township is primarily rural or agricultural in character, off the beaten path, and isolated from any major highways. It has not been subject to most of the development pressures that have impacted areas further east in the County. For the most part, residents of the Township and the Town Board prefer to maintain the isolated, rural atmosphere.

In the northern portion of the Township, intensive lakeshore development has occurred along French Lake, Lake Francis, Moose Lake, and around the south end of Lake Sylvia. Scattered large lots and some hobby farms are found in the northwest corner of the Township and along the Crow River. Located along the southern border of the township is the old village site of Knapp. This is primarily a historical site, however, with no infrastructure or real development potential and will remain mostly agricultural in nature.

Limited commercial development does exist in the rural center of French Lake, most of which is the large industrial area dedicated to the French Lake Auto Parts “junkyard”. This facility is a relatively modern and very large operation dedicated to recycling vehicles and automotive parts. The crossroads of County Highways 3 and 37 also supports a convenience store and gas station as well as a few, small local businesses. This

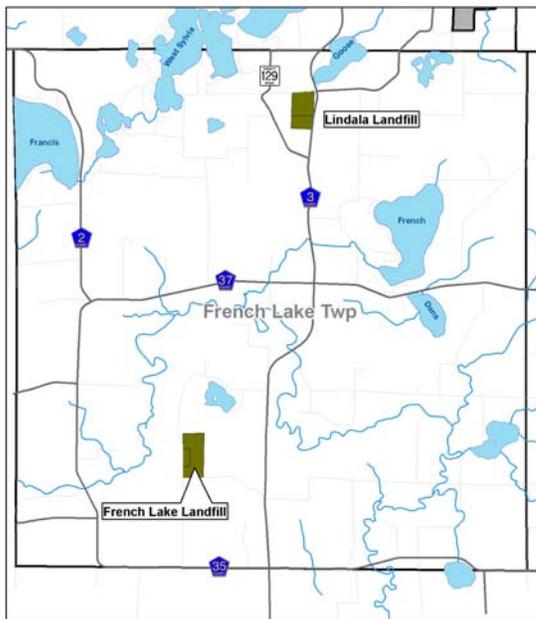


is one of the few, unincorporated, historical “rural centers” that has maintained some commercial life and population over the years, while many others have faded away. As noted in the Land Use Plan map and the policies section of this Plan, some limited development expansion will be allowed in these centers, although the limited infrastructure will curb this type of development.

This area of the County is far from any major service centers and the potential for major growth is limited. Most of the residential development that has occurred is near lakes or in the "French Lake Hills" area of the northwest corner of the Township. A high percentage of the soils in the Township are prime farmland soils or classified as being of statewide importance, especially in the southern and eastern portions of the Township. Rural Residential development is planned to continue in the "hills" area, but most of French Lake is designated to remain agricultural in nature, as much of the development potential built into prior plans has yet to be used.

French lake Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	17812	83%	16397	77%
Rural Residential	1854	9%	2213	10%
Residential Large Lot	189	1%	189	1%
Residential	192	1%	198	1%
Transition Area	0	0%	0	0%
Orderly Annexation Area	0	0%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	0	0%	0	0%
Commercial	32	0%	38	0%
Limited Industrial	82	0%	82	0%
Resource Land	0	0%	820	4%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	0	0%
Public Lands	1231	6%	1455	7%
Total	21392	100%	21392	100%

Closed Landfills



The Northwest Quadrant of Wright County has two listed landfills. Both are closed landfills located in French Lake Township and are owned and managed by the State of Minnesota, Pollution Control Agency (MPCA). The latest reports required as part of the Closed Landfill Program were completed in 2006. Both sites are regularly monitored by the MPCA using wells, gas vents, and gas probes. The French Lake Landfill has 6 monitoring wells and 7 gas wells that are tested once per year, generally in mid-summer. The Lindala Landfill has 7 monitoring wells and 23 gas vents, which are tested twice per year.

The Lindala Landfill property is located in Section 3 and is 70 acres. The once-active portion of the site is 13 acres in size and contains approximately 560,000 cubic yards of waste. The facility stopped receiving waste in 1990 and has been listed as closed since 1995. The French Lake Landfill is located on 80 acres of land in Section 28. This facility was in operation from 1971 to its closure in 1989. The active portion of the site is 6.3 acres and contains approximately 200,000 cubic yards of waste.

While properly closed and maintained landfills should pose little risk, they are an important feature to consider when conducting long range planning. The area around the French Lake Landfill site is in the General Agriculture district in the Land Use Plan and is lightly developed with primarily farmstead residences. Therefore, this site should not have a significant impact on future development activity.

The Lindala Landfill is in closer proximity to limited residential development. With the shore of East Lake Sylvia being less than 1 mile from the site and other rural homes less than one quarter of a mile away, the potential impact of this landfill is greater than the French Lake site. In the area surrounding the Lindala site, caution will be needed to the south and west, which is the directional flow of groundwater. While the current Plan may allow for more development near the site, there are natural obstructions that should limit pollution potential. However, precautions should be taken when installing wells in the area, including routine testing of any wells installed.

Maple Lake Township

Maple Lake Township is primarily agricultural in nature with some scattered “hobby farm” development and a few areas of pre-existing, very dense, lakeshore development. The Township is also affected by growth from both the cities of Maple Lake and Buffalo. Extensive residential development, often on very small lots, surrounds Maple and Eagle Lakes, and occurs on parts of Sullivan, Ramsey and Mary Lakes. Large lot development is scattered in some parts of the Township, but is primarily in the northeast corner adjacent to similar areas in Silver Creek and Monticello Townships, with scattered hobby farms and dwellings along the State Highway 55 corridor. Ney County Park in the northwest corner of the Township preserves natural areas and the headwaters of Silver Creek adjacent to Lake Mary. It is an extraordinary resource and this Plan designates additional resource lands near the Park and along Silver Creek as reviewed elsewhere.

The last update to the Maple Lake Township Land Use Plan map was in 1998. This update expanded the Major Growth/Transition Area from the north edge of the city north to the south edge of Ney Park. The Residential Large Lot district was expanded in two areas, and the Agricultural Residential district was greatly expanded for residential development potential. Since 1998, there have been only 111 new dwelling permits issued in Maple Lake Township. This is a 34 percent drop from the 166 permits issued between 1986 and 1996. Only about half of the new construction since 1998 was on newly created lots, with the remainder being the replacement of existing structures or the conversion of seasonal cabins to year-round residences.

Except for limited growth occurring adjacent to the Cities of Maple Lake and Buffalo, most future development in Maple Lake Township will continue with existing trends. A large area south of the City of Maple Lake and west of Ramsey Lake is designated Rural Residential due to its proximity to the City and existing development in the area. Rolling countryside and wooded areas determined the location of three other Rural Residential districts. These include the areas between Maple and Sullivan Lakes, the land south of Highway 55 and adjacent to similar development in Chatham Township and west of the

City of Buffalo, and the area in the northeast corner of the Township adjacent to similar areas in Monticello and Silver Creek Townships.

As there is a great deal of potential remaining in these areas from the changes made in 1998, no major expansions are planned. The remainder of the Township is primarily agriculture in nature, with many wetlands. Maple Lake Township has approximately 188 unused residential entitlements in the Agricultural district, 278 undeveloped potential building sites in the Agricultural Residential district, and 10 sites in the Residential Large Lot district. In the Northwest Quadrant, Maple Lake Township has more undeveloped potential residences than any other township but Silver Creek. Along with the available development potential, Maple Lake Township will likely still see population growth through the conversion of existing lakeshore cabins into year-round residences.

Maple Lake Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	12712	64%	11727	59%
Rural Residential	4306	22%	4142	21%
Residential Large Lot	520	3%	520	3%
Residential	346	2%	346	2%
Transition Area	0	0%	1237	6%
Orderly Annexation Area	0	0%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	772	4%	0	0%
Commercial	0	0%	0	0%
Limited Industrial	7	0%	7	0%
Resource Land	0	0%	515	3%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	0	0%
Public Lands	1187	6%	1356	7%
Total	19850	100%	19850	100%

Silver Creek Township

Silver Creek Township has experienced a great deal of large lot and "hobby farm" development in recent years, due primarily to the Interstate 94/Hasty interchange and the large areas of wooded and rolling "pothole" landscapes. Intensive development, often on undersized lots, has occurred on Locke, Ida, Eagle and Silver Lakes, with some development along the Mississippi River and on Limestone and Ember Lakes. Lake Maria State Park, as well as other large County Parks and state wildlife management areas, create recreational opportunities and preserve open space, and tend to attract residential development. Limited commercial development occurs at the "Hasty" freeway interchange and in the unincorporated "village" of Silver Creek.

Silver Creek has the highest percentage of forested and grasslands (41.8%) and the second lowest percentage of cultivated land (41.24%) of any Township in the Northwest Quadrant. This is partly due to the existence of Lake Maria State Park, but this statistic also highlights

the natural landscape of the Township, much of which is not well suited to modern farm practices. Agricultural areas do exist, both in the southwest corner of the Township and in the north central area where some irrigation takes place. There is a significant amount of land still designated Agricultural, both to preserve good farmland and the rural character of the Township, a trait which has proven to be very important to its residents. Still, Silver Creek has the largest area of any Township in the NWQ designated as Rural Residential; well over 4500 acres, and very little of that potential has yet to be used.

As there is no primary service center or city in the Township, any intensive residential development could easily destroy the landscapes that give the Township its character. Therefore, future development should be Rural Residential in nature, with relatively large lots or carefully reviewed planned unit developments. The only two exceptions may be the redevelopment of the old Silver Creek “Village” area, and the potential for commercial development around the Hasty interchange. These two areas qualify as “rural centers” as described later in this Plan. Yet, without central sewer or water systems, and with limited transportation facilities, development of both areas must be very carefully monitored and regulated. It is recommended that the Township and County work on more detailed plans for these rural centers after adoption of this Plan.



The rolling, wooded, and pothole-laden landscape also makes Silver Creek Township an important area for natural resources’ conservation. The Plan designates nearly 1,580 acres of land within the Township as Resource Lands, as more fully described later. The attractive landscape and scenic beauty of the Township, along with the decision by Town Boards in the 1970s and 1980s to promote more rural development, is reflected in the number of new homes built within the Township in the last 10 years. Since 1999, 147 single family residential dwellings permits have been issued in Silver Creek Township. This is greater than any other township in Wright County. The majority of these permits are new construction starts, with relatively few replacements or seasonal cabin conversions compared to townships like Corinna or Maple Lake that have intensive lakeshore areas. Due to the very large unused development potential already in the Township, this trend is likely to continue.

Silver Creek Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	10619	46%	9072	39%
Rural Residential	8879	38%	8866	38%
Residential Large Lot	1076	5%	1076	5%
Residential	309	1%	309	1%
Transition Area	0	0%	0	0%
Orderly Annexation Area	0	0%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	0	0%	0	0%
Commercial	79	0%	93	0%
Limited Industrial	0	0%	0	0%
Resource Land	0	0%	1506	6%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	0	0%
Public Lands	2312	10%	2352	10%
Total	23274	100%	23274	100%

Southside Township

Southside Township is in the extreme northwest corner of Wright County and is bordered by Meeker County to the West and Stearns County and the Clearwater River to the north. The landscape in Southside Township includes a medley of diverse features, ranging from its wooded hills in the west, to the flatter, tillable fields in the east. In between is South Haven, an incorporated town of 200, and the densely populated lakes of Sylvia and John. Under it all is a very significant geological feature and natural resource that was brought down by the two latest glaciers: aggregate, or gravel and sand.

The Township's diverse geography is matched by its diversity of land uses. State Highway 55 from east to west gives a good cross-section and snapshot of the varying uses that exist in the Township. Starting from the east is Annandale, a growing city of 3000, and the "Heart" of the "Heart of the Lakes" country. Lake John and Lake Sylvia come next, typical Minnesota lakes surrounded by intensively developed residential cabins and houses, mostly on small lots originally platted for cabins. Lake Sylvia in particular is characterized by a small watershed and very high water quality for a lake in the south-central part of Minnesota. West and north of these lakes are many acres of land rich in aggregate resources and gravel pits engaged in the active harvesting of these resources. A few scattered industrial and commercial businesses lie along State Highway 55, followed by the town of South Haven about two miles before the west county line. Interspersed through it all are the farms that settled this area first, many of which still remain.

Southside is not subject to much suburban-commuter residential development, at least to the extent of which occurs in the east end of the County. Most development in the Township occurs around the prime recreational lakes. The Clearwater River chain of lakes at the north end of the Township, Lake John and Greater Lake Sylvia have been very intensively developed, and continue to grow on a lot by lot basis as seasonal cabins

are upgraded to year-round dwellings. Limited development also occurs on Union and Pickerel Lakes. Despite the lakes and their dense development, Southside is still mainly rural in character, with a low level of service provisions, as with most townships. Prime farmlands are limited due to the underlying coarse soils, but wildlife areas, woodlands and general rural uses still abound and are still appropriate.

A mixture of rural residential development may be appropriate west of Lake Sylvia, but current gravel operations will likely inhibit that for some time. It is likely that specialty farms, wineries, horse and “hobby” farms may continue the conversion from traditional agriculture to other uses in Southside, but the isolated location, limited services and desire to preserve the rural atmosphere ensure that there is little need to provide new residential areas in the township at this time, or for the foreseeable future.

Southside Township Land Use Category	Current LUP Acres	Percent	Future LUP Acres	Percent
Agricultural	11512	74%	5816	38%
Rural Residential	2489	16%	2292	15%
Residential Large Lot	404	3%	428	3%
Residential	716	5%	686	4%
Transition Area	0	0%	833	5%
Orderly Annexation Area	0	0%	0	0%
Major Growth Area	73	0%	0	0%
Commercial	16	0%	9	0%
Limited Industrial	30	0%	20	0%
Resource Land	0	0%	2236	14%
Aggregate Resources	0	0%	2857	18%
Public Lands	235	2%	298	2%
Total	15475	100%	15475	100%

2.3 Demographic Trends and Projections

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

Due to its proximity to the Twin Cities and St. Cloud metropolitan areas, Wright County has one of the fastest growing populations in the state. The NWQ of the County is composed of Albion, Chatham, Clearwater, Corinna, French Lake, Maple Lake, Silver Creek, and Southside Townships and the Cities of Annandale, Clearwater, Maple Lake, and South Haven. While nothing like the explosive growth seen in the Northeast Quadrant of the County, the NWQ has experienced steady growth from 1990 to 2006. During this time period, the population of the NWQ of Wright County has increased from 15,276 residents to 20,002 residents. Unlike the NEQ of Wright County where 88% of residents live in incorporated cities, 67.6% of residents live in townships in the NWQ.

The tables below show the historical population for the cities and townships in the NWQ.

