



Notice of Public Meeting

Committee:	Land Management Committee
Date:	Friday, September 4th, 2026
Time:	8:00 a.m.
Location:	3 rd Floor County Board Room, 407 S. 2 nd Street, Alma, WI 54610
Remote Access:	click here to join
<i>This meeting is open to the public, but portions of the meeting may be closed if this notice indicates that the committee may convene in closed session.</i>	
<i>The following matters may be reviewed, discussed and acted upon at this meeting, and deviations from the order shown may occur:</i>	

Land Management Hearing and Meeting	
1.	Call to Order
2.	Roll Call of Members
3.	Verification of Open Meetings Law Compliance
4.	Approve Agenda
5.	Approve Minutes from Previous Meeting
6.	Public Comment
7.	Public Hearing A. Reading of Notice for Public Hearing B. Comprehensive Land Use Plan Revision C. Public Testimony D. Correspondence E. Public Hearing Adjournment
8.	An Ordinance to Adopt the Comprehensive Land Use Plan
9.	Marty Wenger
10.	General Discussion on Data Centers
11.	GIS/LIO Report
12.	Surveyor Report
13.	Director Report
14.	Chairperson Report
15.	Correspondence
16.	Future Agenda Items
17.	Next Meeting Date and Time
18.	Adjourn

Date: 08/31/2026

Max Weiss, Chair

By: Lisa Schmitt, County Clerk

Board Members: If unable to attend, please contact the Chair. If the Chair is unavailable, please contact the County Clerk’s Office at 608-685-6209. If the Chair and the County Clerk are not available, please call the Administrative Coordinator at 608-685-6234.

Persons with Disabilities: Buffalo County shall attempt to provide reasonable accommodations to the public for access to its public meetings, provided reasonable notice of special need is given. If you require special accommodations to attend this meeting, please contact the County Clerk’s Office at 608-685-6209.

Public Access to the Courthouse: The South Entrance will be the only access to the building after 4:00 p.m. Monday – Thursday and after 12:00 p.m. on Fridays.

Persons who are members of another governmental body, but who are not members of this committee, may attend this meeting. Their attendance could result in a quorum of another governmental body being present. Such a quorum is unintended, and they are not meeting to exercise the authority, duties, or responsibilities of any other governmental body.

BUFFALO COUNTY MINUTES

Committee of the Board:
Date of the Meeting:

Land Management
Wednesday, July 15, 2026

The Hearing was called to order at 8:14 a.m.

Land Management Members Present: Mr. Max Weiss, Mr. Chris Lindstrom, Mr. Robert Sendelbach, Mr. Steve Nelson, Mr. William Bruegger absent-Mr. Joe Bragger

Others Present for All or Parts of the Meeting: Mr. Cale Severson, Ms. Abigail Soderberg, Ms. Jacqueline Schneider, Mr. Ron Jasperson.

Meeting verified with Open Meeting law compliance

Approve agenda-Mr.Lindstrom motion, Mr. Sendelbach second, agenda approved

Review/Discussion/Action regarding Previous Meeting Minutes: Mr. Bruegger motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Sendelbach. Carried.

Public comment-none

Presentation on Remonumentation of Nelson—Mr. Jasperson spoke on the topic, discussion on costs. It will cost \$354,000 to complete remonumentation starting in 2027. Maxville has 2 weeks of field work to complete, will be finished in the fall.

Data centers—Discussion was held regarding the fact that some counties have enacted moratoriums, some are considering. Not enough information has come from the state level. Discussions were held on water usage, power usage, and environmental impacts.

GIS/LIO report—Ms. Schneider spoke on mapping, trout stream easement mapping and imagery. She also spoke on grant submissions.

Surveyor report-Mr. Jasperson did his update during the agenda item above

Director report-Mr. Severson discussed that zoning is busy with the construction season and that they are almost double the sanitary permits as last year. Land Conservation has several projects going on and several future projects planned. Mr. Severson shared that he was elected onto the state Land and Water Board of Directors. Discussion was held on the 9 Key element plan and future projects for that.

Committee chair report-Mr. Weiss spoke on the need to attend the Town of Nelson Board meeting to share the remonumentation cost.

Public Correspondence: none

Future agenda items- remonumentation

Review/Discussion/Action regarding the Next Meeting Date and Time: The next meeting date and time will be August 7th at 8am

Adjournment: Mr. Bruegger motioned to adjourn. Adjourned at 9:36am

Respectfully Submitted,

Cale Severson
Land Management Director



Buffalo County Ordinance

Drafted By: Cale Severson

Presented Month/Year:

September 2026

Involved Committees:

Land Management

County Department:

Land Management

Fiscal Impact: YES / NO

ORDINANCE #26-08-_____

AN ORDINANCE TO ADOPT COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

The Board of Supervisors of Buffalo County hereby ordains as follows:

WHEREAS, On September 4th, 2026, the Buffalo County Land Management Committee considered draft copy of Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan to ordinance entitled "Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan" and placed the same on file in the Office of Land Management for a period of time not less than 30 calendar days prior to September 4th, 2026, and;

WHEREAS, the Buffalo County Land Management Committee held a public hearing on September 4th, 2026, for the purpose of gathering testimony and developing a final draft of said ordinance to recommend to the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors, and;

WHEREAS, notice of this meeting and the Board's final consideration of adoption, was published in the Buffalo County News on August 6th, 2026, in accordance withs. 66.0103 Wisconsin Statutes, and;

WHEREAS, it is the recommendation to the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors to adopt said Ordinance as approved by the Buffalo County Land Management Committee during their September 4th, 2026, committee meeting.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT ORDAINED THAT the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors hereby adopts the following ordinance entitled "Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan Ordinance" which shall be kept permanently on file and open to public inspection in the Office of the Buffalo County Clerk:

CHAPTER 760

BUFFALO COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE LAND-USE PLAN

760.01 TITLE

Chapter 760 shall be known as the Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan Ordinance.

760.02 PURPOSE

This chapter is adopted under authority granted by sections 59.69(2) and (3) and 66.1001, Wis. Stats.



Buffalo County Ordinance

760.03 APPLICABILITY

This chapter applies to all unincorporated areas of Buffalo County and to those areas within incorporated municipalities whose governing bodies have by resolution agreed to have their areas subject to the county comprehensive plan.

760.04 ADOPTION OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Pursuant to sec. 66.1001(4)(c), Wis. Stats., the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors does, by enactment of this ordinance, adopt the document entitled "Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan", including all maps and descriptive materials contained therein, which is on file at the Buffalo County Clerk's office.

760.05 CONFLICT OF PROVISIONS

If the provisions of this ordinance conflict with or contravene with other ordinances, the provisions of each ordinance shall prevail as to all matters and questions arising out of the subject matter of each such ordinance.

760.06 SEVERABILITY OF ORDINANCE PROVISIONS

The provisions of this ordinance shall be deemed severable, and it is expressly declared that the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors would have passed the other provisions, sections, subsections, paragraphs, clauses, or phrases of this ordinance irrespective of whether or not one or more of such parts may be declared invalid. If any provision or part of this ordinance or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the remainder of the ordinance and the application of such provision to other persons or circumstances shall not be affected thereby.

Adopted at a duly called and noticed meeting of the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors on this 28th day of September 2026.

Dennis Bork, County Board Chairperson

ATTEST:

Lisa Schmitt, County Clerk



Buffalo County Ordinance

Land Management Committee:

Max Weiss

Chris Lindstrom

William Bruegger

Steve Nelson

Robert Sendelbach

Joe Bragger

Legal-Fiscal-Administrative Approvals:

Legal Note:

Fiscal Impact:

Karina O'Brien, Corporation Counsel

Date

Lee Engfer, County Administrator

Date

Final Draft

**BUFFALO
COUNTY**
**COMPREHENSIVE
LAND USE PLAN**

2026- 2046

Comprehensive Land Use Plan
2026-2046
Buffalo County, Wisconsin

Acknowledgements

Technical Committee Members

Cale Severson – Director (Zoning Admin/County Conservationist), Dept. Land Management

Briar Golden – Resource Management and Planning Specialist, Dept. Land Management

Nathan Machula – Former GIS/ Land Information Officer, Dept. Land Management

Bill Hedberg – Former Economic Development Coordinator

Technical Committee members were comprised of County employees in the areas of mapping, zoning, land conservation, and economic development. The role of the Technical Committee was to take on the majority of the planning facilitation and writing responsibilities. The following individuals were crucial in initiating the update process and encouraged it to be done in-house by those who have the best interest of Buffalo County in mind. These individuals passed on from this world before the completion of the plan update. We dedicate our work to them and hope that it will have met their typical high expectations.

Mike Owecke – Former Buffalo County Zoning Administrator

Carl Duley – Former UW Extension Agricultural Agent

Steering Committee Members

Carrie Venner-Adams – Representing the East Central Area: Towns of Buffalo, Cross & Milton

Collin Weltzien – Representing the East Central Area: Town of Glencoe

Kasondra Serum – Representing the Northwest Area: Towns of Maxville, Canton, Nelson, and Modena

Deborah Ruff – Representing the West Central Area: Towns of Alma, Belvidere, and Lincoln

Scott Werlein – Representing the Northeast Area: Towns of Mondovi, Naples, Gilmanton and Dover

Steering Committee members were comprised of members of towns boards or community members that were invited to participate by their town board. These committee members reviewed the work of the Technical Committee and ensured that the plan was reflective of the community members they represent. Steering Committee members were also responsible for developing the goals and objectives at the end of each chapter of this plan.

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A Note about this Plan

The Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan can be broken down into three main parts: summary, details, and actions. The first full page of chapter 1 summarizes the main concerns and goals over the twenty-year plan period. After this, the plan delves into details about Buffalo County's population, housing, transportation, utilities & services, natural & cultural resources, economy, government, and land use. Interspersed in this detailed information are goals established by the steering committee. These goals can be found at the end of each chapter (before the maps) in chapters 2-8. The final chapter, chapter 9, lays out a sequenced plan to work toward achieving the goals set in the earlier chapters. This chapter also contains a 'calendar' to update the plan by 2036.

The Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan was first written in 2013 to meet the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Law, s. 66.1001, Wis. Stats. This law requires local units of government engaging in any regulatory actions related to mapping, subdivisions, zoning or shorelands to ensure that those actions are consistent with the local governmental unit's comprehensive plan.

Great amounts of time and energy went into developing the initial plan. For its efforts, Buffalo County was awarded a grant from the State of Wisconsin for \$126,000 upon the completion of its plan and separate plans for 12 towns and a village. While these towns were covered under the county's ordinances and weren't required to have their own plans, they were encouraged to write their own plans and identify their own unique challenges and goals.

The 'Plan Implementation' section of the original 2013 document, lays out is a process that requires the document be updated "as necessary but no less than once every 3 years after the plan is adopted." There is no evidence today that the plan has been reviewed or revised in any way since its initial publication. Despite this, state law does require that land use plans be updated at least once every ten years.

It is self-explanatory that an update was not completed within 10 years of adopting the initial plan. Unfortunately, departmental changes and a delayed release of census data (thanks to the covid-19 pandemic) would set the 2023 update back to 2026. However, a silver lining to this late update may be that complications from data release and analysis can be avoided during a 2035-6 plan update.

Population projections used in this plan come from the WI Dept. of Administration who makes predictions using their own in-house methods and US Census data. Amusingly, the technical committee was suspected by the DOA of obtaining leaked population projections

before they were released publicly. Really, we got our hands on the projections early thanks to our anxious waiting, a misunderstanding at the DOA, and a Duck-Duck-Go web browser.

Most of the data in this plan come directly from the US Census Bureau, WI DNR, or US Department of Agriculture. To make future updates more efficient, data sources were cited below most tables/figures, and exact data sets were identified whenever possible (especially with US census data). Valuable information can also be found in the newly added appendix, including a summary of results from our 2024 community survey.

At the beginning of each of the 9 chapters, an ‘element overview’ paraphrases the required chapter content listed in Wis. Stat. § 66.1001(2). The intent of this addition was to inform future plan writers of the requirements that they must fulfill when updating the plan. These statutory requirements should, by no means, be considered boundaries but should instead be thought of as the ‘bare minimum.’ Authors may be as creative as they see fit, perhaps even incorporating more digital or interactive features in the future.

When it comes down to the impact of this 2026 plan update, the planning component of the document itself is underwhelming. As can be seen in 2024 survey results, there seems to be a fair degree of contentment among Buffalo County’s residents. Most respondents indicated that they would like, for the most part, to keep the landscape and communities of Buffalo County the same as they are. Most concerns were ‘big picture’ problems being experienced at the state and national level. Housing/ property costs, childcare, and managed forest tax law were recurring themes in both the 2024 land use survey and steering committee meetings.

While solutions to these issues seem to be beyond the reach of county-level land use reform, the discussion around them highlighted the importance of intergovernmental cooperation. Town board members expressed a desire to improve the connection between local town governments and their representatives at the county level, a desire that echoes the sentiments of the original 2013 land use plan. So, whether or not we succeed at lowering costs associated with buying a home or finally achieve Managed Forest Law reforms, I believe one of the greatest successes of this plan update could be a renewed sense of community between the county and its towns.

Respectfully,

Briar Golden- member of the Technical Committee

1

A Look at Where We're Going

Issues and Opportunities Faced by Buffalo County

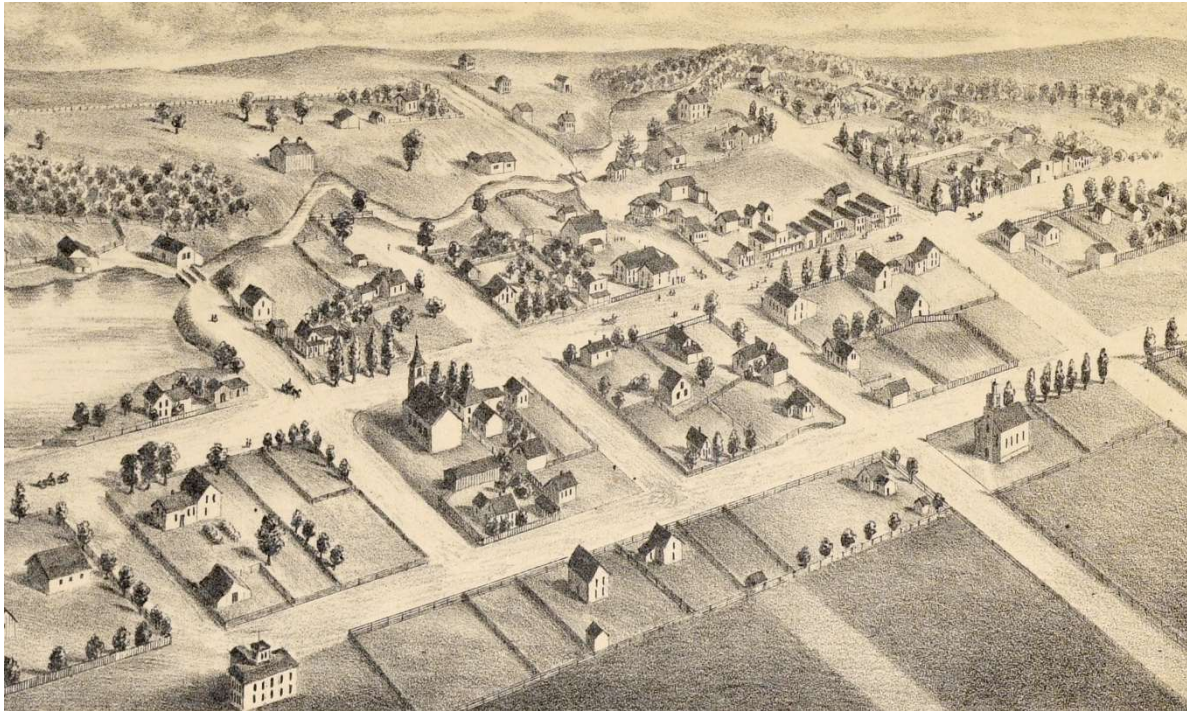


Figure 1.1 "Birds-Eye View of the Village of Mondovi" (Briggs & Falconer, 1877)

Element Overview

Issues and opportunities element. Background information on Buffalo County and a statement of overall objectives, policies, goals and programs of the county to guide future development and redevelopment over a 20-year planning period. Background information includes population, household and employment forecasts used in the development of the comprehensive plan. Also, demographic trends, age distribution, educational levels, income levels and employment characteristics that exist within Buffalo County as per Wis. Stat. § 66.1001(2)(a).

Key Issues | Opportunities

Population: Declining and aging population, median household income 9% lower than state's, lower average educational attainment and declining job market | Residents are resilient and cohesive, willing to travel for work but keep residence in Buffalo County.

Housing: Housing is becoming more expensive and an increasing proportion of homes are being used for second homes or short-term rentals | Aging housing stock can be restored rather than demolished, multi-generational housing opportunities.

Infrastructure: High road miles to low population ratio, areas without broadband connection remain | Active towns willing to coordinate with the County Highway Department, possible opportunities for grants to extend broadband to last mile areas.

Economy: Declining real GDP, agricultural economy, services don't meet needs of residents | Diversify agricultural products produced, broaden the types of industries operating in Buffalo County.

Natural Resources: Numerous locations with steep slopes, sensitive soils and flood hazards | Natural beauty and fertile soils- need to be protected.

Intergovernmental coordination: Communication between county board supervisors and town boards could be improved | Supervisors can be in regular contact with the towns they serve.

Strategic Priorities (2026-2046)

1. Preserve and rehabilitate current housing stock; promote home ownership among Buffalo County's residents.
2. Improve the availability of necessary services, namely childcare, in Buffalo County to retain younger generations.
3. Readjust the low assessment values for lands enrolled in the Managed Forest Law Program.
4. Maintain existing transportation infrastructure while strengthening the partnership between the Buffalo County Hwy Dept and Towns.
5. Normalize communications between county board supervisors and the towns that they represent.

Community Vision

Buffalo County will maintain a resilient rural economy led by agriculture and various other existing businesses; protect shorelands, blufflands, and high quality waters; and offer housing and services that allow residents to age in place. Future development will be concentrated in communities and corridors with infrastructure, while conserving prime farmland and sensitive natural areas. Broadband, transportation safety, and EMS capabilities will support current dispersed rural living and business operations.

Demographic Trends and Outlook

Population change is the primary component in tracking Buffalo County’s past patterns of development as well as predicting future trends. Population characteristics such as size, distribution, and density trends should be monitored to plan for housing, educational, utility, community and recreational facility needs as well as its future economic development.

Population History: On average, Buffalo County’s population has decreased by 1.7% for each decennial census since the county’s population reached its peak of 16,765 inhabitants in the year 1900. Nonetheless, some censuses have reported population increases as high as 5.0% and decreases as low as -8.5% over a ten-year period between 1900 and the present. In the twenty years between the 2000 and 2020 censuses, Buffalo County’s population fell by 487, or -3.53%.

Table 1.1 Regional Population Projections

	2010 Cens.	2020 Cens.	2024 Est.	2030 Projec.	2040 Projec.	2050 Projec.	Chg. '20-'50	%Chg. '20-'50
Buffalo	13,587	13,317	13,234	12,520	11,645	10,675	-2,642	- 20%
Dunn	43,857	45,440	45,693	45,565	44,470	42,475	-2,965	-7%
Eau Claire	98,736	105,710	110,871	110,405	114,945	118,625	+ 12,915	+ 12%
Jackson	20,449	21,145	21,337	21,185	21,690	22,620	+ 1,475	+ 7%
Pepin	7,469	7,318	7,360	6,855	6,325	5,755	- 1,563	- 21%
Pierce	41,019	42,212	42,605	41,375	39,500	36,770	-5,442	- 13%
St. Croix	87,123	93,536	98,849	97,775	102,820	102,980	+ 9,444	+ 10%
Trempealeau	28,816	30,760	30,912	32,660	36,325	41,185	+ 10,425	+ 34%
Wabasha*	21,672	21,642	21,576	21,453	20,889	19,933	-1,709	-8%
Winona*	51,432	50,485	50,880	50,545	49,135	46,799	-3,686	-7%

US Dept. of Commerce-Bureau of the Census with WI Dept. of Administration projections.
*Projections and estimates obtained from a separate study conducted by the Minnesota State Demographic Center

Population Projection: State projections anticipate a significant decline in the county’s population over the next 25 years. Buffalo County is expected to have ~10,675 residents by 2050 (WI DOA, 2024). This is 2,642 residents less than counted in the 2020 census or 20%.

Neighboring Trempealeau and Eau Claire are projected to grow, opening a potential for spillover along state highway corridors. See the appendix for population projections at the town, city, and village level.

Age composition: The years 2015–2020 saw growth in ages 65–69 and 80–84 and declines in many other age categories. Projections indicate declines across all cohorts under age 74 by 2050, with growth only in 75+. Service implications include increased demand for EMS, healthcare access, and senior appropriate housing, while sustaining amenities for remaining youth and working age populations.

Table 1.2 County Population by Age Group

Age Group	2015 Estimate	2020 Census	2030 Projection	2040 Projection	2050 Projection	'20 – '50 Differ.	'20 – '50 % Differ.
0-4	722	689	635	595	515	- 174	- 25 %
5-9	816	761	655	595	545	- 216	- 28 %
10-14	796	826	720	680	635	- 191	- 23 %
15-19	811	767	730	635	580	- 187	- 24 %
20-24	643	601	545	485	455	- 146	- 24 %
25-29	697	645	565	550	480	- 165	- 26 %
30-34	691	735	695	645	575	- 160	- 22 %
35-39	660	786	715	635	615	- 171	- 22 %
40-44	821	702	750	720	670	- 32	- 5 %
45-49	955	744	775	715	640	- 104	- 14 %
50-54	1085	896	685	745	725	- 171	- 19 %
55-59	1022	1,075	735	775	715	- 360	- 33 %
60-64	1007	1,108	870	680	740	- 368	- 33 %
65-69	707	994	1,015	705	745	- 249	- 25 %
70-74	703	769	910	730	570	- 199	- 26 %
75-79	521	530	740	780	545	15	3 %
80-84	311	382	465	575	460	78	20%
85+	351	307	315	400	465	158	51 %

US Dept. of Commerce-Bureau of the Census with WI Dept. of Administration projections. Projected % change applied to 2020 census data.

Race and Ethnicity: The County remains predominantly White (~95%) with small but growing diversity (multiracial and Hispanic shares increasing). See the appendix for a specific breakdown of county racial/ethnic populations.

Income and Poverty: Per capita income is ~\$36,164; median household income ~\$68,722. While these figures are below both Wisconsin and U.S. values, the poverty rate (~10.2%) is slightly lower than state and national average.

Table 1.3 Per Capita Income Comparison

	Buffalo County	Wisconsin	USA
Households (2019 – 2023)	5,692	2,446,028	127,482,865
Per capita income in the past 12 months (2023 dollars), 2019- 2023	\$ 36,164	\$ 42,019	\$ 43,289
Median household income (in 2023 dollars), 2019- 2023	\$ 68,722	\$ 75,670	\$ 78,538
Percent of persons below poverty level*	10.2%	10.7%	11.1%

U.S. Census Bureau- 2023 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates | B19301, B17013, & S1903

*Dollar amount of poverty not available. US Census Bureau

Education: ~92% of residents over the age of 25 have a high school diploma or higher; degree attainment profile indicates opportunities for targeted workforce and credentialing strategies. County residents are slightly more likely to hold an associate’s degree than residents statewide.

Table 1.4 Education Attainment

	Buffalo County		Wisconsin	
	Number	%	Number	%
Population 25 years and Older	9,759	100.0%	4,069,583	100.0%
Less than 9 th Grade	218	2.2%	96,291	2.4%
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	564	5.8%	173,140	4.3%
High School Graduate (or equivalency)	3,722	38.1%	1,207,407	29.7%
Some college, no degree	1,739	17.8%	803,852	19.8%
Associate’s degree	1,360	13.9%	455,765	11.2%
Bachelor’s degree	1,563	16.0%	879,907	21.6%
Graduate or Professional	593	6.1%	453,221	11.1%

U.S. Census Bureau- 2023 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates | S1501

Commuting and Labor Force: About 43.9% of working residents are employed in county; 32.2% commute to other Wisconsin counties; and 23.9% commute out of state. Of the 11,048 individuals over 16 years of age, labor force participation is ~63%, with low unemployment (US Census Bureau 2023).

Employment and Industry: Since most residents work outside of Buffalo County, there are significant discrepancies between the types of industries in Buffalo County (employers) and the skill sets of those living here (labor force).

In 2023, there were 3,695 jobs in Buffalo County while there were over 6,960 people in its labor force. Over half of the county's labor force worked in just three industry categories: the educational services, health care and social assistance industry (22.2%), the manufacturing industry (19.8%), and the retail trade industry (9.9%) / agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, and mining industry (9.5%). Only one of these industries are dominant in Buffalo County itself.

When it came to industries offering employment *within* Buffalo County, the top three were the trade, transportation, and utilities industry (31.4%), the education and health services industry (17.6%), and the leisure and hospitality industry (9.7%). Tables detailing these statistics can be found in the appendix (US Census Bureau).

While most commute outside of the county to work, *employment opportunities within Buffalo County remain critical for its residents*. Using the data above, it is estimated that county residents fulfilled ~83% of industry labor needs within their home county in 2023.

Job Trends- From 2018-2023 Buffalo County had a net loss of 117 local jobs (-3.1%). The trade, transportation, and utilities industry accounted for a majority of this decrease, losing 122 jobs over the five-year period. Looking at this five-year change, Buffalo County hasn't recovered to pre-pandemic employment numbers. ([WI DWD, 2025](#))

Over the 2018-2023 period, the greatest numeric increase in jobs was in natural resources and mining, showing an increase of 63 jobs over the five-year period. While the fastest-growing industry was in 'other services', adding 17 jobs for a 41.5% increase.

Employment Projections- The WI Dept. of Workforce Development (WI DWD) makes employment projections for regions called Workforce Development Areas (WDA). Buffalo County forms the northwest edge of the Western WDA (centered on La Crosse and Tomah) but certainly has exposure to the West Central WDA (EauClaire and Rice Lake) and Minnesota's Southeast Economic Development Region (Winona and Rochester). Being on the edge of these regions can make employment projections specific to Buffalo County difficult to estimate.

Despite the recent decline of local job numbers in Buffalo County, the [WI DWD projects](#) that together the regional Western and West Central WDAs will add over 34,500 new jobs (9.1%) between 2022 and 2032. Together, the education and health service industry and trade, transportation, and utilities industry make up the bulk of projected growth (42%). Manufacturing in these WDAs is expected to grow by 5.9% while natural resource and mining jobs are expected to grow by 8.5%. Rather than job growth, southeastern Minnesota has opportunities for Buffalo County residents to fill replacement openings as their population ages out of the workforce.

2

A Place to Call Home

Housing in Buffalo County



Figure 2.1 A double wedding at the family home of the grooms (Buffalo County Historical Society, 1898)

Element Overview

Housing element. A strategy to provide an adequate housing supply that meets existing and forecasted housing demand in Buffalo County. This element assesses the age, structural, value and occupancy characteristics of the local governmental unit's housing stock. It also identifies specific policies and programs that promote the development of housing for residents while providing a range of housing choices that meet the needs of persons of all income levels and of all age groups and persons with special needs, policies and programs that promote the availability of land for the development or redevelopment of low-income and moderate-income housing, and policies and programs to maintain or rehabilitate the county's existing housing stock as per Wis. Stat. § 66.1001(2)(b).

Existing Conditions

Table 2.1 Housing Units and Population- 2020

	Occupied	Owner-Occupied	Renter-Occupied	Households with individuals under 18	Households with Individual over 65	Vacant Household	Vacant household: for rent	Vacant Households: for sale	Population
T. of Alma	118	99	15	21	48	48	0	0	254
T. of Belvidere	174	161	11	33	76	49	0	2	403
T. of Buffalo	312	281	26	73	120	31	0	0	746
T. of Canton	105	86	21	22	47	3	0	0	245
T. of Cross	146	126	18	53	46	20	2	0	368
T. of Dover	175	143	38	70	52	21	1	0	515
T. of Gilmanton	169	129	19	52	57	23	0	0	425
T. of Glencoe	169	142	13	45	75	18	1	0	402
T. of Lincoln	78	67	6	14	32	20	0	0	167
T. of Maxville	128	115	28	31	49	15	0	0	321
T. of Milton	222	206	10	44	96	39	5	1	541
T. of Modena	118	91	21	31	49	34	1	2	313
T. of Mondovi	190	161	25	49	59	20	0	0	451
T. of Montana	97	90	5	32	36	17	0	2	268
T. of Naples	260	220	21	87	73	6	2	0	697
T. of Nelson	238	215	33	36	110	48	5	1	574
T. of Waumandee	183	183	15	47	63	32	5	2	508
C. of Alma	347	214	146	60	156	132	31	1	716
C. of Buffalo City	474	415	29	93	201	81	0	8	1,007
C. of Fountain C.	394	247	129	79	155	48	27	5	806
C. of Mondovi	1,210	721	503	351	404	79	18	2	2,845
V. of Cochrane	203	133	44	58	67	19	6	0	423
V. of Nelson	157	106	58	38	63	36	8	3	322
Buffalo County '20	5,667	4,331	1,336	1,435	2,134	839	112	37	13,317

US Census Bureau| 2020 Decennial Census| DP1

Density and Distribution of Housing: Buffalo County’s rural character is marked by its low population. Having a population density of less than 20 people/ square mile, *Buffalo County is the most sparsely populated county among all its neighbors (WI&MN)*. Housing density in the county is 9.7 houses per square mile. Low density preserves rural character but increases service costs per unit of housing when development is diffuse.

The distribution of Buffalo County’s housing stock is split nearly evenly between its incorporated cities/villages and its unincorporated towns; however slightly more residents live in unincorporated areas of the county (~55%). This imbalance could be caused by cities/villages, in general, experiencing population decline at a faster rate than towns.

Housing Stock and Trends: There were 6,506 housing units at the time of the 2020 census; estimated to be 6,616 in 2025. If this estimate is correct, this could indicate *an uptick in housing development following a decline between 2010 and 2020*. As housing units are estimated to have recently increased in number, so have the number of unoccupied (vacant) housing units.

One-half of all homes in the county were built before 1970, making the potential for nearly 2,000 homes to approach 100+ years of age during the plan period. This creates both affordability opportunities (lower purchase price) and rehabilitation needs (energy, safety, accessibility).

Table 2.2 County Comparison of Age of Housing Units

Year Structure Built	Wisconsin	Buffalo County	Jackson County	Pepin County	Pierce County	Trempealeau County
Built 2020 or later	0.8%	0.3%	0.5%	0.6%	1.3%	0.7%
Built 2010 to 2019	6.7%	4.4%	7.3%	4.7%	7.4%	8.3%
Built 2000 to 2009	12.3%	12.1%	18.1%	15.4%	17.0%	12.5%
Built 1990-1999	12.9%	10.6%	13.3%	7.6%	12.3%	14.6%
Built 1980-1989	9.5%	7.5%	8.7%	8.1%	11.4%	8.3%
Built 1970-1979	14.3%	15.0%	13.5%	13.9%	15.4%	14.7%
Built 1960-1969	9.6%	8.4%	8.2%	8.2%	7.8%	7.5%
Built 1950-1959	10.4%	8.3%	7.1%	9.1%	5.8%	6.9%
Built 1940-1949	5.4%	7.1%	3.8%	6.6%	3.2%	5.3%
Built 1939 or earlier	18.1%	26.2%	19.6%	25.7%	18.6%	21.1%
Total Housing Units	2,750,750	6,546	9,693	3,603	17,052	13,373

US Census Bureau| 2023 5 Year Community Survey| DP04

Tenure and Income: Housing in Buffalo County is primarily owner-occupied; 72% compared to 53% across Wisconsin (2023 Estimates). While Buffalo County has a significantly smaller proportion of rented housing units than the state average, the county has a *notably higher concentration of lower income renters*.

Table 2.3 Occupied Housing Units Versus Income in Buffalo County- 2023

	Total	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied
Occupied Housing Units	5,692	4,458	1,234
Housing needs with income < \$35,000	1,233	768	465
Housing needs with income > \$35,000	4,279	3,674	605
Total Housing Unit Available	6,546		
Balance of Housing Units available	854		

US Census Bureau| 2023 5 Year Community Survey| B25106 & DP04

Like the rest of the state, about half of renters had annual household incomes less than \$50,000 in 2020; However, more than a quarter of all renters in Buffalo County made less than \$20,000 annually, exceeding state averages. *Most households owning their own home in Buffalo County earned more than \$75,000 annually in 2020.* About 29% earned less than \$50,000.

Table 2.4 Household Income in 2023 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars- COMPLETE

Wages	% of Homeowners		% of Renters*	
	Buffalo County	Wisconsin	Buffalo County	Wisconsin
Less than \$20,000	8.8	5.5	25.4	18.9
\$20,000 to \$34,999	8.9	7.5	12.2	16.8
\$35,000 to \$49,999	11.4	8.6	15.2	15.2
\$50,000 to \$74,999	18.2	16.9	19.4	19.0
\$75,000 or more	52.8	61.4	14.3	26.1

US Census Bureau| 2023 5 Year Community Survey| B25106

Affordability at the National Level: Wages have doubled over the past 25 years (up 105%) and offer more purchasing power for everyday consumer goods (costs up 80% since 2001). But these *gains for the employees and consumers have been overshadowed by healthcare and home prices that have nearly tripled* during the same time period- up 187%+ and 200% respectively (Federal Reserve Economic Data & Case-Shiller National Home Price Index 2026). This has created a higher threshold to cross for those trying to purchase their first home.

Affordability at the County Level: Buffalo County ranked in the 90th percentile for housing affordability (Forward Analytics 2024) with an average home price of \$245,000 compared to the state's \$310,000 (WI Realtors Association 2024). This has been fortunate considering that residents had an average household income 12% lower than the state average

(USBEA 2023). Because of the availability of affordable low-income housing in the county, *middle' income residents tend to be the economic group most burdened by housing costs.*

The 2020 census found *1 in 4 homeowners in Buffalo County were housing-cost-burdened*, meaning they devoted more than 30% of their household income to housing. Statewide, about 1 in 5 homeowners shared the same burden. Though less than the state average, slightly more than half of homeowners in the county enjoyed housing costs <20% of income.