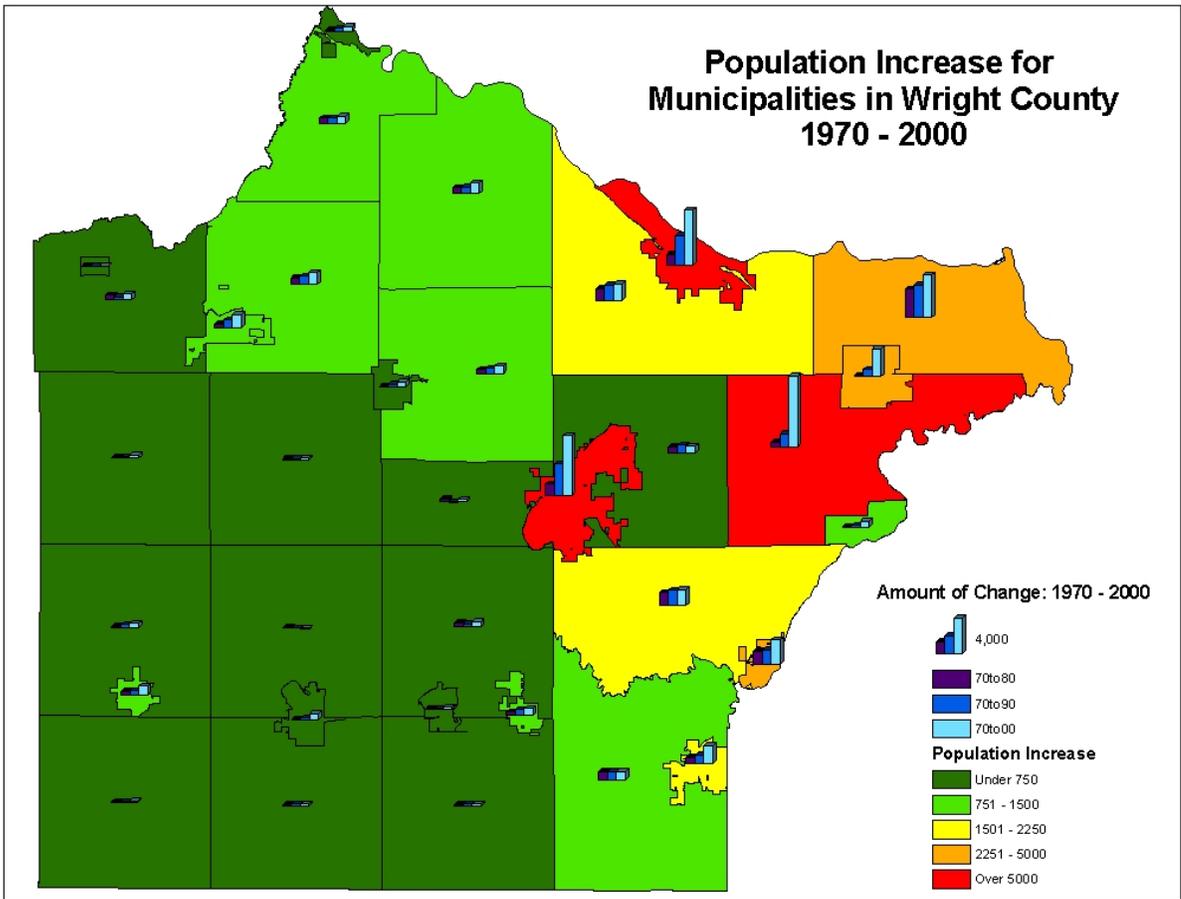
POPULATION	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2006
NWQ Wright County	8,117	10,501	14,570	15,276	18,678	20,002
Townships						
Albion	937	969	1,127	1,121	1,146	1,218
Chatham	459	890	1,268	858	1,162	1,234
Clearwater	413	585	1,153	1,156	1,368	1,409
Corinna	804	1,109	1,831	2,053	2,457	2,402
French Lake	789	824	936	945	1,130	1,163
Maple Lake	727	1,226	1,718	1,829	2,128	2,138
Silver Creek	896	1,102	1,778	1,835	2,332	2,416
Southside	488	918	1,475	1,241	1,576	1,544
Cities						
Annandale	984	1,234	1,568	2,054	2,684	2,957
Clearwater	274	282	379	597	858	1,400
Maple Lake	1,018	1,124	1,132	1,394	1,633	1,912
South Haven	328	238	205	193	204	209

The number 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. In the NWQ, the increase in households can be attributed to new development activity, the conversion of existing seasonal lakeshore property to year-round dwellings, and smaller household sizes in recent years. In 1990, the average Wright County household size was 2.95. The 2007 estimated household size is 2.71 persons per household.

Household Change

Jurisdiction	1990	2000	2006
Wright County	23,013	31,465	41,923
Albion Twp	359	398	448
Chatham Twp	282	374	407
Clearwater Twp	375	479	524
Corinna Twp	715	944	985
French Lake Twp	327	405	433
Maple Lake Twp	604	744	785
Silver Creek Twp	605	789	846
Southside Twp	467	592	598

The following graphic highlights the nature of population changes in Wright County from 1970 to 2000. This pattern continued through the years following 2000 until the economic recession in 2008. As noted earlier, the NWQ did not experience the kind of drastic changes felt in the NEQ, but did have steady increases in population. This growth was partially influenced by commuter growth tied both to the Interstate 94 and State Highway 55 corridors, some influence by the growth of the St. Cloud Metro area, and significantly by retirees moving to occupy lakeshore residences and the conversion of lakeshore seasonal cabins to year-round homes. The fact that much of this growth continues to occur in townships will result in the continued need in many areas for the County and Townships to work together to address issues such as residential-agricultural conflicts, on-site sewage treatment regulation and improvements and the impact on rural roads originally built primarily for agricultural purposes.

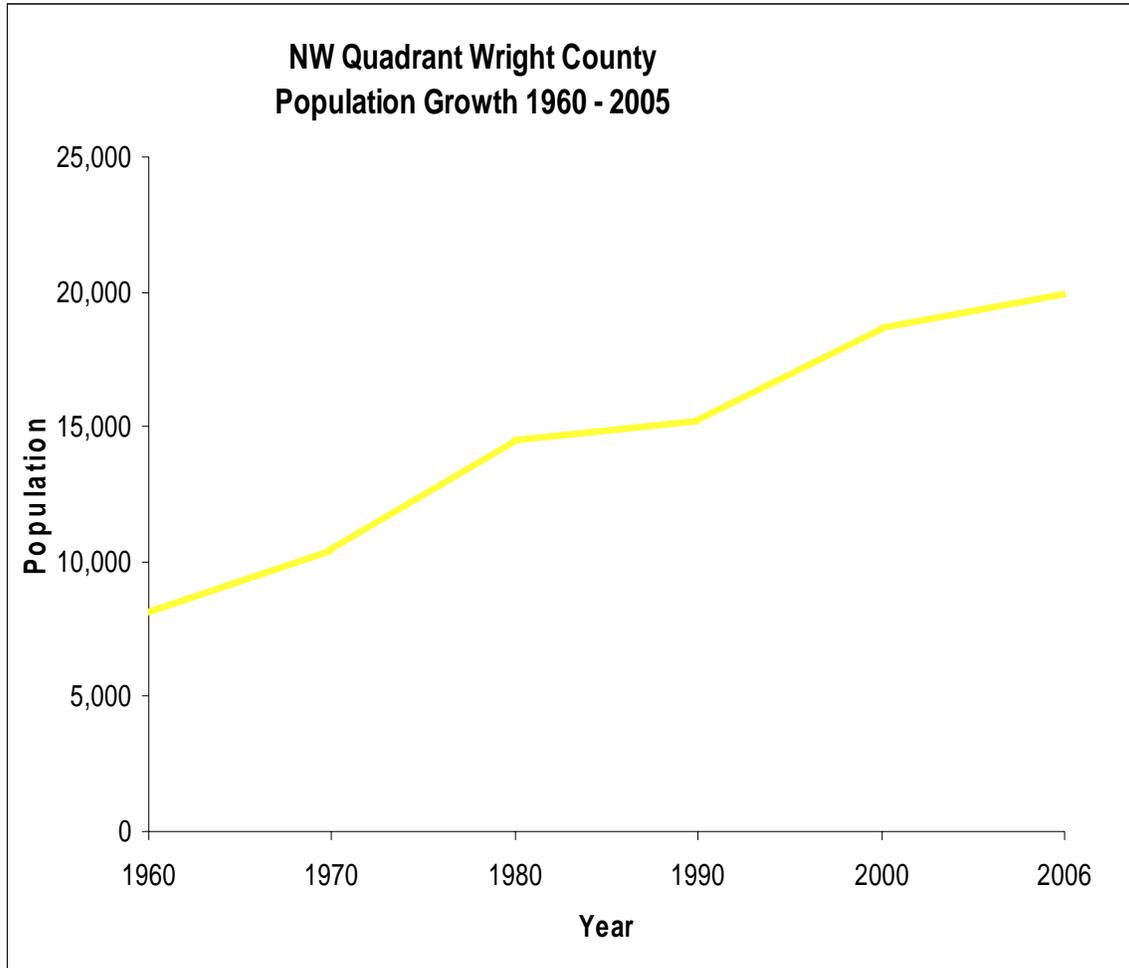


Growth Rates and Population Projections

The population projections completed as part of the land use planning process indicate that the NWQ 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 NWQ. The following graphs give a snapshot of past population growth rates:

AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2006
NW Quadrant Wright County	3.3%	0.5%	2.0%	1.1%
Townships				
Albion	1.5%	-0.1%	0.2%	1.0%
Chatham	3.6%	-3.8%	3.1%	1.0%
Clearwater	7.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.5%
Corinna	5.1%	1.2%	1.8%	-0.4%
French Lake	1.3%	0.1%	1.8%	0.5%
Maple Lake	3.4%	0.6%	1.5%	0.1%
Silver Creek	4.9%	0.3%	2.4%	0.6%
Southside	4.9%	-1.7%	2.4%	-0.3%
AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH RATE	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2006
Cities				
Annandale	2.4%	2.7%	2.7%	1.6%
Clearwater	3.0%	4.6%	3.7%	8.5%
Maple Lake	0.1%	2.1%	1.6%	2.7%
South Haven	-1.5%	-0.6%	0.6%	0.4%

The steady but not radical growth in the NWQ can also be graphically depicted as follows:



The table below shows increasing population projections for the cities and townships in the area. The Minnesota State Demographer projects a higher percentage increase for Wright County over the next 25 years than any other county in the state except for Scott County. The Northwest Quadrant of Wright County is made up of predominately smaller sized cities and townships. Historical populations and future projections for this area are greatly impacted by annexation and specific projects, thus making projections difficult.

**Northwest Quadrant Population Projections
State Demographer's Projections**

Municipality	2006*	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	24 year increase	Annual Growth Rate
Annandale - City	2,957	3,388	3,855	4,279	4,658	5,091	2,134	2.2%
Clearwater - City	1,400	1,750	2,152	2,528	2,872	3,259	1,859	3.4%
Maple Lake - City	1,912	2,181	2,470	2,733	2,967	3,235	1,323	2.1%
South Haven - City	209	224	237	248	257	268	59	1.0%
Albion - Township	1,218	1,306	1,385	1,452	1,506	1,572	354	1.0%
Chatham - Township	1,234	1,423	1,630	1,818	1,987	2,180	946	2.3%
Clearwater - Township	1,409	1,560	1,716	1,854	1,974	2,114	705	1.6%
Corinna - Township	2,402	2,651	2,908	3,134	3,329	3,556	1,154	1.6%
French Lake - Township	1,163	1,291	1,424	1,542	1,645	1,764	601	1.7%
Maple Lake - Township	2,138	2,339	2,544	2,721	2,872	3,050	912	1.4%
Silver Creek - Township	2,416	2,728	3,062	3,363	3,628	3,933	1,517	2.0%
Southside - Township	1,544	1,719	1,902	2,064	2,206	2,370	826	1.7%
NW Quad Total	20,002	22,560	25,285	27,736	29,901	32,392	12,390	1.9%

Note: The figures are based on the State Demographer's estimates and past trends and can be impacted greatly by many factors. 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 is impossible to accurately predict. In general, based on the current economy, the trend toward more growth in the cities and less in the townships, and the potential impact of increasing energy costs, it is likely that the growth projections for most of the Townships are actually too high in most cases.

Finally, the following population projections were found in each of the listed cities' comprehensive plans. These projections are for reference only and are not based on the current economic and housing slowdown and are more than likely too aggressive. However, they do serve as a basis for city growth projections and infrastructure plans, and they still need to be considered.

Northwest Quadrant Population Projections

Provided by City Comprehensive Plans

Municipality	2006*	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	24 year increase	Annual Growth Rate
Annandale - City	2,957	3,640	3,950	4,639	5,450	6,400	3,443	3.3%
Clearwater - City	1,712	2,644	3,686	4,816	6,009	8,359	6,647	6.8%
Maple Lake - City	1,912	2,395	2,795	3,175	3,565	3,955	2,043	3.1%

*2006 State Demographer Estimate

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2.4 Physical Features

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

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

Prior Land Use Plan Map

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

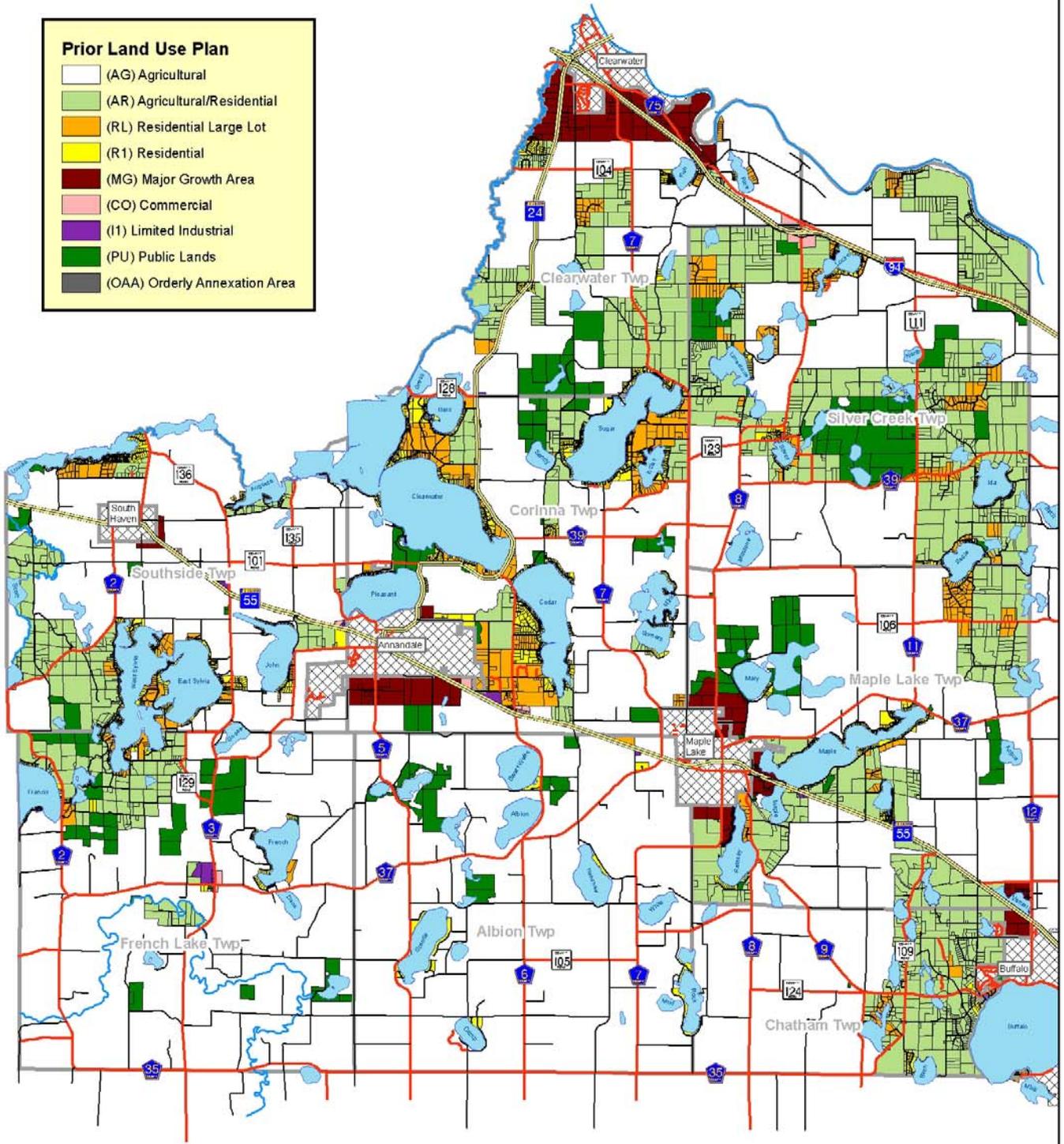
Prior plans were organized around individual township maps, partly because the technology for detailed mapping (GIS, geographic information systems) was less advanced, and it was difficult to change scales and adequately show changes on a regional basis. New technology has greatly enhanced the ability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

The data from this map originates from the Wright County Planning and Zoning office. The last County-wide Plan update was completed and adopted in 1988. However, several townships have worked with the County to review and amend their land use plans since that time. These included Corinna and Maple Lake Township (1998), Clearwater Township (2001) and Silver Creek Township (2003). In addition, Albion Township worked with the County on a thorough review of its land use plan during this time but decided that no changes were warranted. Chatham, French Lake and Southside Townships did not see the need for changes, or chose not to pursue such studies. All three see only minor changes, if any, in this Plan to add residential development, partly due to the extensive areas set aside in 1988, which have yet to be completely developed.