Buffalo County was in lockstep with the rest of the state when it came to the proportion of income spent by renters on housing, with one exception. Buffalo County experienced lower rates of renters burned by housing costs. About 1 in 3 renters in the county spent more than 30% of their income on housing in 2020, compared to 1 in 2.5 across the state. This may be due to Buffalo County's predisposition not to charge any cash rent to a notable portion of its renters. Nearly *1 in 7 renters paid no cash rent* in 2020, 3X higher than the state average.

Housing Access: *About 1 in every 8 housing units in Buffalo County were estimated to be vacant in 2023-* a growing trend over the past two decades. Over half of these unoccupied dwellings are used for seasonal recreation. The percentages of homes vacant or used for recreation was just slightly higher than the state average, but as recent as 2010 the ratio of vacant and recreational dwellings was below the state average.

Permit activity: *There has been growing permit activity for homes in Buffalo County.* An average of 24.8 zoning permits for new, replacement, and trailer homes were issued annually from 2019-2023, compared to 20.5 from 2009-2012. This is an increase of 21% despite the towns of Waumandee and Montana no longer being part of the total since leaving county zoning in 2018.

While homes saw an increase, *permits for recreational dwellings declined 68% between the two time periods.* 'Recreational' dwellings typically have no plumbing or electricity. Perhaps less dwellings are being built for recreation, or could this decline be thanks to changing preferences of recreational landowners desiring a vacation home rather than a 'cabin in the woods?'



Needs and Demand 2026-2046

Housing Forecasts: If recent trends continue (2020-2025 DATCP Housing Estimates), Buffalo County could see *more homes with less residents* over the next 20 years. Here's why:

Senior Housing: Residents over the age of 75 are much more likely to live alone. Those born between 1956 and 1966 make up Buffalo County's largest age group. The county can expect to have more than *500 additional residents over the age of 75 by 2040* as these individuals age over the next quarter-century (a 44% increase from 2020). This projection assumes that the county's aging populations will remain residents of Buffalo County and won't move as their needs change.

Housing that offers shared common areas, transportation services, and a close proximity to healthcare facilities can be attractive to older adults and their families. However, senior living options that offer these amenities in and near Buffalo County are limited, especially given the potential for future demand. *Rather than focusing on the construction of new facilities to meet this short-term boom of demand, it may be wise to encourage aging in place and multi-generational housing options.*

Empty Homes: Homes are being built for purposes other than housing residents. Non-resident landowners in Buffalo County increasingly desire living quarters on their recreational properties that have the amenities of a full-time home. *Nearly half of all vacant homes in Buffalo County are vacation/seasonal homes* (2023 USCB). In some cases, these vacation homes are also used as short-term rentals (a.k.a. tourist rooming houses).

Smaller (/less) families: Fueled by declining birth rates, *population is projected to decline by 20% over the next two and a half decades*. If this trend is driven by more residents remaining single throughout their lives, more housing units may be required per capita than exists today. More resources devoted to less efficient living arrangements could result in more expensive housing for those that do start families in Buffalo County. This is why maintaining the county's abundant stock of affordable (and often quite old) single-family dwellings may be important in the coming decades.

Rehabilitation and Weatherization: Buffalo County the highest percentage of pre-1970 homes of all surrounding counties. While these time-tested homes tend to be more affordable up front, they often present hazards that may need to be addressed. A few potential hazards could include: lead paint, asbestos, polluted wells, failing septic systems, and faulty wiring. *While rehabilitating these homes can be costly, significant long-term savings can be achieved if they are also brought up to modern energy efficiency standards.* Prioritizing support for hazard remediation in homes as well as updates to insulation and heating systems

Keeping Infrastructure in Mind: Buffalo County had the 4th highest highway spending per capita (2023) and a property tax rate higher than 2/3 of Wisconsin's 72 counties (2024/2025). Encouraging future development to occur near existing infrastructure can help to use resources more efficiently and reduce further strain on the tax base.

Impacts on Natural Resources: Since 2018, Buffalo County's zoning ordinance has contained added protections for prime farmland, steep slopes, and blufflands. Of the 140 zoning permits for dwellings from 2019-2023, 45 permits (32%) were issued for dwellings that were built within 100 yards of a sensitive natural area such as a bluff or a stream. *The Department of Land Management analyzed its previous performance during this 5-year time frame and found that 6 dwellings were likely placed in a location that was not in compliance with a county ordinance that protects these natural areas.*

This proximity of housing development to sensitive natural areas was also analyzed based on the residency status of the landowner. *Landowners that were not residents of Buffalo County were more than 2x as likely as residents to construct a dwelling within 300' of a sensitive area. In fact, more than half of all dwellings constructed on properties owned by nonresidents were built within this zone.* Of the 6 potential noncompliant dwellings previously mentioned, all potential infringements on bluff impact areas were on property owned by nonresidents while both cases of possible shoreland impact area violations were on properties owned by residents. This reflects the tendency of residents to build in valleys nearer to streams and the bottom of bluffs and nonresidents to build on ridges near the crest of the bluff.

Programs to Support Housing in Buffalo County: Buffalo County’s residents and developers have access to a variety of housing support programs at the federal, state, regional, and local level. These range from guaranteed loans to home repairs and senior housing opportunities. If you or your community would benefit from housing support, a table displaying available programs is included at the end of this chapter.

Goals and Objectives

Promote Home Ownership for the Residents of Buffalo County

Remind residents of opportunities of loans through USDA Rural Development as well as income eligibility. VA Office continue to serve as an advocate for veterans looking to purchase a home

Encourage towns to work with the county to ensure rental properties (short-and long term) are compliant with zoning and health department standards. For properties that fail to meet these standards enforcement could lead to a transfer of property for those unwilling to make necessary changes.

Preserve and Rehabilitate Current Housing Stock

Advocate for more funding to the Community Development Block Grant. Maintain a consistent voice in Buffalo County.

Prioritize middle income communities

Prevent Conflicting Land Uses in Residential Areas

Encourage towns to use buffers around land uses that may be in conflict with agriculture. For example, placing the ANRT-5 district around residential and commercial districts.

Remind those in agricultural areas of Wisconsin’s Right to Farm Law.

Housing Programs Available in Buffalo County

Service/Program	Description	Contact Information
Federal Programs		
HUD Housing & Urban Development	Establishes and enforces fair housing law. Administers programs including mortgage insurance assistance; development, rehabilitation, and modernization of public housing; multifamily housing development; and provides rental subsidies to lower-income families.	Milwaukee Field Office, 310 West Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1380, Milwaukee, WI 53202-2289; Phone: (414) 297-3214; Fax: (414) 935-6775; TTY: (414) 297-1423; Toll-free: (800) 955-2232.
FHA Federal Housing Authority	Provides mortgage insurance on single-family, multifamily, and manufactured homes through approved vendors.	FHA Resource Center; Toll-free: (800) CALL-FHA (800-225-5342); TTY: (800) 877-8339.
USDA-RD US Department Of Agriculture Rural Development	Provides financial support in rural areas for public facilities like sewer and water as well as assistance in development/purchase of single and multifamily housing for rural residents and migrant farm labor.	Wisconsin Guaranteed Rural Housing (GRH) Program; Email: Wisconsin-grh@wi.usda.gov; Phone: 715-345-7623
VA Veteran's Affairs	Offers purchase loans at competitive interest rates, loan guarantees (similar to a co-signer), and refinancing programs to provide cash from home equity for certain personal pursuits.	VA Benefits Hotline: 800-827-1000 https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/
State Programs		
WHEDA WI Housing & Economic Development Authority	Uses the sale of revenue bonds to provide low-cost, fixed-rate mortgages to low- and moderate-income individuals/families to purchase their first home. Also works with developers to finance affordable rental housing and support economic development and agriculture through small business guarantee programs.	Email: info@wheda.com; In WI: 1-800-334-6873. Madison office: 201 W. Washington Ave., Ste 700, Madison, WI 53703 or P.O. Box 1728, Madison, WI 53702-1728; Phone: 608-266-7884; Toll Free: 800-334-6873
DOA – Division of Housing	Offers financial and technical assistance to improve and expand housing, increase affordable housing opportunities and provide services to people with disabilities, without housing, and/or a low to moderate income.	Division of Housing, 101 E. Wilson Street, 5th Floor, Madison, WI 53703; Phone: 608-266-7531; doa.wi.gov

Western Dairyland	Home buyer education and down payment assistance to Buffalo County residents who meet certain income criteria. Education processes meet USDA/Rural Housing, WHEDA and FHA requirements for homebuyers.	Main Office: 23122 Whitehall Road Independence, WI 54747 715-836-7511 info@wdeoc.org westerndairyland.org
Senior Housing and Adult Care		
Garlick's CBRG INC	Founded in 1985 and currently has 4 adult family homes, 1 CBRF, and 2 Assisted Living Apartments. A Community Based Residential Facility Incorporated creating a safe home environment where every resident has the opportunity to develop their lives while enhancing their independence.	539 N. Eau Claire Street, Mondovi, WI 54755 715-926-5818.
Hillview Senior Living	A 12-unit Community Based Residential Facility (CBRF), licensed by the State of Wisconsin and located on the 1st Floor of the American Lutheran Home in Mondovi. Provides a supportive environment for individuals who need assistance with daily living tasks.	210 Memorial Drive, Mondovi, WI 54755; 715-926-4962
Home Place of Mondovi	Offers independent and assisted living apartments to seniors 55 years old and older. Memory care provides the opportunity for all stages of dementia and accommodates the frail elderly.	158 E Main Street, Mondovi, WI 54755 Homeplace Haven: 715-926-4740 Homeplace LLC: 715-926-4777
Mondovi Housing	Available to individuals or couples ages 62 and older who meet income based qualifications. Rent is based upon a percentage of income, not assets after medical expenses. There is an application process and nearly always a waiting list for apartments.	600 Buffalo Street, Mondovi, WI 54755 715-926-4943 mha@mondovihousing.com
Step By Step Adult Family Home	A licensed 24-hour senior care facility with four beds.	637 West Hudson Street, Mondovi, WI 54755 715-926-5898
Troy's Adult Family Home	A licensed 24-hour senior care facility with capacity for four residents.	649 N. Eau Claire Street, Mondovi, WI 54755 715-926-5828

3

Traversing Ridge, River, and Valley

Transportation in Buffalo County



Looking South on the BNSF Railway in the City of Alma. (Photo Credit: Roy Luck, 2014)

Element Overview

Transportation element. A means to guide the future development of the various modes of transportation, including highways, transit, transportation systems for people with disabilities, bicycles, electric scooters, electric personal assistive mobility devices, walking, railroads, air transportation, trucking and water transportation. The element compares Buffalo County's objectives, policies, goals and programs to state and regional transportation plans while identifying highways within the local governmental unit by function. State, regional and other plans, including transportation corridor plans, county highway functional and jurisdictional studies, urban area and rural area transportation plans, airport master plans and rail plans that apply in Buffalo County are also incorporated as per Wis. Stat. § 66.1001(2)(c).

Existing Transportation System

Network Overview: The system is multimodal, but internal movement of people and goods is dominated by highways. Rail and water follow the Mississippi corridor; regional commercial air service is nearby in Eau Claire and La Crosse.

Air: Regional air service is available at La Crosse Regional Airport and Chippewa Valley Regional Airport. *Three small private airports operate in Buffalo County:* Durand Municipal Airport in the Town of Maxville, Log Cabin Airport in the Town of Naples, and The Farm Airport in the Town of Dover.

Rail: BNSF Railway operates dual mainline tracks along the Mississippi River. It is a major east-west national route connecting Chicago to the east and Minneapolis-St Paul to the west. *Primary rail customers in Buffalo County are Dairyland Power Cooperative in Alma and La Crosse Milling Company in Cochrane.* There are small maintenance facilities in Nelson, Alma, Fountain City, and Bluff Siding. Canadian National Railway operates a branch line from Arcadia to Marshland, where it connects with the BNSF mainline.

Water: The inland waters of the Mississippi River carve along the western edge of Buffalo County. This waterway connects Minneapolis-St Paul and the Upper Midwest ports to world markets via commercial barge traffic. *Except for the coal port at Dairyland Power Cooperative in Alma, there are no other ports in Buffalo County.* The closest port is in Winona, Minnesota.

Bicycle/Trail Facilities: The Buffalo River State Trail starts in Mondovi and runs for 6.5 miles in Buffalo County, continuing to Fairchild in Eau Claire County. The Great River State Trail ends at Marshland in the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge, on the boundary with Trempealeau County, running to La Crosse and connecting to further trails. The Flyway Trail is still in development. Phase 1 is complete, 1.8 miles from Town of Buffalo Park to Aghaming Park Road in the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, which connects to Minnesota via the Historic Wagon Bridge to Latsch Island and highway bridge to Winona. Phase 2 is under construction in 2025, connecting the Flyway Trail to the Great River State Trail. *The next proposed phase would extend the Flyway Trail farther north along State Road 35, and eventually connect to other trails, perhaps in Durand.* A network of snowmobile trails are maintained on mostly private lands by local snowmobile clubs using DNR snowmobile registration funds.

Interstate Bridges at Wabasha and Winona: Local residents rely heavily on these two interstate bridges. Because of the rural nature of the county and the distance to Wisconsin urban areas like Eau Claire and La Crosse, many Buffalo County residents depend on access provided by these two Mississippi crossings. This reliance ranges in importance from emergency medical services and jobs to commerce and entertainment. This reliance goes both ways as Minnesota businesses depend on customers in Wisconsin.

Roadways: There are 1,038 total miles of public roads in Buffalo County. This system is maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT), Buffalo County Highway Department, and the various cities, villages and towns within the county. While the regional transportation system is truly multimodal, *it is the roadway network of Buffalo County that moves the people and goods throughout the county*. This network receives a substantial level of public investment to maintain the system. Budget restraints will continue to pose a challenge for the continued level of service across all jurisdictions. To assist in inventorying, classifying, and planning efforts regarding the roadway network a Road Functional Classification System has been established.

Road Functional Classification System

Roadways serve two primary travel needs: access and mobility. Access provides opportunities to enter and exit destinations, while mobility focuses on efficient travel over longer distances. Roadways are divided into three roadway functional classifications:

Arterials- Offer fast travel, often connecting larger urban areas and linking smaller transportation systems to each other. Tend to carry heavy traffic volumes and large vehicles from commercial and industrial areas.

Collectors- Balance speed with accessibility, joining local roads to arterials. Often provide service to medium-sized communities and are vital to local industries.

Locals- Prioritize access rather than speed. Service homes, businesses, and other destinations.

Functional classifications are important because they are used to determine funding program eligibility. Fortunately for Buffalo County, *traffic volume alone does not determine functional classification*. The DOT's Bureau of Planning and Economic Development tries to review and update the state's entire functional class system every 10 years, using data from the new census. Factors most important to determining the functional class of a roadway include: mileage percentages, arterial continuity issues, changes in development within the community, new roadways or road configurations, changes in traffic volume, urban area boundary adjustments, and population changes.

After reviewing these criteria, the WI DOT follows US Department of Transportation procedures to draft proposed changes on a map and then presents the proposed functional classification updates to local officials. *Local officials can concur with the proposal or request revision using*

input such as data from contracted traffic volume surveys. The last update to Wisconsin's functional classification system was completed in 2022.

It is currently DOT's policy to align jurisdictional responsibilities with functional classifications whenever possible. For example: arterials should be state or federal highways while collectors are county highways and local roads are 'owned' by towns, cities, or villages. The 2013 Comprehensive Land Use plan argued that "*Buffalo County has many discrepancies between the functional road classifications and the proper jurisdictional alignment.*" The writers suggested that by realigning the functional classes of Buffalo County's roadways to the proper jurisdictional responsibilities, more appropriate levels of service and funding can be allotted to each of the county's roadways- so long as any transfers are mutually agreed upon by both jurisdictions involved.

Wisconsin Asset Management Systems

Buffalo County uses the *Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating System* (PASER) that is incorporated into the *Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads* (WISLR) program to evaluate and inventory the highway system as a tool for implementing a five-year maintenance and improvement plan. This plan is reviewed and adjusted annually by the Buffalo County Highway Committee. The Highway Department also assists most towns within the county for the physical inventory and record keeping for their systems. PASER ratings are updated every year on the county system and every other year on the town system. The most important element of the PASER and WHISLER programs is to maintain the history of all improvements on the system.

Wisconsin Department of Transportation Local Bridge Program and Inventory

Buffalo County Highway Department manages the inventory and inspections of all local bridges (county, town and city) within Buffalo County. The current inventory includes 173 inspected structures that are eligible for Federal Aid replacement funds. This program is significant in effort and importance due to the large number of structures maintained on the system. Map 3.4 Buffalo County Bridge Locations, shows our current bridge inventory.

State and Regional Transportation Plans

The Wisconsin DOT published a comprehensive transportation plan called [Connect 2050](#) in May 2022. It is Wisconsin's Statewide Long-Range Transportation Plan, designed to meet the state's transportation needs for the next 20 years, following their previous plan from 2009, *Connections 2030*. *One potential problem with the plan is that it is based on 2013 population projections*, which estimated that the population would increase to almost 6.5 million by 2040. The newer Wisconsin population projection from 2024 estimates that the population will decrease to 5.8 million by 2050, and further decrease to 5.7 million by 2050. The newer projections also predict that the portion of the population over age 65 will increase more, to a larger share of the overall population than previous projections.

Besides the primary Connect 2050 plan, the DOT has several other plans on specific aspects of the transportation system, either published recently or still in progress:

- [Wisconsin State Airport System Plan 2030](#) (Feb 2015)
- [Transportation Asset Management Plan](#) (Apr 2023)
- [Wisconsin Rail Plan 2050](#) (Jul 2023)
- [Wisconsin State Freight Plan](#) (Jul 2023)
- [Strategic Highway Safety Plan: 2023-2027](#) (Dec 2023)
- [Active Transportation Plan 2050](#) (in progress); combines bicycle and pedestrian plans

Wisconsin Four-Year Highway Improvement Program (STIP): the more specific construction programs for the Wisconsin DOT through 2028. See Map 3.5 Wis Dot Improvement Program and Table 3.2 Wisconsin DOT 2025- 2028 Six Year Highway Improvement Snapshot for the current Four-Year Program. The most recent versions of Map 3.5 Table 3.2 can be found at the Wisconsin DOT website: <https://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/astnce-pgms/highway/stip.aspx>

Table 3.2 Wisconsin DOT 2025-2028 Four-Year STIP Snapshot

Hwy	Project Title And Limits	Miles	Estimate (Range)	Year	Work Type	Project Description
B	STH 37 - Gilmanton	2.56	\$1,000,000 - \$1,999,999	2026	Construction /PVRPLA	STH 37 to STH 88
OO	Czechville - Alma	5.45	\$250,000 - \$499,999	2025	Design - Full PS&E/ PVRPLA	Prairie Moon Road to STH 35
P	STH 95 - Marshland	0.02	\$1,000,000 - \$1,999,999	2025	Construction/Bridge Replacement	Trempealeau River bridge B-06-0238
35	Alma - Pepin	0.00	\$100,000 - \$249,999	2026	Real Estate Acquisition	B-06-0898,0899,0900,0901,0902,0903
35	Fountain City - Alma	0.06	\$750,000 - \$999,999	2026	Construction/ BRRHB/Concrete Overlay	Waumandee Creek bridge B-06-0059
35	Alma - Pepin	1.64	\$1,000,000 - \$1,999,999	2027	Construction /Resurface	S jct Riverview Dr to Buffalo River
35	Trempealeau - Alma	8.58	\$6,000,000 - \$6,999,999	2027	Construction /Resurface	Old STH 35 to Indian Creek Rd
35	Alma - Pepin	0.00	\$30,000,000 - \$34,999,999	2028	Construction/BRRPL	B-06-0242,0243,0244,0245,0246,0247
37	Alma - Mondovi	3.47	\$12,000,000 - \$12,999,999	2026	Construction /Pavement Replacement	STH 88 to USH 10
37	Alma - Mondovi	1.30	\$750,000 - \$999,999	2026	Construction/Local Utilities	STH 88 to USH 10
37	Alma - Mondovi	2.10	\$1,000,000 - \$1,999,999	2026	Construction/Culvert Replacements	C-06-4588, 4589, 4592, 4594, 4597
37	Alma - Mondovi	4.90	\$2,000,000 - \$2,999,999	2027	Construction /Resurface	STH 35 to CTH F
54	Winona - Galesville	0.65	\$250,000 - \$499,999	2027	Construction /Resurface	MN/WI state line to STH 35
95	Fountain City - Arcadia	9.45	\$100,000 - \$249,999		Design - Full PS&E/ Resurfacing	CTH G to CTH A

[2025-2028 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program](#) Project Listing: Northwest Region (p. 337)

Other Plans

[Wisconsin State Trails Network Plan](#): encouraging regional and local trail links to the statewide trail system.

[Buffalo County Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan](#): planning the coordination of publicly funded transportation services in Buffalo County.

[Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Plan](#): In reviewing the Regional Plans listed above, no inconsistencies were evident between any regional plan and Buffalo County goals.

Goals and Objectives

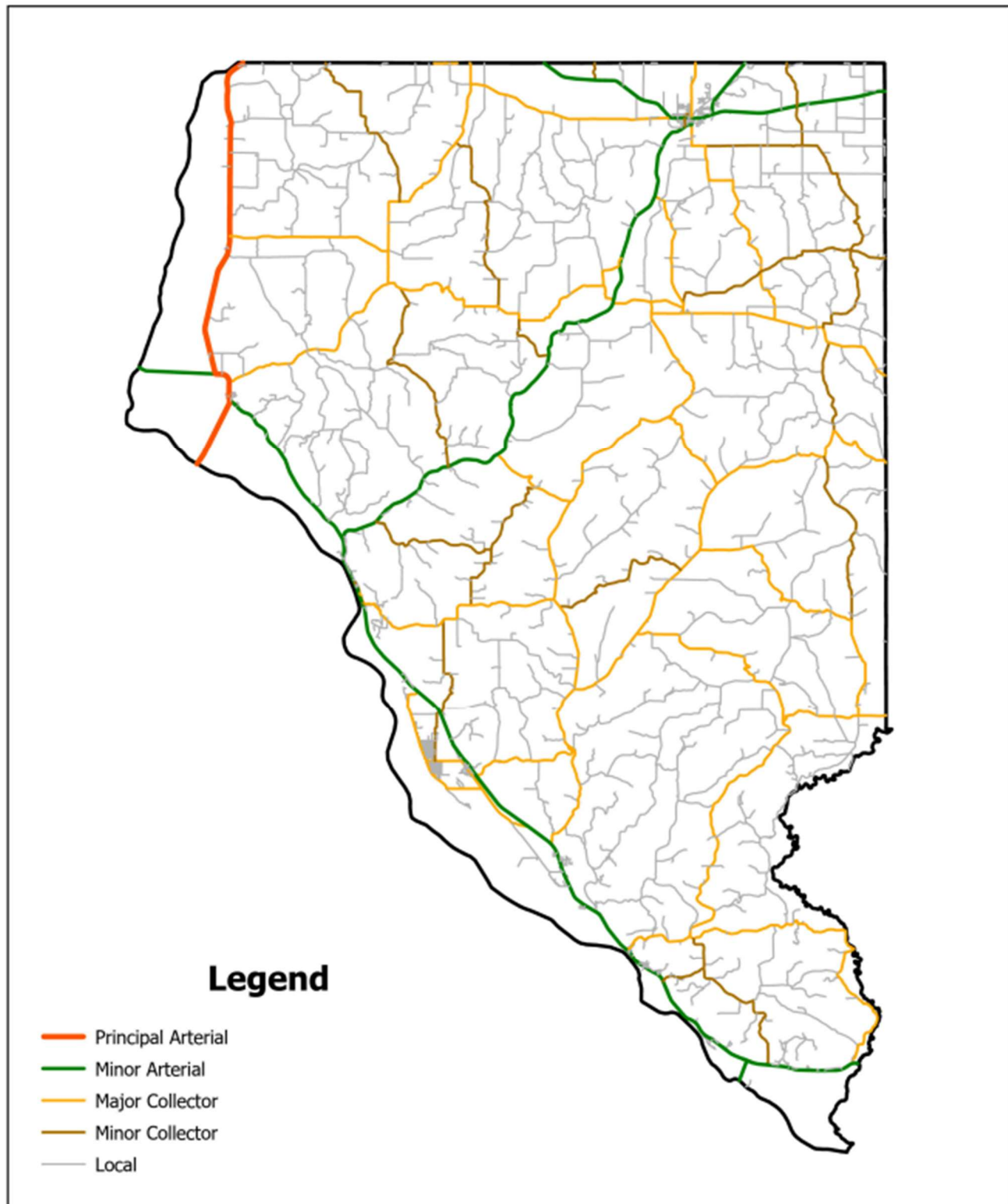
Maintain and preserve the existing roadway network

Strengthen partnerships by normalizing communications & expectations between the Buffalo County Highway Department and the Towns.

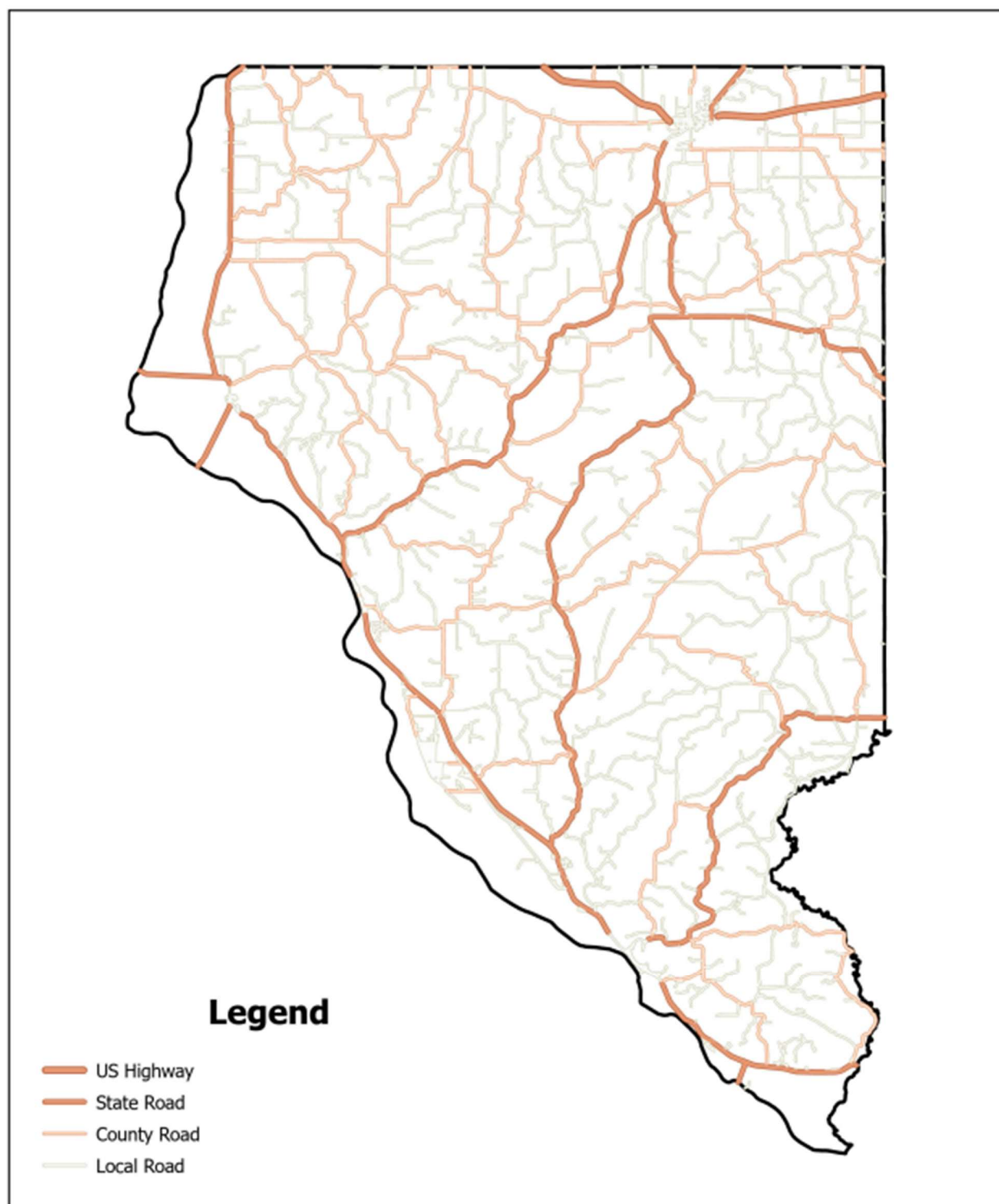
Balance tourism infrastructure with local needs

Offer the towns and their local residents a chance to speak on tourism projects, e.g. bike trails.

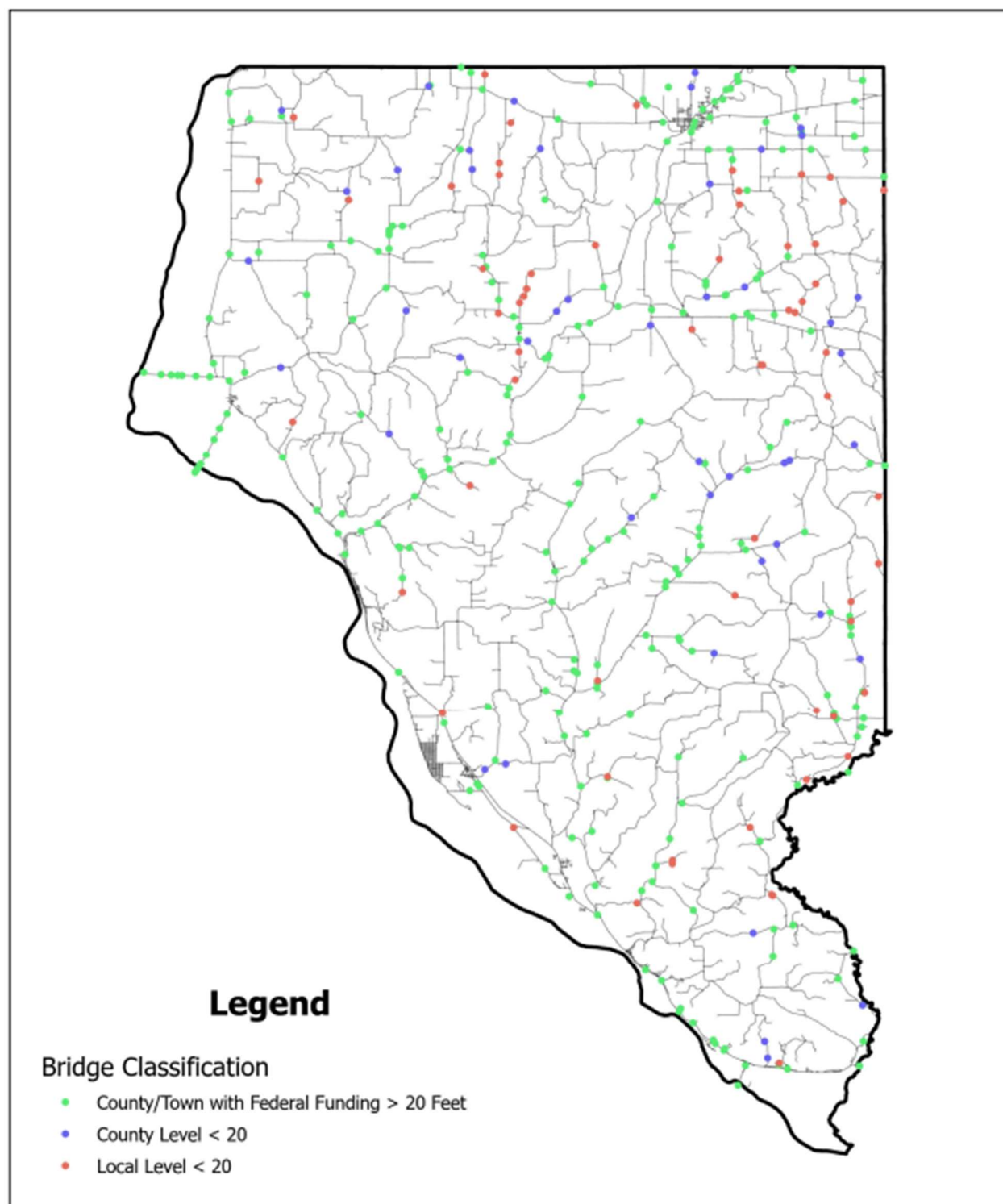
Map 3.1: Wisconsin DOT Functional Road Classification



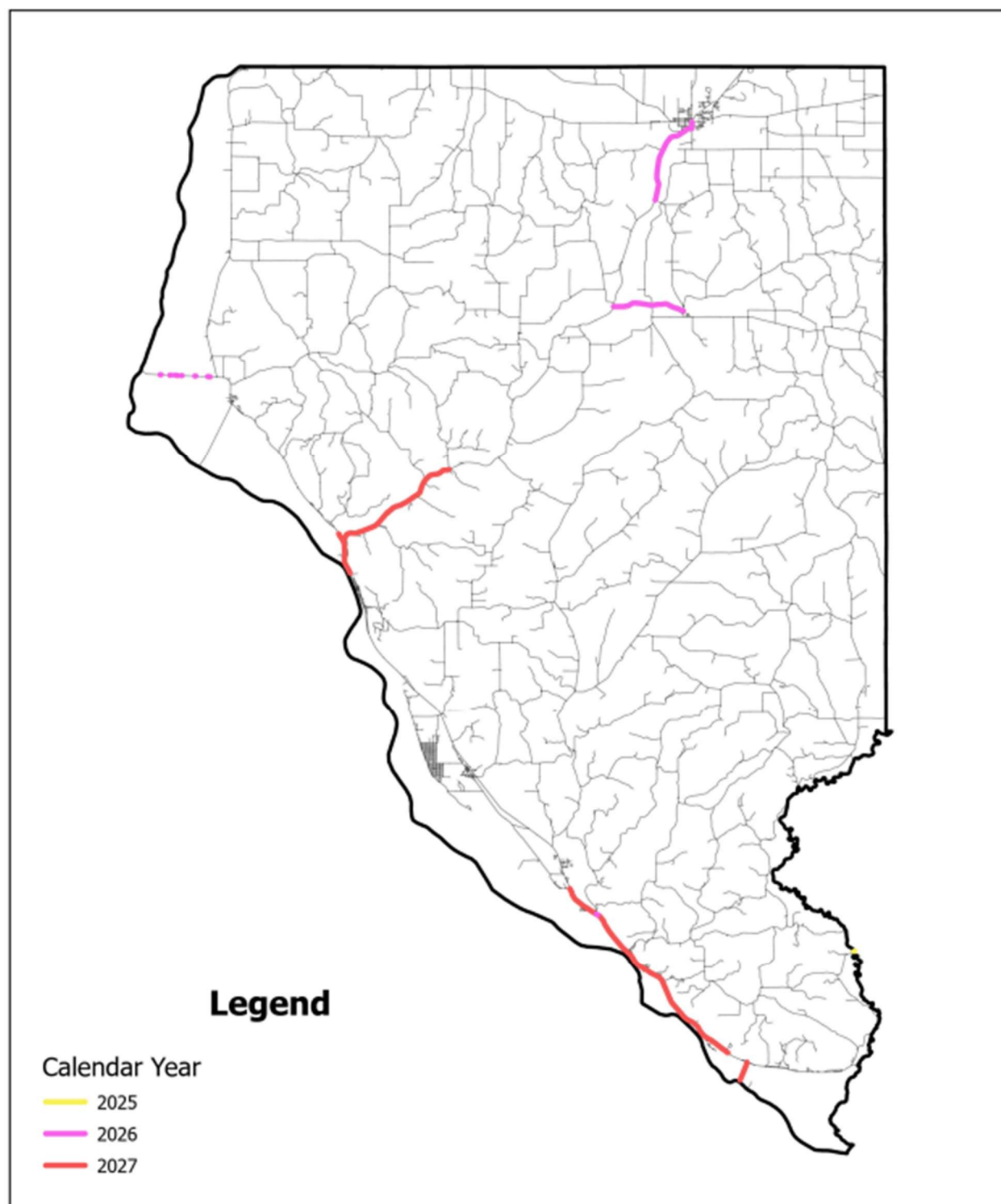
Map 3.2: Jurisdictional Road Classification



Map 3.4: Bridge Locations



Map 3.5: Wisconsin DOT Improvement Program



4

Providing Necessities

Utilities and Community Facilities of Buffalo County



Figure 4.1 Proposed wastewater treatment facility for the City of Mondovi. Construction began in 2021. (Clearas Water, 2019)

Element Overview

Utilities and Community Facilities Element. Addresses the future development of utilities and community facilities in Buffalo County such as sanitary sewer service, storm water management, water supply, solid waste disposal, on-site wastewater treatment technologies, recycling facilities, parks, telecommunications facilities, power-generating plants and transmission lines, cemeteries, health care facilities, childcare facilities and other public facilities, such as police, fire and rescue facilities, libraries, schools and other governmental facilities. The element describes the location, use and capacity of existing public utilities and community facilities that serve the county, and includes an approximate timetable that forecasts the need in the local governmental unit to expand or rehabilitate existing utilities and facilities or to create new utilities and facilities and shall assess future needs for government services in the local governmental unit that are related to such utilities and facilities as consistent with Stat. § 66.1001(2)(d).

Utilities

Water Supply

Buffalo County lies within the Lower Chippewa and Buffalo-Trempealeau drainage basins, each feeding the mighty Mississippi River on the county’s western border. Despite the abundance of water that travels through our lands, **nearly all our drinking and irrigation water is sourced from our groundwater supply.** This water is mainly drawn from the county’s sandstone aquifer (USGS HA 730-J, 1992). Shallow wells in river valleys may also draw on water held in the sands and gravels deposited by rivers and glacial meltwater.

The moderate-to-high permeability of Buffalo County’s soils allow rain and snowmelt to rapidly recharge Cambrian sandstone aquifers that sit atop a far less pervious pre-Cambrian igneous rock formation (see illustration 5.3 in chapter 5). The exceptional rates of groundwater recharge along with adequate rates of precipitation from the region’s humid-continental climate help to ensure an abundant supply of groundwater for our future generations.

Table 4.1 Municipal High Capacity Wells

Municipal Water Supply Name	Normal Well Pump Capacity Gallons Per Day	Population Served by Facility	Well Depth (Feet)	Construction Year
Alma Waterworks	Well 1- 216,000	769	440	1910
	Well 2 – 128,000		488	1961
Cochrane Waterworks	49,000	450	100	1981
Fountain City Waterworks	34,000	443	305	1965
Mondovi Waterworks	Well 1 – 216,000	2,667	384	-----
	Well 2 – 324,000		373	1972
	Well 3 – 576,000		444	1995
Nelson Water & Sewer Department	180,000	375	90.5	1968

Wisconsin DNR Drinking Water System

As of 2025, roughly 65 percent of Buffalo County residents are served by private wells owned and maintained by individual property owners. **Buffalo County has no jurisdiction over the siting or design of these wells.** Private well drillers and residents are responsible for complying with the regulations set forth by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) CH NR 812 and NR 809 Wis. Adm. Code. An estimated *35 percent of all Buffalo County residents are served through five municipal water supply systems.* These systems are

fed by 8 high-capacity municipal wells pumping anywhere from 34,000 gallons per day to 576,000 gallons per day.

Buffalo County has approximately 121 permitted high-capacity wells- wells that, by themselves or in combination with other wells on a single property, have approval from the Department of Natural Resources to pump over 100,000 gallons. These wells are used in a variety of industrial, agricultural, and municipal applications.

Once known as the smallest city in the United States, the City of **Buffalo City is actually one of the largest communities in the region with no municipal well or central waste-water treatment facility**. Each of its residents rely on a private onsite wastewater treatment system (holding tanks and septic systems) to treat wastewater produced by their homes or businesses.

Buffalo City is bound by the Mississippi River to its west and sandy agricultural fields on all other sides. The city's surroundings, combined with high soil permeability and the high density of private wells & septic systems in Buffalo City makes the possibility of groundwater contamination a conceivable issue. **In 2023, a well water study of Buffalo County identified elevated nitrate levels (>2.0 ppm N) in 69% of the wells tested for the study in Buffalo City**, compared to the countywide average of 46%. These wells were mainly concentrated in the northern half of the city.

In the past, high costs of infrastructure projects has discouraged adding municipal utilities to the city. However, the potential health risks, aging infrastructure, development pressures and limited space for replacement septic systems may outweigh system development costs.

The Buffalo County Department of Health and Human Services operates an in-house water testing laboratory. This facility provides the community with bacteriological, nitrate, and arsenic testing. The department routinely tests wells from around the county that provide water to members of the public such as taverns and other businesses, public parks, childcare facilities, schools, and churches for example. Private well owners may also voluntarily use the services of the Health Department's water testing lab. The services provided by this lab have proven to be a cost-effective way for residents and Buffalo County to meet well sampling requirements and help to ensure the safety of the county's drinking water supply.

Wastewater Management

Private On-Site Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS): serve the majority of Buffalo County residents. With the exception of Waumandee, only the incorporated communities of the county provide their residents with sewer service to a municipal wastewater treatment facility. All other county residents depend on POWTS to dispose of their wastewater. These facilities include various

facilities such as septic systems, holding tanks, portable restrooms, composting/incinerating toilets, and vault privies (outhouses). All of these POWTS are regulated by the Buffalo County Department of Land Management.

Five of the county’s six municipalities are served by a sanitary sewer service. Only Buffalo City and its 1,012 residents are served entirely by POWTS rather than a municipal wastewater treatment facility. A few outlying homes in the City of Mondovi do not have sewer service are also served by POWTS. The lack of a centralized wastewater treatment system and municipal well, particularly in Buffalo City, can promote a sprawling pattern of development due to the regulatory setbacks between private wells and septic systems.

Chapter SPS 383 Wisconsin Administrative Code was created to establish standards and criteria for the siting, design, installation, inspection, and management of POWTS in the state. Buffalo County is the governmental unit responsible for regulating POWTS within the county and administering the POWTS maintenance program. There are approximately 4133 systems in our inventory. The inventory helps to identify older POWTS in the county that need rehabilitation or replacement.

Wastewater Treatment Facilities (WWTF): Are owned and operated by the cities of Fountain City, Mondovi, Alma, and the villages of Cochrane and Nelson, as well as the Town of Waumandee. In accordance with Wisconsin’s Administrative Code NR 208, these facilities must adhere to regulations set by the WIDNR Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) Permit Program.

To promote awareness and responsibility of wastewater treatment needs and to maximize the lifespan of these expensive capital investments, the WPDES Permit Program uses an annual, self-evaluation report called the Compliance Maintenance Annual Report (CMAR). This report is intended to evaluate possible system problems or facility deficiencies. CMAR not only provides each WWTF with a grade point average (GPA) based on weighted CMAR responses but also rates sample data collected from WWTFs. The GPA of a WWTF helps initiate actions that should be taken to prevent violations of WPDES permit and possible environmental contamination.

Table 4.2 Buffalo County Wastewater Treatment Facility CMAR GPA Report

Facility Name	2021	2022	2023	2024
Alma Wastewater Treatment Facility	3.62	4.0	3.62	4.0
Cochrane Wastewater Treatment Facility	4.0	3.63	3.45	3.63
Fountain City Wastewater Treatment Facility	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.81
Mondovi Wastewater Treatment Facility	3.53	3.47	3.32	3.68
Nelson Wastewater Treatment Facility	3.84	4.00	4.00	3.74
Waumandee Sanitary District #1	3.53	3.26	3.88	4.00

All WWTF within Buffalo County have a GPA of good or satisfactory for the years of 2021 to 2024. Scores are calculated by subtracting any points generated for a specific category from 100. The corresponding points can then be translated into an A through F grading scale (see Table 4.3 CMAR Point and Grading System).

Stormwater Management: Is facilitated by various departments and agencies. The WI Department of Natural Resources requires state stormwater permits for mine sites and construction projects that disturb more than one acre of land. The Buffalo County Shoreland Zoning Ordinance regulates land use practices within 300' of navigable water ways while the Zoning Ordinance requires a permit for any land alteration over 10,000 square feet.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) technical standards are used as a guide in developing stormwater management and erosion control plans. The County Conservationist works closely with farmers and other landowners to control runoff and prevent soil erosion problems. The Buffalo County Highway Department engages in stormwater management projects along highway right of ways to control runoff and sedimentation into waterways.

Solid Waste Management: is a cooperative effort between Buffalo County and its incorporated municipalities to promote and protect the public health, the natural environment, and general welfare of residents, by minimizing environmental, economic and social costs to residents.

Solid waste management in Buffalo County is best described as convoluted. Historically, the county has had some level of involvement/governance over solid waste but has stopped short of county action to be the sole responsible agent since 1984 for the management of solid waste materials.

All residents have an option to contract for solid waste pick up from a private contractor. The overwhelming solid waste removal program in Buffalo County is the bag system or more commonly referred to as “Pay as you throw” (PAYT). PAYT programs have proven to be effective tool in increasing recycling efforts while also encouraging waste minimization. The result is significant energy savings from transportation, increases in material recovery for recycling, and reduction in pollution from landfills and incinerators. PAYT programs also encourage producers to develop more efficient designs and environmentally friendly product life cycles.

Under a PAYT scheme, waste collection costs are distributed more fairly among the population and in proportion to the amount of waste, each user generates. This allows some or all of the costs associated with waste management to be removed from the resident’s property taxes. Conversely, as long as the resident has disposable income the system works. Since household waste has been noted as “generally related to household income” even those with less disposable income are likely to face lower waste collection charges under PAYT systems.

It must be noted that since a PAYT is dependent on one’s disposable income. Economic instability may result in excess dumping and burning of household refuse.

Since the closing of the municipal landfills in the late 1980's and the expansion of waste haulers, a side effect known as Potential Responsible Party (PRP) possesses a threat to Buffalo County. A PRP is a possible polluter who may eventually be held liable for the contamination or misuse of a particular property or resource. Under the Superfund Act, municipalities may be held responsible for the cleanup of contaminated landfills. The level of liability is dependent upon the four classes of contamination, and the amount received from that municipality over a given time period. The four classes of PRPs may be liable for contamination at a Superfund site:

1. The current owner or operator of the site.
2. The owner or operator of a site at the time of disposal of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant occurred.
3. A person who arranged for the disposal of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant at a site.
4. A person who transported a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant to a site, who also selected that site for the disposal of the hazardous substances, pollutants or contaminants.

To mitigate the risk, Buffalo County entered into a twenty-year agreement with La Crosse County, and their Waste to Energy Program. The county bought into this program in 1991 and renewed in 2003 through 2023 at a cost of \$9,450.00 annually. This program has been considered largely ineffective. In 2023, the county did not renew their participation in the program and, at the time of writing, is no longer participating in this program.

Buffalo County has decided that it will not pursue flow control- a legal provision that allows the state and local governments to designate the places where municipal solid waste (MSW) is taken for processing, treatment, or disposal. The idea of flow control has become a heavily debated issue among state and local governments, as designated facilities may hold monopolies on local MSW and/or recoverable materials. However, by instituting flow control and routing Buffalo County's material solid waste to La Crosse, the County could reduce the annual cost to the La Crosse Waste to Energy Program exponentially by the amount of tonnage they receive.

Recyclable Materials Management: in Buffalo County is organized through an established Responsible Unit (RU) program governed by NR544. Buffalo County serves as the responsible unit for 85% of the population. The towns of Waumandee, Glencoe, and Montana operate as their own responsible units, along with the municipality of Fountain City. Responsible

units outside of Buffalo County's program hire private contractors to collect recyclable materials, either through curbside pickup or at drop-off sites. They receive a small per-capita stipend from the State to help cover their expenses. The County Recycling Program operates a single-stream roll-off box drop site system. Material collected is sorted by Green Circle Recycling, LLC, located in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Table 4.4 Buffalo County Recycling Program

	DNR Responsible Unit Program	County Drop- Off Recycling Sites	Curbside Recycling	Landfills	Municipal Composting
Town of Alma	X	X			
Town of Belvidere (BBC)	X	X			X
Town of Buffalo	X	X			
Town of Canton	X				
Town of Cross	X				
Town of Gilmanton	X	X			
Town of Glencoe	X				
Town of Lincoln	X				
Town of Maxville	X	X			
Town of Milton	X	X			
Town of Modena	X	X			
Town of Mondovi	X	X			
Town of Montana	X				
Town of Naples	X				
Town of Nelson	X	X			
Town of Waumandee	X				
Village of Cochrane (BBC)	X	X			X
Village of Nelson	X	X			
City of Alma	X	X			X
City of Buffalo City (BBC)	X	X			X
City of Fountain City	X		X		X
City of Mondovi	X	X	X		X

Buffalo County Recycling Department Data 2025

The County recycling program has ten drop-off sites throughout Buffalo County (see Table 4.4 Buffalo County Recycling Program for details on the services offered in each municipality). Patrons can drop off their unsorted materials at these sites. The program collects the single-stream material from these remote locations and delivers it to the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) in the City of Mondovi for bulk processing, minimal storage, and shipping preparation. The

MRF, owned and operated by the Buffalo County Recycling Program, is dedicated to processing bulk materials. It includes a tipping floor that assists in compacting the bulk material for shipping.

Telecommunications Facilities: transmit information by electronic means. These facilities include but are not limited to radio, telephone, television, and internet. If the basic functions of telecommunications haven't changed significantly since the initial writing of the land use plan in 2012, one can still recognize that their stranglehold on our daily lives sure has.

Ready or not, many residents were forced to dive into this new 'virtual reality' when the Covid-19 pandemic forced some employees to work, and many school children to learn, on devices from home. For these employees and school children, remote work and virtual learning became an expectation from their employers and school districts whether they had reliable internet access or not.

During the early 2020s, online delivery services saw a boom in business, and it became the norm to stream entertainment over the internet at home. Services such as telehealth and massive online vacation rental booking platforms became part of the norm as well. None of the technologies used in these digital services were new at the time, but their place in the home became a sudden necessity during a time of enforced shelter-in-place orders.

Today, finances and other sensitive data are becoming increasingly digitized. It is now not uncommon for businesses or institutions to refuse cash payment and opt for digital payment instead. Digital codes, usually known as blockchain, now are used as a form of currency and can be exchanged with fiat money. If this trend continues, new vast networks of energy, data centers, and broadband services may be necessary to support these new facilities.

Telephone: Depending on your age, you might be surprised to see a wireless landline phone on display at your local history museum. In 2005, more than 75% of American households had a landline phone, but by 2022 only about 15% of Wisconsin households had one. *Today, about 98% of US adults own a cellphone.* This dramatic shift in tech use has required significant changes in infrastructure over the last 20 years.

Due to the increase of wireless communication for public safety, business, and personal use, the matter of constructing telecommunication towers has received attention from all levels of government. *Chapter 16 of the Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance establishes the permitting requirements for mobile tower siting in the county.* The adoption of the revised Zoning Ordinance in 2018 came at the perfect time, providing a straightforward process for permitting

the numerous towers that were part of the federal FirstNet program that Wisconsin bought into in 2017.

Spurred by difficulties in communications by first responders on 9/11/2001, *the 2012 US Congress authorized the creation of a public-private partnership to build a nationwide public safety broadband network known as FirstNet*. This project was funded in 2017, awarding AT&T \$6.5 billion and radio spectrum rights for 25 years. In return, AT&T would have to offer FirstNet service from all of their new and existing cell towers while meeting certain connection strength and service area requirements.

In 2018 alone, 16 new cellular communications towers were permitted in Buffalo County and several more were added to the system in following years- this would more than double the county's mobile tower inventory. These towers were constructed into the early 2020s by Bugg Tussel, an internet provider, who agreed to place AT&T's microwave antennas on their towers. Both Bugg Tussel and AT&T can offer private plans to the public, so long as AT&T provides FirstNet services to public first responders for the term of their contract. *These services will also support the Next Generation 911 protocol discussed later in this chapter under the law enforcement heading.*

Since the implementation of the FirstNet program, service coverage in Buffalo County has improved significantly- for first responders and private customers alike. The private marketplace has also become more competitive, offering better pricing. *There are now 16 telecommunications providers throughout the county, a 45% increase since 2012*. However, it should be noted that there are a few limited areas of the county not covered by a service provider (see Map 4.1).

Television and Internet: Are also provided by a few of Buffalo County's telephone cooperatives- typically in the form of cable television and fiberoptic internet. Due to the topography of the county, it can be cost prohibitive for these to be installed in certain areas of the county. But thanks to new and alternative technologies, many residents now have access to broadband internet at competitive rates.

As part of their agreement with AT&T, Bugg Tussel offers internet service from all of the FirstNet towers that they installed. Unlike fiberoptic internet, no further investment in infrastructure is needed other than a router that is rented to each subscriber for a monthly fee. Further competition has entered Buffalo County's marketplace in the form of satellite internet from Starlink. At the time of writing, Starlink's monthly fee for broadband internet services is less than half the cost of tower projected internet.

Broadband internet is a form of electronic communication transporting large quantities of data at download speeds of at least 100 megabytes per second(mps) and 20 mps upload speeds as set by the FCC. Broadband allows businesses to save time and money, students to obtain online information, and families to stay better connected over long distances. (Map 4.2 Number of Broadband Providers, displays current Broadband coverage throughout Buffalo County)

Data Centers: As briefly mentioned under the ‘telecommunications’ heading, data centers are used in the processing, storage, and transfer of digital data. While data centers have mostly been out of sight and out of mind for Buffalo County’s residents over the past 50 years, an explosion in demand from cloud computing services, the global financial system, and ‘artificial intelligence’ ventures have recently brought data centers to the forefront of conversation in Wisconsin.

The growing scale and frequency of data centers have driven public concern over the immense amount of energy that large data centers use and the potential impacts to water from additives used in the cooling process. Buffalo County’s first exposure to modern data center siting occurred in 2026 with the installation of finance related data centers housed in shipping containers that operated in conjunction with a local energy provider’s substations. Though much smaller than the “hyper-scale” data centers that have been proposed or constructed in Mount Pleasant, Port Washington, or Beaver Dam, these data centers brought some needed attention to categorizing data centers in the Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance.

Electrical Power Generation and Distribution

Power Generation: Wisconsin primarily generates its electricity from coal and natural gas. Over the past two decades, Wisconsin electric utilities have slowly been shifting from coal to natural gas. The next three biggest sources (nuclear fuels, hydroelectric dams and wind) make up a small percentage of Wisconsin’s electricity generation.

Buffalo County is serviced by two electric power generation sources, *Xcel Energy and Dairyland Power Cooperative*. These two organizations produce and transmit all of the County’s electricity from their power generation facilities to their cooperative members via their transmission lines and Xcel’s limited distribution grid. *The majority of the power delivered to the residents of Buffalo County comes from the Dairyland coal-powered plants located just outside the City of Alma*. Originally built in 1947 to supply power for the soaring, post-war energy boom, DairyLand’s Alma Station was decommissioned in 2014. Built in the late 1970s, DairyLand’s most modern station, the John P. Madgett Station (JPM) has the

capacity to generate 387 MWs of electricity. The JPM Station use electrostatic precipitators to remove nearly 100 percent of all particulates that are created from the burning of coal.

The power that is produced from Alma's Dairyland plant and Xcel's Prairie Island nuclear power plant, located in Welch, Minnesota, is transmitted via large transmission line to one of approximately 17 substations located all throughout Buffalo County. *Power from smaller renewable energy sources is added to the electricity transmitted through these transmission lines helping both Xcel and Dairyland meet their renewable energy quotas set forth by the State of Wisconsin.* From these substations, the electricity undergoes a conversion from extremely high voltage, used to reduce energy loss during transmission line travel, into a useable household voltage and amperage. This energy is then distributed to one's household via the much smaller distribution grid.

The final distribution of electricity is provided by one of the three energy wholesalers that service Buffalo County, Riverland Energy Cooperative, Eau Claire Energy Cooperative, and Northern States Power Wisconsin (a subsidiary of Xcel Energy). Riverland Energy Cooperative manages the largest share of energy distribution within the County. Riverland was formerly known as Buffalo Electric Cooperative and Trempealeau Electric Cooperative before their merger on June 1, 1999. Riverland energy is continuing to offer affordable reliable energy within Buffalo County. (See Map 4.3 Utilities in Buffalo County for an overview of power utilities throughout Buffalo County)

A slight increase in the cost of energy and in conjunction with greater accessibility to newer technologies has helped to make the implementation of alternative energy sources a more attractive proposition for many rural residents. The potential to use animal or agricultural byproducts not only reduces one's energy consumption but also reduces the cost associated with the removal of these waste products.

New advanced technologies are also making it easier for residents to harness the natural energy sources on their farms, providing yet another source of power generation that is plentiful and environmentally friendly. *There is currently one utility-scale solar farm online in Buffalo County.* A solar ordinance for these larger developments was enacted by Buffalo County in 2024.

Distribution: Completed in 2017, the CapX20202 transmission line provided much needed upgrades to the electrical grid throughout the Upper Midwest. As part of a larger 800-mile network, a 156-mile, 345-Kilovolt (kV) transmission line runs from substations in Hampton and Rochester, Minnesota to a substation in La Crosse, Wisconsin with approximately 25.5 miles running through Buffalo County.

This new transmission line was constructed by a coalition of 10 utility companies including Dairyland Power Cooperative and Xcel Energy. The goal of the project was to improve electric reliability while opening new avenues for renewable energy in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Approximately 95 landowners throughout Buffalo County were directly affected from the acquisition of land for the use of easements and right-of-ways.

Alma to Blair Transmission Line Project: A \$188 million project to construct a new 34-mile double circuit 161/345 kV transmission line connecting the Blair Tremval Substation to the Alma Substation. New 70'-90' steel monopoles will replace existing wooden poles on one of two existing routes running through the heart of the county. This transmission line will be updated to "relieve congestion along the grid, support growing renewable energy resources and ensure the continued delivery of safe, reliable and cost-effective electricity to homes and businesses in western Wisconsin" as per Dairyland Power. The project has been approved by the Public Service Commission and will be constructed in 2026 and 2027 with restoration efforts taking place after the line goes in-service in 2028.

Natural Gas

Natural gas is considered a cleaner alternative to traditional fossil fuels used today. With 43% less carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions than that of electricity derived from coal, natural gas is considered by many as the best source of energy for the environment both inside and outside of one's home.

Natural gas can be used for the heating of your home, drying of your clothes, and for the cooking of meals. This multi-purpose along with a growing market of high efficiency appliances could potentially lead to large energy savings for the residents of Buffalo County. Currently only Midwest Natural Gas, Inc. provides natural gas services within Buffalo County. Most of the 1,233 residents' serviced by Midwest Natural Gas, Inc. can be found around the City of Mondovi, with only a few exceptions on the border between Buffalo and Trempealeau counties. (To view regions where Midwest Natural Gas, Inc. provides services, please see Map 4.3) At this time, Midwest Natural Gas, Inc. has no plans to expand their distribution of natural gas any further into Buffalo County. Low population densities and long distances make any expansion an expensive undertaking for Midwest Natural Gas, Inc.

Community Facilities

Libraries: Buffalo County is a member of the Winding River Library System (WRLS). WRLS provides the residents of its seven-county region with a wide variety of library resources from connections to massive online databases, book sharing and delivery capabilities, and collections of eBooks, audiobooks, and other multimedia. This system offers residents the availability to easily access resources that may be too cost prohibitive to obtain at the local level. Besides offering traditional library resources these facilities offer free WIFI internet access. This access to the internet has allowed residents whom are either unable to afford or live in regions with limited internet options to search for jobs or further their education.



Figure 4.2 Gilmanton's Howard Library is one of the oldest in the county. Membership fees are still the same as they were in 1866: \$1.00 for a lifetime membership.

The Cities of Alma, Fountain City, Mondovi, and the town of Gilmanton all have physical library sites in the county at this time. Residents can travel outside of the county; however, the county incurs charges for these usages. At present, Buffalo County is responsible for 70 percent of the charges occurred by county residents. These rates vary, as individual libraries, which reside outside the county, are responsible for setting their rates. This has resulted in large financial spending on behalf of the county in past years. The Library Services Plan contains more detailed information about the county's participation in the Winding River Library System.

The City of Alma received a \$4,250,000 grant to fund a new library and community center. Construction of this facility began in 2025. Fountain City received a grant to renovate the Municipal Auditorium and Library with construction starting in 2025. Mondovi moved the public library to a new facility constructed in 2024.

Schools: Of the seven school districts that serve Buffalo County only four reside within the borders of Buffalo County. (See Map 7.1 Buffalo County School Districts)

Alma School District: Located in the City of Alma, the district provides a safe educational setting for all students from pre-K to seniors in high school. Multiple additions have been added to the buildings original 1950's structure to help facilitate a student population of about 300, with average class sizes ranging from 20 to 25 pupils. The school's large gym and cafeteria

proves to be a great venue for many local community organizations, such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and for public forums / debates.

Cochrane-Fountain City (C-FC) School District: Constructed in 1959, the original school has seen several different additions. These various additions helped to provide a safe learning environment for the school's estimated 550 student population. The pre-K-12 school complex is located on one site, Fountain City and the Village of Cochrane. The Cochrane-Fountain City Elementary School serves about 275 students in grades K4-6, and the Cochrane-Fountain City Jr/High School serves about 275 students in grades 7-12.

The ample space of the C-FC high school gym, common areas, and the Jim Granum Auditorium make it an ideal facility for events and public organizations. With minimal fees, used only to help offset operating costs, residents and organizations of the district can rent these spaces whenever school is not in session.

Gilmanton School District: the K4-12 school facility has a student population of approximately 130. The Elementary school is taught in a separate location in a combined classroom setting. A three-story brick structure that was built in the early 1920's houses grades 5-12 (middle and high schools). As the student population expanded, additional expansions to this facility were completed including a gymnasium and shops. The most recent expansion was the addition of a science wing in the mid-90's. There are currently no plans for future facility expansions at this time.

School District of Mondovi: During the 2020-2021 school year, total enrollment was 894. The student-to-teacher ratio in pre-kindergarten through grade 3 is no more than 18:1; the ratio in all other grades is less than 25:1. There are 78 certified staff, 3 administrators, and 46 full- or part-time support staff members.

District facilities include a complex in the city of Mondovi and another building, Anthony School, located in Eau Claire County- about eight miles north of Mondovi on Highway 37. Students in Five-Year-Old Kindergarten through grade 12 attend the city school; students participating in the Early Childhood program or the Four-Year- Old Kindergarten program attend Anthony School. The city complex includes an outdoor swimming pool, a distance learning center, a fine arts performance area, weight room, three indoor athletic areas, and an outdoor physical education area which includes newly renovated tennis courts and running track, a football field, baseball and softball fields, and additional practice fields.

Parks and Playgrounds: Buffalo County's history and natural beauty offers residents and tourists a plethora of outdoor recreational activities, which range from pleasure driving, to camping, biking, and water activities. Buffalo County does not own or maintain any county parks or trails; however, patrons of the county can find many parks and trails provided by the local municipalities, state, and federal agencies. For more specific information regarding the location and uses of each park and trail system in the county please refer to the Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Enjoying the natural beauty of Buffalo County is easy as there are roughly 11 camping areas, located all throughout the County. The mix of public and privately owned and operated camping sites provides approximately 433 total campsites (See table 4.6 Buffalo County Camping Locations for more details). This diverse camping selection offers the public a wide range of camping experiences, from tent camping to recreational vehicle camping with an even wider array of amenities. Buffalo County's nationally top-ranking record of trophy whitetail deer has inspired a growing number of outfitters and sportsmen's clubs all throughout the county. Though the majority of these lands are not open to the public without permission, they do offer the outdoor enthusiast yet another experience.

The Lower Chippewa State Natural Area, in the Village of Nelson, allows outdoor enthusiasts to explore the breathtaking views from the high bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River and Great River Road. The 161 acres not only provides scenic views of the bluff lands, but also provides excellent habitat for raptors, reptiles, and rare plant life found in few other parts of the state. Once used by the Native Americans, this site was designated by the Wisconsin Historical Society as an important archaeological site. This site not only protects the natural beauty of Buffalo County but also the county's historical heritage.

Thrive! Park, located in the Village of Nelson, is a newly established area that spans over 25 acres of bluff top and bluff side along the Mississippi River. Visitors can access the bluff top via hiking roads and trails. The park features "goat prairies," which have recently been cleared as part of a broader prairie restoration initiative in the Nelson area.

Small municipal parks are located throughout the County. Many of these parks feature playground equipment, green spaces, and open areas suitable for organized sports. Surrounding several of these parks, residents can also find additional amenities such as tennis, pickleball, and basketball courts, as well as baseball diamonds. These recreational areas not only provide a safe environment for the county's youth to play but also promote physical fitness and community well-being.

Near the Village of Cochrane and the City of Mondovi, there are private golf courses. Additionally, a third golf course located just north of the County line near Durand is also available to serve the residents of Buffalo County.

Child Care: Facilities can be found all throughout Buffalo County with day care providers located in the Cities of Fountain City, Buffalo City, and Mondovi as well as within the Village of Nelson. Currently, Buffalo County has ten licensed facilities, which allows for the care of more children and stricter safety considerations. Buffalo County Department of Health and Human Services is responsible for ensuring that state and local standards are continually being followed by all known childcare facilities within Buffalo County.

Medical/ Health Care: Buffalo County has three medical clinics within its borders. These facilities include St. Elizabeth's Alma Clinic, Mayo Clinic Health System-Oakridge in Mondovi, and Emplify Health's Mondovi Clinic. However, due to insurance options, limitations in services, and the vast distances patients must travel, many of the residents in the county are forced to choose providers outside the county. Fortunately, Winona Health Services in Winona Minnesota, Gunderson Lutheran in La Crosse, St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Wabasha, Gunderson Tri-County Hospital in Whitehall, and Advent Health in Durand, and the numerous medical facilities in Eau Claire and Menomonie, Wisconsin, are in relative proximity to Buffalo County and have the ability to serve many of our residents immediate and specialty needs.

This limited access to quality universal health care was a major theme in past Community Health Improvement Plans. Limited access not only encompasses one's hospital care but also the access the community has to dental, mental health, and long-term care services. Without proper access to these critical services, the people of Buffalo County are at an even greater risk of suffering from diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and excessive alcohol use. Improvement in the number of medical facilities would not only aid in the efforts of improving health conditions throughout the county but also has the potential to bring new high paying jobs and higher levels of education to the communities within Buffalo County.

Senior Care Facilities: are located throughout Buffalo County. In the City of Mondovi, residents can take full advantage of the skilled nursing staff and independent living apartments of the American Lutheran Home. Seniors requiring less care can utilize the Buffalo County Housing Authority to provide subsidized senior living, which is adjusted to one's income. This

organization helps the Buffalo County Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) achieve their “Aging in Place” mission, allowing senior citizens to have the resources to stay within their communities as long as possible.

Several Residential Care Apartment Complexes and Community Based Residential Facilities are also located in the City of Mondovi.

The Wisconsin Dept of Health Services’ Elder Nutrition Program uses state and federal funds, plus contribution to provide at least one-third of daily nutritional needs of older adults. Meal sites have been established in the Town of Gilmanton, The Village of Nelson, and the Cities of Buffalo City and Mondovi. Though these sites run on various days of the week and times, they do provide the county’s elderly community an affordable hot meal and social activities. Programs like this have proven instrumental in maintaining cognitive health and establishing a social network for checking on the health and welfare of our community’s older generation. Home delivered meals are available throughout Buffalo County to eligible individuals.