The Land Use Plan is a visionary document that sets out a direction for how a community should grow. It is important to keep in mind that it is not just a map, but also includes goals and policies that attempt to capture the vision and explain the philosophy of the County Board and its partner Townships and Cities for the future growth and development of the County. Reviewing this Plan periodically is essential to determine to what extent the Plan has been followed and if any modifications are necessary due to changing growth patterns or shifts in policy. While not universally accepted, the Wright County Plan has been generally recognized both within and outside of Wright County as being quite successful for finding practical ways to manage growth, protect the environment, limit sprawl, and provide for efficient and economical growth patterns in the face of unprecedented growth pressures over the last three decades. While individual land use decisions may often prove controversial in isolation, little or no evidence has been found to suggest that the basic direction and policies established by the County Board and Planning Commission over the years are in need of major change.

Prior Land Use Plan

- (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

Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan Map



Drafted: January 22, 2009

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Existing Land Use/Land Cover

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

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

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

Albion Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	13,661	60.20%
Transitional Agricultural Land	10	0.04%
Deciduous Forest	1,740	7.66%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	521	2.30%
Grassland	3,577	15.76%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	249	1.10%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	6	0.03%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	78	0.34%
Other Rural Developments	16	0.07%
Water	1,806	7.95%
Wetlands	1,039	4.58%
Total Acres	22,703	100.0%

Chatham Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	5,481.3	54.72%
Deciduous Forest	897.1	8.96%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	316.9	3.16%
Grassland	2,210.6	22.07%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	103.8	1.04%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	0.1	0.00%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	53.7	0.54%
Other Rural Developments	17.6	0.18%
Urban and Industrial	0.3	0.00%
Water	526.2	5.25%
Wetlands	409.7	4.09%
Total Acres	10,017	100.0%

Clearwater Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	6,876.2	45.72%
Transitional Agricultural Land	6.0	0.04%
Deciduous Forest	3,459.0	23.00%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	306.5	2.04%
Grassland	2,420.1	16.09%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	131.5	0.87%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	6.3	0.04%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	105.1	0.70%
Other Rural Developments	55.0	0.37%
Urban and Industrial	0.2	0.00%
Water	777.2	5.17%
Wetlands	872.1	5.80%
Exposed Soil, Sandbars, and Sand Dunes	19.8	0.13%
Unclassified Land	1.2	0.01%
Bare Rock	2.4	0.02%
Total Acres	15,039	100.0%

Corinna Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	8,308.2	39.28%
Deciduous Forest	3,265.6	15.44%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	365.6	1.73%
Grassland	2,015.8	9.53%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	141.8	0.67%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	5.6	0.03%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	597.1	2.82%
Other Rural Developments	11.4	0.05%
Urban and Industrial	6.9	0.03%
Water	5,282.8	24.98%
Wetlands	1,148.7	5.43%
Total Acres	21,150	100.0%

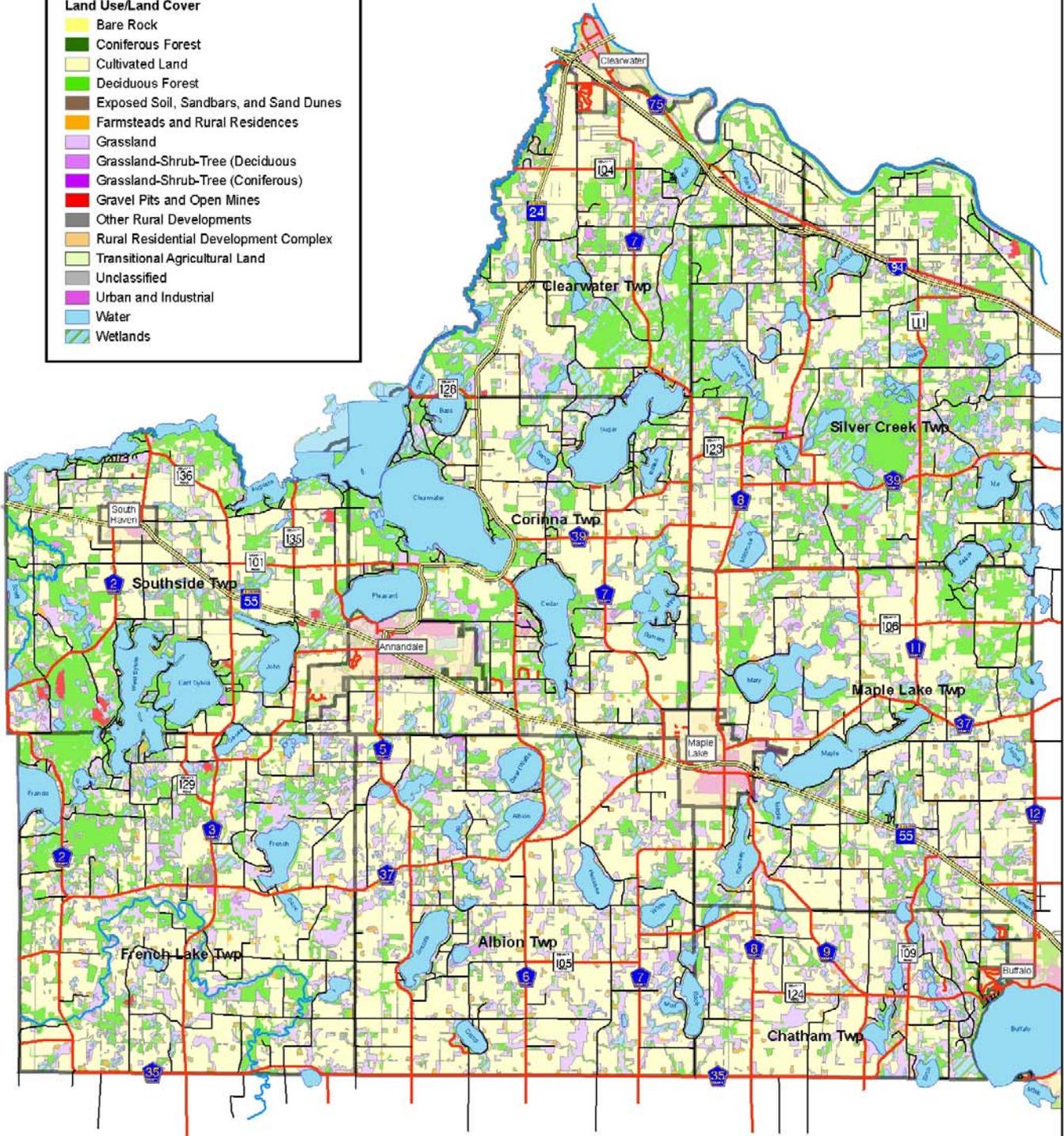
French Lake Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	10,955.8	48.28%
Transitional Agricultural Land	15.9	0.07%
Deciduous Forest	4,602.6	20.28%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	503.9	2.22%
Grassland	4,279.6	18.86%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	151.8	0.67%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	31.2	0.14%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	102.8	0.45%
Other Rural Developments	94.4	0.42%
Urban and Industrial	17.0	0.07%
Water	1,268.0	5.59%
Wetlands	665.1	2.93%
Exposed Soil, Sandbars, and Sand Dunes	2.8	0.01%
Total Acres	22,691	100.0%

Maple Lake Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	11,564.9	52.04%
Deciduous Forest	3,333.1	15.00%
Coniferous Forest	2.6	0.01%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	549.2	2.47%
Grassland	3,282.0	14.77%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	146.4	0.66%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	245.1	1.10%
Other Rural Developments	29.9	0.13%
Urban and Industrial	20.1	0.09%
Water	1,833.9	8.25%
Wetlands	1,216.3	5.47%
Total Acres	22,224	100.0%

Silver Creek Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	10,344.4	41.24%
Transitional Agricultural Land	13.5	0.05%
Deciduous Forest	6,191.0	24.68%
Coniferous Forest	16.7	0.07%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	500.6	2.00%
Grassland	4,116.0	16.41%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	161.1	0.64%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	43.0	0.17%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	83.6	0.33%
Other Rural Developments	40.7	0.16%
Urban and Industrial	41.0	0.16%
Water	2,163.6	8.63%
Wetlands	1,363.5	5.44%
Exposed Soil, Sandbars, and Sand Dunes	4.9	0.02%
Total Acres	25,084	100.0%

Southside Township Land Use/Land Cover Distribution Table	Acres	Percentage
Cultivated Land	7,539.0	41.33%
Deciduous Forest	4,443.3	24.36%
Farmsteads and Rural Residences	284.5	1.56%
Grassland	1,941.1	10.64%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Deciduous)	156.4	0.86%
Grassland-Shrub-Tree (Coniferous)	2.5	0.01%
Gravel Pits and Open Mines	192.6	1.06%
Rural Residential Development Complexes	175.9	0.96%
Other Rural Developments	35.3	0.19%
Water	2,508.1	13.75%
Wetlands	952.3	5.22%
Unclassified Land	11.6	0.06%
Total Acres	18,243	100.0%

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



Land Use/Land Cover

Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan Map



Drafted: January 22, 2009

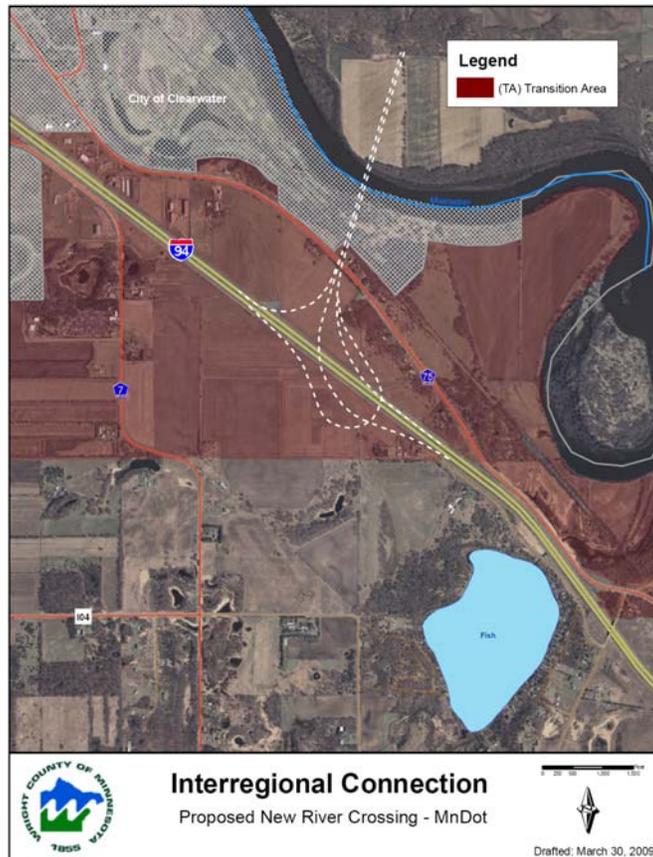
Transportation System

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

The NWQ is transected east to west by two major highway corridors: Interstate 94 on the north and State Highway 55 near the central portion of the quadrant. While planning for I-94 is left to the federal highway authorities, its interchanges at County Road 8 and State Highway 24 create the potential for development and/or increased traffic in the quadrant. Highway 55 connects four of the five cities in the quadrant and is a major thoroughfare for commuter and local traffic. In response to the high volume of traffic on Highway 55, and to preserve the potential for future right-of-way expansion, the County has adopted an ordinance and an “official map” that identifies land adjacent to 55, from Buffalo to Annandale, which may be needed for future expansion.

There are several potential areas in the NWQ (and one in the NEQ) that merit more detailed study in regard to both transportation and other land use issues as time and funds become available: 1) The proposed Aggregate Resource Area in Southside Township; 2) the proposed Aggregate Resource Area in Monticello Township; 3) the Hasty freeway interchange area in Silver Creek Township, and; 4) the Transition Areas around Annandale, Maple Lake and Clearwater (including the proposed interregional connection from I-94 to US Highway 10).

In Southside Township, the impending increase in heavy truck traffic due to the concentration of aggregate-related uses, coupled with the potential for conflicts between commuter and recreational traffic, cries out for further study. The issues in the Monticello ARA are similar, and need to be viewed in the context of the imminent expansion of State Highway 25. The



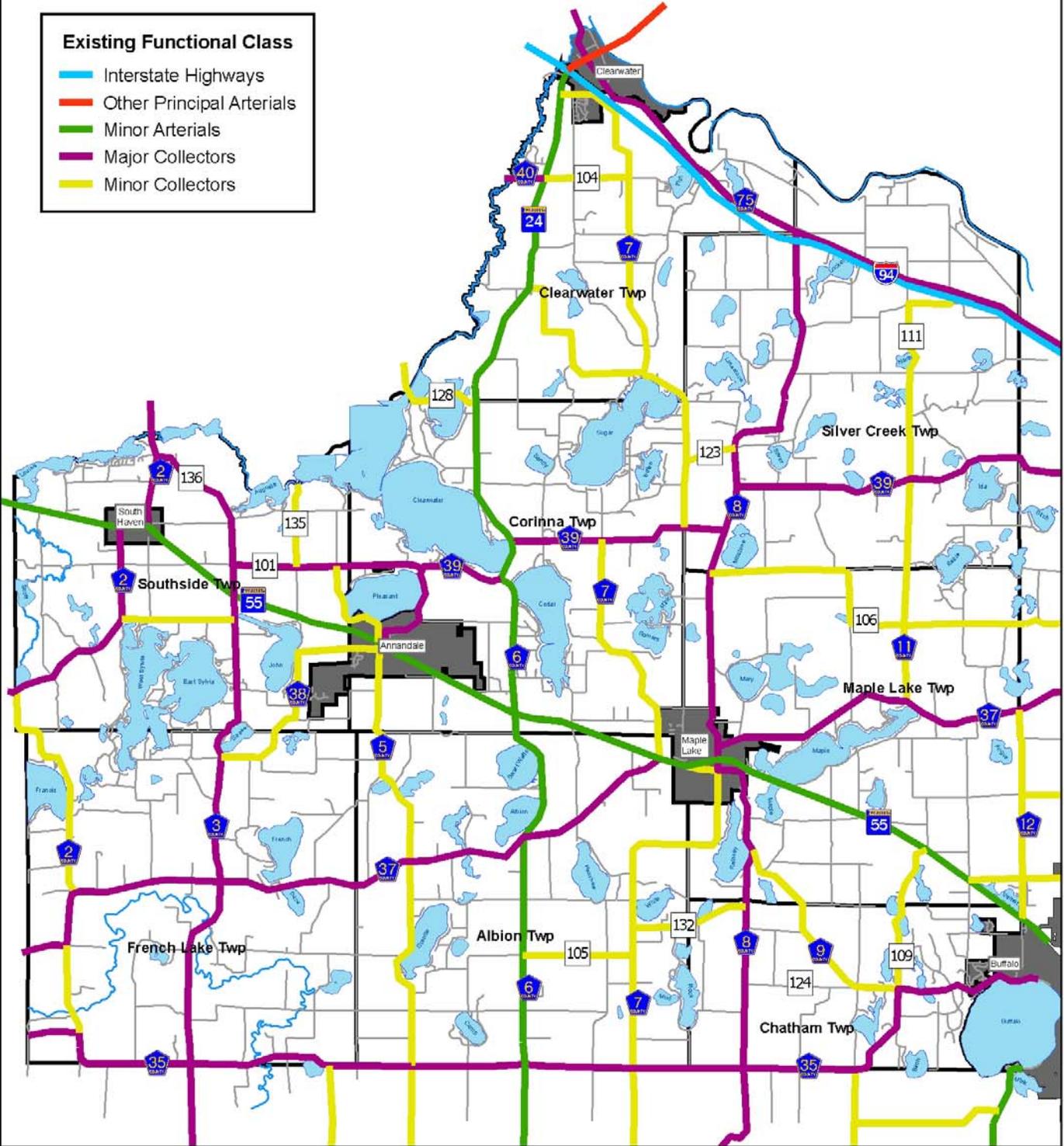
County and affected Townships should consider the use of revenue from the aggregate tax to, at least partially, provide more detailed plans for these areas.

The Hasty interchange has the potential for limited commercial development, and a plan for that development and the accompanying traffic-related issues would aid in making the best and most efficient use of that area. While limited by a lack of sewer and water and other urban infrastructure, this is the only freeway interchange in the County which is not located within city limits and therefore will continue to be beset by pressure for development. Silver Creek Township has voiced a serious concern that the nature of development around this interchange should be a benefit to the community, of high quality and reflect the rural values voiced by the Township and its residents.

Detailed planning of roads and land use may be needed in the Transition Areas, and will depend on cooperation between the relevant City, Township(s) and the County. The proposed interregional connection from I-94 to US Highway 10 may also have an affect on the land use around the Clearwater area, though development impact will likely be minimal, or even negative due to the limited local access to and from the connection.

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

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



Existing Functional Classification

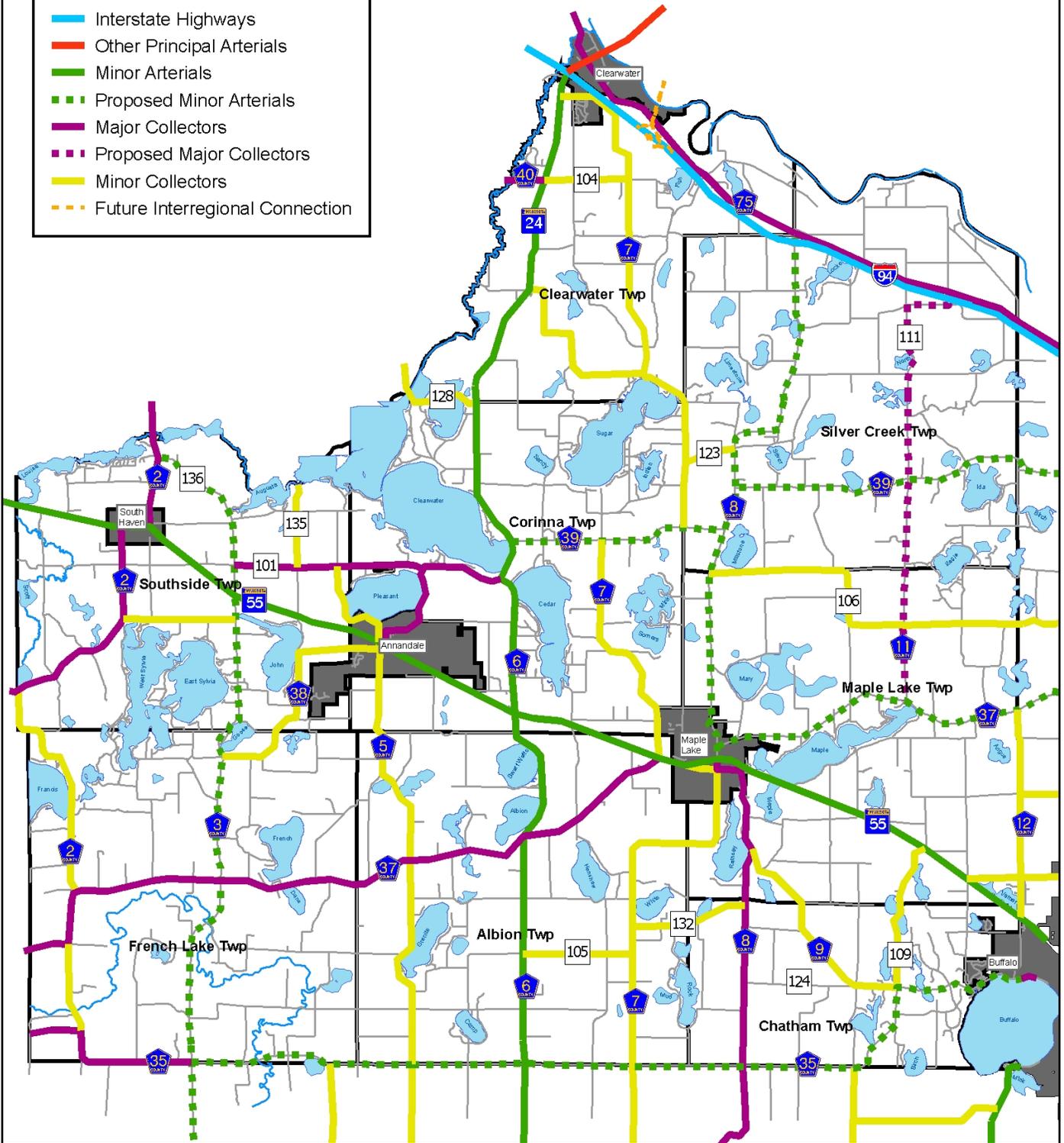
Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan Map

0 0.45 0.9 1.8 2.7 Miles



Drafted: January 22, 2009

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



Future Functional Classification

Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan Map



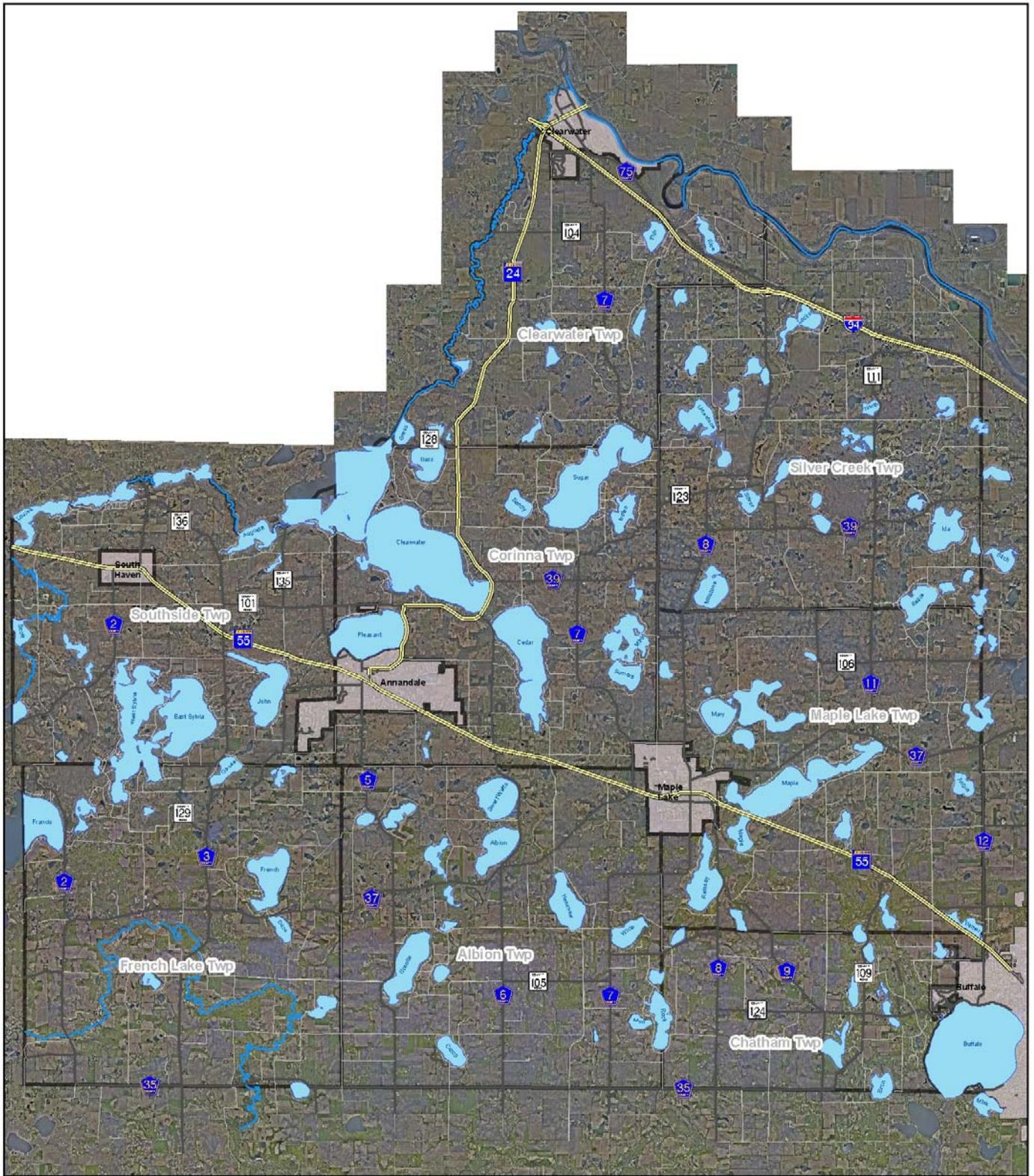
Drafted: January 22, 2009

Aerial Photograph

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

The aerial photography used in the Northwest Quadrant (NWQ) Land Use Update was flown in 2005. The photos were produced at a 1 foot pixel resolution (1 pixel per square foot). The photographs were then geo-rectified to a specific coordinate system that allows them to be layered with other Wright County data. For example, the aerial photography was used as a base to identify likely areas to include in the new Resource Area district. Other data, such as wildlife/green corridors, wetlands, public lands, and soils, were layered over the aerial photography to show areas that may be suited for inclusion into the district. From this map, staff and the Resource Committee conducted a tour of likely areas to aide in selection of the most appropriate locations. Aerials were also used to help determine possible changes to the existing Land Use Plan map. The photography allowed us to view existing developments, rather than just colors on a map. Existing uses were identified using the aerials and then compared to the land use districts and adjacent land uses.

New aerial photographs were taken in the spring of 2008, along with two-foot contour elevations. Once fully available and implemented, these new datasets will dramatically increase the usefulness of existing data by allowing planners to see the land in three dimensions. The use of aerial photography has taken an increasingly important role in land use planning and zoning administration. As technology improves, the practical uses of aerial photography will likely increase.



Aerial Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



0 0.45 0.9 1.8 2.7 Miles

Drafted: January 22, 2009

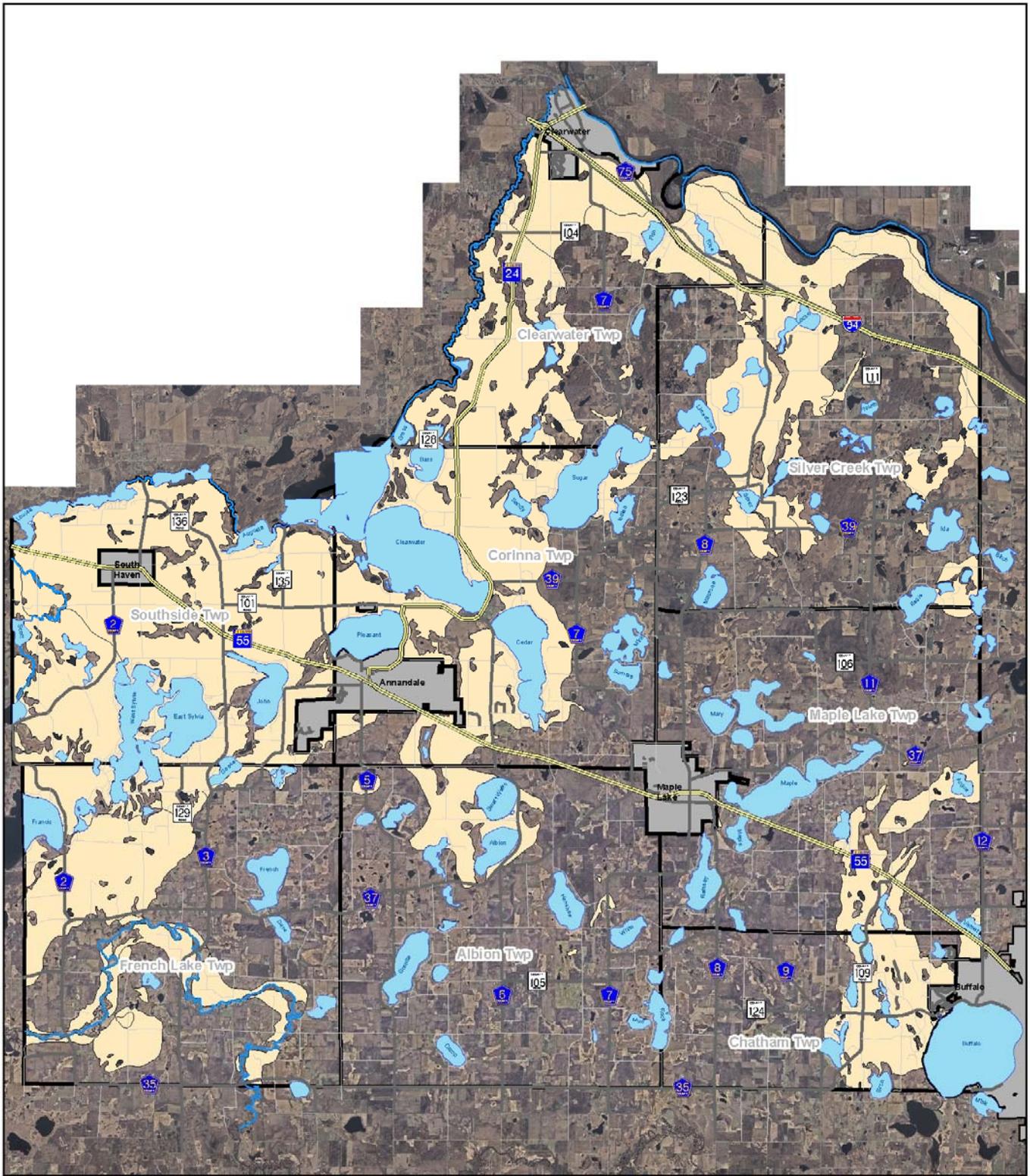
Aggregate Resources

This map highlights the location of the aggregate resources located in the Northwest Quadrant of Wright County. State law and policy, and economic considerations require the County to consider the protection of aggregate resources when developing its planning programs. In the development of a future land use map, it is important to do what is possible to prevent conflicts between current and expected future mining operations and other land uses and residents. Having an inventory of potential aggregate resources is valuable in making many types of land use and zoning decisions. Other Chapters of this Plan and review of the work of the Aggregate Resources Committee provides more detail regarding aggregate resources and planning efforts.

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

The potential aggregate resources data, along with the locations of existing gravel mining operations, ecological features, roads and densely developed areas, was helpful in drawing a future land use map, and creating an Aggregate Resource Area where gravel mining would be a prevalent land use, and where non-agricultural development would be strictly limited or prohibited.