Buffalo County’s rural setting makes transportation an ever-increasing issue for seniors or those with disabilities. Transportation services are available to Pepin and Buffalo County residents seven days a week for all purposes including medical, social, and personal business. Priority is given to individuals aged 60+ and people with disabilities. Handicap accessible van & bus available for individuals who require specialized transportation. Passengers will pay a cost share rate which is determined by income. Requests for transportation must be made in advance whenever possible. Through this program, residents of Buffalo County are able to travel into Winona and Wabasha, Minnesota for grocery shopping, banking and pharmaceutical needs. For more specific information about these types of services, please contact ADRC Buffalo and Pepin Counties Transportation Program at 1-866-578-2372.

Cemeteries: Buffalo County has a variety of cemeteries varying in size, age, and denominations. There are an estimated 67 known burial sites located all throughout the county. All cemeteries within Buffalo County are maintained and cared for by either the municipalities or by private organizations. Wisconsin Statute §157.115 indicates that if a private organization abandons or fails to care for a cemetery then the municipality, in which the cemetery is located in, may take control of the cemetery. This has the potential to create a hardship on the municipality. As a result, Buffalo County does not have jurisdiction over the cemeteries in the county.

The locations of these cemeteries are generally available in the Buffalo County Plat Books and the Buffalo County Historical Society. The Buffalo County GIS/Land Information Office currently has the location of most known cemeteries and graveyards mapped and available on the County’s map portal webpage.

Emergency Services: Outside of the cities of Fountain City and Mondovi, Buffalo County relies predominately on the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office and volunteer Fire and EMS agencies to respond to emergency situations. The only fulltime staffed agency is the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office. State Patrol, and two local police departments augment the Sheriff Department through mutual aid requests.

Buffalo County is a 911 County and is equipped with a dispatch center. All agencies respond by dispatch and paging through the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office Dispatch Center, which is located at the Buffalo County Courthouse. In 2024, the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office received a grant from the Department of Military Affairs' Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) to install a NextGeneration 9-1-1 (NG911) system that will have the ability to transmit, receive, process, transfer, dispatch, use, and store both voice and data (in the form of pictures, videos, text messages, and incident information) associated with a 911 call or request for emergency assistance.

With the advent of the National Incident Management System and the National Response Framework, an all-hazards approach to emergency mitigation, planning, response and recovery has taken place. The Departments of Public Health and Emergency Management are intertwined in planning for the executable response to all-hazards (manmade/natural) events within Buffalo County. This is done through strategic planning and the request for, and implemented use of, state and federal resources.

There is a standing Local Emergency Planning Committee that meets twice annually to review the status of bulk chemical plants and hazardous material spills within the confines of Buffalo County.

Fire and HAZMAT - There are five volunteer fire departments within the boundaries of Buffalo County. There are three supporting on the outer fringes of Buffalo County and they are Durand VFD, Arcadia Glencoe VFD, and the Dodge Fire Department. There are also mutual aid agreements (MOU)'s with Winona and Wabasha, Minnesota and Eau Claire, WI.

There are currently two Regional HAZMAT teams that service Buffalo County. Chippewa Falls, Eau Claire north of state highway 95 and that is a level 1, formally (LEVEL A+) and La Crosse south of state highway 95 and level 2 formally (Level A).

Ambulance Service - Six Ambulance companies service Buffalo County. Five are volunteer, with Winona Area Ambulance being private. Mayo health care provides helicopter service out of Eau Claire and Rochester, along with GundersonAIR out of La Crosse, WI.

Law Enforcement - The Buffalo County Sheriff's Office serves as the primary law enforcement agency in the County. Although the City of Mondovi maintains its law enforcement agency, the County is called upon regularly to assist in mutual aid situations. Located in the Buffalo County courthouse building, the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office's twenty-three full-time staff and six part-time employees provide 24-hour law enforcement and process services, court security, jail facilities, and emergency dispatch. The Buffalo County Sheriff's Office's two K9 units and the Mondovi Police Department's one K9 unit serve the County's 672 square miles.

Situated within the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office, as depicted in Figure 4.1, Buffalo County Sheriff's Office Organizational Chart, the Buffalo County Jail and Dispatch Divisions are responsible for providing 24-hour jail monitoring and emergency telephone services for all residents in the county. Using an Enhanced 911 System (E911), dispatchers are able to send and organize emergency management assets quickly and accurately. This highly integrated system has proven to be a critical component in the managing of eight Fire Departments, four First Responder organizations, six Ambulance Services, as well as with other county and state entities, including those in Minnesota.

The County is further supported by two troopers from the Wisconsin State Patrol, and the DNR Warden.

Other Governmental Facilities:

Built in 1962, the Buffalo County Court House, in Alma, serves as the seat of county government. This facility houses all county offices as well as additional rental office space for state agencies. The 1988 southern addition added approximately 12,320 square feet to the overall building footprint. No future expansions are anticipated at this time. Buffalo County owns and maintains five highway shops located throughout the County. Located off State Road 37, the largest of the Buffalo County highway shops, the Alma Highway Shop was originally built in 1969. This facility has since remodeled its sign and office areas in 2004 as well as the construction of a second larger storage building in 2010. Due to its close proximity to the county courthouse and its relative central location within the county, this facility has become the primary hub for equipment maintenance and field operations.

Smaller satellite shops can be found in the cities of Mondovi and Fountain City as well as in the towns of Modena and Waumandee. These facilities vary in both age and size. (See Table 4.7 Other Government Facilities, for specific details) In an effort to maximize emergency response times and optimize county resources, flood control equipment, emergency response trailers, and the county impound facility have been strategically arranged at these sites. By placing

these critical assets among the smaller highway shops, emergency planners can quickly deploy them as needed even in the most severe conditions.

Many of the local units of government own and maintain their municipal buildings. These facilities vary greatly in both age and size. Several of these structures were originally designed and used as schools and for farm storage. These buildings have since been renovated into large halls used for meeting and local events.

Goals and Objectives

Improve availability of necessary services to retain younger generations of residents

Work with the health department to bolster childcare certification in the county. Look for ways to expand this crucial service.

Prevent well water contamination in sensitive areas

Focus on improving groundwater in areas already identified as contaminated in the 2023 well water study.

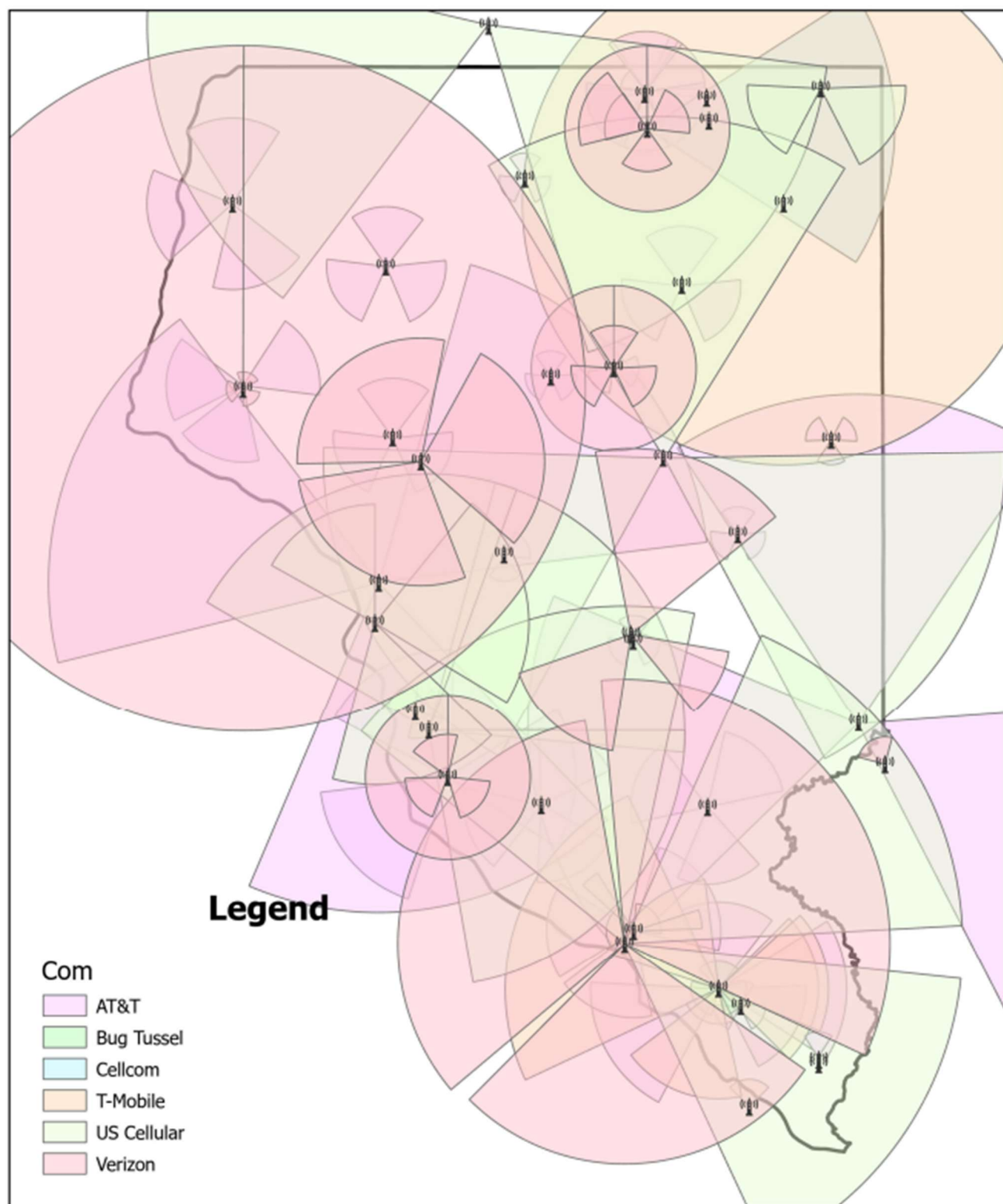
Work with the health department to conduct future studies, bolster current sampling efforts, and educate residents. Look into launching a reverse osmosis program to support those with contaminated water.

Investigate the use of community wells in areas more prone to groundwater contamination, e.g. the Buffalo City area.

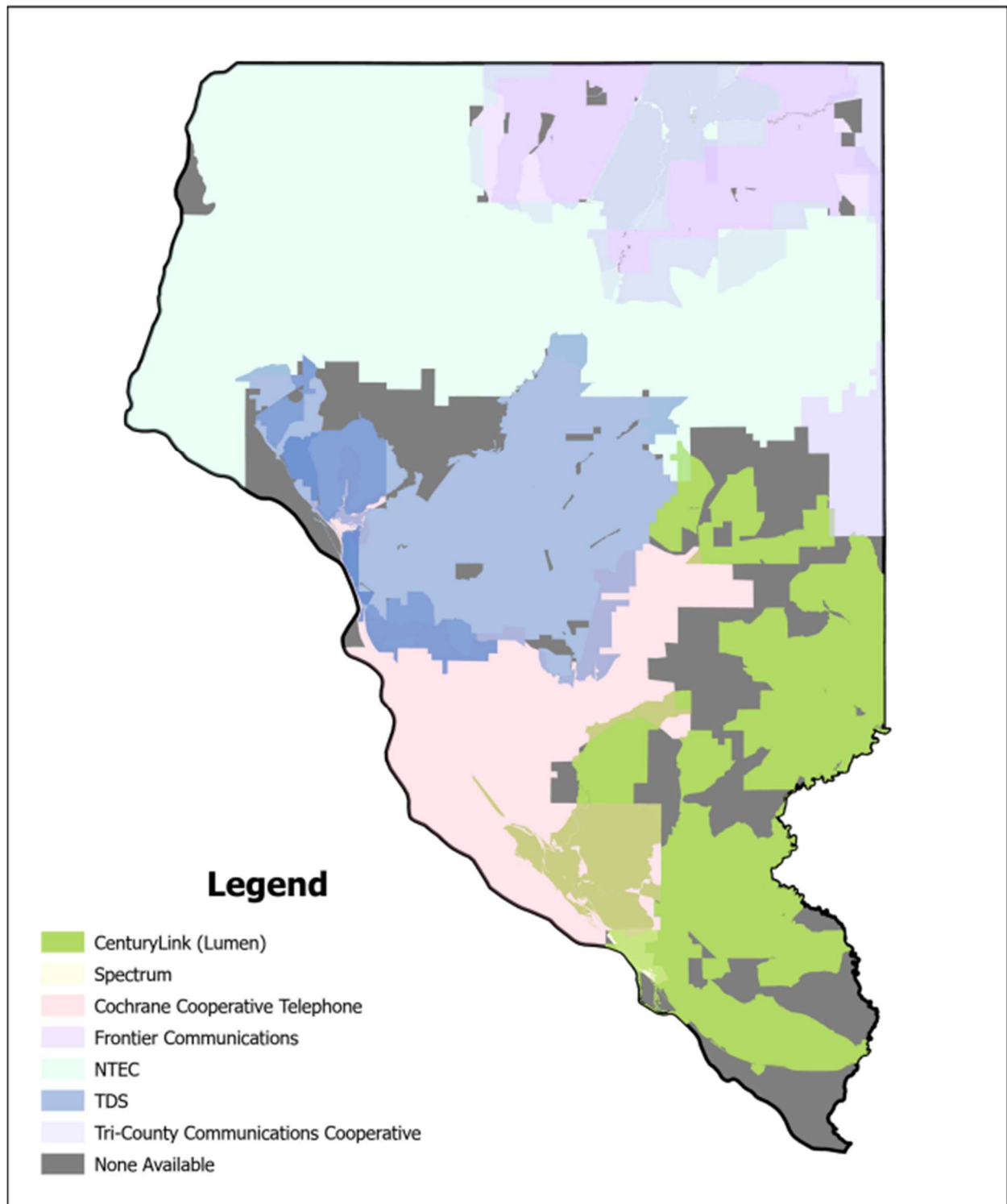
Improve cellphone and broadband services in the county

Be on the alert for Public Service Commission grants. The latest Broadband Expansion Grant was opened on May 19th of this year and closed on July 27th.

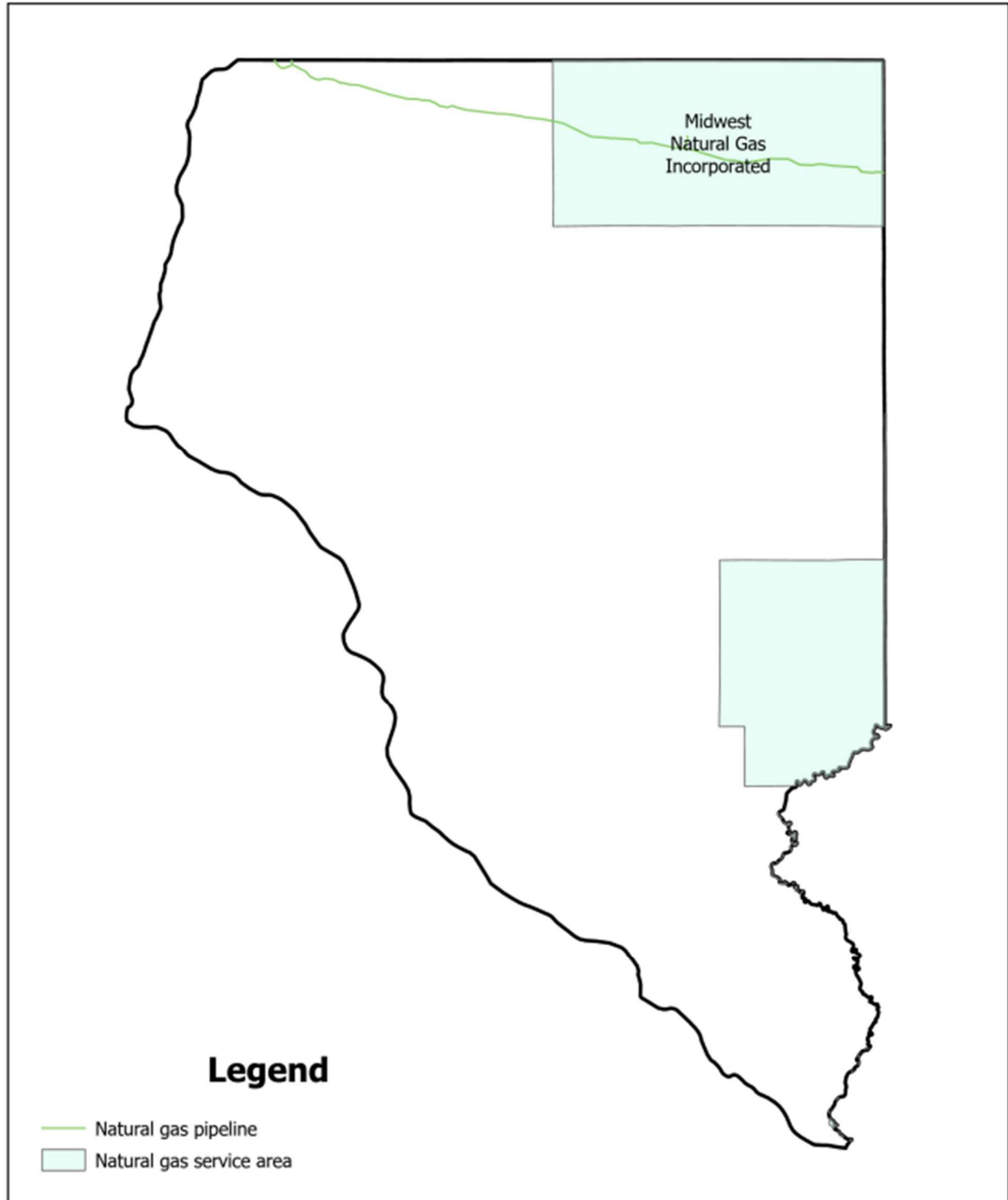
Map 4.1: Cell Phone Coverage



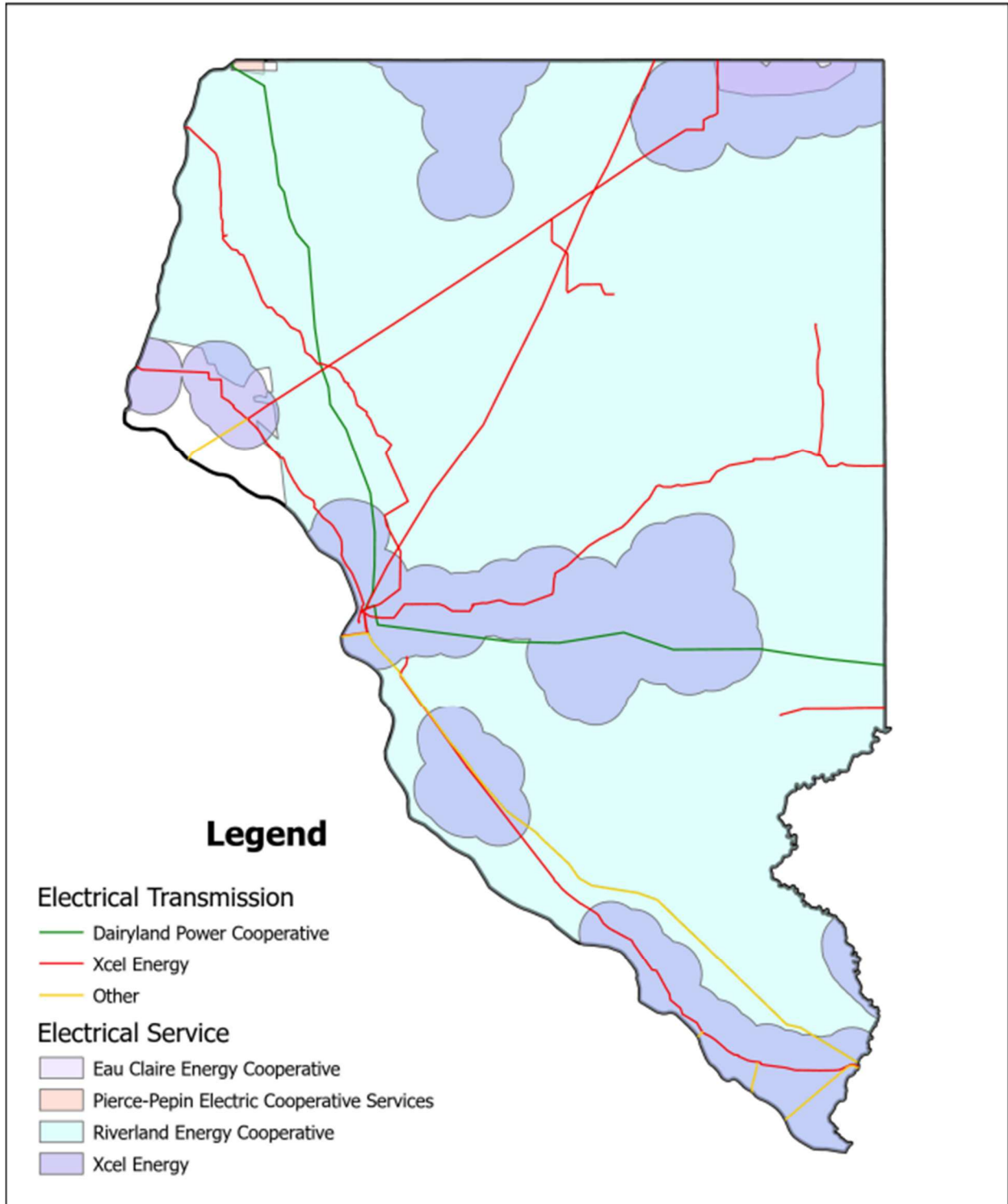
Map 4.2: Broadband Providers



Map 4.3a: Natural Gas Utilities



Map 4.3b: Electrical Utilities



5

Our Land, Water, and Heritage

Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources of Buffalo County



Figure 5.1. A farmstead in the Town of Montana (WI Land and Water, 2024)

Element Overview

Agricultural, natural and cultural resources element. This element focuses on the conservation, and promotion of the effective management, of natural resources such as groundwater, forests, productive agricultural areas, environmentally sensitive areas, threatened and endangered species, stream corridors, surface water, floodplains, wetlands, wildlife habitat, metallic and nonmetallic mineral resources consistent with zoning limitations under s. [295.20 \(2\)](#), parks, open spaces, historical and cultural resources, community design, recreational resources and other natural resources as consistent with Stat. § 66.1001(2)(e).

Our Landscape

Lying on the northern edge of the driftless region, Buffalo County's topography is extremely varied. It consists mainly of high ridges, long narrow valleys, and areas of steep sloping land in between. Bluffs rise above the river bottoms by 500 feet in some areas. Soils throughout much of the county are silty upland soils with sandy upland soils being concentrated in the rolling hills of the northeastern reaches of the county. Loamy stream terraces and mucky bottomland soils can be found throughout the county. While glacial meltwater and ice dams had an impact on the county's river valleys, the current understanding is that only the northwestern edge of the county was glaciated during the last ice age. Remnants of glacial till have been found on the ridges bordering Pepin County.

Agriculture and Natural Resources

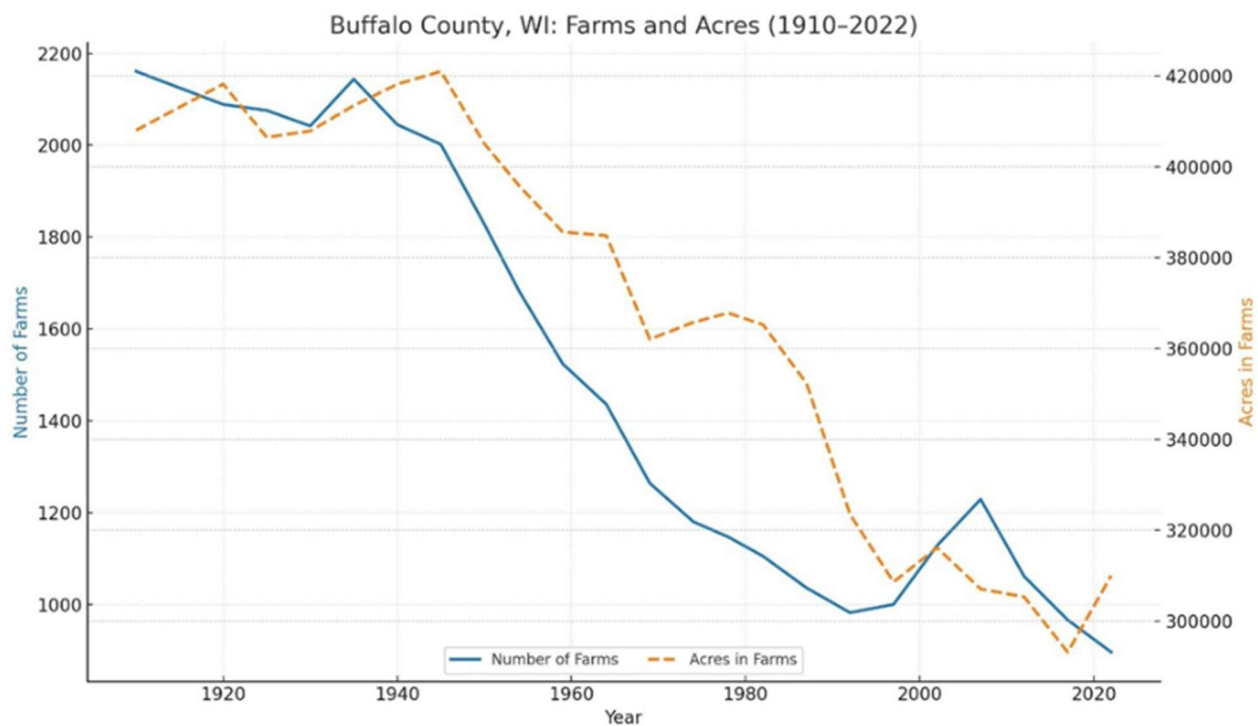
Why Our Farms Matter: The Heart of Buffalo County

Agriculture is more than just a business in Buffalo County; it is the backbone of our economy and the soul of our landscape.

A County Shaped by its Farms- Since settlement, most of Buffalo County's land has been held by people seeking an income or livelihood from agriculture. This has greatly impacted the development of Buffalo County's natural and cultural landscapes. Today, about *72% of Buffalo County's land lies within farms*, down from a peak of 98% in the 1940s (USDA Census of Agriculture 1910-2022).

High Farming Concentration- We are one of only three counties in Wisconsin where at least *20% of all earnings or 17% of employment* come directly from farming (USDA ERS 2025).

Soils Worth Protecting- We rely on *Prime Farmland*—land with the best mix of nutrients and water to grow high-yield crops. Prime Farmland is comparatively rare in Buffalo County, primarily occupying level ridgetops and stable valley floors. *Farmland of Statewide Importance* is much more common in the county. It is nearly prime, but has greater limitations such as steep slopes, high erodibility, or flooding potential. Currently, there are zoning restrictions that discourage development on prime farmland (USDA Class I & II soils).



Growing Farm Size- While the number of farms has fluctuated, *the average farm size has grown to 346 acres* as operations consolidate to remain efficient. In 2022, Buffalo County had the largest median farm size of all Wisconsin's counties and ranked second to Adams County as the county with the largest average farm size.

Protecting our farmland ensures that the local agricultural economy remains stable, providing jobs and maintaining the scenic "ridge and valley" views that make our county a beautiful place to live.

Balancing Industry: Large Farms and Mining

It is important to balance our economic needs with the protection of our natural resources.

Permitting New Livestock Facilities: The Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance regulates the location of new feedlots, barns, and parlors based on the number of "animal units" they will hold. One animal unit is equal to 1,000 lbs of animal weight. A simple system of setbacks from roads and property lines is currently used to site livestock facilities. While there are no setbacks from new livestock facilities to existing homes, the ordinance creates a setback for new non-farm homes from some existing livestock facilities. Any structure

capable of holding more than 250 animal units also requires a conditional use permit. Any new manure storage system or livestock structure holding more than 25 animal units are required to submit a nutrient management plan to the department of land management annually.

Managing Large Livestock Operations (CAFOs): Farms with over 1,000 animal units are regulated and monitored by the state to prevent runoff into our streams. These farms are known as confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). All CAFOs are required to have a nutrient management plan. *There are currently 6 CAFOs permitted in Buffalo County.*

Strong mining and farming oversight prevents heavy truck traffic and water pollution from lowering property values or damaging residents' quality of life.

Non-Metallic Mining: We currently have *35 active mines* for sand, gravel, and stone. Any new mines go through a permitting process that involves review by the town board, a third-party professional, the highway department, and the board of adjustments. Mines are required to have a *reclamation plan* (an agreement to restore the land once mining is finished) as well as a state stormwater permit. The county inspects mines to ensure that no more land is being mined than can be reclaimed using funds held in bond with the county, in case of insolvency. An annual fee is paid to the county to cover the costs of inspection.



Figure 5.3. Non-metallic mine reclamation at the O'Neil quarry in the town of Montana (2021, Buffalo County LCD)

Protecting Our Drinking Water (Groundwater)

Every single resident in Buffalo County relies on groundwater (water stored in underground rock layers called aquifers) for their drinking water. Much of Buffalo County's well water is obtained from its porous sandstone aquifer that is made up of several layers of sandstone that can be drawn simultaneously by a single well. Shallow wells in river valleys may also use our uppermost sand and gravel aquifers (outwash/alluvium).

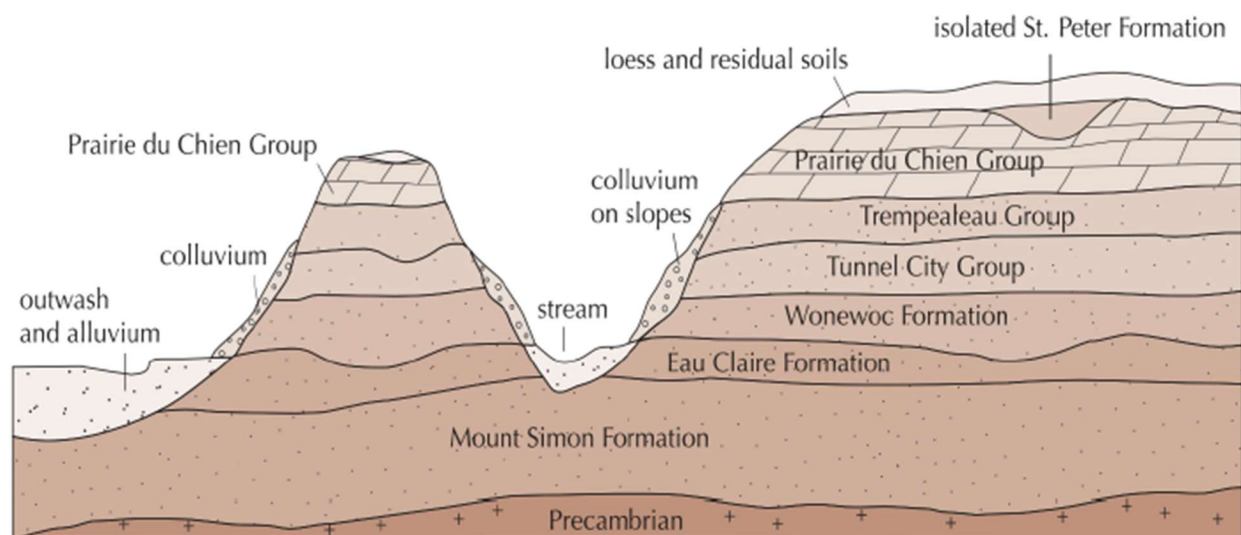


Figure 5.4: Cross section of a typical Buffalo County stream valley (WGNHS, 2001)

Sensitive Geology: Soils, especially those found in wetlands, can serve as a filter for groundwater recharge. In the northern half of the county, *sandy soils allow pollutants to seep into groundwater more easily* than the heavier soils in the south. Shallow bedrock underlying our ridges (purple on Map 5.5.) often has cracks and fractures that create a direct conduit to groundwater, allowing groundwater and pollutants to move through the aquifer very quickly.

Wellhead Protection: Wells, due to their direct path to an aquifer, can pose a threat to the safety and quality of groundwater if they are not properly constructed or maintained. Some communities like *Mondovi and Cochrane have formal plans to protect the area around their municipal wells from contamination*. Buffalo County currently does not have a wellhead ordinance, but residents can test their well water by bringing a sample to the Buffalo County Health and Human Services Department. *Buffalo County currently has 126 high-capacity wells* actively permitted with the WI DNR, up slightly from 123 in 2013.

Safe Waste Management: We use a *Manure Storage Ordinance* to ensure that farm waste doesn't leak into our shared water supply. The *Buffalo County Sanitary Ordinance* is also enforced to protect water resources from household sewage.

Assessing Groundwater Quality: Buffalo County conducted a baseline well water quality study in 2023 with the assistance of UW Stevens Point. The results “characterize a groundwater source that is generally well balanced and aesthetically pleasing.” Of the 177 samples analyzed, *5% had nitrate-nitrogen levels above the safe drinking water standard*. These samples wells were mainly concentrated in agricultural areas of the south and north- and southcentral regions of the county. *17% of wells contained measurable amounts of a common pesticide* but none exceeded the accepted health standard. Complete results from the 2023 “Buffalo County Well Water Quality Monitoring” can be found in the appendix. By managing how we use the land above our aquifers, we ensure that the water coming out of your kitchen tap remains safe and clean for our family and our neighbor’s.

Navigating the Path to Healthy Surface Water

The groundwater of Buffalo County sometimes comes to the surface at low points in the landscape and feeds *perennial streams*. The year-round wet conditions at these sites create a unique community of plants and animals, setting them apart from the ephemeral ditches that only drains water during rain and snowmelt events. There are *1,600 miles of streams and rivers* that run through Buffalo County.

Funneling water: Each stream lies within a larger *watershed*, an area of land that channels runoff from rain and snowmelt into a common outlet. There *are seven different watersheds* that, at least partially, lie within Buffalo County’s borders according to the WI DNR.

Assessing Watershed Health: Because watersheds drain surface water into a shared stream, the quality of water at this point can provide clues as to the type and intensity of land use in a particular watershed. A healthy watershed will slow water as it moves across the landscape and filter it as it continues its journey through the water cycle. A watershed



Figure 5. 5. WI DNR staff conduct a fish shocking survey of Waumandee Creek (Buffalo County, 2023)

experiencing disturbance among its natural communities may see high nutrient loading from agriculture and household wastewater, increased flash flooding from impervious surfaces, and cloudy water from washed soil.

Impaired Waters: States are required to maintain a list of waterbodies that do not meet the water quality standards of the federal Clean Water Act. On this list, the WIDNR has identified *21 impaired waterbodies in Buffalo County*. By far, the most common impairments for the county’s waterbodies are *degraded habitat/ biological communities and high phosphorus levels*. Both the Mississippi and Lower Trempealeau Rivers are impaired due to mercury in fish meat.

Table 5.1 Buffalo County Impaired Waters- With and Without Restoration Plans

Watershed Name	Pollutant/Causes	Impairment	Rest. Plan?
Bear Creek	Total Phosphorus	High Phosphorus	No
Bohris Valley Creek	Total Phosphorus	Unknown	No
Botana Valley Creek	Cause Unknown	Degraded Biological Community	No
Buell Valley Creek	TSS	Degraded Habitat	Yes
Buffalo River	Total Phosphorus	Degraded Biological Community, High Phosphorus	No
Danuser Creek	Total Phosphorus	Unknown	No
Elk Creek	Total Phosphorus	High Phosphorus	No
Harvey Creek (Lower Buffalo River)	Total Phosphorus	Degraded Biological Community, High Phosphorus	No
Irish Valley Creek	TSS	Degraded Habitat	Yes
Iron Creek (Lower Buffalo River)	Total Phosphorus	Unknown	No
Jahns Valley Creek	TSS	Degraded Habitat	Yes
Little Bear Creek	Total Phosphorus	Unknown	No
Little Waumandee Creek	Total Phosphorus	Unknown	No
Mississippi River (Pools 4-6)	Mercury, PFOS, Total Phosphorus, PCBS	Pollutants in fish tissue and water column	No
Rose Valley Creek	TSS	Degraded Habitat	Yes
Swinns Valley Creek	TSS	Elevated Water Temp	Yes
Swinns Valley Creek	Total Phosphorus	High Phosphorus	No
Trempeleau River (Lower)	Mercury, Total Phosphorus	Pollutants in fish tissue, high phosphorus levels	No
Waumandee Creek	Total Phosphorus	High Phosphorus	No
Weiland Valley Creek	TSS	Elevated Water Temp	Yes
Wolf Valley Creek	TSS	Degraded Habitat	No
Yaeger Valley Creek	TSS	Degraded Habitat	No

(WIDNR, 2024)

Angling Our Way to High Quality Water: All of Buffalo County’s seven watersheds and many of its impaired waters are home to trout, a type of cold-water sport fish that is sensitive to poor water quality. These fish, along with other organisms, can be used as ‘biological’ indicators of watershed health. The WI DNR currently recognizes *30 trout streams in Buffalo County*. There have been significant efforts, especially in the southeast of the county, to restore trout habitat and stabilize streambanks. These efforts have resulted in 27 public fishing easements on trout streams in the county.

Lakes: Due to the county’s location within the driftless region, *natural lakes are very rare*; however, the WI DNR has identified 41 water bodies as lakes (24K Lakes and Open Water Data 2025). Except for Bensel Pond, near the CFC school building, and a few backwater lakes in the floodplains of the Chippewa and Mississippi rivers, the vast majority of Buffalo County’s 41 ‘lakes’ hold water because of man-made impoundments.

Tables listing inventoried trout streams, lakes, and watersheds can be found in the appendix.

Enjoying Our Great Outdoors: Land, Parks and Wildlife

Even though we do not have a formal "County Park" system, Buffalo County offers world-class opportunities for recreation.

State Treasures- *Merrick State Park and the Tiffany Wildlife Area* provide over 13,000 acres for hunting, fishing, and hiking.

Local Gems- Despite not having a county park system, our towns and cities maintain vibrant spaces like *Buena Vista Park* for scenic views (Alma) and *Mirror Lake* for fishing and kayaking (Mondovi). There are many other parks in the county, details can be found in the appendix.

Forest Resources: Nearly half of our county is forested (*168,000 acres*), though almost all of it is privately owned.



Figure 5.6 A member of the Raptor Resource Project rappels to a peregrine falcon's nest (a state endangered bird) on a headland bluff between Alma and Nelson. (BC DLM, 2024).

Ecological Communities: Buffalo County’s rugged landscape creates the opportunity for a variety of natural communities to thrive. However, because of land use changes some of these communities are in danger of extinction. Of the 14 ecological communities identified in Buffalo County, nearly half face vulnerability. The county’s *Oak Openings are critically imperiled*, being listed as such at the state level and even globally. Oak openings contain prairie plant species with 5-40% canopy cover from fire resistant trees. Most remaining oak openings are found on steep west-to south-facing slopes where they are associated with Dry Prairies on bluffs (a more common but still vulnerable community).

Endangered and Threatened Species: In total, Buffalo County is home to *45 threatened and endangered species* listed by the WI DNR. Of these species, six are federally protected and seven are federally listed as species of special concern. A complete list of the county’s endangered and threatened species can be found in the appendix.

Dark Skies: Light pollution is a growing issue for humans and wildlife across the world. Buffalo County, especially its interior, has some of the darkest skies between the La Crosse, Eau Claire, Saint Paul, and Rochester. Promoting shielded lighting, warm color temperatures (2200K or lower), motion sensors, and turning off unnecessary lights can help protect night skies for the health and well-being of all.

Cultural Resources

Historical resources, programs, and special events bring people of a community together to celebrate their cultural identity. Not only do these special events build community spirit, but they can also be important to the local economy.

Historical Background

The anthropological history of the land now known as Buffalo County, Wisconsin dates back several thousand years and begins with the area being used by Native American peoples as hunting and gathering lands. In more recent history, the land was seen as a shared area among adjacent tribes with the understanding that hunters and gatherers could be safe from any fighting.

European settlement began in 1839, when Thomas Holmes arrived with his wife, her brother and his wife. Their trip northward on the Mississippi River was cut short by winter, and Holmes set up a trading post hoping to trade with the Dakota Sioux living in the area now known as Winona. By 1853, enough settlers arrived to prompt the Wisconsin legislature to create Buffalo County.



Figure 5.7 A participant in Waumandee's annual fall Plow Fest (Explore Buffalo County, 2025)

Buffalo County's history is rich in agricultural pursuits as well as logging, other river related industries, transportation and tourism. As the county has moved through time, it has adapted well to take advantage of the natural beauty and resources available. For more information about Buffalo County's history, one can refer to the appendix's 'A Brief History of Land Use in Buffalo County' or the Buffalo County Historical Society as well as such books as *The History of Buffalo County*, by L. Kessinger.

A Brief Inventory the County's Cultural Resources

Each town, city and village have a variety of public events and organizations that exhibit local pride. Listed are some examples of what the county believes to be of cultural importance:

- Local churches (active and historical such as Tell Church and Eagle Valley Church)
- Local schools (educate youth and promote a sense of community)
- Local fairs (Buffalo County Fair and Gilmanston Free Fair)
- Local community events (Mondovi Friendship Days and Waumandee Plow Fest)
- Fraternal organizations (Lions and Knights of Columbus)
- 4-H Clubs (there are currently eleven in the county)
- Museums and historical societies (from local and county history to medieval European)
- Golf courses (Walnut Grove and The Valley)

The Buffalo County Fairgrounds- First held in Cream in October of 1872, the Buffalo County Fair has held deep roots within the social fabric of the County. With the replacement of the Buffalo County Agricultural Society by the Buffalo County Agricultural Fair Association, Inc. (BCAFA) in 1954, the Buffalo County Fair has been able to continue embodying its original philosophy of promoting better farm products and stimulating better living conditions within the rural communities.

The Fair moved to the northwestern portion of the City of Mondovi in 1894, where it still resides today. The City of Mondovi purchased the Fairgrounds in 1912, and then in 1954 the BCAFA obtained their first ten-year lease of the property for operation of the Fair. Today the fairgrounds are still owned by the City of Mondovi and leased to Buffalo County for the purpose of the County Fair. The Fair itself is organized and conducted solely by the BCAFA.

In 2018, after the Pepin County Fair lost its facilities and faced a decline in volunteer numbers, it merged with the Buffalo County Fair, resulting in the first Buffalo-Pepin County Fair held at the fairgrounds in Mondovi.

Multiple buildings have been constructed throughout the years to house livestock, distribute concessions, and provide flush restrooms and entertainment during the duration of the Buffalo County Fair. Many of these buildings are rented out for storage throughout the rest of the year. The open grass areas of the fairgrounds provide an excellent area for outdoor summer league activities such as soccer and flag football. The City of Mondovi uses portions of the fairgrounds for smaller city events.

Preserving Our Cultural Resources

Unfortunately, there are many threats to the cultural resources of a community. Whether it is development pressure, rehabilitation and maintenance costs, or simply the effects of time, it is often difficult to preserve the cultural resources in a community. Future planning within the community should minimize the effects on important cultural resources in order to preserve the character of the community.

Buffalo County does not have any of its own historical resource databases, but there are several state and federal databases that should be used to help identify and appraise cultural and historical resources. More databases and tools may become available, and the County would use those tools as well.

For places not listed in the following inventories or registers, the county can use the *National Park Service's National Register Bulletin 15* to determine the historic significance of a place. This bulletin identifies standard requirements to identify places eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, whether they are significant on a national, state, regional, or local level.

Wisconsin Historical Markers- identify, commemorate and honor the important people, places, and events that have contributed to the state's heritage. The WI Historical Society's Division of Historic Preservation administers the Historical Markers program. There is only one registered historical marker in Buffalo County:

- Beef Slough, on Wisconsin State Road 35, ½ mile north of Alma

The Architecture and History Inventory (AHI)- A collection of information on historic buildings, structures, sites, objects, and historic districts throughout Wisconsin. The AHI is comprised of written text and photographs of each property, which document the property's architecture and history. Most properties became part of the Inventory as a result of a systematic architectural and historical survey beginning in 1970s.

Caution should be used as the list is not comprehensive and some of the information may be dated, as some properties may be altered or no longer exist. Due to funding cutbacks, the Historical Society has not been able to properly maintain the database. Also, inclusion

of a property conveys no special status, rights or benefits to the owners. The Historical Society lists 461 AHI records for Buffalo County. Contact the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation for more information about the inventory.

The Archaeological Site Inventory (ASI)- A collection of archaeological sites, mounds, unmarked cemeteries, marked cemeteries, and cultural sites throughout Wisconsin. Similar to the AHI, the ASI is not a comprehensive or complete list; it only includes sites reported to the Historical Society. The Historical Society estimates that less than 1% of the archaeological sites in the state have been identified. Wisconsin law protects Native American burial mounds, unmarked burials, and all marked and unmarked cemeteries from intentional disturbance. The Historical Society lists over 150 ASI records for Buffalo County. Contact the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation for more information about the inventory.

The National Register of Historic Places- is the official national list of historic properties in America worthy of preservation, maintained by the National Park Service. The State Register is Wisconsin's official listing of state properties determined to be significant to Wisconsin's heritage and is maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation. Both listings include sites, buildings, structures, objects, and districts that are significant in national, state, or local history. There are currently 13 registered places within Buffalo County.



Figure 5.8 The Fugina House in Fountain City is on the National Register of Historic Places for its Prairie School style Architecture (Jonathunder, 2014)

The establishment of a historical preservation ordinance and commission- is one of the most proactive methods a community can take to preserve cultural resources. A historical preservation ordinance typically contains criteria for the designation of historic structures, districts, or places, and procedures for the nomination process. The ordinance further regulates the construction, alteration and demolition of a designated historic site or structure. A community with a historic preservation ordinance may apply for Certified Local Government (CLG) status, with the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Once a community is certified, they become eligible for:

- Matching sub-grants from the federal Historic Preservation Fund,
- Use of Wisconsin Historic Building Code,
- Reviewing National Register of Historic Places nominations allocated to the state.

While Alma and Fountain City both have historic preservation ordinances on their books, no other local government in Buffalo County (including the County itself) has such an ordinance. There are no Certified Local Governments in Buffalo County.

Disclaimer: Consistency Between Farmland Preservation and Comprehensive Land Use Plans

The Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan shall be considered part of the Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and therefore the documents must be internally consistent. Though they may be adopted separately, the planning component of each shall be considered the same document rather than two separate plans.

If there are any inconsistencies between the Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan and the Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan shall supersede the Buffalo County Comprehensive Use Plan. This applies to any inconsistencies that appear in maps or text contained in the plan. In the event that any inconsistency is identified on a map, a note shall be added to the map legends (farmland preservation and land use) explaining that the farmland preservation plan takes precedence. If any inconsistency appears in text, the appropriate language shall be added to the text where the inconsistencies are present.

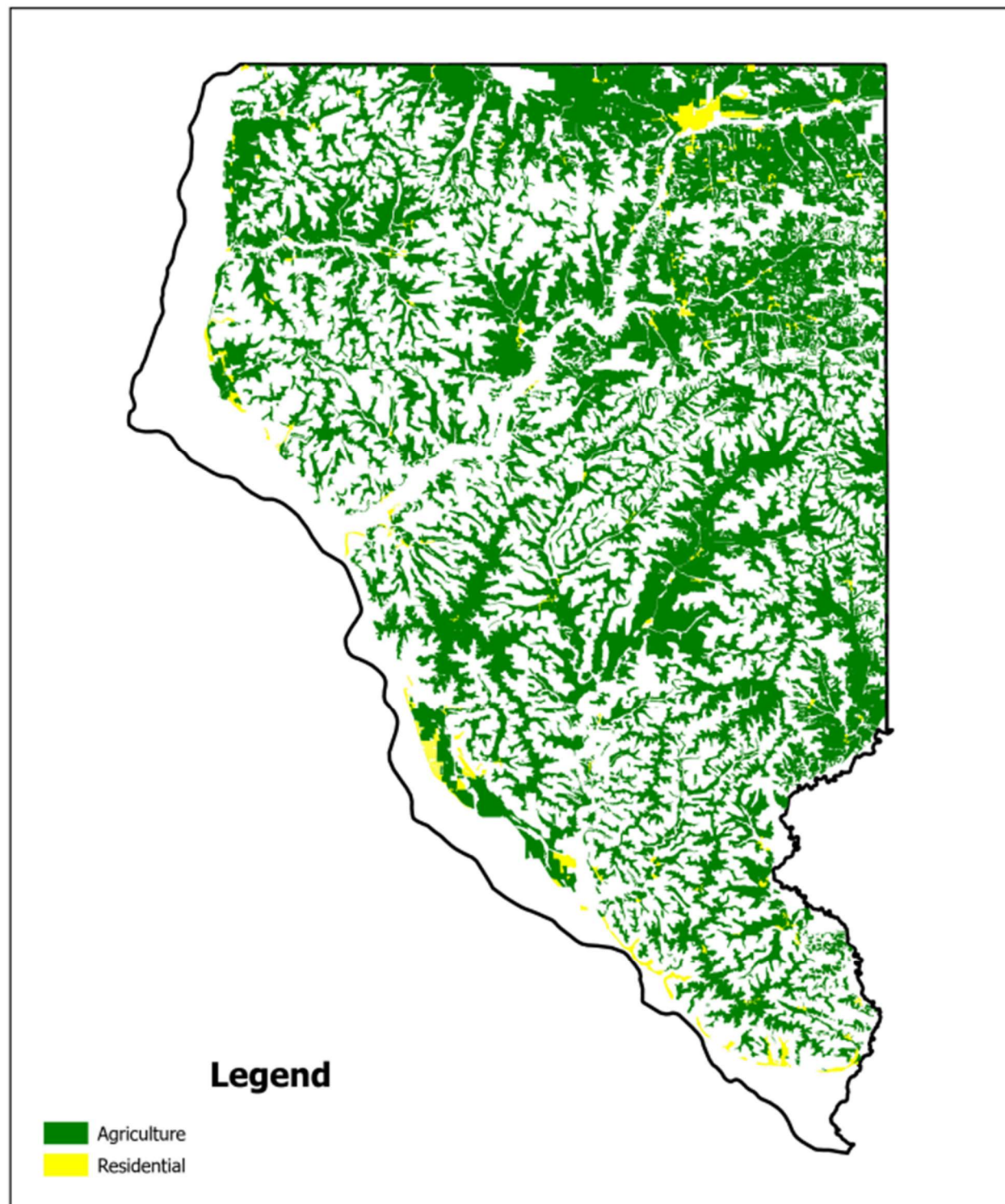
Goals and Objectives

Continue to conserve Buffalo County's soils

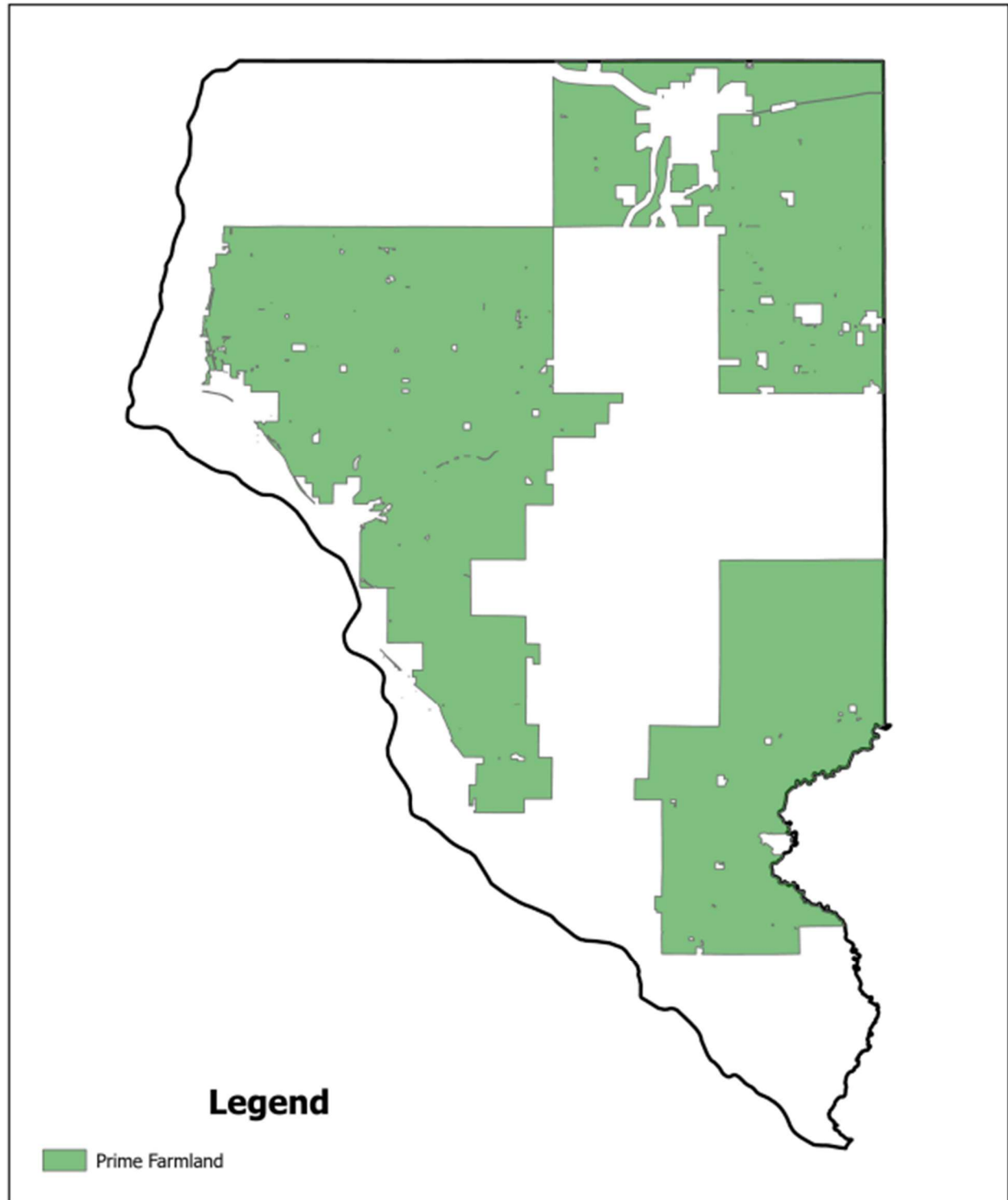
Bolster soil conservation initiatives by connecting existing producer led groups, staying competitive in grant programs, and staying true to the county's 10-year Land and Water Resource Management Plan (2022-2031).

Update the Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan in 2027. Reach out to new towns to see if they would be interested in joining farmland preservation (ANR-40) zoning. Recertify both the farmland preservation plan and the farmland preservation zoning ordinance with DATCP before December 31, 2028.

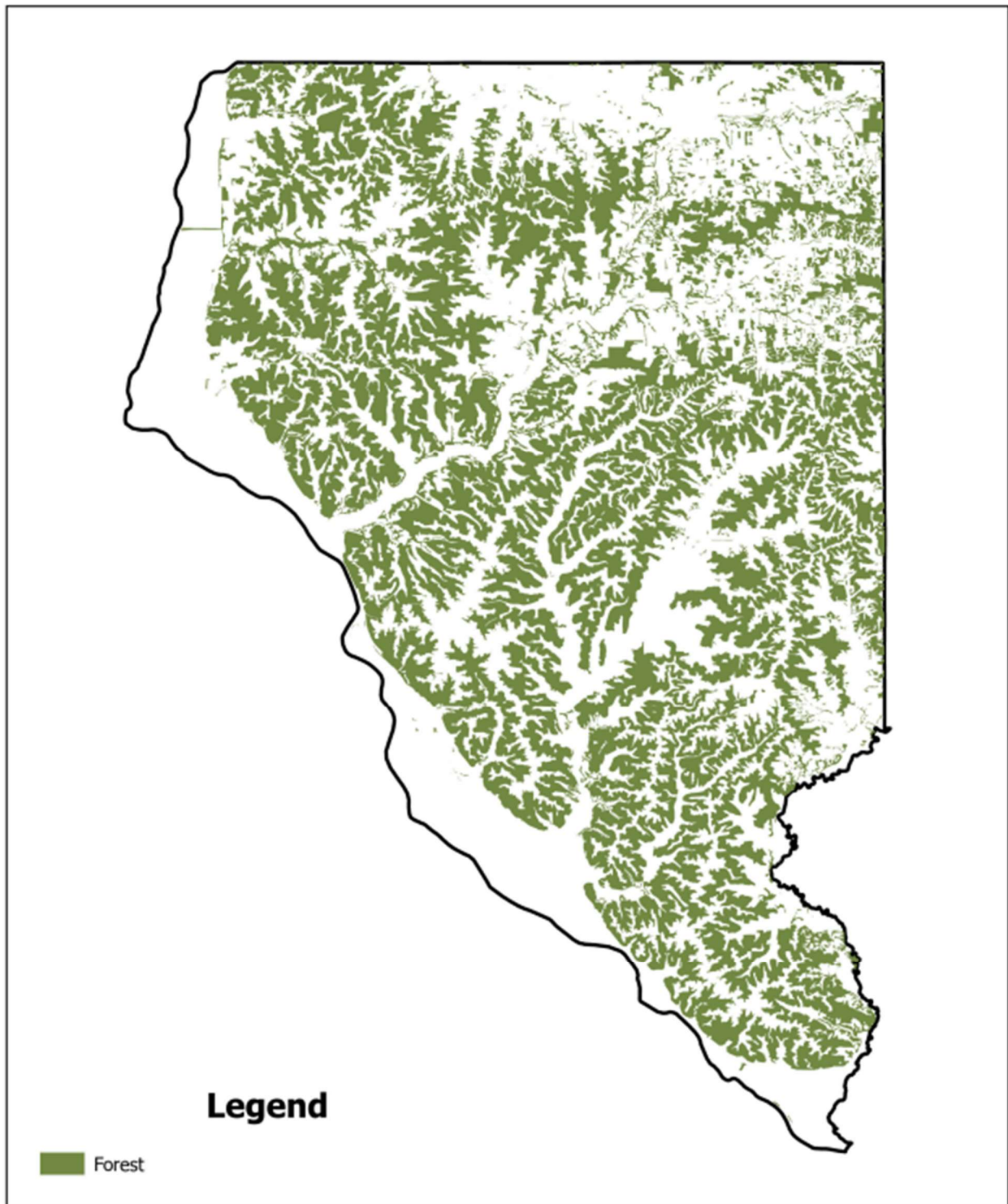
Map 5.1: Agricultural and Residential Land