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



Aggregate Resources Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



Drafted: January 22, 2009

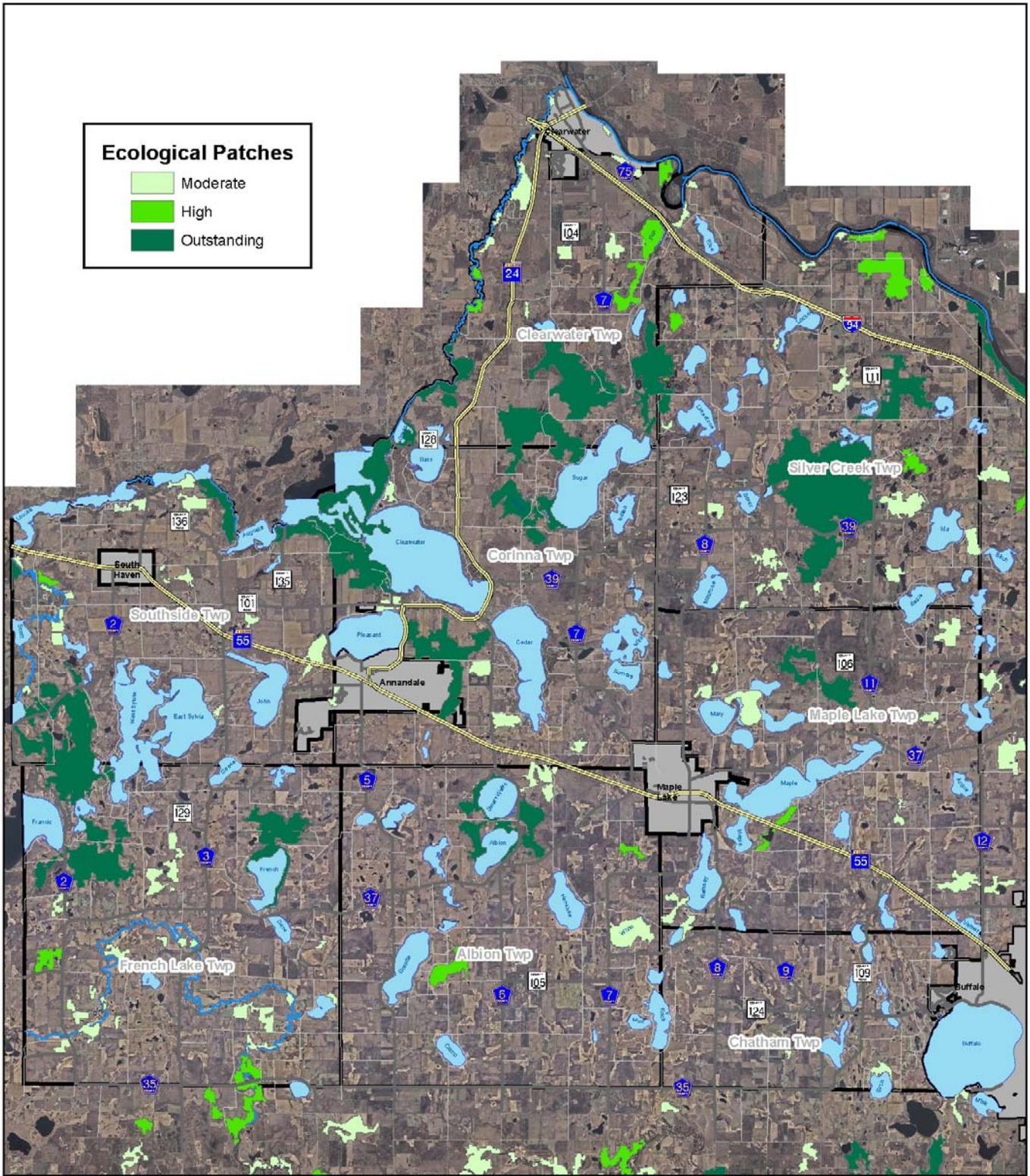
Ecological Resources

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

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

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

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



Ecological Patches

- Moderate
- High
- Outstanding



Ecological Resources Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



0 0.45 0.9 1.8 2.7 Miles

Drafted: January 22, 2009

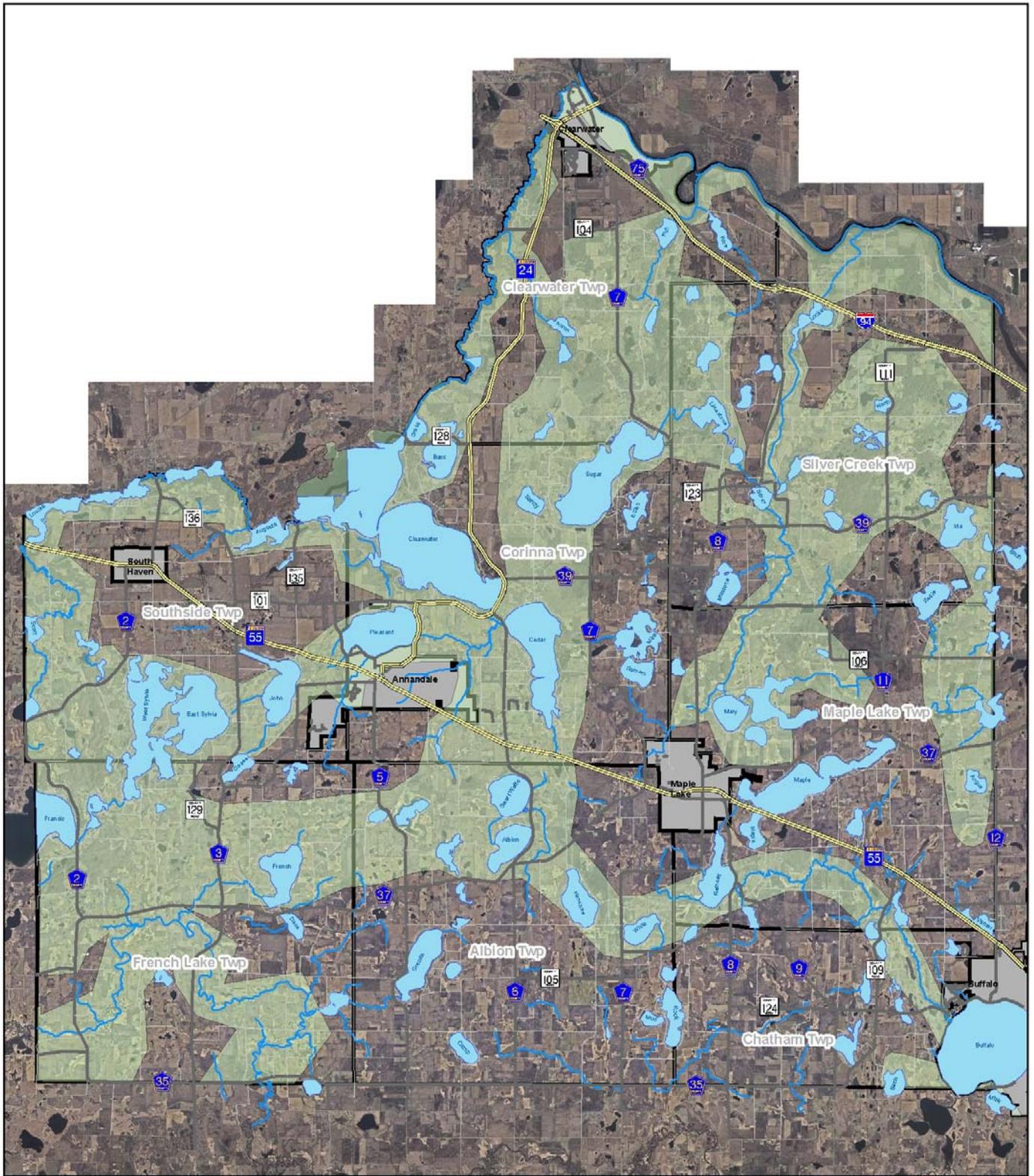
Metro Conservation Corridors

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

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

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

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



Metro Conservation Corridor Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



0 0.45 0.9 1.8 2.7 Miles

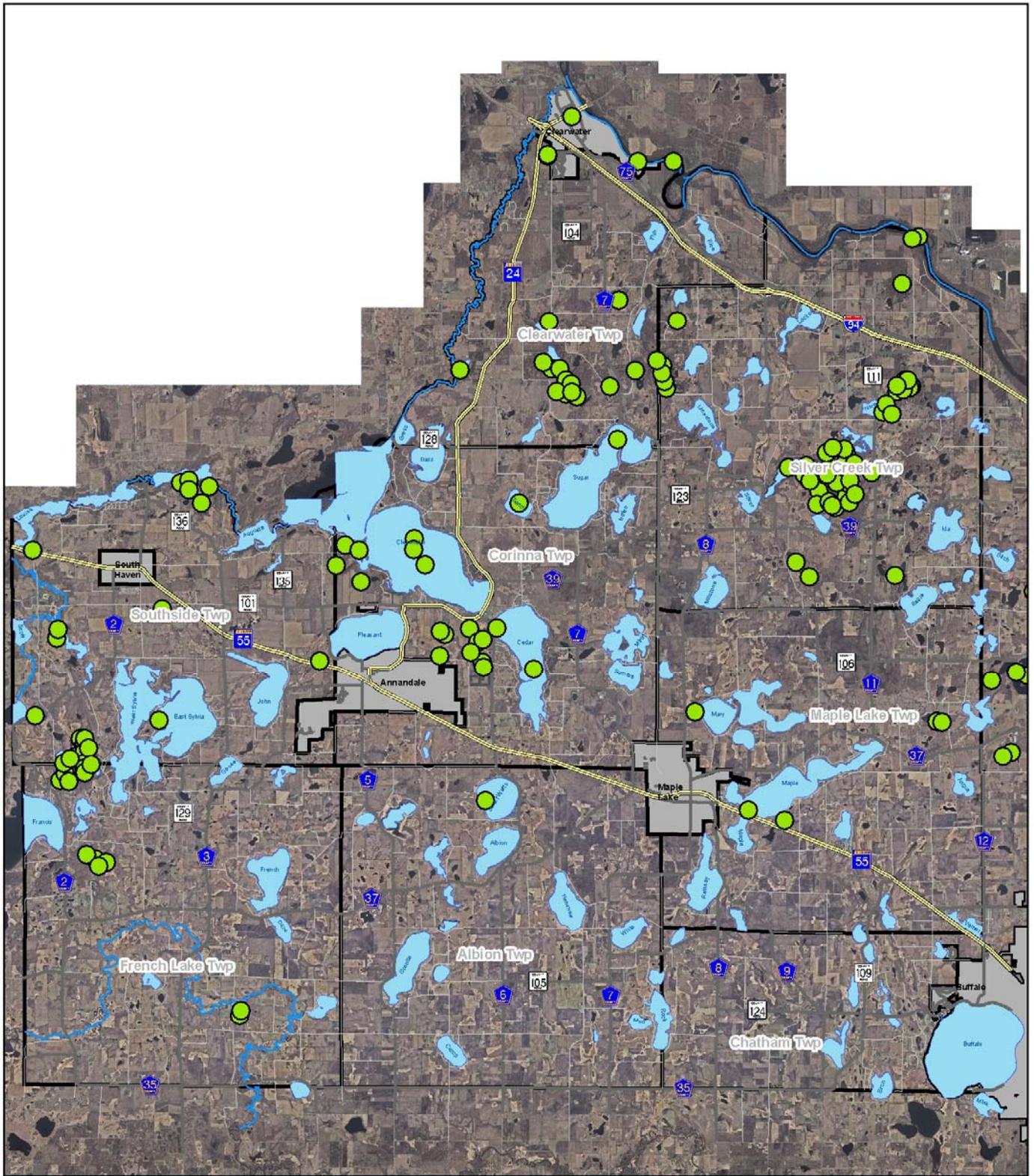
Drafted: January 22, 2009

Rare Natural Features

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

Many of the records have been added since the creation of the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS). The oldest records are from the 1800's, but confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the data set begins to diminish prior to 1987. However, from 1987 until the present, the DNR has been continually updating this data. This county by county survey of rare natural features by the MCBS is an ongoing survey, and has been completed for many counties in Minnesota, including Wright County. The base of the data was collected through the biological survey process but is continually updated through field work and public submission (through a rare feature reporting form). Some of the resources contained include plant and animal species, animal aggregations, native plant communities, and geologic features. The primary emphasis is on species and ecological communities that are rare or endangered.

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



Rare Natural Features Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



0 0.45 0.9 1.8 2.7 Miles

Drafted: January 22, 2009

Lakes and Wetlands

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

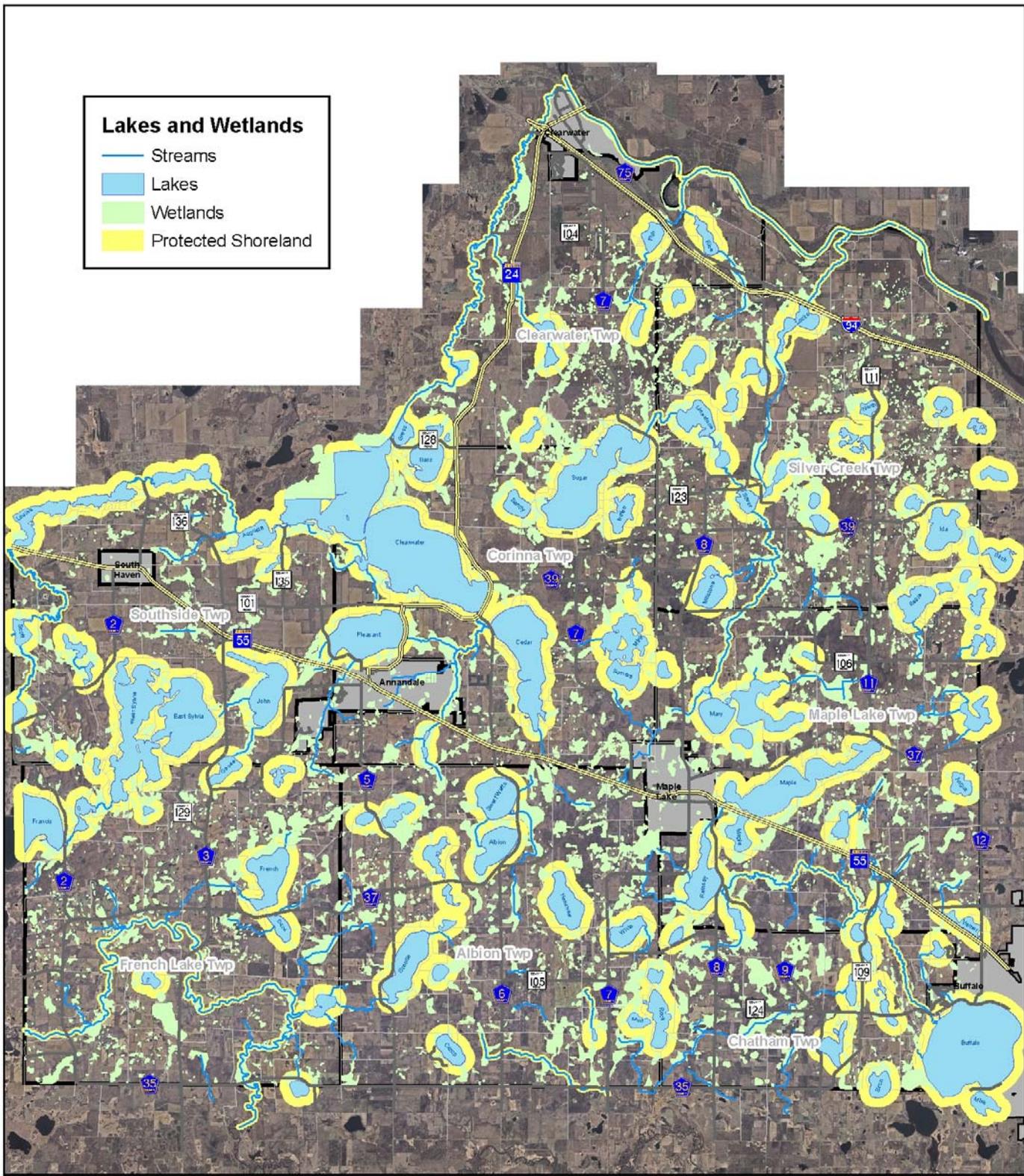
All photo-interpretable wetlands are mapped. In the treeless prairies, ¼ acre wetlands are mapped, and in forested areas, small open water and emergent wetlands are mapped. In general, the minimum mapping unit is from 1 to 3 acres depending on the wetland type and the scale and emulsion of the source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

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

Lake and wetland information is especially important to planning efforts in the Northwest Quadrant of Wright County due to the major portion of the economy that is dedicated to recreation on the lakes in this area. Water quality maintenance and improvement is essential to this economy and is clearly important to most residents in this area. With other resources, data on this map was very useful to the Natural Resources/Water Quality Committee, as is discussed elsewhere in this Plan.

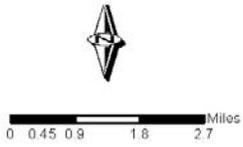
Lakes and Wetlands

-  Streams
-  Lakes
-  Wetlands
-  Protected Shoreland



Lakes and Wetlands

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



Drafted: January 22, 2009

Agriculture in the Northwest Quadrant

As in most of Wright County, agriculture is the predominant land use in the NWQ in terms of land area, and it remains a crucial economic factor. However, over the last few decades, there has been a noticeable change in the nature of farming in some areas. Many farms and large landholdings have been converted to large lots, “hobby farms”, residential areas, recreational property and parks, particularly in the most northerly and westerly parts of the quadrant where soils are not the best for crop production, or where lakeshore development has taken place. Nonetheless, agriculture, including specialized agriculture like wineries, equine operations and other non-traditional agricultural endeavors, remains a vital and cherished part of all areas of the Northwest Quadrant.

Soil “quality” in the NWQ is quite variable. While soils do not follow township lines, several townships are characterized by predominantly sand, gravel and generally coarse soils. Some owners/renters of large tracts of coarse soils have utilized irrigation to enhance the viability of productive agriculture, and with great success. The topography on these coarse soils often creates pockets of productive, irrigated land surrounded by rolling hills of woodland and/or prairie vegetation. Generally, there is not the irrigation investment made by animal-based farms, so there are few sizeable feedlots currently located in those coarse soil areas. Animal agriculture used to rely on home-grown crops, with many farms needing to plant high-water demand alfalfa and corn in their crop rotation. High input costs for irrigation have made large-scale animal agriculture less economical on these coarse soils. Therefore, hobby farms, mostly with horses, can often be found scattered throughout these areas.