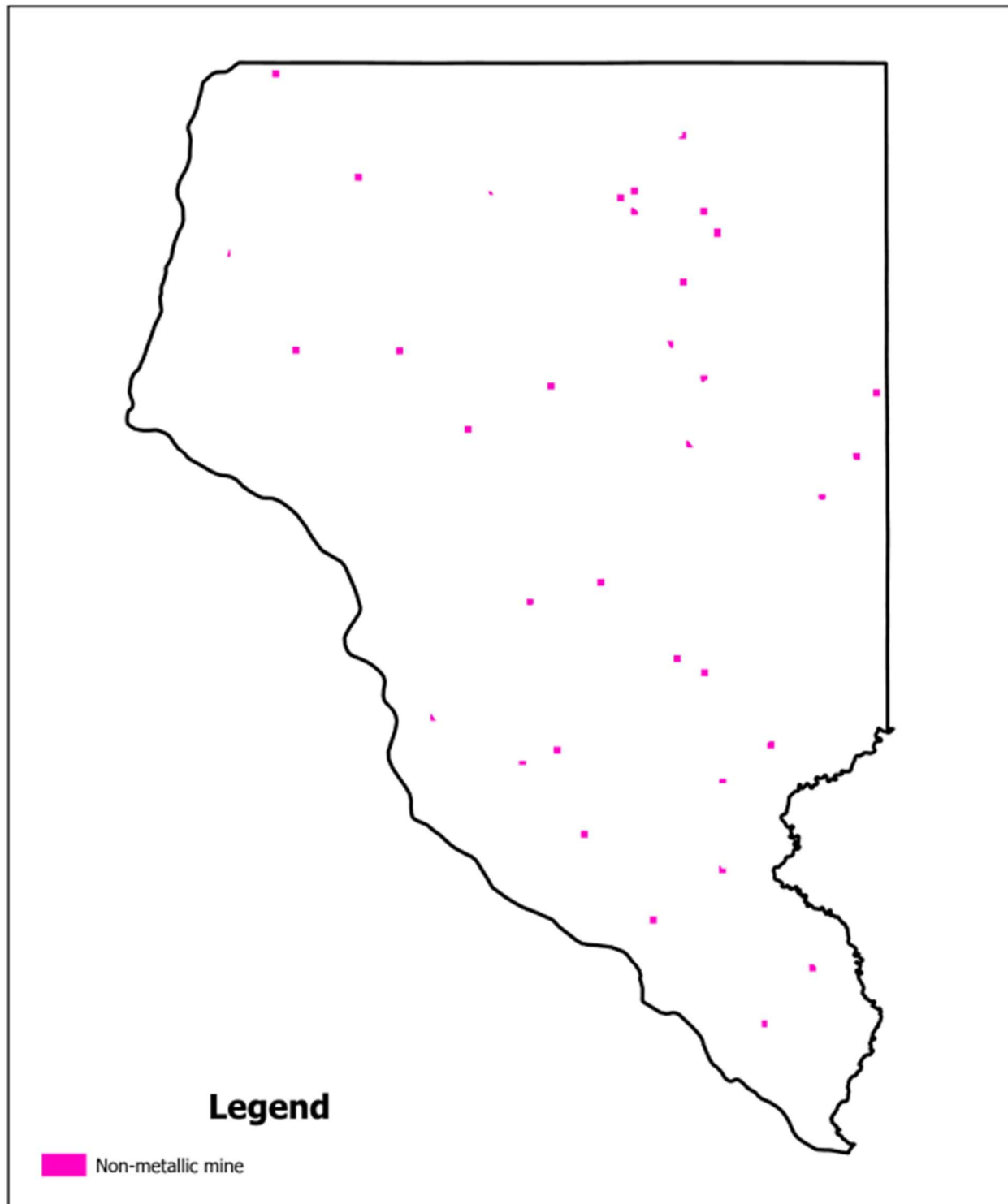
Map 5.2: Farmland Preservation



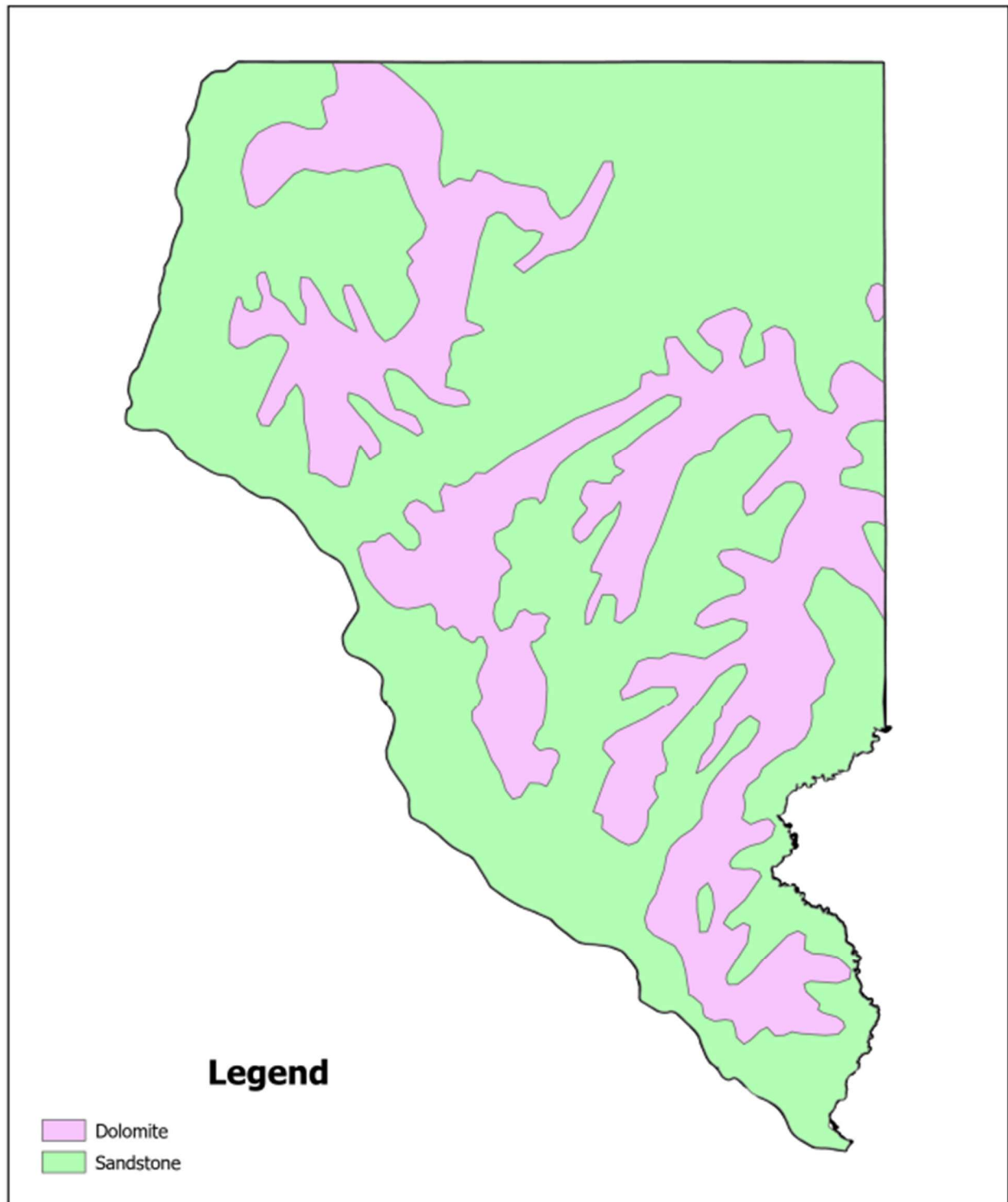
Map 5.3: Forest Land



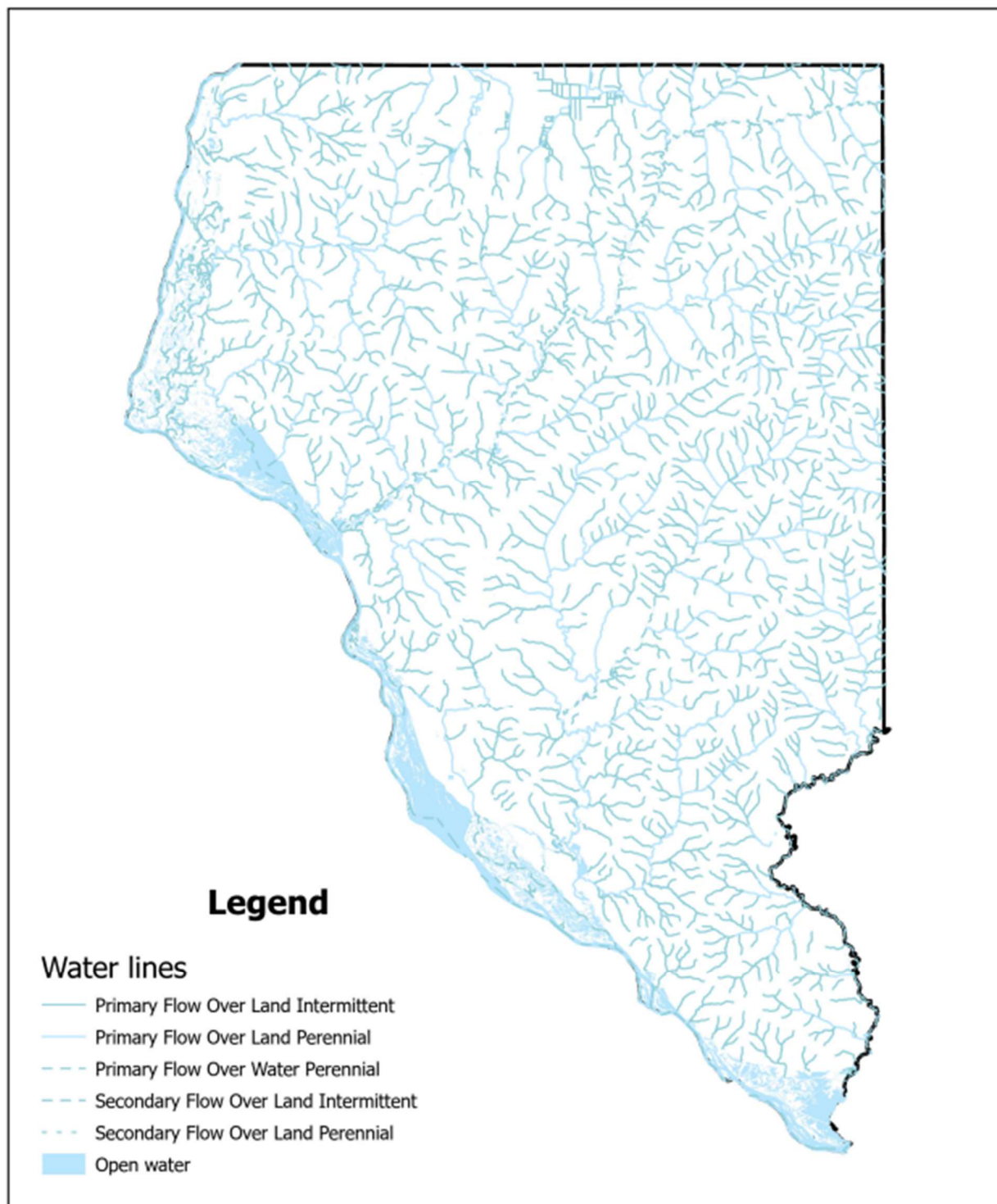
Map 5.4: Permitted Non-Metallic Mines



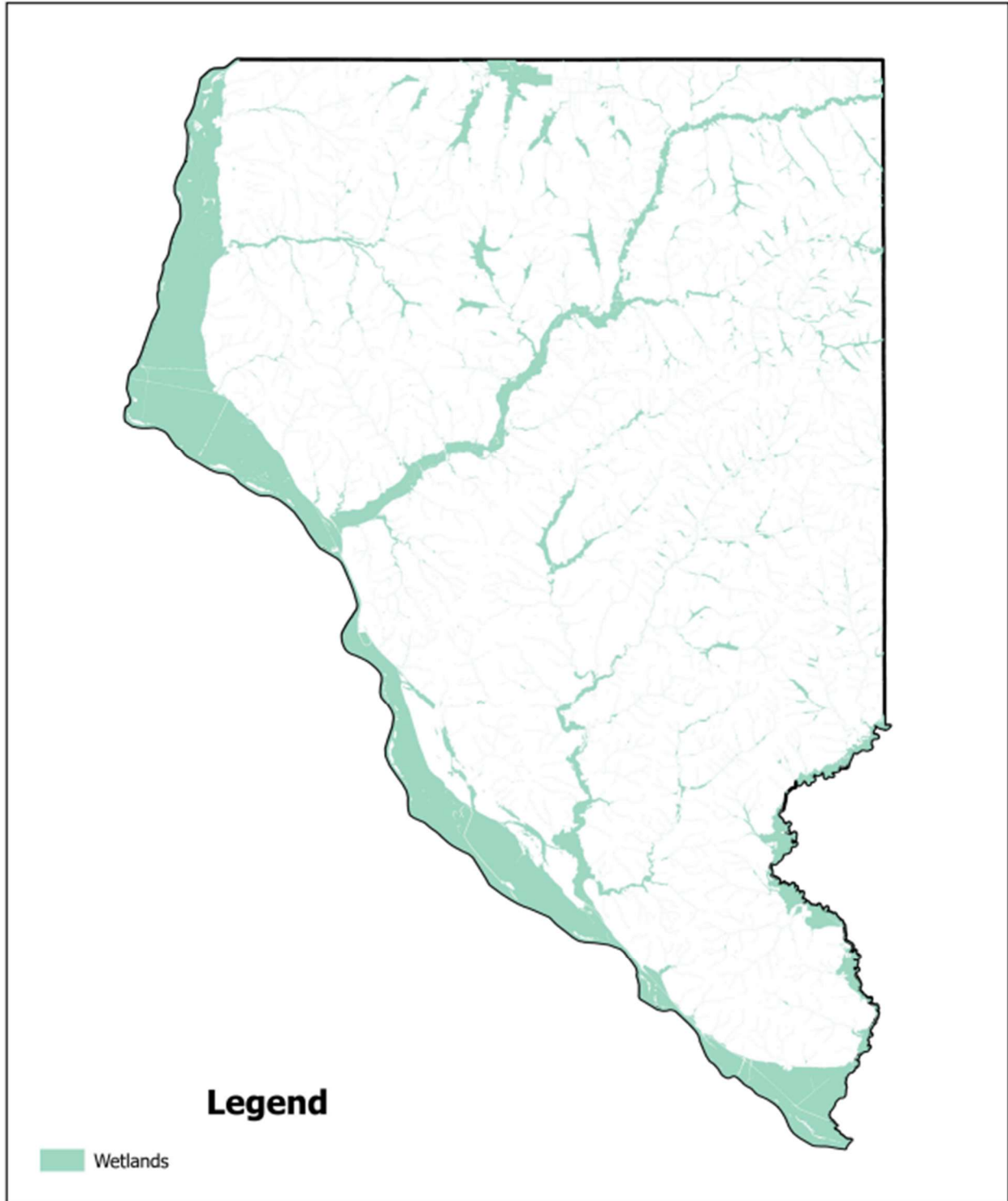
Map 5.5: Bedrock Geology



Map 5.6: Surface Water



Map 5.7: Wetlands



6

Getting Down to Business *Economic Development Buffalo County*



Figure 6.1: The Golden Frog in Fountain City was a frequent place to make agricultural trades. The business owners no doubt benefited from these transactions (BCHS, ca. 1910)

Element Overview

Economic development element. Intended to promote stabilization, retention or expansion, of the economic base and quality employment opportunities in Buffalo County, including an analysis of its the labor force and economic base. The element shall assess categories or particular types of new businesses and industries that are desired by the county. Strengths and weaknesses of the county are analyzed with respect to attracting and retaining businesses and industries, and adequate number of sites for such businesses and industries are designated as necessary. The element evaluates and promotes the use of environmentally contaminated sites for commercial or industrial uses. The element also identifies county, regional and state economic development programs that apply to the local governmental unit as consistent with Stat. § 66.1001(2)(f).

Employment Information

Manufacturing, agriculture, and education/health/social occupations comprise a majority of people employed in Buffalo County. Buffalo County is very rural with an abundance of natural beauty, wildlife, and productive soils. It is also within commuting distance to manufacturing, education, and healthcare jobs in Arcadia, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Rochester, MN, and Winona, MN. Buffalo County tends to have very low unemployment rates, as seen in Table 6.1 Buffalo County Employment Statistics, due to the variety of jobs in the region and the growth of industry in Arcadia (Ashley Furniture and Pilgrim's Pride Chicken) and Mondovi (Marten Transport). Many people may be underemployed, but entry-level jobs are available.

37 percent of the population that is eligible to work are not in the workforce. This number is made up of retired residents, youth (few youth jobs in many parts of Buffalo County), disabled residents, and people who are not interested in working.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	NUMBER	PERCENT
Population 16 years and over	11048	
In labor force	6968	63.1
Civilian labor force	6960	63
Employed	6780	61.4
Unemployed	180	1.6
Armed Forces	8	0.1
Not in labor force	4080	36.9
Civilian labor force	6960	
Unemployment Rate		2.6
OCCUPATION		
Civilian employed population	6780	
16 years and over		
Management, business, science, and arts occupations	2246	33.1
Service occupations	1001	14.8
Sales and office occupations	1156	17.1
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	865	12.8
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	1512	22.3
CLASS OF WORKER		
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	6780	
Private wage and salary workers	5360	79.1
Government workers	812	12
Self-employed in own not incorporated business workers	572	8.4
Unpaid family workers	36	0.5

Table 6.1: Buffalo County Employment Statistics
(US Census Bureau, DP03 2023 estimates)

MEANS OF TRAVEL	PERCENT
Car, truck, or van -- drove alone	79.5
Car, truck, or van -- carpooled	5.5
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	0.1
Walked	4
Other means	1.5
Worked from home	9.4
MINUTES	
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	25.3

Table 6.2: Buffalo County Commuting Habits
(US Census Bureau)

Commuting to Work: Many employed residents of Buffalo County, who do not work on their own farms, or are self-employed, commute in or out of the county to work. Table 6.2 Buffalo County, Commuting Habits, indicates the means of travel and the commute time as reported in the US Census. The communities where most residents commute to work include Winona, MN, Arcadia, Eau Claire, Wabasha, MN, Durand, Menomonie, and La Crosse.

Industries of Buffalo County: Buffalo County has a small manufacturing base. Only one manufacturing industry, La Crosse Milling (oat miller) is in the top ten employers in the County, see Table 6.4 Buffalo County Top 10 Employers. Most employment opportunities in the near future will be outside of Buffalo County. Following the plans and actions at the end of this section should improve the long-term employment opportunities within Buffalo County.

Table 6.3: Buffalo County Top 10 Employers (WI Department of Workforce Development, 2025)

EMPLOYER	SERVICE OR PRODUCT	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES
Marten Transport LTD	General Freight Trucking, Long Distance TL	500-999 Employees
Mondovi Public School	Elementary and secondary schools	100-249 Employees
Buffalo County	County government services	100-249 Employees
Dairyland Power	Electric power generation	100-249 Employees
AM Lutheran Mondovi	Nursing care facilities	100-249 Employees
Cochrane-Fountain City School	Elementary and secondary schools	100-249 Employees
Alma Public School	Elementary and secondary schools	50-99 Employees
Midwest Dental Management, Inc.	Office administrative services	50-99 Employees
Department of Defense	Engineering services	50-99 Employees
La Crosse Milling Co.	Breakfast cereal manufacturing	50-99 Employees

Economy

According to the FRED, Buffalo County had a gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022 of \$790,924,000. According to the USDA 2022 Census of Agriculture, Buffalo County sold \$348,867,000 in agricultural products. This would make agricultural *products* 44% of Buffalo County's GDP, not including any goods or services related to or incidental to agriculture.

On a chart, it appears that Buffalo County has soared to new heights and set a new record of GDP dollar value. However, when adjusted for inflation, Buffalo County's real GDP has actually declined by over 21% since 2007.

Environmentally Contaminated Sites:

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Remediation and Redevelopment Tracking System (BRRTS) was utilized to identify contaminated sites in Buffalo County. The database identified one open or conditionally closed contaminated site in Buffalo County, which is associated with a closed fueling station in Gilmanton.

The Wisconsin DNR Solid and Hazardous Waste Information System was reviewed for waste disposal sites in Buffalo County. The registry has one operating site in Buffalo County. Over 15 closed or inactive landfill sites exist in the county.

Since the sites listed above are already degraded, they can be the best first choice for largescale building projects that may include commercial or industrial uses.

County, Regional, and State Economic Development Programs

County Programs

- Buffalo County Economic Development Loan Fund Regional Programs:
- Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Business Capitol Fund
- Riverland Energy Cooperative Revolving Loan Fund Program
- Dairyland Power Cooperative Economic Development Loan Program

State Programs

- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation Technology Development Loan
- Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
 - o Dairy Development and Meat and Livestock Development Program
 - o Organic and Specialty Crop Development Program
 - o Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin Program

Federal Programs

- USDA Rural Partners Program

Local Planning Effort:

Buffalo County regional economic development shall promote a stable and sustainable economic environment through collaborative planning and community involvement that benefits business and residents alike.

Economic expansion will recognize and respect that natural systems are vital to providing both economic benefit and quality of life for all citizens. Our environment provides the opportunity to support the requirements of various types of enterprise. Economic growth will reflect the scale and values of our communities and citizens.

“The foundations upon which future economic expansion within the county shall rest are:

- *Supporting the growth of existing business;*
- *Creating new opportunities for sustainable business;*
- *Maintaining the unique quality of life already present in the county;*
- *Participating in the information economy.”*

-Buffalo County Economic Development Committee, 2016 &

*Buffalo County Economic Development Ad Hoc Committee Report,
December 2015*

2013 Town Comprehensive Land Use Planning written surveys and Town planning meetings all had several key factors that need to be considered when planning for economic development. They include:

- Preserve the natural beauty of Buffalo County
- Preserve prime farmland in Buffalo County
- Preserve the rural character of Buffalo County

The planning group on economic development concentrated on a paper submitted and presented by Dr. Steve Deller; UW-Extension, UW-Madison Rural Economist, in 2011 that identified key economic development clusters. The clusters identified by Dr. Deller include: *forest and wood products, dairy production, farm value-added production, tourism, transportation, minerals, and construction*. These clusters can be viewed in detail following the goals and objectives of this element (Figure 6.2).

As with all economic development, business development cannot stand alone. Overwhelmingly, people live in Buffalo County because of the natural beauty, small town atmosphere, and agricultural base. Economic development must be in balance with these characteristics.

Goals and Objectives

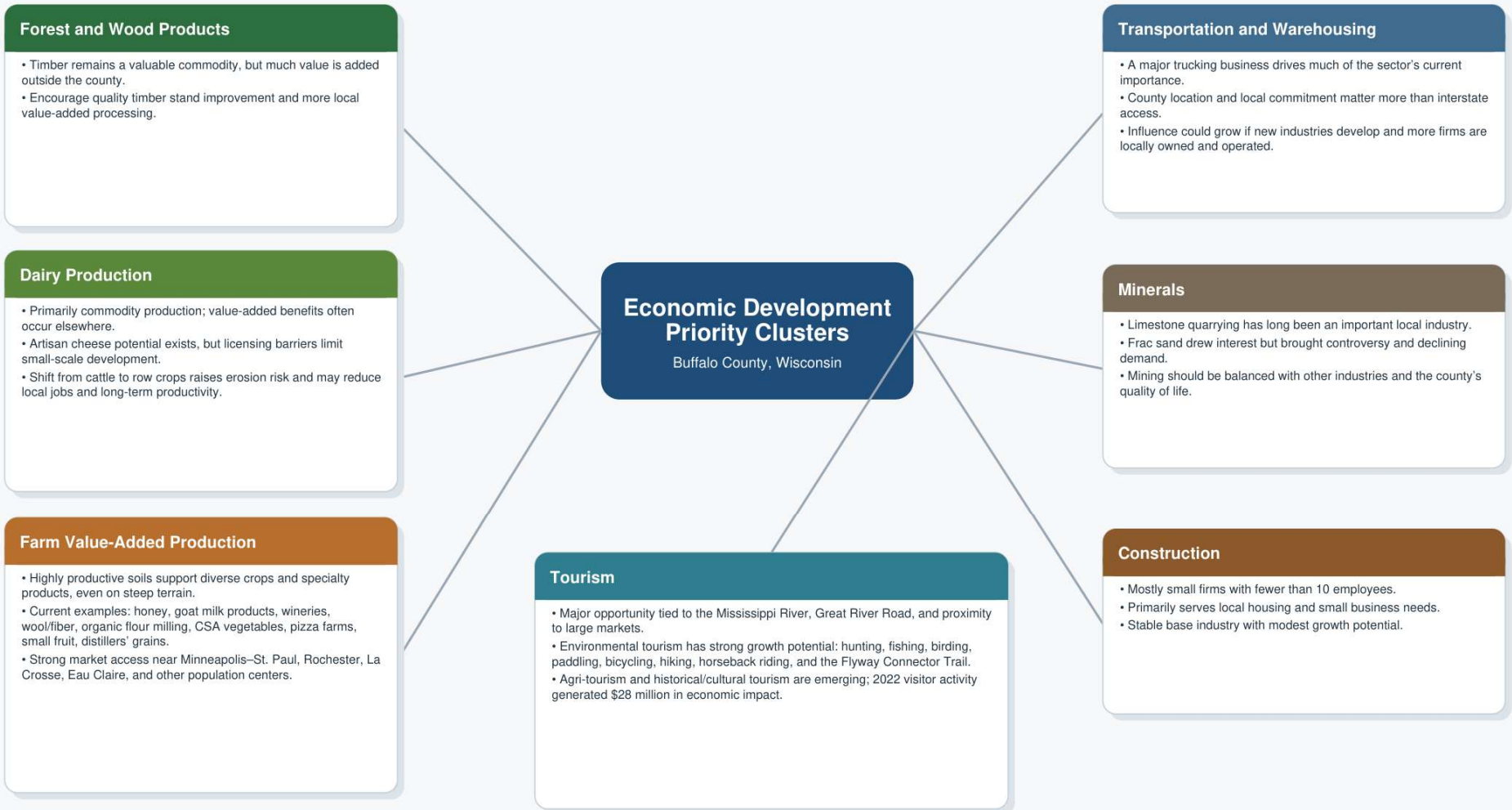
Retain and Expand Existing Businesses

Make towns and municipalities familiar with the county's Economic Development Committee (new since the last plan). Investigate methods to increase workforce development and labor participation in the county, particularly in childcare. Inquire into the workings of the Buffalo County Economic Development Fund.

Foster orderly development clustered near existing business locations. Avoid conflicts with current or future agricultural endeavors. Support and promote small niche businesses in the area, especially those centered around agriculture.

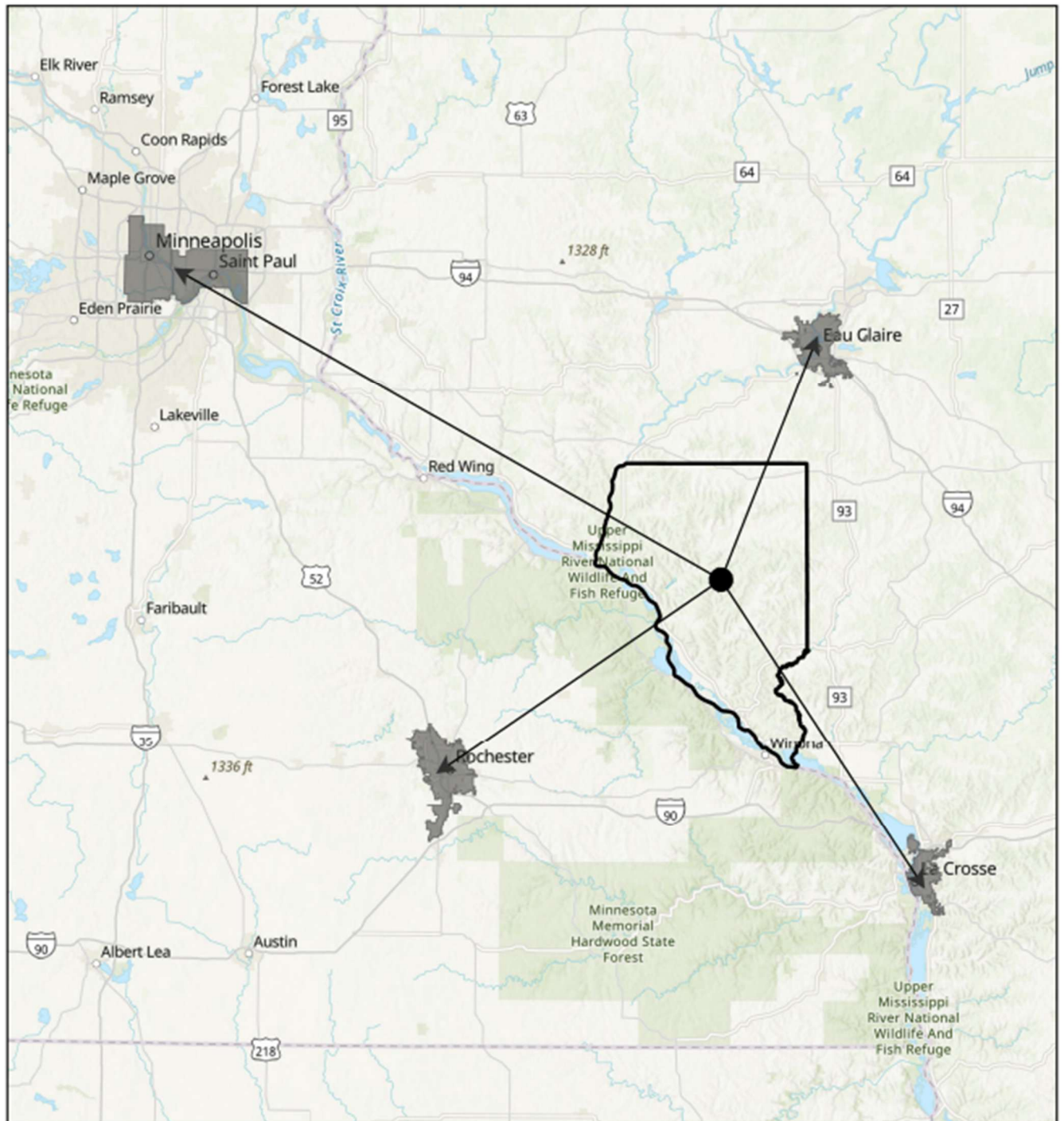
Buffalo County Economic Development Clusters

Concept map based on planning-group priorities informed by Dr. Steve Deller's 2011 economic cluster framework



Framing emphasis: retain commodity strengths, expand local value-added activity, manage land and natural resources carefully, and leverage tourism/recreation and market access for diversified growth.

Map 6.1: Proximity of Population Centers



Buffalo County is located in close proximity to a few metropolitan areas. Eau Claire, La Crosse, and Rochester, Minnesota, are within a 1-hour drive. The Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St Paul, Minnesota, is within a 2-hour drive.

7

Staying Connected

Intergovernmental Cooperation in Buffalo County



Figure 7.2. The Buffalo County Courthouse (WI Historical Society, 1984)

Element Overview

Intergovernmental Cooperation Element. This element is meant to promote joint planning and decision making with other jurisdictions, including school districts, and adjacent local governmental units, for siting and building public facilities and sharing public services. The element analyzes the relationship of the local governmental unit to school districts, adjacent local governmental units, the region, the state, and other governmental units. It also incorporates any plans or agreements to which the local governmental unit is a party. The element identifies existing or potential conflicts between the local governmental unit and other governmental units that are specified in this paragraph and describe processes to resolve such conflicts as per Stat. § 66.1001(2)(g).

Relationships with Other Entities

Intergovernmental cooperation is any arrangement by which officials of two or more jurisdictions communicate visions and coordinate plans, policies, and programs to address and resolve issues of mutual interest. This can be as simple as communicating and sharing information, or it can involve entering into formal agreements or sharing resources such as equipment, buildings, staff, or even revenue.

The Buffalo County Board of Supervisors (representing 14 districts) implement and oversee county rules and regulations to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the community and environment. While issues do occasionally arise, the board of supervisors and county departments have and continue to respond based on the values and best judgments representing the county as a whole.

School Districts

Buffalo County is served by seven K-12 school districts and one private school: Alma, Arcadia, Cochrane-Fountain City, Durand-Arkansaw, Gilmanton, Independence, and Mondovi school districts, and St Boniface Catholic School. Buffalo County lies in two technical college districts: Western Wisconsin Technical College and Chippewa Valley Technical College. There are no conflicts identified at this time. (See Map 7.1 Buffalo County School Districts).

Adjacent County and Overlapping Local Governments

Three Wisconsin counties surround Buffalo County: Pepin County, Eau Claire County, and Trempealeau County. No conflicts are known to exist at the present time. Certain county departments have and continue to coordinate and share information and services when available.

Buffalo County has 17 towns, 2 villages, and 4 cities within its boundaries. Each of those 23 municipalities are represented by elected officials who are responsible for managing the affairs of the local government. Towns include Alma, Belvidere, Buffalo, Canton, Cross, Dover, Gilmanton, Glencoe, Lincoln, Maxville, Milton, Modena, Mondovi, Montana, Naples, Nelson, and Waumandee. The villages are Cochrane and Nelson. The cities are Alma, Buffalo City, Fountain City, and Mondovi. (See Map 7.2 Buffalo County Municipal Boundaries and Surrounding Regions).

Regional Partners

Buffalo County is within the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission's (MRRPC) area of representation. The MRRPC covers nine counties along the Mississippi River in western Wisconsin. Its authorized functions include providing advisory services on regional issues to local governments and other public and private agencies, acting as a coordinating agency for programs and activities and contracting with local units of government to make studies and offer advice on land use, thoroughfares, community facilities, public improvements, and encouragement of economic and other developments. Specific examples of services offered by MRRPC are comprehensive plans, zoning and subdivision ordinances, grant writing, geographic information system map production, revolving loan fund administration, economic development planning, economic data collection and dissemination, and advocating public policy positions on issues affecting our region.

State Partners: Buffalo County, Wisconsin DNR, DOA, DOR, DOT, and other state departments coordinate and discuss issues and potential joint projects to provide desirable and valuable services to the residents and visitors of the county. Continuing cooperation with these agencies will ensure future accomplishments benefiting the county.

Federal Partners

Agencies that are active in Buffalo County include the US Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Buffalo County's Land Management Department has primary interaction with these agencies.

The US Army Corps of Engineers operates Lock & Dam 4, Lock & Dam 5, Lock & Dam 5A, and the Fountain City Service Base. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) manages parts of two National Wildlife Refuges within Buffalo County: the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge. The federal government also owns two radio towers in Buffalo County, operated by two federal agencies: the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Geodetic Survey (NGS).

Planning and Other Agreements

Comprehensive planning is at various stages in Buffalo County's local units of government. At this time Buffalo County has entered into various intergovernmental plans or agreements with local municipalities, other counties, and state and federal agencies. These are some examples of the agreements that Buffalo County has entered into: Statewide Voter Registration System with 21 municipalities, Aging and Disability Resource Center with Pepin County, Trempealeau County and Town of Naples, and Economic Support with local counties, NRCS, Buffalo-Pepin County Fair Association, Winter Road Maintenance Agreements with Pepin County, Trempealeau County, and Town of Naples, and Department of Transportation contractual agreements. The review period of each of these agreements vary from yearly to 25 years.

Emergency Response

Local law enforcement, first responders, ambulances, and fire departments provide services to area residents in emergencies. Because of the terrain in the Driftless Area restricting direct travel and the resulting response times, emergency service coverage areas do not align with county boundaries. Ambulance services from Arcadia in Trempealeau County, Durand in Pepin County, and Winona County, Minnesota, respond to 47% of Buffalo County. Mondovi ambulances likewise respond to parts of Pepin County and Eau Claire County. Fire departments from Arcadia and Independence in Trempealeau County and Durand in Pepin County respond to 16% of Buffalo County, and Mondovi Fire responds to parts of Pepin County and Eau Claire County.

These are governed by formal agreements between those jurisdictions. Another issue caused by Driftless Area terrain is that cell phone calls often connect to towers in other jurisdictions, requiring 911 dispatchers to transfer emergency calls to the proper agency, either in other counties or even across the river in Minnesota.

Extraterritorial Zoning (ETZ)

Cities and villages with population less than 10,000 can exercise a 1.5-mile extension of zoning control outside their corporate boundaries if the proper cooperative steps with the adjoining town(s) are followed (Wis. Stat. 62.23(7a)). This allows cities or villages to extend land use control over new development that otherwise might be incompatible with a city's or village's future growth.

Potential benefits of ETZ include:

- Provides for smoother transitions between rural and urban land uses.
- Reduces conflicting land uses, which lessens citizen complaints and protects property values.
- Makes planning for roads, utilities, recreation facilities, etc. easier.
- Coordinates mutual protection of sensitive areas and natural resources.

Strong intergovernmental cooperation and communication are a requirement when enacting ETZ. Municipalities that enact ETZ must work with towns and the county to obtain ETZ authority. The key to using ETZ successfully is early and continuous discussions between all jurisdictions and formal public input. Sharing and discussing land-use plans regularly could ultimately reduce the need for ETZ.

Existing and Potential Conflicts

The legislation regarding comprehensive planning requires Buffalo County to identify any existing and/or potential problems between the County and other governmental units. The problems and the processes to resolve those problems must also be described.

The only potential conflict identified at this time is Section 108.04 of the City of Mondovi's Municipal Code. This article identifies the city's intentions to exercise extraterritorial zoning on portions of the Towns of Naples and Mondovi. It seems that this article may have expired, but it may be proactive for the city to enter into conversations with the county and towns to address these intentions.

There are no other known active conflicts between the county and other intergovernmental units. Potential conflicts could arise with various zoning regulations in the county. Municipalities and the county should be encouraged to work together for uniform zoning regulations and avoid such conflicts.

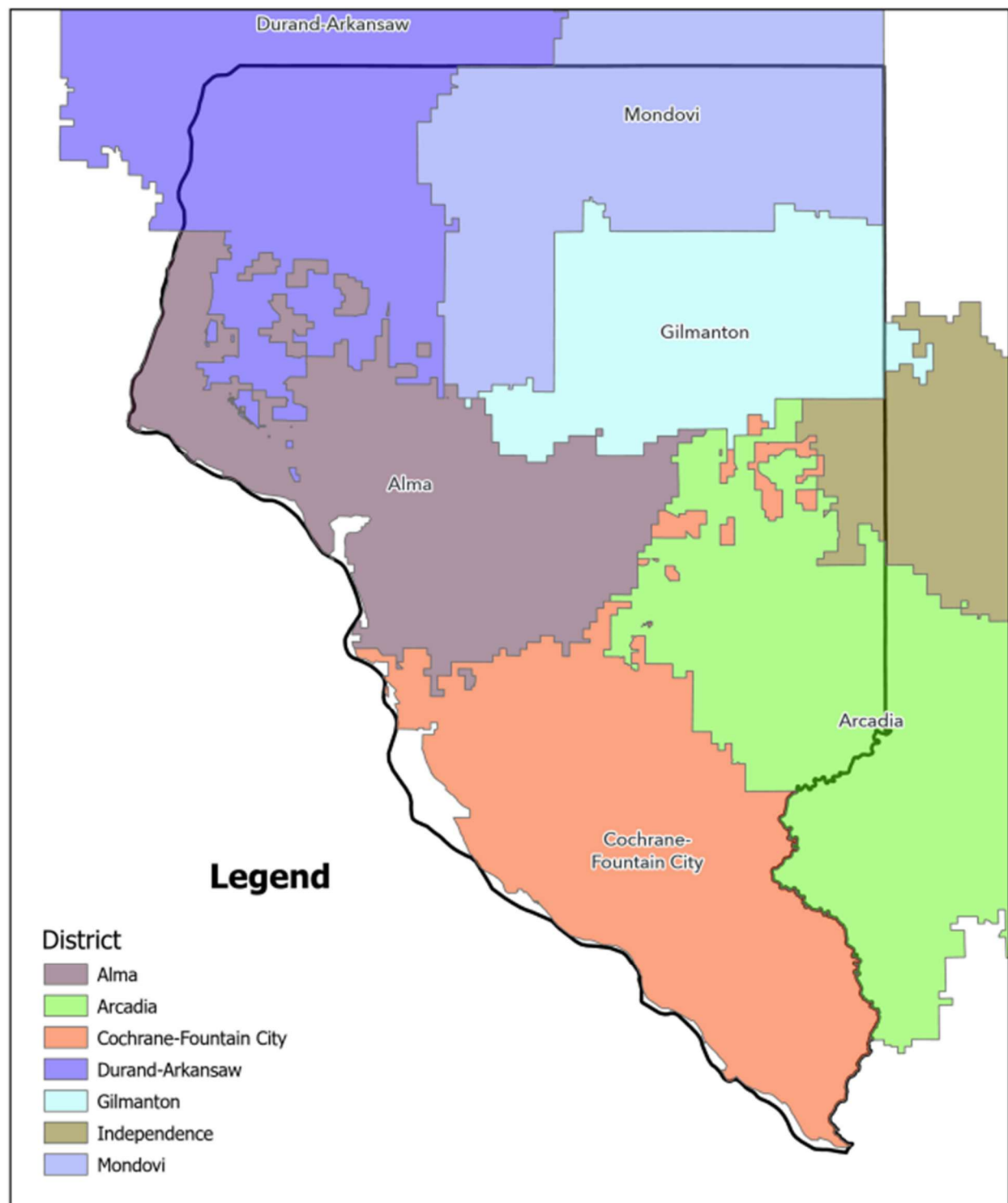
One weakness that has been noted is less than ideal communication between municipalities and the county board. Possible solutions to correct this are a biannual meeting between the municipalities and county board, or the county board supervisors attending municipal meetings within their district, to keep them informed of upcoming or trending issues.

Goals and Objectives

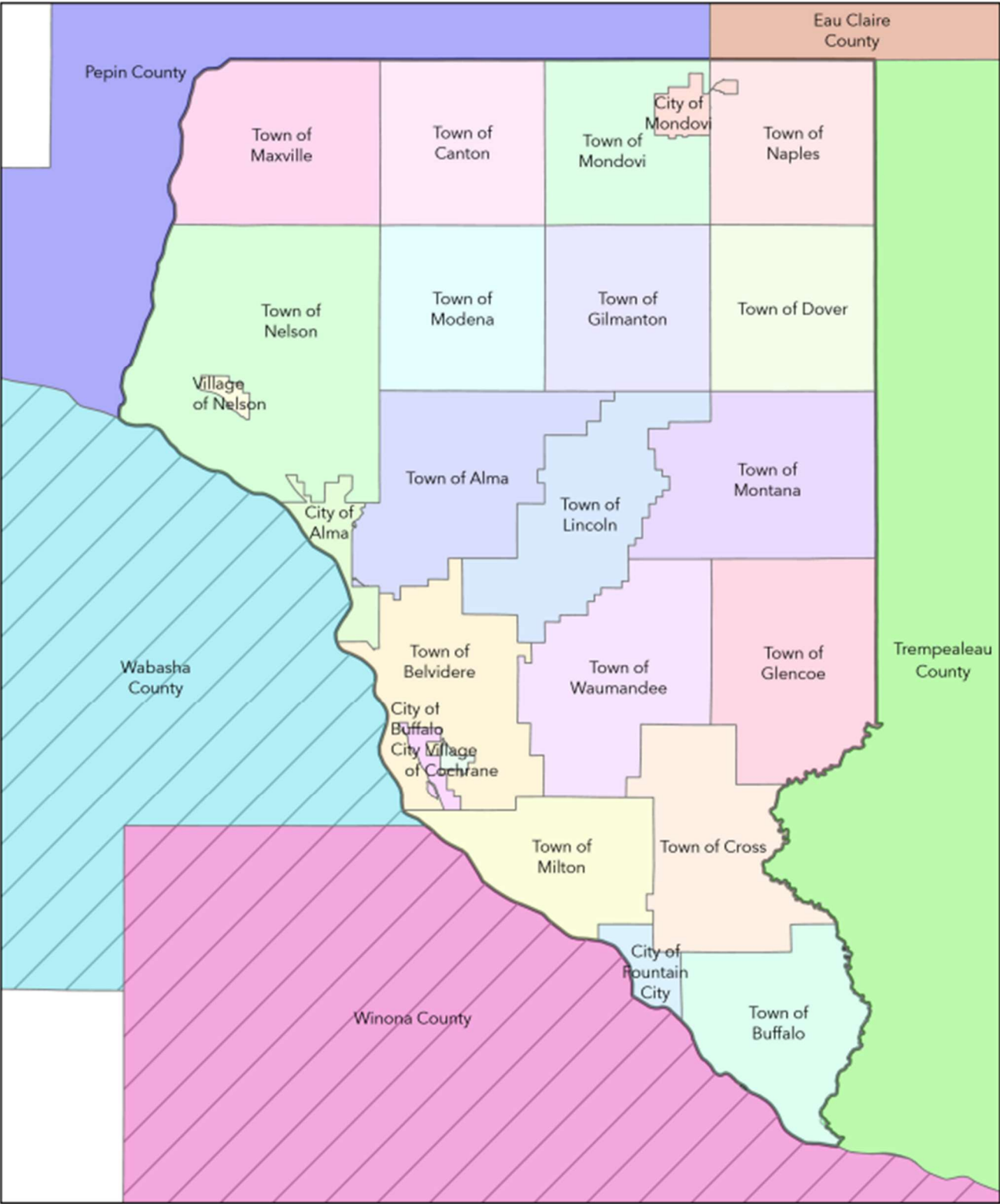
Encourage continued participation in the Wisconsin Towns Association

Villages should also be encouraged to join. Find ways to drive consistent interaction and communication between county board supervisors and board members of the towns they represent.

Map 7.1: School Districts



Map 7.2: Municipal Boundaries and Surrounding Counties



8

Stewardship

Land Use in Buffalo County



Figure 8.3. Farmers gather around to hear the results of UW Extension's wheat trials. Agriculture is, and has long been, the main land use in Buffalo County (BC LCD)

Element Overview

Land-use element. This element is used to guide the future development and redevelopment of public and private property. It lists the amount, type, intensity and net density of existing uses of land in the local governmental unit, such as agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial and other public and private uses. It also analyzes trends in the supply, demand and price of land, opportunities for redevelopment and existing and potential land-use conflicts. Projections of future residential, agricultural, commercial and industrial land uses are based on Chapter One's background data. Maps in this element show current and future land uses, productive agricultural soils, natural limitations for building site development, floodplains, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive lands, the boundaries of areas to which services of public utilities and community facilities (chapter 4), will be provided in the future, consistent with the timetable described in Chapter 4, and the general location of future land uses by net density or other classifications as per Stat. § 66.1001(2)(h).

How Land Use was Decided in the Past

Before Zoning: Prior to 1965, land use in Buffalo County was shaped by transportation and the public land survey system. Combined with the county's unique geography, these factors eventually created the rural landscape that we are familiar with today. It was a growing wave of technological changes in the mid-20th century that brought calls for a more active approach to land use controls. *More about this topic can be found in the Appendix under "A Land Use History of Buffalo County."*

Modern Zoning was Born in Buffalo County: In the 1960s Buffalo County pioneered a new concept of zoning that extensively integrated the USDA's soil surveys into the county's system of land use control. 1965 Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance remained largely unchanged for over half a century, until the ordinance was entirely revised in 2018. Though the historical ordinance was a small booklet of only 28 pages, its impact on land use across the unincorporated areas of Buffalo County was much more imposing; enforcing its standards on thousands of structures across generations of residents.

Current Zoning and Land Use Ordinances

Administration: At the time of writing, 15 of the 17 towns within Buffalo County participate in county comprehensive zoning as described in Wisconsin Statute 59.69. Zoning regulations are established by the elected officials of the Buffalo County Land Management Committee who oversee the operation of the Department of Land Management. This department consists of employees charged with interpreting the ordinance and carrying out the day-to-day tasks required to implement the zoning ordinance as well as other regulations across the county. When special circumstances arise (i.e. a variance from the zoning ordinance, the issuance of a conditional use permit, or an appeal of the zoning department's decision), appointed members of the Buffalo County Board of Adjustment are tasked with upholding the integrity of the zoning ordinance.

Purpose and Intent of the Zoning Ordinance: The general purpose and intent of the Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance is to promote and protect public health, safety and general welfare. Specific purposes of this ordinance include but are not limited to: aid in the implementation of the Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan and other relevant plans; establish zoning districts to guide the distribution and location of land uses; encourage planned and orderly land use and development; conserve the natural resources of the county including agricultural lands, forests, wetland, and surface and groundwater resources; protect and conserve property values, economic stability and the property tax base; facilitate adequate provisions for highway, utility, education, health, emergency response and recreation facilities; encourage land uses which are in accordance with their character and suitability; encourage land use and location of structures which is compatible with existing and planned land uses, and prohibit and control land uses deemed incompatible with nearby land uses; protect and conserve the scenic beauty and amenities of the natural and geographic features of the county; protect and conserve the soil resources of the county by managing erosion and stormwater runoff from development sites;

provide for the administration and enforcement of this ordinance and prescribe penalties for the violation of this ordinance or any amendments to this ordinance.

Current Zoning Standards: Established with the adoption of a comprehensive revision of the county zoning ordinance in 2018, the current ordinance consists of 21 chapters and is 228 pages long. This revision was a complete overhaul of the 28-page 1965 ordinance and aimed at addressing many of the land use concerns voiced in the 2013 comprehensive land use plan. Among these were the revision of minimum lot sizes, permitting requirements for houses built on steep soils, the establishment of bluffland development standards unique to the Mississippi River corridor, age requirements for mobile homes, prohibition of driveways that are not safely accessible to emergency services, compatibility with Wisconsin's Right to Farm Law, promoting farmland preservation through incentive programs and 590 nutrient management plans, encouragement of town participation in conditional use permit and rezone applications, and a comprehensive update the county addressing system.

Zoning Districts: Are divided into residential, commercial, industrial, conservation and agricultural/natural resource (ANR), the last being divided into five separate districts based on density of single-family homes.

Farmland Preservation Efforts: To make Wisconsin's Farmland Preservation Program tax credits available to residents, the 2018 revision implemented certain state-required protections for farmland were implemented across the majority of towns in the county. To balance residents' desire for future residential development with calls to participate in the farmland preservation program, the least restrictive model ordinance was selected for use. This model became what is now Buffalo County's farmland preservation zoning district (ANR-40).

Properties in the ANR-40 zoning district, whether the owner is collecting the tax credit or not, may have only one lot 'parceled off' for each 40 acres owned under a single deed. When four new lots have been created or 5% of a property has been divided from the parent tract (which ever comes first), *a restriction is placed on the property's deed preventing any future land division from the property*. The Towns of Bufalo, Canton, Gilmanton, Lincoln, Maxville, Milton, and Waumandee did not desire to participate in the program.

When residents were surveyed in 2024, *a majority felt that too much farmland was being converted to non-farm uses*. This may indicate that additional measures may need to be taken to prevent the intrusion of non-farm land use in Buffalo County to satisfy current public concerns. This could be accomplished by reducing the number of land divisions allowed in the ANR-40 zoning district (for example, from one division per 40 acres owned to one per 80 acres owned), or by encouraging nonparticipating towns to rezone agricultural lands to the ANR-40 zoning district.

Bluffland Preservation Efforts: To preserve the historic, environmental, economic, and scenic value of the bluffs along the Mississippi River, measures were put into place in 2018 to discourage building on these headland bluffs as well as the interior bluffs, hills, ridges and floodplains of the county. Chapter 14 of the Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance established a blufflands and steep

slopes ordinance, setting development and performance standards on any slopes ranging from 12-22% and prohibiting development on slopes greater than 32%. Further restrictions are put in place for lands determined to be within any ‘bluff impact zone’ as well as lands determined to be part of the Mississippi River Headland Bluffs overlay.

Local Involvement in the Permitting Process: Gaining additional participation from towns in the conditional use permitting process was a previous objective of the 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan. This objective was accomplished with the adoption of the 2018 revision of the Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance. Towns may now provide direct input to the Zoning Department and Board of Adjustments prior to the public hearing for a rezone, variance, or conditional use permit via a Town’s Acknowledgement Form. Applicants are responsible for submitting this form to the town government, which will provide a response of support, opposition, or no comment as well as any comments or recommendations by the town board. A received Town’s Acknowledgement form is required prior to holding a public hearing.

Other Land Use Ordinances

In addition to zoning, the following ordinances are also administered by the Department of Land Management:

Assemblage Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to regulate the assemblage of large numbers of people, requiring a license therefore, to protect the health, safety and welfare of all persons, residents and visitors, and to impose penalties and enforce the same against any person for any violation of such ordinance.

Floodplain Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to provide a regulatory scheme for development in the unincorporated areas of Buffalo County in that uncontrolled use and development of its floodplains and rivers would impair the public health, safety, convenience, general welfare and tax base.

Shoreland Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to provide a regulatory scheme for the purpose of promoting the public health, safety convenience and welfare, and promote and protect the public trust in navigable waters by preventing and controlling water pollution, protecting aquatic life, controlling land use, and preserving/ restoring shoreland vegetation and scenic beauty.

Subdivision Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to provide safe and orderly subdivision layouts.

Sanitary Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to promote and protect public health and safety by assuring the proper siting, design, installation, inspection and management of private on-site wastewater treatment system (POWTS) and non-plumbing sanitary systems.

Uniform Numbering System Ordinance: The purpose of this Ordinance is to promote and protect the health, safety, and general welfare of the public of Buffalo County by providing the most

practical, efficient, and logical means of physically locating properties and structures located in the County. The primary and vital purpose of an addressing system is to provide the means and standards for the most rapid location of property by emergency service providers including; emergency medical service, fire departments, law enforcement, and other first responders and service agencies. The system will also serve the U.S. Postal Service and the public at large in the timely and efficient delivery of services. It is the intent of this Ordinance to establish the method by which address numbers are assigned, as well as how signs are obtained, installed, and maintained. It is further intended to provide for requirements for road naming and the review process and responsibilities involved in assuring all public and private drives are named and signed in accordance with accepted criteria.

Nonmetallic Mining Reclamation Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to establish a local program to ensure the effective reclamation of nonmetallic mining sites on which nonmetallic mining takes place in compliance with state statute and administrative rule.

Solar Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to provide a regulatory means for the siting, construction, and operation of both small- and large-scale solar installations in the County of Buffalo, subject to reasonable restrictions, which will preserve the public health and safety. Roof mounted and wall mounted solar arrays do not fall within this ordinance.

Uniform Dwelling Code Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is to provide a regulatory scheme for the construction of 1 and 2-family dwellings and other habitable structures. It also addresses the placement of manufactured homes, subject to reasonable restrictions, which will preserve the public health, safety and general welfare. (Buffalo County contracts with a private party to fulfill the requirements of this ordinance).

Wind Energy Facility Ordinance: The purpose of this ordinance is provide a regulatory scheme for the construction and operation of wind energy facilities, subject to reasonable restrictions, which will preserve the public health, safety and general welfare. It addresses the timely removal of non-operating, reconstructed, enlarged and relocated wind towers as well.

Current Development Trends

Overall, zoning permit issuance has been relatively stable since 2017- following the adoption of the new zoning ordinance (Figure 8.2). There has also been a significant decline in the number of conditional use permit applications. This is likely due to the much more straightforward method of land use permitting in the new zoning ordinance when compared to the original zoning ordinance. While only time can tell if this is actually the case, it can illustrate the importance of adequate land use controls to meet the needs of communities and a unique landscape.

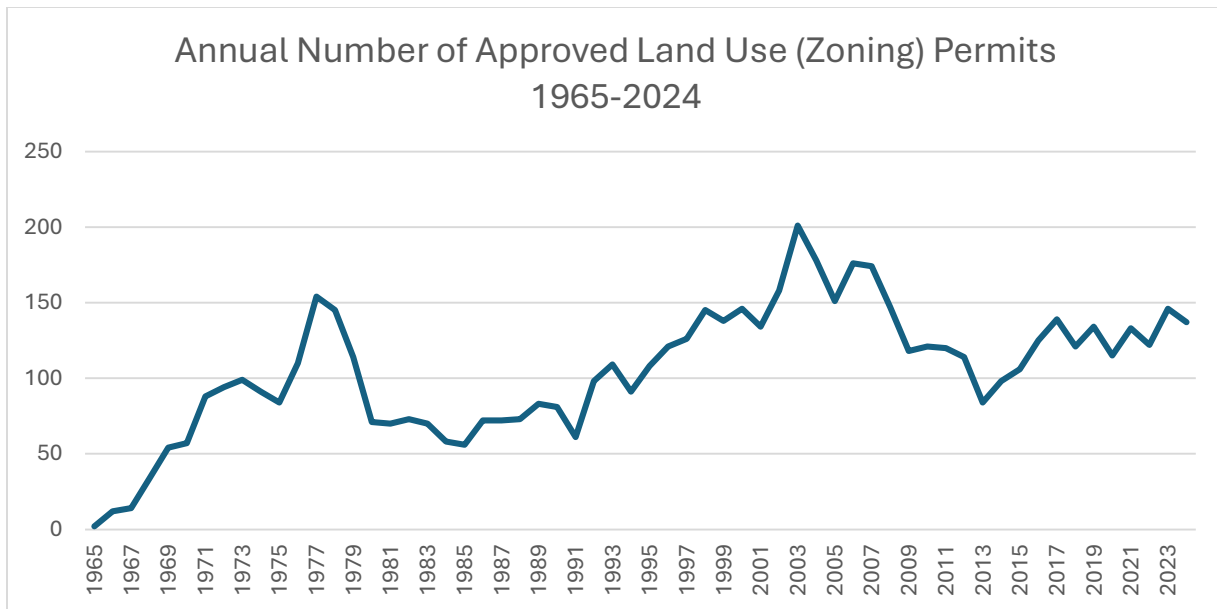


Figure 8.2: Zoning Permit approval over time (Buffalo County Zoning Department)

Since the adoption of the 2018 zoning ordinance revision, Waumandee and Montana have not participated in zoning. This can make it more difficult to track development trends in the county. However, the zoning department still has purview over sanitary permitting in these towns. By monitoring the number of new sanitary permits issued each year, one can get a picture of the overall residential development in areas without public sewer service in the county (figure 8.3)

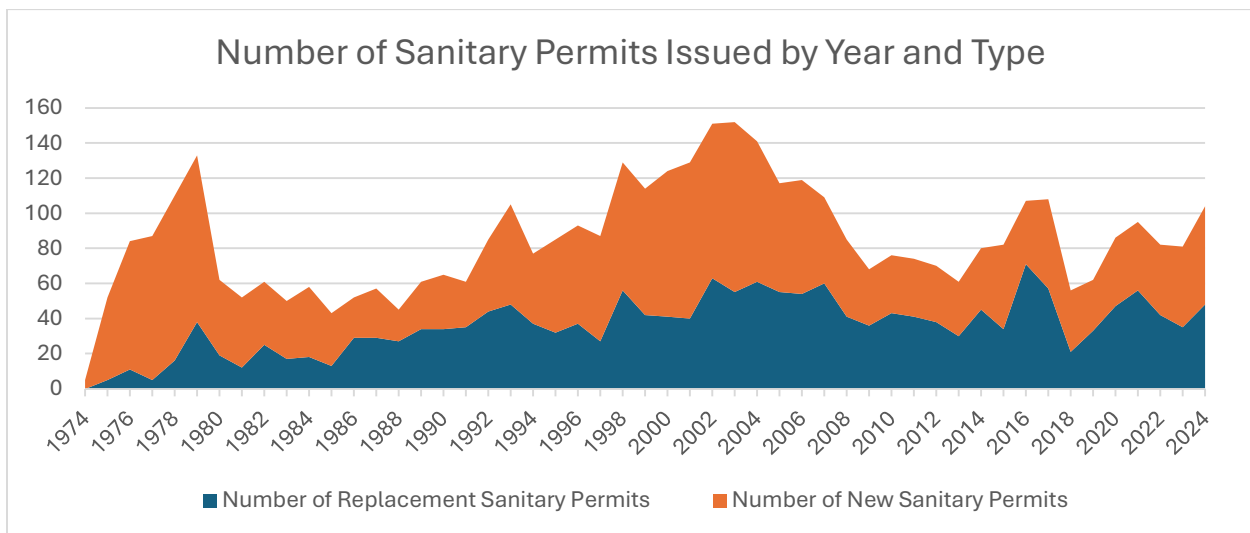


Figure 8.3: Number of new sanitary permits STACKED on number of replacement sanitary permits over time (BC Zoning)

Terminology for Present and Future Land Use

There are three general terms that are used throughout the remainder of the land use element: current and future land use, zoning districts, and assessed land. It is important to understand what is meant by each of these terms.

Current and Future Land Use- Current land use is a snapshot of the primary use of a particular piece of land at any given moment. The current land use classification does not identify any accessory or secondary land uses that may be present on a property. Future land use is a projection of what planners believe the primary land use for a particular piece of land will be at a given point in the future. Planners, at the town and county level, determine future land use based on development that they foresee as being favorable for the predicted future needs of Buffalo County residents.

Zoning Districts- Zoning is a system for regulating land use within a given governmental unit. It is the main planning tool of local governments to manage future development and is the primary tool for implementing land use plans. Various geographic areas (zoning districts) are restricted to certain uses and development. Buffalo County has nine zoning districts designed to regulate the types of activities that can be accommodated on a given piece of land, the amount of space devoted to those activities, and the ways that buildings may be placed and shaped.

Assessed Land – The local property tax rate (typically unique to the town) applied to a property in a particular year is determined by classification of land uses on tax parcels constituting that property. Unlike current and future land use classifications, a property can have multiple assessed land use classifications across a single tax parcel. Thus, while not perfectly accurate, data from assessed lands provide greater detail and more insight into land uses that are accessory to the primary land use on properties across the county.

The following is a hypothetical situation showcasing the interaction between these three systems of land use categorization:

A five-acre parcel of land is zoned for agricultural use; however, an old farmhouse sits on three acres of lawn within this parcel. The remaining two acres is part of a larger row crop field. Despite being zoned agriculture, the current land use classification of this parcel would be residential. The tax assessor would likely assess the parcel as consisting of three acres of G1 (residential) land and two acres of G4 (Agricultural) land. This five-acre parcel is also adjacent to a state highway and an existing cheese plant. Since this is the only industrial development in town, the town board desires that any future industrial development occur on this parcel of land should the need arise. Therefore, this property would be classified as industrial under the future land use system of categorization.

Current and Future Land Use

Of Buffalo County's 672 square miles of land, *agriculture is currently the predominant land use in Buffalo County, covering nearly 197,500 acres or about 64% of assessed land*. Forested and undeveloped lands currently make up the second largest land use category, accounting for over 101,000 acres or 33% of assessed land. All other land uses, namely developed lands, represent approximately 10,400 acres, or only about 3% of assessed land.

Land Assessment: Table 8.1 2023 Property Assessments, displays the breakdown of property uses within the county in the unincorporated Municipalities in the county. The eight statutory classifications for real property are residential, commercial, manufacturing, agricultural, undeveloped, agricultural forest, productive forest land and ‘other.’

Table 8.1 Property Assessments 2024 (Buffalo County Treasurer’s Office)

<i>Municipality</i>	Residential Acres	Commercial Acres	Manufactur. Acres	Agricultural Acres	Undeveloped Land Acres	Agricultural Forest Acres	Productive Forest Lands Acres	Other	Total Acres
T. of Alma	201	36	0	9,649	2,021	3,471	1,148	198	16,724
T. of Belvidere	298	129	0	9,460	604	3,164	1,641	250	15,546
T. of Buffalo	636	101	30	5,903	1,216	4,163	1,588	202	13,839
T. of Canton	229	1	21	11,484	1,816	3,052	348	160	17,111
T. of Cross	333	14	0	9,774	2,231	3,426	1,004	196	16,978
T. of Dover	429	26	55	13,809	1,647	2,880	739	202	19,787
T. of Gilmanton	304	13	0	11,941	2,034	4,107	845	186	19,430
T. of Glencoe	193	21	172	18,322	796	3,340	691	420	23,955
T. of Lincoln	124	5	0	8,931	1,231	4,139	1,090	136	15,656
T. of Maxville	144	24	137	11,332	459	5,716	1,193	185	19,190
T. of Milton	286	88	13	4,163	2,500	1,525	449	89	9,113
T. of Modena	305	36	0	9,232	2,423	3,140	719	139	15,994
T. of Mondovi	505	70	164	13,492	1,254	2,197	726	120	18,528
T. of Montana	134	13	0	17,048	833	4,342	657	243	23,270
T. of Naples	590	29	0	14,510	2,425	2,282	420	209	20,465
T. of Nelson	768	49	28	12,822	2,189	5,182	1,280	182	22,500
T.Waumandee	228	30	3	15,627	1,070	3,284	708	270	21,220
Total Acres	5,707	685	623	197,499	26,749	59,410	15,246	3,387	309,306

A Snapshot of Actual Land Use: Wisconsin law requires an assessor to classify land on the basis of use. There are situations where this involves a judgment of the predominant use but, nonetheless, tax assessment data can give a more detailed picture of how land is currently being used compared to its potential use- as would be depicted on a zoning map.

Current and Future Land Use of Buffalo County: Depictions can be seen on Maps 8.1 and 8.2 (respectively). The Current Land Use Map depicts the primary assessed land use of tax parcels within Buffalo County. This map contrasts slightly with the Future Land Use Map that shows areas identified by municipal comprehensive planning efforts as being ideal locations for future residential, industrial or commercial development as established in 2013.

An Important Note: the Future Land Use Map does not reflect the anticipated use of land in the near future- most residents of Buffalo County do not foresee any significant change in population or development over the next two decades. Instead, the Future Land Use Map is a preparative document intended to guide decision making in the event that a town would experience residential growth or receive a request for industrial or commercial development.

This method of land use planning not only helps direct future development but also provides citizen input into the future of the community. Comparing current and future land use maps also helps decision makers identify areas where potential conflicts could exist between land usages. These maps, along with current zoning maps, should be viewed as tools to help make subsequent zoning and other land use decisions more informed and more transparent.

Guiding Future Development

By comparing property assessment data (current land use) to anticipated changes in population or economic conditions (future land use), development can be encouraged or discouraged with zoning districts. Zoning districts reflect the desired use of a property by identifying specific land uses allowed on a parcel as well as the size of the parcel itself.

Zoning: Table 8.2 Zoned Acreage in Buffalo County shows the zoning classifications in Buffalo County. These districts don't necessarily reflect the actual use of the land. Instead, they are better used to analyze the potential use of the land and the intended density of current/future development. Note, before any comparison is made between 2013 and 2025 figures, the change in standards of zoning districts must be considered. For a more accurate account of current land use across Buffalo County's landscape, refer to Table 8.1 Property Assessments.

See Map 8.5 Current Buffalo County Zoning Districts for a depiction of current countywide zoning districts in Buffalo County.

Table 8.2 Zoned Acreage in Buffalo County, 2025

Municipality	Residential	Agricultural	Conservation	Commercial	Industrial
Total Acreage	5,327.8	334,739.4	38,283.0	491.4	3,107.6
% Of Total Land	1.39%	87.64%	10.02%	0.13%	0.81%

Buffalo County Zoning Department

Agriculture/Natural Resource (ANR) Land Use: Of the zoned land in Buffalo County (excluding the conservation district), approximately 94% of it is in an ANR zoning district. Another 3% of land is in an ANR Transition zoning district. This district acts as a buffer by limiting certain agricultural activities near higher density development and promoting residential growth. These figures align

with 2025 tax assessment data that identify about 97% of privately owned land across the county as agricultural, woodland, or open space. When comparing the ratio of zoning districts to property assessment data, *Buffalo County's current stance on future land use is well illustrated: a desire to preserve forest and agricultural land while encouraging modest amounts of new development.*

This stance can allow for some flexibility considering future population projections. All of Buffalo County's ANR zoning districts allow for limited development, most of which restrict development to one home per 40 or 20 acres. If the population of the county declines as predicted, limited new development in ANR districts can meet the limited needs of the small population base without significantly impacting agricultural lands. However, if non-farm populations rise or non-resident vacation homes jeopardize the agricultural and forest lands of the county, the current density standards should allow decision makers to react in time without significant impacts from development.

Residential Land Use: The county has seen limited demand for development due to its relative isolation from major population centers and major transportation arteries. Less than 2% of land is zoned for residential use. There is no indication that housing will increase at a rate greater than it has in the recent past with a trend of 2 or 3 homes expected to be built in each municipality each year. Cost of job commute and limited job opportunities may also hinder additional housing construction.

The Land Management Committee will welcome new development but attempt to direct it to the most suitable areas indicated by county and municipal comprehensive planning efforts, striving to maintain a balance between land uses and curbing land use that would have a detrimental impact on future land use(s).

Commercial and Industrial Land Uses: nearly five square miles of land in Buffalo County has been zoned for industrial use. Although the industrial zoning district has permitted uses such as distribution businesses, light industry, and business offices, most industrially zoned acreage is located in nonmetallic mining sites around the county. The majority of nonmetallic mining sites are rock quarries located on the tops of ridges and are typically dedicated to obtaining dolomitic limestone for crushed rock applications.

Commercial and industrial development is expected to remain low due to the lack of railway, interstate, and other critical utilities. Table 8.7 Real Estate Valuation Summary in 2024 Dollars, provides a look at the value of land devoted to each land use type by Township.

Conservation Land Use: This zoning district is currently assigned to properties that are inaccessible to future development in the foreseeable future. This includes for example, natural areas, state parks, cemeteries. While land is increasingly being used for recreational purposes, the restrictions that the conservation zoning district places on land make it an unattractive district to any landowner seeking to hold land as an investment. Any additions to the conservation zoning district would likely come from conversion of land into a state or county park.

Opportunities for Redevelopment: Redevelopment entails new construction or adaptive reuse of buildings on developed sites with a pre-existing use, typically in urban spaces. The rural nature of Buffalo County and its lack of idle industrial sites make opportunities for redevelopment rather scant. However, if current industries continue to consolidate redevelopment may become a more relevant strategy in the future.

Some examples of past redevelopment in Buffalo County include the numerous historic schoolhouses and creameries scattered over the countryside now being used as private residences. Abandoned railroad beds have also been converted to recreational trails.

Just as the country schools and local creameries of yesteryear consolidated, so do the farms and agricultural service businesses of today. This means that there is a likelihood that agricultural infrastructure will become increasingly idle soon. That infrastructure located near highways or cities could become repurposed to other uses such as warehousing or tourism. Examples already exist of poultry barns being used for self-storage and barns being used for housing, lodging, and event spaces.

Land Demand and Prices

The average value of agricultural land sold in Buffalo County increased 486% from 1998 to 2023. Between 2014 and 2023, 7,013 acres of agricultural land without buildings were sold in Buffalo County and 361 acres were converted to other uses.

Table 8.3 Agricultural Land Sales (USDA , NASS Statistics Service)

Year	Agricultural land continuing in agricultural use			Agricultural land being diverted to other uses			Total of all agricultural land		
	Number of transactions	Acres Sold	Dollars per acre	Number of transactions	Acres Sold	Dollars per acre	Number of transactions	Acres Sold	Dollars per acre
1998	30	2,288	1,052	37	1,676	1,124	67	3,964	1,083
2000	29	2,651	1,201	34	1,595	1,306	63	4,246	1,240
2005	27	2,080	2,177	15	612	2,978	42	2,692	2,359
2010	17	1,141	2,941	8	260	2,965	25	1,401	2,945
2015	8	551	4,480	-	-	-	8	551	4,480
2020	19	1,041	3,940	2	76	3,874	21	1,117	3,936
2023	18	609	6,316	2	80	6,601	20	689	6,349

Analyzing the demand for land and prices has proven challenging due to changes in record keeping by the USDA NASS. At the time of this update, annual statistics at the county level were only available for years 2014-2023, limiting the ability to ensure congruency between new data and the data used in the 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

The method used in Table 8.6, giving ‘snapshots’ of land markets in Buffalo County using five year increments, is not adequate to assess the average price over time, nor does it allow for a total count of land transactions, acres sold, or acres diverted to another use. The USDA ceased providing values and acreages of agricultural lands sold with buildings after the 2019 dataset.

Absentee Landowners

Over the past two decades, there has been rising concerns about the amount of land held by non-community members, or absentee landowners. GIS and zoning staff reassessed the methods used in the 2013 Land Use Plan and found that 30.3% of land in towns is owned by absentee owners. The change in methodology is described following the table below.

Table 8.4 Absentee Landowners in Unincorporated Areas (Buffalo County Treasurer’s Office)

YEAR: 2025	Total # of Landowners	# of Absentee landowners	Acres owned by absentee landowners (Estimate)	Total Acres	% of absentee owned acres
T. of Alma	236	84	11,742.42	27,625.67	42.5%
T. of Belvidere	328	92	6,597.19	23,217.05	28.4%
T. of Buffalo	411	105	8,277.16	20,267.17	40.8%
T. of Canton	183	59	6,468.86	23,175.65	27.9%
T. of Cross	264	79	7,642.98	24,193.42	31.6%
T. of Dover	290	85	6,701.46	23,271.36	28.8%
T. of Gilmanton	274	86	7,543.98	23,366.23	32.3%
T. of Glencoe	272	59	7,389.64	28,788.58	25.7%
T. of Lincoln	209	86	10,554.37	23,720.52	44.5%
T. of Maxville	209	48	6,287.32	26,622.53	23.6%
T. of Milton	323	73	4,404.57	17,167.60	25.7%
T. of Modena	228	89	9,488.45	23,324.10	40.7%
T. of Mondovi	268	55	5,823.42	20,850.74	27.9%
T. of Montana	205	62	9,093.22	30,369.53	29.9%
T. of Naples	351	73	5,729.32	22,797.70	25.1%
T. of Nelson	449	167	11,856.84	48,602.49	24.4%
T. Waumandee	288	66	6,125.85	28,086.13	21.8%
Total	4,788	1,368	131,927	435,446	30.3%

The definition of absentee landowner was decided by the 2026 Comprehensive Land Use Technical Committee to be any landowner with a primary residence that did not fall within a zip code *servicing* Buffalo County. It should be noted that this definition includes landowners living outside of Buffalo County, except for those with an Eleva zip code in their mailing address. Defining absentee landowner in this way was done for two reasons: to make a simple and replicable means of analysis and to provide inclusivity to those landowners living just beyond the borders of Buffalo County. One disadvantage of this new definition of absentee landowners is that our 2025 analysis cannot be used to accurately compare absentee landowner estimates with those listed in the original 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Previously, the 2013 Comprehensive Land Use Plan defined a landowner as “any landowner with a primary residence that did not fall within the boundaries of Buffalo County.” To illustrate why this definition was broadened in this plan update, consider the following scenario: a resident of Bluff Siding owns land near Urne and a resident of the City of Arcadia owns land in the Town of Glencoe. It takes 50 minutes for the Bluff Siding-Urne landowner to reach their property from their primary residence while it takes the Arcadia-Glencoe landowner 10 minutes. Under the methodology used for this plan update, neither landowner would be considered absentee; however, the methodology used in the 2013 plan would identify the Arcadia resident as an absentee landowner, despite their close proximity to their Buffalo County property.

To determine the estimated number of acres of land owned by absentee landowners within Buffalo County, GIS was used in conjunction with parcel data provided by the Treasurer’s Office. First, individual landowners and the number of acres under their ownership in each town were established. The tax roll mailing address of each landowner was then filtered to determine whether or not its zip code was one of the following: Alma, Arcadia, Cochrane, Durand, Fountain City, Gilmanston, Independence, Mondovi, and Nelson. If not, the landowner was considered to be ‘absentee.’ Because of the small number of landowners on the border with Trempealeau and Eau Claire counties with an Elva address, this zip code was excluded from the ‘local’ addresses and counted manually. This was done to include in the absentee count the Eleva zip code landowners that held property in the interior of Buffalo County.

Managed Forest Law (MFL)

Managed Forest Law (MFL) is a landowner incentive program that encourages sustainable forestry on private woodlands in Wisconsin. Participants designate their property as ‘open’ or ‘closed’ to public access for recreation and commit to a 25- or 50-year sustainable forest plan. In return for following specific forestry practices outlined in this plan, landowners receive a significant reduction in property tax rates. The loss in tax revenue to the municipality is intended to be offset by a yield tax from harvested timber.

There have been concerns that a connection exists between the increase in absentee landowners and the increase in land enrollment in MFL. As more absentee landowners have the available resources to purchase the land at the recent accelerated land prices, they enroll in the MFL program as a means to reduce the amount of property taxes they pay.