Albion, Maple Lake and western Chatham Township (together with adjoining areas in Corinna, Silver Creek and French Lake) have mostly prime, highly-productive farmland, and many of the farmers in this area are large-tract landowners. The large machinery used on these operations often takes up the entire width of local roads and can impact roadbed longevity and traffic. Furthermore, there are numerous feedlot operations scattered throughout the prime soils area with primarily beef and dairy operations. Most of the small and mid-sized dairy operations will haul manure on a daily basis, usually to a temporary stockpile during the summer. There can be manure spreading after each cutting of alfalfa (3-4 times over the summer) and daily during fall to spring. Local and state feedlot rules include setbacks for manure application, but they apply chiefly to water quality protection.

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

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Prime Farmland Soils

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

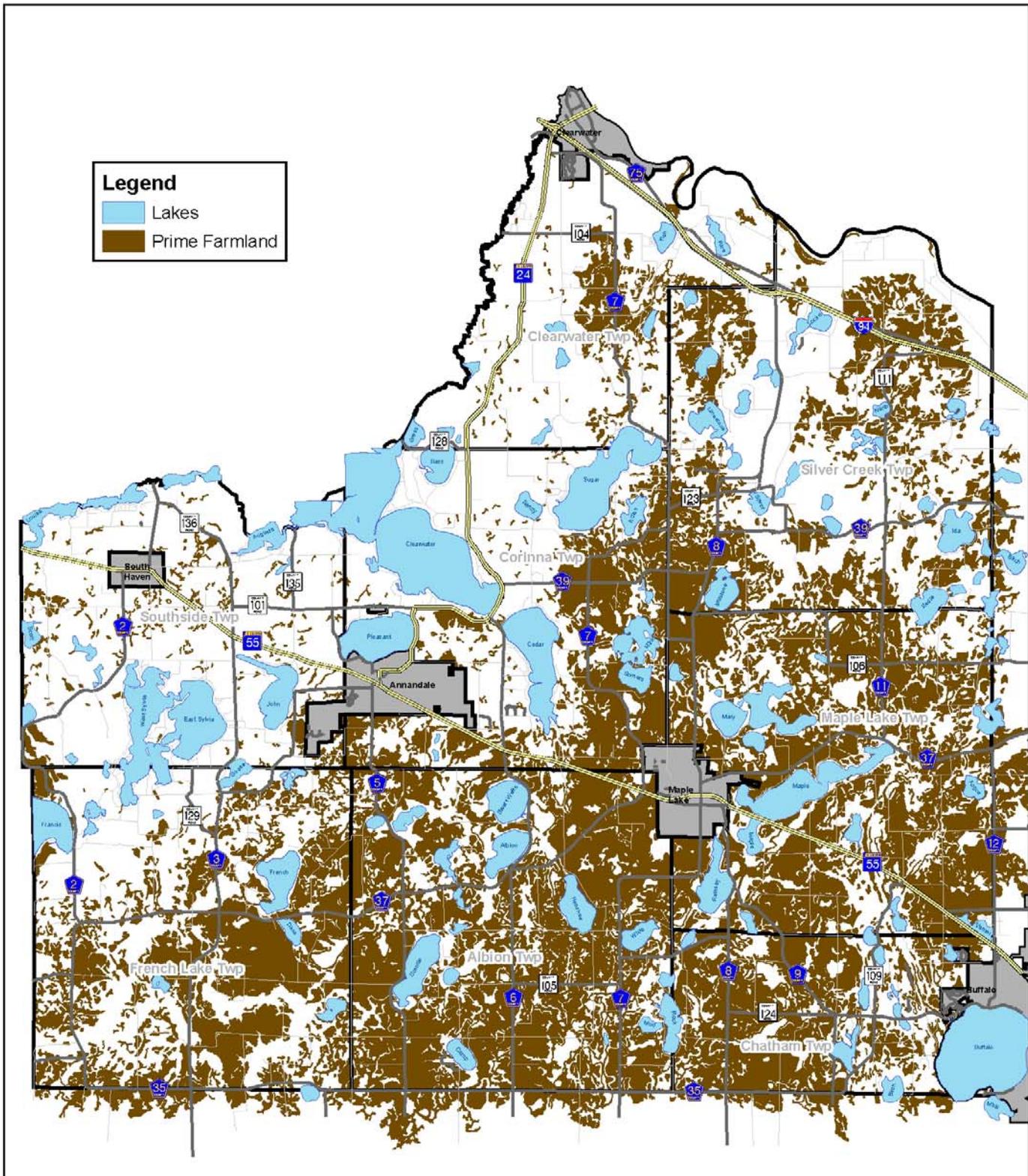
In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively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

Prime farmland in Minnesota generally includes:

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

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

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



Prime Farmland Soils Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



Drafted: January 22, 2009

Feedlot Map

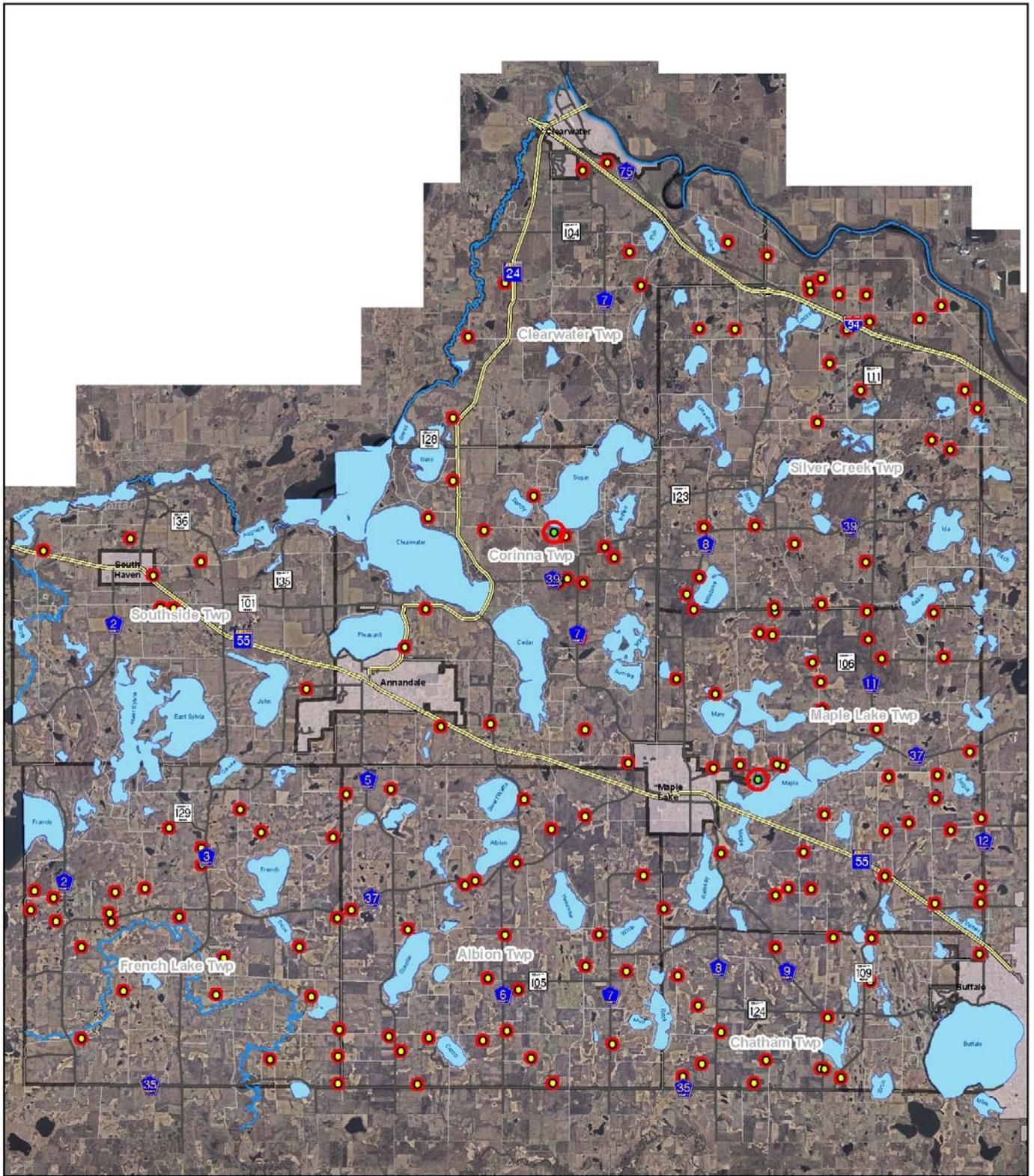
Feedlot data is gathered on a four-year rotation with the most recent update in 2006. The location of each feedlot is marked using the air photo (and a site sketch if available) to outline the lots and buildings used for animal containment. A 500 foot buffer is placed around this outline if the feedlot contains 10 or more animal units, but less than 500 animal units. Feedlots with 500 or more animal units will have a 1000 foot buffer. Feedlots with 10 or more animal units are required to be registered with the county.

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

The feedlot registration process involves a three page form sent to the producer. The third page of the 2006 registration update asked for the producer to give an estimate of the number and type of animals they would have for the next four years. Some producers may have estimated high for their numbers, especially the smaller “hobby farms”, but they will usually still have ten or more animal units. Registrations going forward are asking the producer to give an average maximum number of animals for the past 5 years. Updated registrations are required by January 1, 2010. A producer may re-register by returning the registration form, or their information is automatically updated when the Wright County Feedlot Administrator does a site inspection.

The NWQ currently includes feedlots up to 765 animal units and many families with an apparent commitment to long term farming plans. An expansion of a feedlot in a Residential or Resource Land use area requires a Conditional Use Permit. Existing feedlot locations are taken into consideration when designating new Residential districts or Resource Land. Areas with existing feedlots are not generally considered to be appropriate for designation as Residential or Resource Land.

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



Feedlot Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



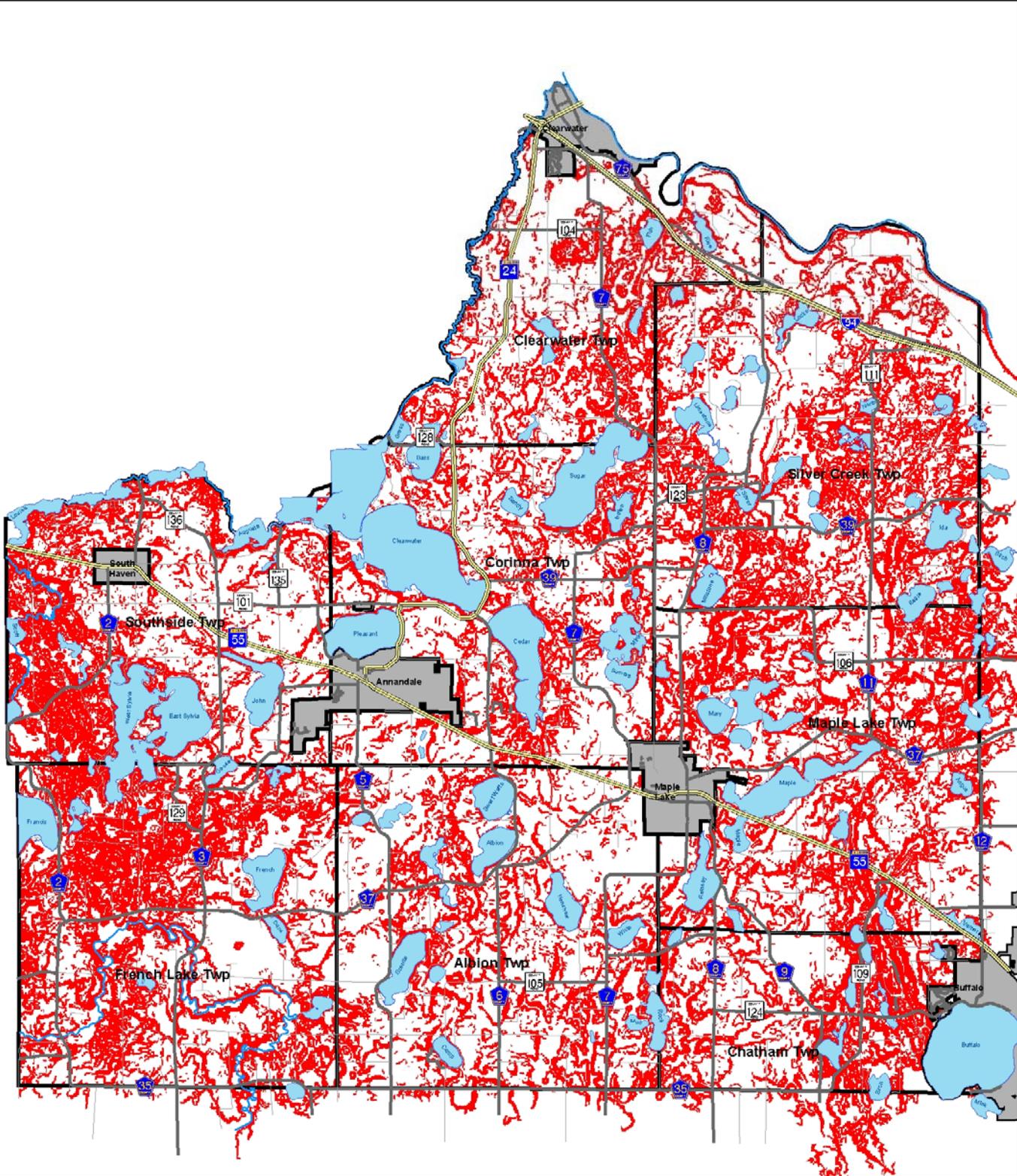
Drafted: January 22, 2009

Steep Slopes

Steep slopes are topographic features that are defined as having a slope of 12 percent or greater. The Steep Slopes layer was created using contour elevation data for the County. These elevations were then analyzed to find areas with slopes of 12 percent or greater. The County is awaiting new topography data with two foot contour intervals. This new data will improve the slope layer by allowing the County to use better base data.

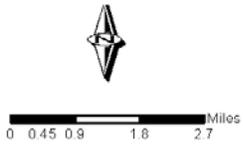
From a land-use standpoint, steep slopes are an indicator of areas that may not be suitable for intense residential or agricultural activities. Steep slopes in shoreland areas are especially important to recognize, where intense development not only compromises the integrity of these slopes, but once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

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



Steep Slopes

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



Drafted: January 22, 2009

Resource Overlay

The Resource Overlay map combines several different resource layers onto one map. The layers include streams, lakes, wetlands, protected shoreland, farmland preserve, prime farmland, aggregate resources and significant terrestrial and wetland ecological areas, or ecological patches.

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

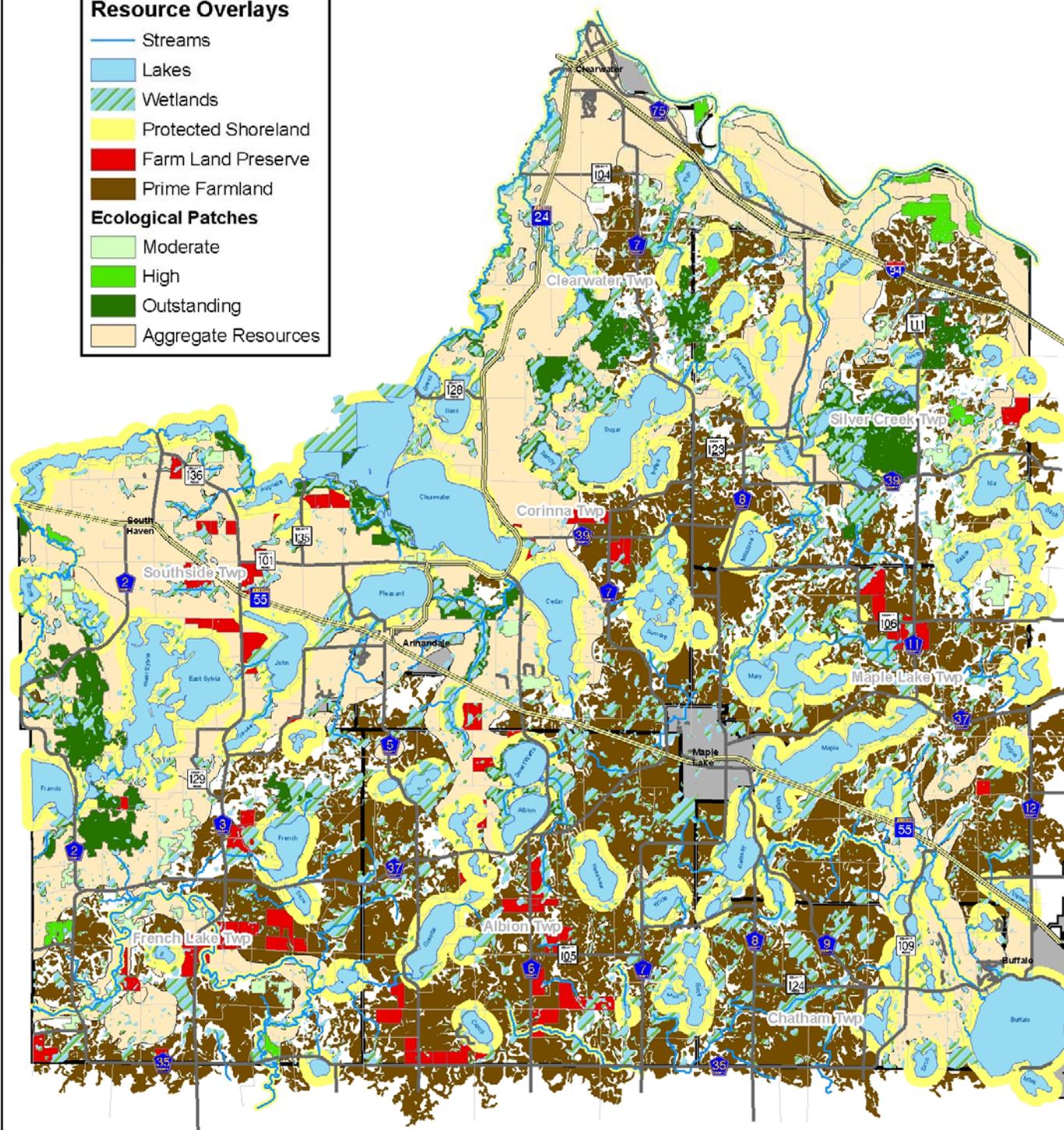
Farmland Preserve is a state program that provides a property tax reduction for agricultural lands. The land must be in an area designated Agricultural or Rural Residential in the County Land Use Plan. The land must be at least 35 acres and remain in the program for a minimum of eight years. The purpose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

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

The Aggregate Resource Map shows where the aggregate resources are located within Wright County. Having this inventory aids in the development of the land use map, and is helpful in creating policies that protect aggregate resources from future use conflicts that would hinder future aggregate mining operations. The data used to create this overlay was compiled and provided by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

The ecological resources overlay map highlights ecologically sensitive areas in the NWQ and shows an analysis of significant terrestrial (ex. forests and grasslands) and wetland ecological areas in the County. Based on a fixed set of criteria, these areas are given an importance ranking of moderate, high, or outstanding. The data is provided by the Department of Natural Resources. Many of the areas identified on this map are areas that are now contained within the Resource Lands District or remain in a land use designation that would have low density development such as Agricultural.

- Resource Overlays**
- Streams
 - Lakes
 - Wetlands
 - Protected Shoreland
 - Farm Land Preserve
 - Prime Farmland
- Ecological Patches**
- Moderate
 - High
 - Outstanding
 - Aggregate Resources



Resource Overlay Map

Wright County Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan



Drafted: January 22, 2009

3.0 Process, Review, and Public Input

3.1 Overview

The NWQ Plan is step two in a three-step process to completely update the comprehensive land use plan of Wright County. Though spearheaded by Wright County Planning and Zoning staff, the plan could not have come together without the assistance of the consulting firm of SEH, Inc., and guidance by the Wright County Planning Commission. Furthermore, multiple meetings with the quadrant's eight townships, several general and specific topic open houses for public review and comment, the work of the various committees described below, and other comments received from landowners gave county staff the information necessary to aid in the drafting of this plan.

There were many opportunities for public involvement during this planning process. First, there were three well publicized "kickoff" open houses held in January and February, 2008, in Annandale, Maple Lake and Silver Creek Township. Four committees were recruited and appointed by the Wright County Board of Commissioners to address specific areas of the Plan: aggregate resources, natural resources/water quality, Annandale's Transition area, and Maple Lake's Transition Area. The natural resources/water quality committee held an open house in October of 2008 and the aggregate resources' committee held two informational meetings in January of 2009. As work on the Plan was being finalized in the late autumn of 2008, preliminary findings and proposals were reviewed with each Township Board at their regular meetings.

3.2 Open Houses

To kick off the Plan, three open houses were held in January and February of 2008. These were set up to share with the public the preliminary findings and background data on population growth, transportation, natural resources, gravel mining, parks and recreation, past and current planning efforts and other important factors impacting the lives and aspirations of the people who live and work in northwestern Wright County. The open house participants were also given the opportunity to complete a survey, the results of which are available as an appendix to this Plan.

NWQ residents that completed the survey generally agree that a long range plan is necessary to preserve natural resources, improve lake quality and control growth in the townships. They also see that agriculture is an important component of Wright County's economy. A majority of people say that limited commercial and industrial uses are appropriate along major roadways and that gravel is a vital resource but more restrictions are necessary. While the survey is a fair representation of thoughts and opinions of those that participated, it is not, nor was it ever presented as a scientific survey.

The open houses included representatives from the Planning and Zoning Office, along with numerous other agencies that have an interest in planning and conservation efforts.

These included the Wright Soil and Water Conservation District, Wright County Parks, the Wright County Highway Department, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Maps and information were available about aggregate resources, the County Agricultural Preserve program, conservation best management practices, conservation and natural resource data, feedlots, highways and traffic issues, individual sewage treatment systems, lakes and wetlands, parks and the current Land Use Plan.

Not all attendees signed in at these meetings, so attendance estimates based on these sign up sheets are likely low. Nevertheless, according to attendance sheets, the open house at Annandale High School on January 28, 2008 had 65 attendees. 50 people attended the open house at Maple Lake High School on February 6, 2008, and 93 signed in at the Silver Creek Town Hall on February 7, 2008. At these meetings, only the existing Land Use Plan was displayed. No new land use changes or proposals were presented. Basic parcel maps of each township were available for residents to mark locations of interest and to make comments. The comments from all the open houses were transcribed for presentation to the Planning Commission. The purpose was to derive, as well as possible, a sense of the concerns and hopes of the public for the future of the area. For these reasons, the response to the open house was an important guide for County Staff in the preparation of the Plan, since it was clear that landowner sentiment favored maintaining a rural atmosphere and protecting the environment and natural resources.

3.3 Special Committees

There were four committees established to further analyze 3 major issues that were vital to the Plan: Transition Areas, Resource Lands, and Aggregate Resources. A Committee was established for each of the Transition Areas of Maple Lake and Annandale. One committee was established to study natural resource-related issues, and another was formed to assess aggregate resource-related issues.

The Four Cities in the NWQ - Transition Areas and Committees

The Annandale Transition Area committee met three times during the summer of 2008, and was quite successful in amicably establishing a mutually agreeable Transition Area boundary. Transition areas were a very controversial and contentious issue in the NEQ, which is one reason these committees were formed. Representatives from Southside and Corinna Township met with Annandale members in City Hall, and the meetings went very well. In fact, much of the discussion in this committee revolved around other ways to coordinate planning between the communities, including trail system connections and issues surrounding the provision of municipal sewer services to lakeshore properties near the City. In the end, all three local units of government agreed with the County on a mapped Transition Area that should easily accommodate future growth for the city over the time frame (approximately 20 years) envisioned for this Plan. Complete consensus was gained on the Transition Area, which focuses on growth primarily toward the south and west.

The Maple Lake committee met one time in September of 2008 and was able to come to a quick resolution on the boundaries of the Maple Lake Transition Area. Representatives from Albion, Corinna and Maple Lake Township were all present for the meeting with the Mayor and city staff in City Hall. The City of Maple Lake's Comprehensive Plan was very informative and helpful during this process, as it was a realistic and practical roadmap for their growth. In fact, an informal agreement between the City and Township of Maple Lake already existed for an Orderly Annexation Area. The existing County Land Use Plan already included most of what the City was showing for future growth, and with minor changes in Albion Township, consensus on the new Transition Area was reached quickly.

The City and Township of Clearwater have an orderly annexation agreement that designates a very substantial area for future City growth. This area and agreement were reviewed by County staff with City and Township officials at a regular meeting of the Clearwater Orderly Annexation Area Joint Planning Board. All agreed that the orderly annexation area would serve as an appropriate area to be included in the County Plan as a Transition Area for Clearwater.

The City of South Haven has a sewage treatment plant in Southside Township and it is relatively new, but the plant was not built to provide any major growth for the City. In addition, there is a substantial area of undeveloped land already within the South Haven City limits, and there has not been any indication of extraordinary growth planned or expected for the City. Therefore, no major changes are planned for the Transition Area around South Haven.

Water Quality/Natural Resources Committee

The Wright County Board appointed seven members to the Water Quality and Natural Resource Committee and they met for the first time in early March, 2008. The main tasks for the committee were to: 1) Identify natural resource areas of the NWQ that are significant and could be designated as "Resource Lands" in accord with the process started in the NEQ Plan; 2) to review and suggest modification, if necessary, for the policies that were developed during the NEQ Plan, and; 3) review and suggest changes for County implementation of land use policies that would enhance the quality of the lakes, water and natural resources of Wright County.

The Committee met with various agencies (Parks Dept., SWCD, DNR, etc.) to get a better idea of the location of some of these important features in the County. After the third meeting, the committee began to identify and map important areas that fit the definition of the resources that were worthy of protection. The group toured these areas to get a better idea of the nature of the resources and to identify some additional policies that may assist them in their mission. One challenge was addressing those Resource Lands that were already designated in the existing Land Use Plan as Rural Residential, and a new policy was adopted to address this situation. Two other policies dealing with mining and animals/feedlots were adopted as well.

Once the Committee finalized the map and policies, an informational public meeting was held in Annandale for those property owners within the proposed Resource Lands. Approximately 60 people attended the open house and the feedback was generally quite positive. While a few landowners requested to be removed from the area, most were supportive of the County taking a stance to preserve natural resources in this area, and a few landowners requested to be included in the district.

The Committee met a final time to discuss the results of the open house and to decide on a final map that would take into consideration all the feedback received. The Committee also requested to stay together after the Land Use Plan is finalized to discuss and possibly amend the areas of County ordinances that pertain to our natural resources and water quality. In general, there was complete consensus by all members on the work and final conclusions and recommendations of this committee.

Aggregate Resources Committee

In March of 2008 the Wright County NWQ Aggregate Resources Committee began their task of mapping and creating policies for the NWQ and NEQ aggregate resource areas. Their goals were fourfold: 1) To map out the proposed Aggregate Resource Areas (ARAs) in the NWQ and NEQ; 2) To update, if necessary, the aggregate resource policies published in the NEQ Plan; 3) To define the policies that will apply both in and out of the ARA, and; 4) To consider amendments to the gravel mining ordinance that would implement the mapped areas and the land use policies created. The first several meetings of the committee were primarily educational, and included a review of past work by the County in this area, state laws and policies, data available from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and included guest speakers from the DNR Minerals Division and the Aggregate and Ready-Mix Association of Minnesota.

The committee was deliberately composed of members with widely varying viewpoints on mining and its potential impact on the environment. Representatives of the industry, lake association members with environmental concerns, property owners near mining areas and property owners with land including aggregate all brought unique viewpoints to the table. After nine meetings, the committee came close to a consensus on the two areas to be mapped, and there was very little debate on updating the NEQ Plan policies for the NWQ. However, composing new communally acceptable policies that will apply to mining both in the ARA and County-wide was much more difficult. Though a majority of the committee did reach a conclusion on the policies proposed in this Plan, complete consensus was never achieved. Mining aggregate has always been a very controversial topic in Wright County, and the work of this committee was not easy, nor is it expected to be universally accepted. Ordinance amendments to implement the Plan were discussed, and will be pursued after the NWQ Plan is adopted.

The Committee was successful in creating a new ARA in Southside Township, and the NEQ ARA was reduced by 45% from what had been proposed originally. Along with the general policies that were adopted as part of the NEQ Plan, the committee proposed to amend one policy and add a new one as described later. Model policies were drafted that

define the major regulatory differences inside and outside the ARAs, though this is where the disagreements surfaced most strongly and where the committee could not reach a full consensus. It is possible that many of these differences may be resolved through the ordinance amendment process, but as a practical matter, not every difference will be resolved, as members hold honestly divergent opinions that simply cannot be reconciled.

3.4 Final Open Houses, Other Public Input and Conclusion

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

State law requires that the County Planning Commission hold a public hearing prior to making a final recommendation on the Plan to the County Board of Commissioners. Prior to that hearing, two final “open house” meetings were held. The meeting on May 4, 2009 was held at the Maple Lake High School and the one on May 7, 2009 was at the Clearwater Township Hall. The staff presentation included a short explanation of each committee’s work process and the corresponding proposed districts. Any change to land use plan maps for each township was highlighted and the planning process used to make those decisions was explained. Large, paper maps of the proposed land use districts for each township were also displayed. Administrator Salkowski presented the plan and its background with a speech and Powerpoint presentation. Planning and Zoning staff, a representative from the SWCD and members of the various committees were available to answer questions and record comments before and after the presentation. There were about 50 people at the Maple Lake open house and about 60 attended the meeting in Clearwater. Constituent comments received were generally positive.

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

4.0 Land Use Plan

4.1 Purpose/Introduction

The purposes of land use planning are:

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

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

The goals and policies of this chapter build upon the Planning Principles stated in previous chapters, as well as input from the public and the NWQ's various committees. The principles are the fundamental tenets upon which this Land Use Plan is built. The goals and policies are more specific.

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

4.2 Overall Goals and Policies

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

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

Policy Statements

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Policy Statements

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Policy Statements

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

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

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

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

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

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

Policy Statements

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

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

- Development of lakeshore property shall abide by State Shoreland Management Rules to maintain, as far as practical, a natural shoreline and natural views of shoreland areas from the lake's surface.
- The intensity of development in rural areas shall be restricted so as not to overload natural surface drainage systems. Where development is proposed that will add significant impervious surface areas or interfere with natural drainage systems, the developer will be required to provide facilities to compensate for any negative impacts.
- Mining and other commercial or industrial endeavors shall be required to shield adjoining property from deleterious effects.
- In accord with County policies and regulations, the use of planned unit development (PUD) and residential PUD concepts will be encouraged where such developments provide enhanced environmental protection, protect natural features and result in a better overall design than would result from standard subdivision practices.

- In general, development activity should take place in harmony with the existing, stable, natural environment. Development proposals should be adapted to suit the natural landscape, rather than altering the land to suit the development.

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

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

Policy Statements

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

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

Policy Statements

- Coordinate and plan road improvements with appropriate road authorities including identification of jurisdictional responsibilities and collaborative financing mechanisms.
- Require new development to provide an adequate system of local streets while limiting direct access to major thoroughfares in order to maintain safe and efficient operations on these roadways.
- Require the dedication or preservation of right-of-way consistent with appropriate right-of-way standards when property is platted or subdivided, and work with landowners/developers during the site planning and platting process to implement safe and efficient roadway design.

- Plan, design, and construct transportation improvements that respect the natural environment and reflect the aesthetic character and values of the citizens of the NWQ 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 NW Wright County Transportation Plan, as well as the Highway 55 Corridor Coalition.

4.3 Specific Areas Goals and Policies

Overall Policy Statement

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

Specific Policy Areas

- Rural Areas – This encompasses the rural, agricultural, aggregate resources, and resource land area of the NWQ. 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 NWQ 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 NWQ. The individual cities are responsible for planning and implementing land use controls within their own borders.
- Transition Areas - Designates areas adjacent to cities where a combination of uses in an urban or near-urban environment is likely to develop over the long term. The purpose is to provide a buffer between urban and rural areas, and promote cooperation between affected cities and townships in making land use decisions.

Rural Policy Areas

The rural areas encompass the unincorporated area of the NWQ. 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, and;
- Manage land use so that urban services will not need to be extended into the rural area, and so that existing service levels (on-site sewers, gravel roads, etc) will meet service needs.

Rural Area Service and Development Policies

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

Rural Area Policy 1: Principal Use

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

goal of preserving the rural area. Land uses that will require service levels greater than those that are generally provided in a rural agricultural area should not be allowed. Uses of this nature will be directed to the urban areas where the needed services are available.

Rural Area Policy 2: Residential Land Uses

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

Rural Area Policy 3: Other Land Uses

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

Rural Area Policy 4: Service and Development Standards

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

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

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

Resource Area Policies

The Resource Land classification identifies lands that have unique environmental features or natural resources. The intent of this district is to highlight these areas as being special, unique and worthy of protection for future generations. The NWQ is unique since it contains a large portion of the County's lakes and wetlands, and many of these areas are incorporated into the Resource Land District. Some people refer to this area as the "Heart of the Lakes".

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

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

Resource Land Policy 1: Protection

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

Resource Land Policy 2: Density

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

Resource Land Policy 3: Siting

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

Resource Land Policy 4: Mining

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

Resource Land Policy 5: Feedlots

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

Resource Land Policy 6: Development

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

Aggregate Area Policies

Aggregates and gravel are used as base materials under foundations and roads. Although they are basic, low-value natural resources, the availability of gravel and construction aggregate is essential to the construction industry, and consequently, economic growth. A major challenge associated with their production is the cost of transportation. Because aggregate and gravel are low-value materials, the net cost of production raises quickly when accounting for transportation costs. Although local market conditions vary, it is generally not cost-effective to haul aggregate more than 20 miles from its mining site. Many localities nationwide have already experienced shortages of construction aggregate. In fact, it has been estimated that the seven-county metro area will run out of easily accessible gravel by 2029. The ultimate reason for this is urbanization, which on the one hand increases the demand for construction aggregates, and on the other, tends to remove aggregate-bearing lands from production through land development and zoning decisions that preclude mining. When sources of aggregate are eliminated locally, and become more remote from places of need, the costs of construction rise significantly. In high

growth areas with rising land values, this creates land use conflicts between the development and mining industries. Often these interdependent industries compete for use of the same land. How can this conflict be turned into opportunity?

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

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

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

The following Aggregate Resource Policies were updated by the Aggregate Committee after a thorough review of the Northeast Quadrant Plan and a complete analysis and discussion of gravel mining in Wright County.

Aggregate Resource Policy 1: Density

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

Aggregate Resource Policy 2: Reclamation

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

Aggregate Resource Policy 3: Timeframe

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

Aggregate Resource Policy 4: Nuisance Mitigation

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

Aggregate Resource Policy 5: Further Study

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

Aggregate Resource Policy 6: Changes in State Law

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

Aggregate Resource Policy 7: Ordinance Changes

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

Aggregate Resource Policy 8: Future Uses

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

Cities Policy Area

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

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

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

Objectives:

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

Cities Policy 1: Focus of Growth and Investment

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

Cities Policy 2: Planning

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

Cities Policy 3: Service Level

The County will support growth that can be accommodated within existing or reasonably planned service capacities of the cities. Growth beyond the service capability of the city

has potential for adverse impacts, not only on the city, but also on surrounding areas and the County as a whole. The County will cooperate with cities whenever possible to ensure adequate levels of public services. The service levels should be maintained at a level that adequately serves the residents. The County and cities should continue to plan jointly in the future to ensure sound planning.

Cities Policy 4: Annexation

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

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

Transition Areas

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

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

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

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

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

Objectives:

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

Policy: Designation of Transition Areas

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

Policy: Level of Service

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

Policy: Management

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

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

4.4 Land Use Definitions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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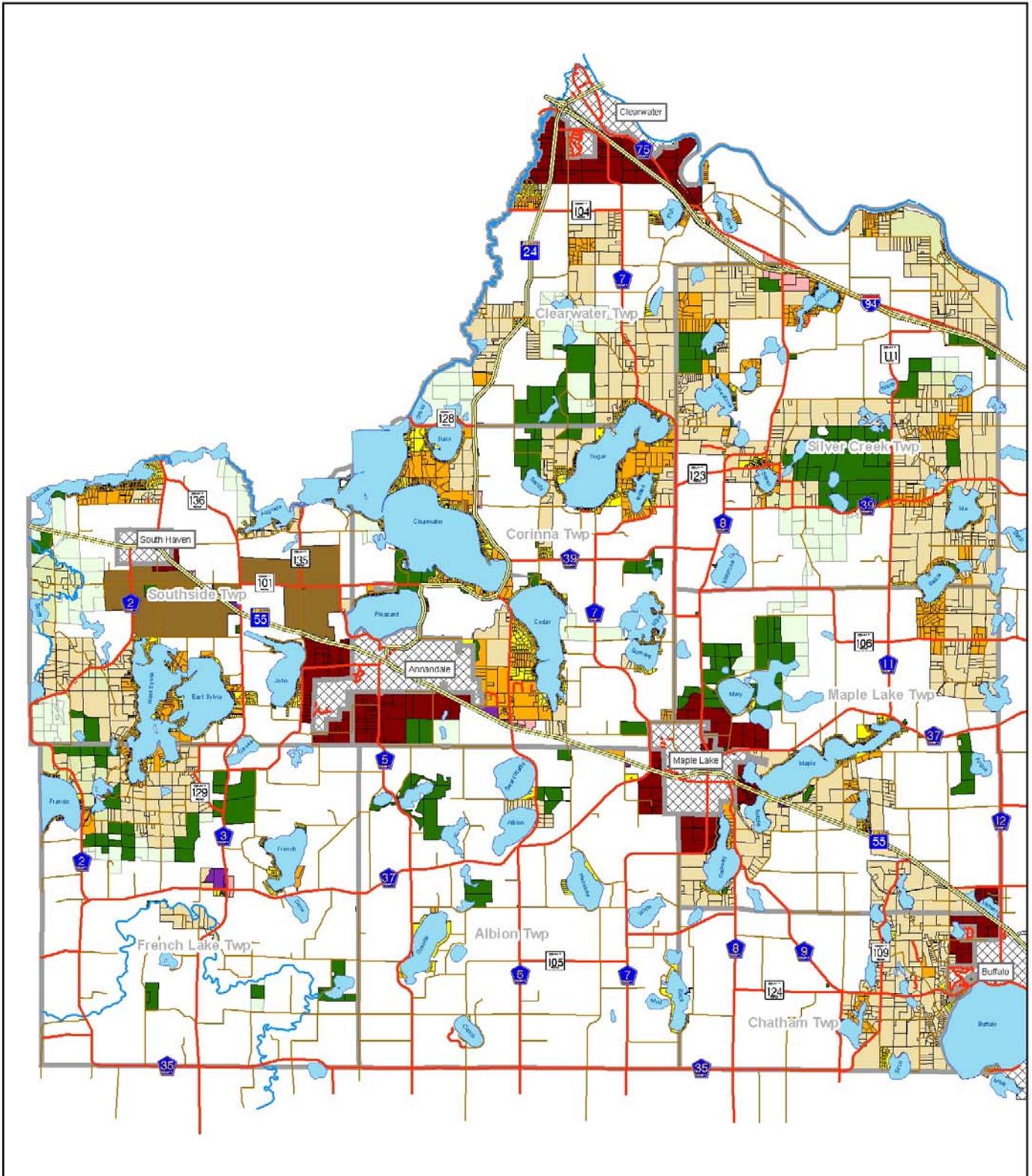
4.5 NWQ Future Land Use Map

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

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

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

Resource Lands and Aggregate Resource Areas were added in strategic locations in the quadrant for several reasons, as described elsewhere. An expanded commercial area is proposed around the I-94 County State Aid Highway #8 interchange and limited, additional commercial areas were designated around Hasty and French Lake to facilitate limited and thoughtful development or redevelopment of these historic villages. Furthermore, relatively small areas of additional Rural Residential were added in French Lake and Clearwater Township, mainly for infill between similar, adjacent land use designations. The Cities of Annandale, Maple Lake, and Clearwater, and their surrounding Townships have come to agreements on the newly designated Transition Areas. South Haven appears to have adequate room for growth for the foreseeable future within the current city limits.



Northwest Quadrant Land Use Plan Map

Land Use Districts

- | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (AG) Agricultural | (R1) Residential | (TA) Transition Area |
| (RR) Rural Residential | (CO) Commercial | (RES) Resource Land |
| (RL) Residential Large Lot | (I1) Limited Industrial | (PU) Public Lands |
| | | (ARA) Aggregate Resource Area |



0 0.35 0.7 1.4 2.8 Miles

Drafted September 1, 2009

5.0 Administration and Implementation

5.1 Plan Administration

In so far as Wright County has previously enacted a zoning ordinance, which includes provisions for agricultural protection, many of the provisions of this Plan can be implemented through continued administration of existing zoning. Some changes in the zoning ordinance may be necessary as a result of this Plan, and the “implementation” section discusses the potential for more substantial changes. Concurrent with work on this Plan update, new County Subdivision Regulations, which have not been reviewed or updated since 1979, are being developed.

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 and, in general, carrying out the day to day administration of planning and zoning in the County.

5.2 Implementation

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

5.3 “1 per 20” Land Use District

The idea of creating a new, 1 unit per 20-acre land use district surfaced during development of the Northeast Quadrant Plan 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. Some of the arguments for and against this proposal, and the potential for implementation, are more thoroughly reviewed in the NEQ Plan. As would be expected, the topic also surfaced during many discussions on the NWQ Plan, and again raises strong opinions on both sides of the issue.

At the time of adoption of the NEQ Plan, the County Planning Commission and County Board decided that this issue will have an impact on the entire County, and therefore should be delayed until the plans for the remaining areas of the County are completed. At that time, a delay of 12 to 18 months was thought to be adequate, and that time has

expired. However, especially because the final part of the County Plan to be updated, the southern “Highway 12 Corridor”, includes the most intensively farmed lands in the County, the County Board and Planning Commission believe that this important topic should be further delayed, but not ignored, and should be addressed as part of the completion of a plan for the entire County. The economic slowdown that reached historical proportions in 2008 also took the pressure off the need for an immediate decision on this matter.

5.4 Transition Areas

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

Unlike the very controversial decisions regarding the development of the Transition Areas in the NEQ, the process and review of these areas occurred with little controversy or animosity in the NWQ. The process used to arrive at the maps for these areas is described in Chapter 3. Where they do not exist, the County does recommend that cities and townships seriously consider the creation of Orderly Annexation Areas (OAAs) 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 OAAs being established. Concepts, such as cluster development that includes plans for future city utilities, could be agreed upon during the OAA negotiation process. For land on the outer edge of the Transition Areas furthest

from the City, clustering could allow some development in the interim period before the land is actually ready to be developed and served with infrastructure by the city. It is imperative that when urban growth reaches rural development or cluster development that these developments be annexed into the city and served by city infrastructure. If this does not happen, a haphazard and inefficient development pattern will emerge, as it already has in some areas due to a lack of planning, or poor planning, in the past.

5.5 Resource Lands

"Resource Lands" have been identified and designated in several locations within the NWQ. Significant units of resource lands have been designated along the Clearwater River in Southside and Clearwater Township; Clearwater, Cedar and Mink Lakes in Corinna Township; Nixon and Cornell Lake in Clearwater Township; the chain of Lakes along the west side of Southside and French Lake Township including Lake Francis, Moose Lake, and Scott Lake; and one of the largest areas, a portion of Mary Lake and land along Silver Creek connecting Ney Park to Lake Maria State Park in Maple Lake/Silver Creek Township. The intent of the Resource Lands District is to highlight the designated areas as special, unique, and worthy of protection for future generations. The Water Quality and Natural Resource Committee (see Public Process section) voiced concern that too much development in these areas will forever alter, if not destroy, important local natural assets such as our lakes and wetlands. 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 these natural resources and maintain/protect the "Heart of the Lakes'" dedication to conservation and rural living.

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

5.6 Aggregate Resources

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 Areas 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. Funding for this project, in part, could come from the Aggregate Material Tax, the rules for which were changed during the 2008 Minnesota legislative session. Until a more detailed study is completed, the existing zoning will remain in place. Furthermore, to incorporate many of the policies and ideas that came out of the NWQ Aggregate Resources Committee, a complete review of the current gravel mining ordinance is necessary to accommodate the desire and intention to delineate rule differences for mining property that is inside and outside the Aggregate Resource Area (ARA). An attempt was made in the Aggregate Resource Committee to draft a preliminary set of basic rules for these lands, but because it appeared that the Committee was far away from a consensus, no single, uniform, set of rules was written and presented as a firm and standing proposal. Rather, any Staff proposal was always presented with a caveat that a majority of the group had never agreed on any set of rules. Nevertheless, the following rules and definition changes, or some version of them, should be implemented when the gravel mining ordinance is rewritten.

Gravel mining policies inside an ARA

1. All newly proposed gravel mining operations would require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP).
2. Once a mining operation is permitted, processing could be permitted administratively, with opportunity for Township review.
3. Screening requirements and other performance standards may be adjusted on an ad hoc basis, at the request of the applicant and at the discretion of the Planning Commission.
4. Seasonal mining and borrow pits could be permitted administratively, with approved plans and opportunity for Township review.
5. An “entitlement” would not be required to mine. (Lands restricted to “agricultural use” could be mined.)

Gravel mining policies outside an ARA

1. Borrow pits for public highway construction jobs could be permitted administratively, with approved plans and an opportunity for Township review, provided they are immediately adjacent to the highway job.
2. Seasonal mineral extraction for public highway construction jobs, and related processing would require a CUP.
3. All forms of processing in existing or new sites would require a CUP.
4. New sites for long-term mineral extraction would be prohibited. Pre-existing, legal pits could continue to operate within the confines of the Conditional Use Permit, but not expand into new areas not included in the original permit.

Proposed Definition Changes

Mining/Mineral Extraction – The extraction of sand, gravel, rock, clay and other minerals from the ground in excess of 1000 cubic yards and the removing thereof from the site.

The removal of minerals associated with construction of a building shall be exempt from this definition provided such removal is an approved item in the building permit.

Mining/Mineral Extraction, Seasonal – Any operation where mining/mineral extraction occurs on a temporary, seasonal basis, not to exceed 2 years in operation, from beginning to reclamation. The mining must be for a highway road construction project. Mining of clay or other similar earthen materials for projects unrelated to highway construction can also be considered under this policy.

Mining/Mineral Extraction, Borrow pit – Seasonal mining/mineral extraction directly related to and used for a highway construction project. The borrow site must be on property directly adjacent to the highway project.

Unresolved issues:

These two suggestions were discussed and debated at length by the committee, with no consensus reached. County Staff see merits on both sides of these debates, but believe that the impact on the entire County, including areas with limited or no aggregate resources, would be unacceptable.

- All mining, except for borrow pits immediately adjacent to road projects, should be prohibited outside an ARA.
- All mining, seasonal, long-term, or otherwise, outside the ARA should be prohibited within 1000 feet of any DNR designated lake.

Trial Period

Though created with the best of intentions, many public policies have unforeseen implications that are not realized until sometime in the future. Because of this possibility, and because of the lack of unanimity on the part of the Aggregate Committee, this concept of an Aggregate Resource Area should be reviewed in 5 years, along with any subsequent changes in County mining regulations.

The County, all the cities and townships within it, and much economic activity are dependent on the availability of aggregate resources. Monticello and Southside Townships are likely to be impacted most dramatically by future demand from both inside and outside the County. At the end of the NWQ review process, those two townships took positions which are nearly opposite and impossible to reconcile with a uniform, county-wide program. Monticello stated its opposition to any ARA, and noted their opinion that the existing regulatory system is adequate. Southside approved its mapped ARA, but asked that all mining other than “borrow pits” be prohibited outside the ARA.

There is little doubt that the mining of sand and gravel will remain a critical and controversial issue in the County, and especially in these two townships. Before the recommendations of this NWQ Plan are fully implemented, the valid concerns and questions of all parties need to be addressed as much as is possible. As noted above, a complete review of current mining regulations in the County is needed to implement the recommendations in this Plan. The recommendations herein will also need to be reconciled with concerns which have already arisen and new ones that may arise in the final Plan phase. The County should review the legality and practicality of having different mining regulations in different areas of the County, altered approaches that can address the concerns of all townships, and other potential new solutions that may arise as this work continues.

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. As the NWQ continues to evolve and change, revisions and amendments should be made, if necessary, to ensure the Plan works. However, as stated elsewhere, such changes should only be made to address the needs of the entire community, as no Plan should be altered haphazardly to suit the needs of one proposed project, development or special interest. Wright County includes many precious natural resources, and lies in an area that will continue to grow and prosper. It is the sincere hope of all involved in the development of this Plan that such growth and change will occur with respect for the natural amenities that make the NWQ and Wright County such a desirable location in the first place.