Table 8.5 Total MFL Acres Over Time

	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2024
T. of Alma	1,037.22	6,276.63	7,987.77	8,138.60	9,904.43	10,436.95
T. Belvidere	919.6	2,951.76	3,157.86	3,445.33	4,182.89	4,726.97
T. of Buffalo	200	1,351.20	1,622.99	1,985.10	2,142.28	2,283.45
T. of Canton	731.25	4,492.36	4,736.58	4,728.96	4,747.43	5,234.92
T. of Cross	992.93	3,572.39	4,837.22	5,740.25	6,345.10	6,725.18
T. of Dover	745.35	2,259.65	2,504.21	3,093.01	3,415.81	3,428.10
T. Gilmanton	936.1	2,425.24	2,471.50	2,674.80	3,292.62	3,902.67
T. of Glencoe	1,320.59	3,346.97	4,203.89	4,064.43	4,492.73	4,737.43
T. of Lincoln	2,594.74	5,771.04	6,567.32	6,320.91	6,962.99	8,032.80
T. of Maxville	772.45	3,602.97	3,875.94	4,308.63	4,237.34	4,358.99
T. of Milton	618.5	2,088.12	2,538.70	2,713.49	3,187.95	3,934.51
T. of Modena	2,546.91	4,233.31	6,029.49	6,040.99	6,632.10	7,271.82
T. Mondovi	723.6	1,628.70	1,997.99	2,071.99	2,392.20	2,280.93
T. of Montana	1,419.02	5,514.07	5,837.95	6,536.74	6,994.54	7,080.03
T. of Naples	247	1,288.83	1,733.63	1,903.13	2,081.13	2,128.13
T. of Nelson	2,741.69	7,263.35	8,285.00	8,552.03	10,217.93	11,510.07
T. Waumandee	1,783.95	5,714.12	6,090.89	6,219.89	6,503.89	6,782.92
V. of Nelson	0	0	109.5	109.5	86.5	86.5
C. of Alma	0	0	381	381.33	628.51	789.81
C. Fountain C.	0	0	152.7	152.7	152.7	171.7
Total	20,330.90	63,780.71	75,122.13	79,181.81	88,601.07	95,903.88

(Buffalo County Treasurer's Office)

In addition to the number of absentee landowners purchasing this land, there is an impact on the amount of property tax that the property owners of the county pay because of the land enrolled in MFL. Table 8.6 Comparison of Property Tax With and Without MFL Enrollment, shows a comparison of the decrease in property taxes that are paid on land enrolled in MFL. This table reflects only the county tax and county receipts. In addition to this there are similar effects at the Town level in relationship to their levy.

Table 8.6 Comparison of Property Tax With and Without MFL

	Total MFL Acres Open & Closed	Property Tax if Productive Forest	Property Tax from MFL Acres	Missing Taxes
2015	79,181.81	\$4,929,494.87	\$395,323.47	-92.0%
2020	88,601.07	\$6,367,769.90	\$494,631.69	-92.2%
2024	95,903.88	\$6,613,270.01	\$586,788.66	-91.1%

Information obtained from Wisconsin DOR and Buffalo County Treasurer.

The property tax if the land was productive forest alone is the average tax rate across each municipality, times the acres enrolled in MFL there.

It is important to understand that land enrolled in MFL does not decrease the amount of revenue that a County would receive. It changes or increases the mill rate and re-distributes the property tax. The effect on the Town is similar.

There are additional sources of revenue that the county receives when land in the county is enrolled in MFL. One source is a Resource Aid Payment for counties that have > 40,000 acres enrolled in MFL. This equates to a payment between \$30,000 and \$35,000 and based on the number of acres enrolled in MFL. The state funds are always the same, however the amount to each county changes each year based on the number of acres in relation to what other counties have enrolled in the program. The other sources of funding to the county include a Yield Tax, Withdrawal Tax and Annual Aid Payment.

These sources of revenue change each year as well and have never exceeded \$65,000 per year since the program began, including the MFL Tax from Table 8.5.

Use Value Assessment.

Use Value Assessment was created under the authority of 1995 Wisconsin Act 27 with a change to state statute sec. 70.32, which governs the valuation of real property.

The goal of this legislation was to protect Wisconsin's farm economy and curb urban sprawl by assessing farmland based upon its agricultural productivity, rather than its potential for development. Legislation requires that the assessed value of farmland be based on the income that could be generated from it rental for agricultural use and income and rental from farming are a function of agricultural capability. Because any land could theoretically be used for agricultural purposes, statutes and administrative rules limit the benefit of use value assessment to only those lands that qualify as "land devoted primarily to agricultural use."

Goals and Objectives

Tax load redistribution

Managed Forest Law (MFL) and its low tax assessment rates, need to be readjusted for the wellbeing of the county. Continue to communicate with state representatives and visit Madison to advocate for changes to the program.

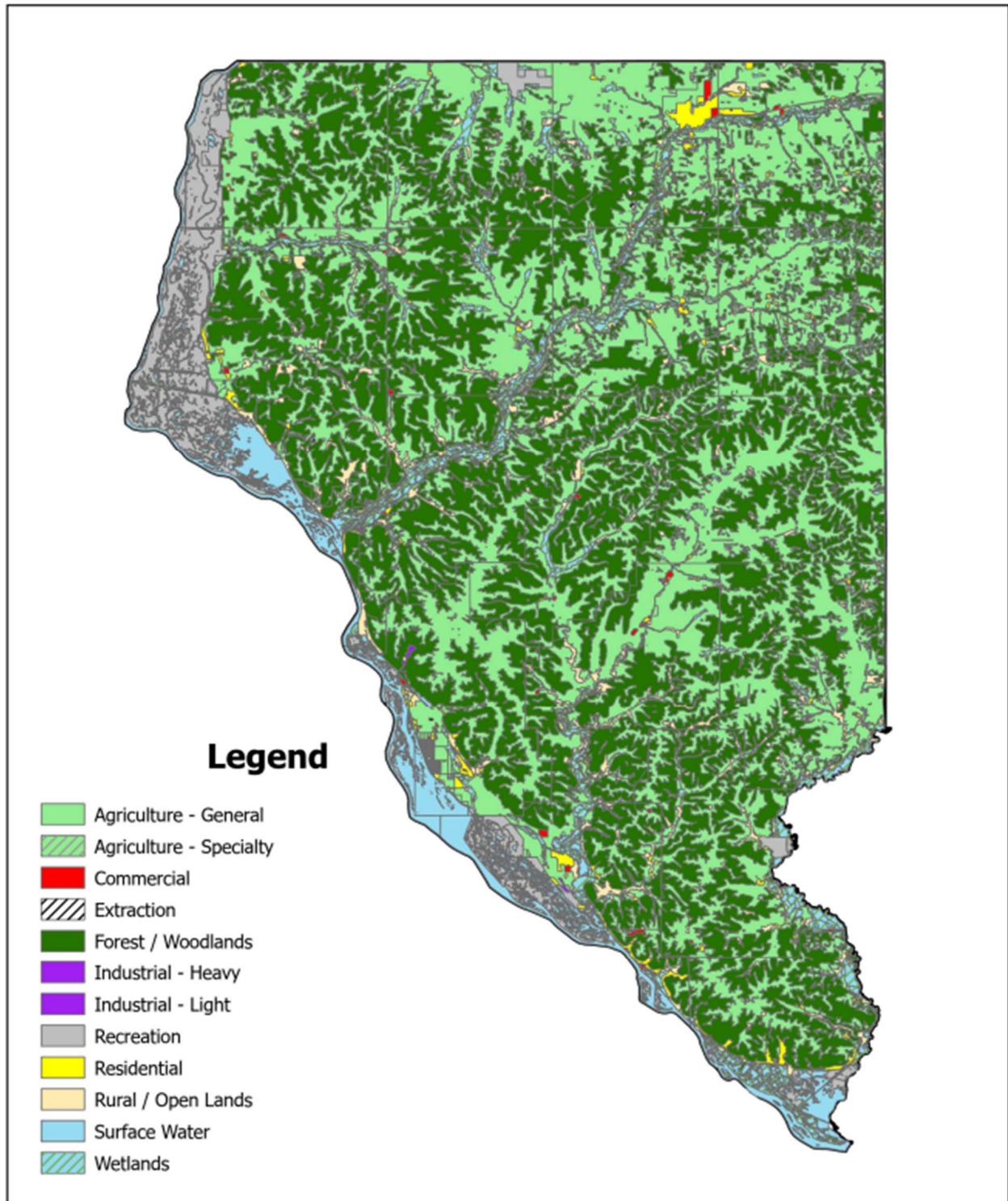
Ensure safety of life and property

Ensure driveways to dwellings are being built to safe specifications. Towns have the ability to enact driveway ordinances to ensure safe and reliable access to first responders and utility service vehicles. Encourage all towns to enact such an ordinance and offer support via the Towns Association.

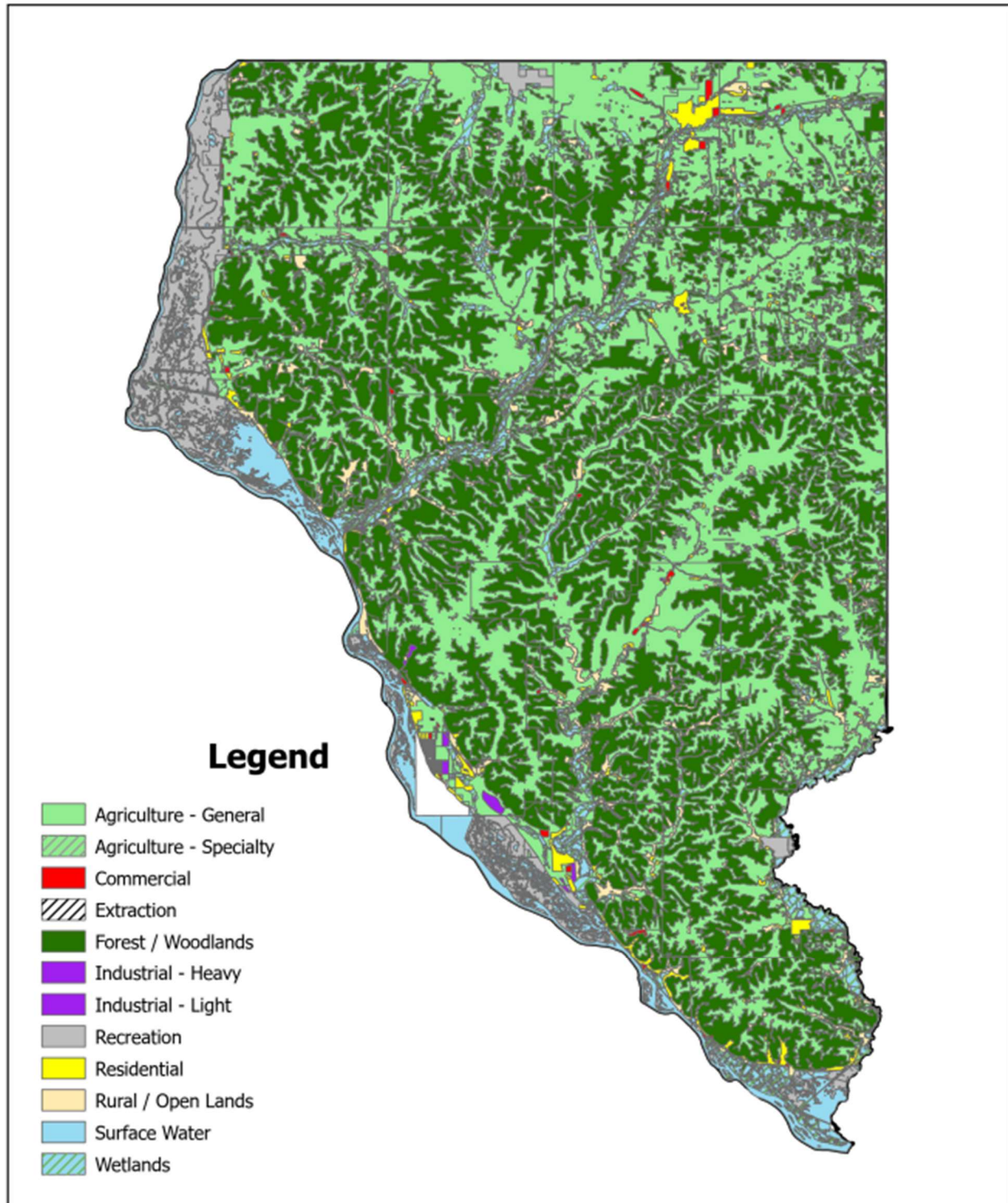
When possible, take opportunities to reevaluate floodplain elevations that have been established by FEMA. Also, consider new measures to be taken for structures proposed in areas prone to flooding but not in a FEMA floodplain zone.

Work with the Highway Department to determine if anything can be done with tree plantations immediately adjacent to roadways. Plantations of evergreens can cause drifts and ice patches in winter, as well as obstruct a driver's vision of wildlife.

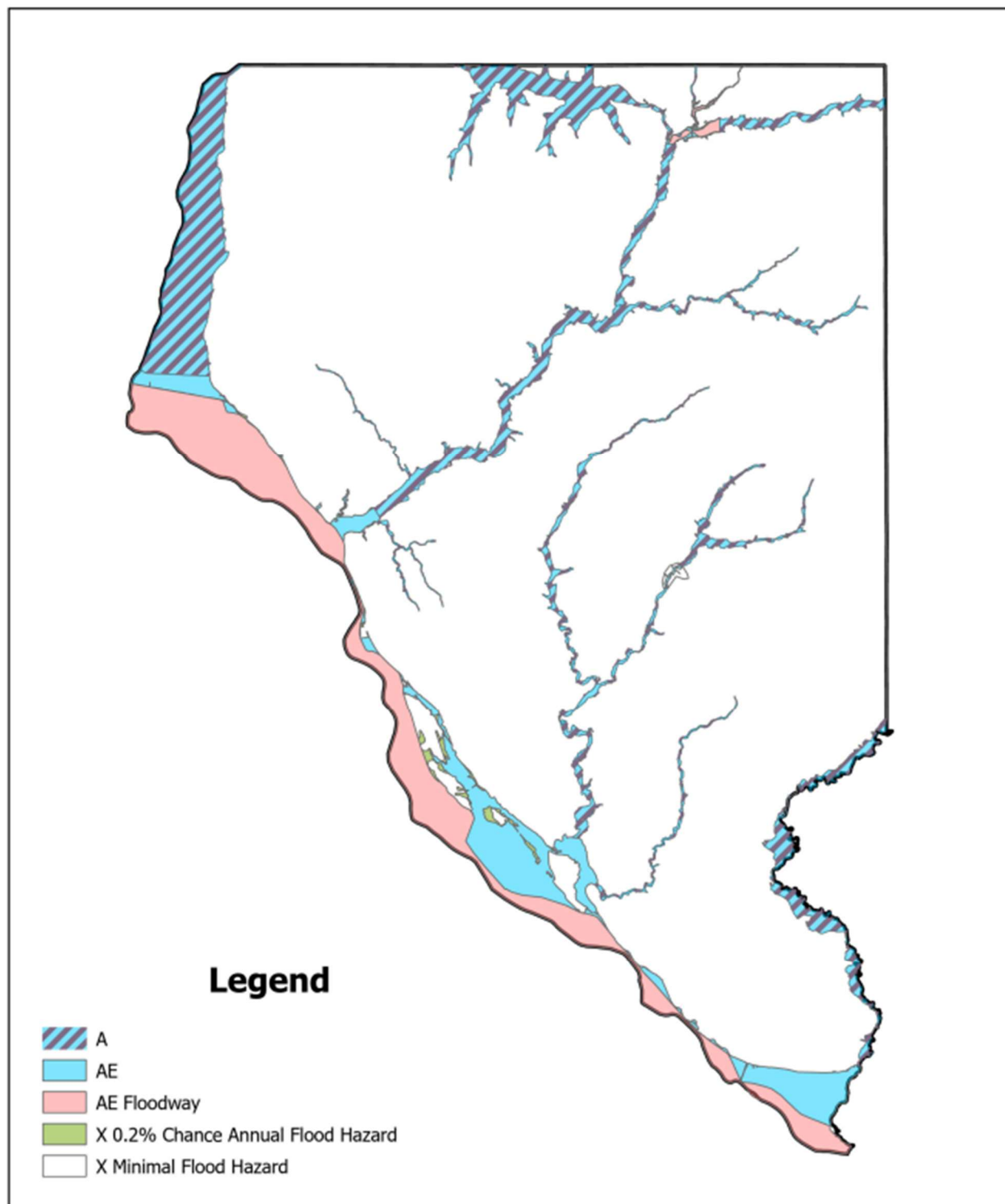
Map 8.1: Current Land Use



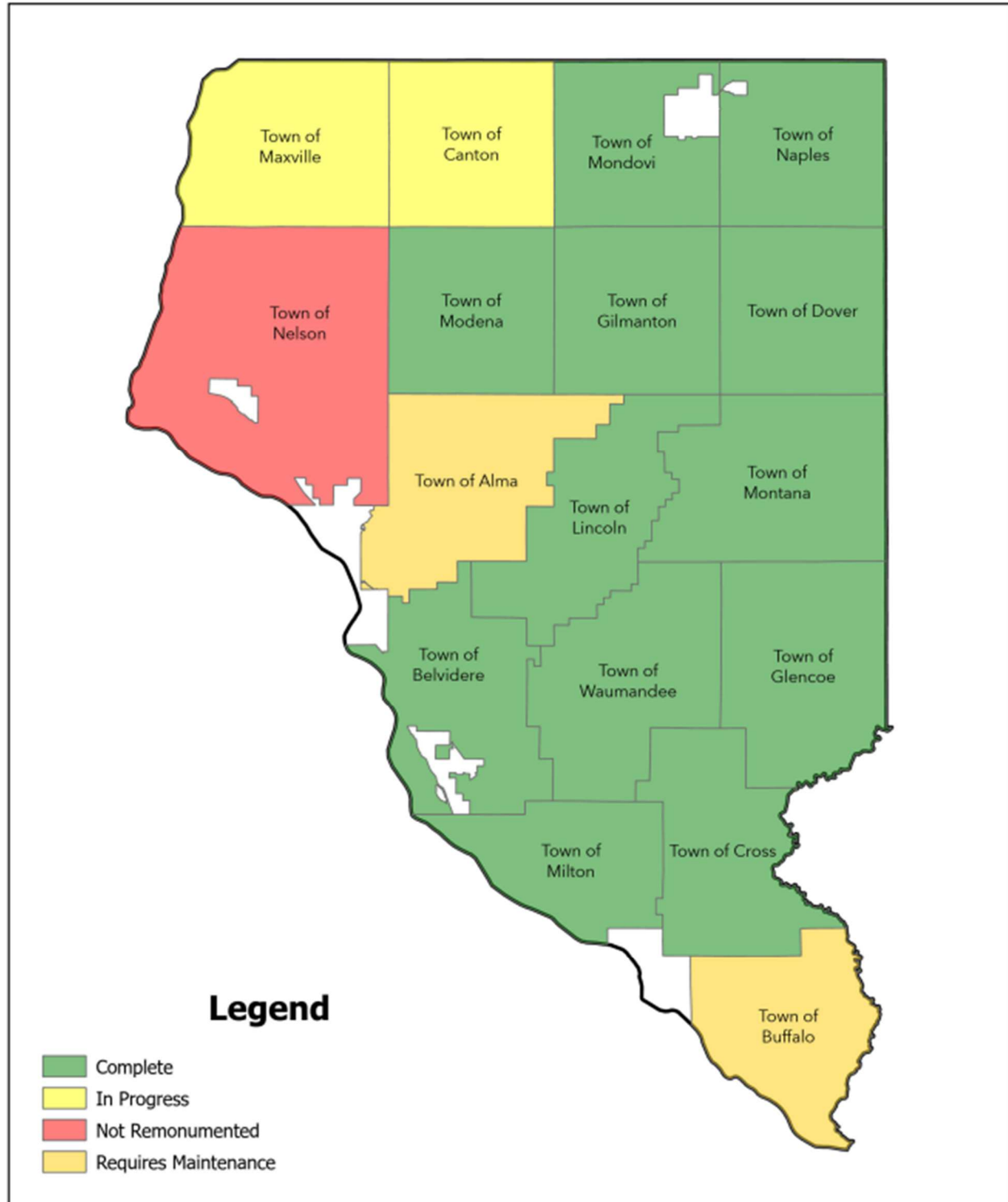
Map 8.2: Future Land Use



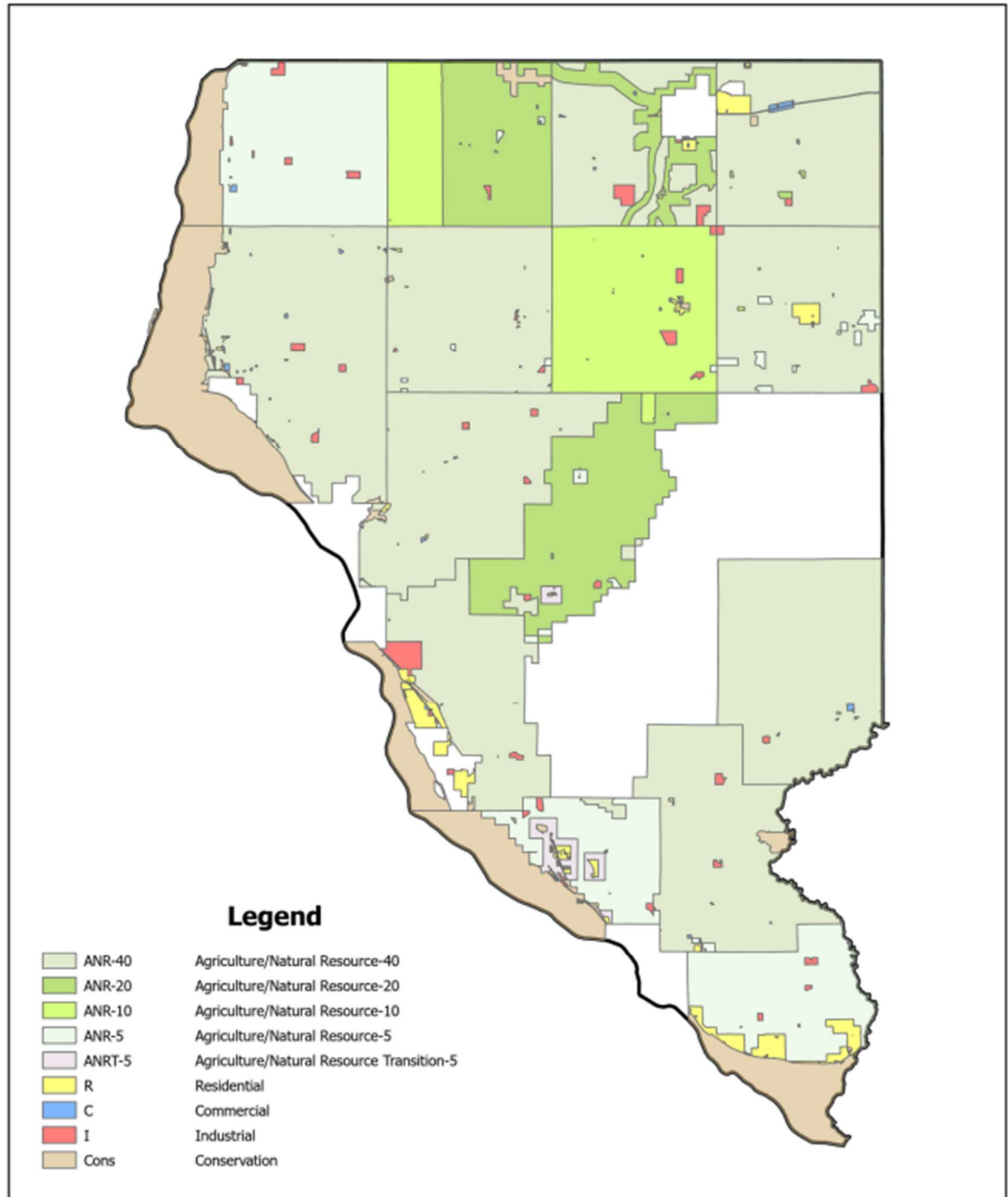
Map 8.3: Flood Hazard Areas



Map 8.4: PLSS Remonumentation Status



Map 8.5: Zoning Districts



9

Plan Implementation



Element Overview

Implementation element. A compilation of programs and specific actions to be completed in a stated sequence, including proposed changes to any applicable zoning ordinances, official maps, or subdivision ordinances, to implement the objectives, policies, plans and programs contained in any of the previous elements. The element describes how each of the elements of the comprehensive plan will be integrated and made consistent with the other elements of the comprehensive plan, and includes a mechanism to measure the local governmental unit's progress toward achieving all aspects of the comprehensive plan. The element lays out a process for updating the comprehensive plan. This element establishes that the comprehensive land use plan shall be updated no less than once every 10 years.

Action Items

Buffalo County's Comprehensive Plan is intended to provide decisions makers, County employees, and residents with a rational basis for how current and future development should be shaped throughout the county. This element outlines a variety of actions necessary to ensure the ongoing success of this plan and that the community's needs have and will continue to be addressed.

Major goals from chapters 2-8 have been identified and incorporated into the sequential work plan below. This plan ensures integration of all major elements into an actionable sequence of events in which all items are brought into conversation with decision makers at the county level.

1 month after plan adoption: Begin work on updating the Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan to monitor changes occurring to farmland in the county and ensure continued eligibility to participate in the Wisconsin farmland preservation tax incentive program. Investigate the opportunity to add additional towns into the program.

3 months after plan adoption: Make administrative revisions to the Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance. Changes will be proposed at a public hearing before the Land Management Committee. These changes are not meant to significantly alter land use controls, but rather promote consistency in the current zoning ordinance and ensure that its original intent is being met- ultimately strengthening the document.

4 months after plan adoption: Utilize the Land Management Committee to investigate potential actions that could be taken to address concerns with Managed Forest Law. Highlight any efforts that are already being taken by Buffalo County to make residents voices heard in Madison.

5 months after plan adoption: Work with the Department of Health and Human Services Committee to develop a status report on childcare training and licensing in the county. Share this information with Towns Association and look for opportunities to improve.

6 months after plan adoption: Buffalo County's representative to the Community Development Block Grant will make efforts to deepen the county's relationship with the administrator of the program: the Chippewa County Housing Authority. The goal of this will be to develop publications identifying available home repair grant opportunities and revitalize awareness of the program in Buffalo County.

8 months after plan adoption: County Board Members are encouraged to meet individually with town boards in their represented districts. The Buffalo County Highway

Committee and the highway commissioner should make arrangements to meet with the entire Buffalo County Towns Association Unit

One year after plan adoption: Work with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection to adopt a revised Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan.

Annually, each December: Minor updates made to the Zoning Ordinance, as the Zoning Administrator sees fit. At this time, the Comprehensive Land Use Plan should be reviewed and progress discussed with the Land Management Committee.

Consistency

As we have discovered with our 2018 zoning ordinance, consistency can be difficult to achieve in extensive documents. To ensure that chapters, goals, and objectives are indeed consistent with one another and the true intent of the plan, the Comprehensive Land Use Plan will be reviewed annually prior to the December Land Management Committee meeting. If any changes need to be made to the plan to ensure consistency, the plan will be amended at the December meeting using the plan amendment process listed below.

Plan Adoption

Plan adoption, is in accordance with State of Wisconsin Statute 66.1001(4). The adoption process includes enacting an ordinance of plan adoption, supported by the majority vote of the County Board and requiring at least one public hearing at which the proposed ordinance is discussed. The State of Wisconsin Statute 66.1001(4) requires the plan to be updated once in every 10-year period after adoption.

Plan Amendment Process

The Department of Land Management, under the direction of the Land Management Committee will oversee the plan amendment and update process. When the plan is in need of an update or amendment, the Land Management Committee shall direct the Land Management Committee to commence work on revising the plan. The Land Management Department may also inform the committee of any deadlines or amendments that are necessary. At a minimum, the plan should be implemented and updated according to Table 9.1 “Plan Update Calendar 2026-2036.”

The Department of Land Management shall first assemble a technical committee of any county employees and/or outside agencies (USDA, UW-Extension, etc.) who have expertise in the elements contained in the plan. This technical committee shall be responsible for writing a draft of the plan update/ amendment. It is highly recommended that a county wide land use survey be made available to the public to obtain input as was done in 2024.

Table 9.1 Plan Update Calander

Plan Update Calander 2026-2036	
2026-	Plan adoption. Begin work to achieve goals set in update.
Annually	Zoning Ordinance updates, review Comp Plan. County board members should attend Buffalo County Unit Towns Association meeting.
2031	Land Mgt. employee attends towns association meeting to give updates on goals and ordinance changes over past 5 years. Expedite update process if towns wish.
2034	Conduct community survey. Have towns association get word out and begin search for steering committee members. Assemble a technical committee to begin plan writing.
2035	Meet monthly with technical committee members. Complete a draft of the plan update. Assemble the steering committee.
2036	Finalize goals and objectives with the steering committee. Adoption of plan update. A 30-day notice of public hearing is required prior to taking action at a Land Management Committee Meeting.

In an effort to develop a greater sense of intergovernmental communication, it is recommended that County Board Supervisors meet annually with the town boards of the communities in their respective district. County board members are also encouraged to attend the annual Wisconsin Towns Association meeting for the Buffalo County Unit. It is at this meeting that a steering committee should be assembled prior to a plan update. To bolster participation, *two chairs of the WTA are required to be members of the steering committee.*

At the meeting town representatives would select one representative for each of their five regions so that all areas of the county would be covered (See Table 9.1 Steering Committee Districts). In addition, the cities and villages would be asked to select two representatives

to serve on the Steering Committee. The Steering committee shall then be asked to review the most current version of the comprehensive land use plan draft. It would be during this review process that the Steering Committee is given the opportunity to meet with county management and supporting agencies (DNR, USDA, and NRCS) to discuss current and future development plans and answer any questions the committee may have. Following these meetings, the steering committee is tasked with providing updates and recommendations, particularly of goals and objectives, to the Technical Committee (Department of Land Management) who will then incorporate the changes into the plan draft.

Table 9.2 Steering Committee Districts

Region Name	Municipalities Represented
Northeast	Town of Mondovi, Naples, Gilmanton, Dover
Northwest	Town of Maxville, Canton, Nelson, Modena
West Central	Town of Alma, Belvidere, Lincoln
South East	Town of Montana, Glencoe, Waumandee
South	Town of Buffalo , Cross, Milton
City and Villages would select two representatives	

A plan update requires a public notice that must be published at least 30 days prior to a public hearing. Upon holding a public hearing and review of the plan by the Land Management Committee, recommended amendments/ updates to the plan shall be forwarded to the County Board. The County Board should then formally act on the recommended amendment(s) based on public input, recommendations from the Land Management Department, and Land Management Committee recommendations. If agreed upon by the County Board, the update is then adopted by enacting an ordinance of plan amendment, supported by the majority vote of the County Board.

Closing Remarks

In order to meet the goals and objectives laid out in this plan, portions of other planning elements may overlap. As the county implements this plan, it should assess the impact of each implementation effort against the rest of the plan.

As with all public information derived from various sources, this plan may contain errors or faults. Therefore, Buffalo County does not provide any warranty, expressed or implied, as to the accuracy of this plan. The recipient is encouraged to make an independent investigation or verification of any data or claims. If an error is found, it is requested that the Buffalo County Dept of Land Management be advised so that the information may be examined and corrected. Please refer to the disclaimer on page 64 as well.

Appendix

Chapter 1

Table A1.1 Population Projections for Buffalo County Municipalities

Municipality	1960	2000	2010	2020	2030 Project.	2040 Project.	2050 Project.	% Change (‘20-‘50)
Towns				7198			5768	-19.9
Alma	384	377	297	254	227	200	172	-32.3
Belvidere	456	442	396	403	341	280	220	-45.4
Buffalo	737	667	705	746	713	674	629	-15.7
Canton	479	304	305	245	214	183	152	-38.0
Cross	395	366	377	368	350	330	306	-16.8
Dover	491	484	486	515	509	497	479	-7.0
Gilmanton	617	470	426	425	400	372	341	-19.8
Glencoe	528	478	485	402	359	316	271	-32.6
Lincoln	401	187	162	167	159	150	139	-16.8
Maxville	493	325	309	321	308	293	275	-14.3
Milton	271	517	534	541	517	489	456	-15.7
Modena	555	318	354	313	274	235	196	-37.4
Mondovi	511	449	469	451	420	388	352	-22.0
Montana	445	306	284	268	242	216	188	-29.9
Naples	584	584	691	697	676	649	614	-11.9
Nelson	1,005	586	571	574	560	541	515	-10.3
Waumandee	649	515	472	508	498	483	463	-8.9
Villages				745			517	-30.6
Cochrane	455	435	450	423	384	343	301	-28.8
Nelson	Na	395	374	322	287	252	216	-32.9
Cities				5374			4390	-18.3
Alma	1,008	942	781	716	654	590	523	-27.0
Buffalo	484	1,040	1,023	1,007	950	887	816	-19.0
Fountain City	934	983	859	806	737	666	591	-26.7
Mondovi	2,320	2,634	2,777	2,845	2,741	2,611	2,460	-13.5
Total	14,202	13,804	13,587	13,317	12,520	11,645	10,675	-19.8

US Dept. of Commerce-Bureau of the Census with WI Dept. of Administration projections. Projected % change applied to 2020 census data.

Table A1.2 County Racial/Ethnic Populations

Race	Buffalo County		Wisconsin	
	Population	%	Population	%
White	12,651	95.0	4,737,545	80.4
Hispanic*	327	2.5	447,290	7.6
Black or African American	43	0.3	376,256	6.4
Asian	23	0.2	175,702	3.0
Native American and/ or Alaska Native	41	0.3	60,428	1.0
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	12	0.1	2,199	0.0
Identified by two or more	400	3.0	359,354	6.1
Other	147	1.1	182,054	3.1
Total	13,587		5,686,986	

*An ethnicity, counted as a component of one or more races.
US Census Bureau, 2020

Table A1.3 County Labor Force Overview

Total population 16 years and over		11,048
Classification	# Employed	%
In Labor Force	6,968	63.1%
Civilian Labor Force – Employed	6,780	97.3%
Civilian Labor Force – Unemployed	180	2.6%
Armed Forces	8	0.1%
Not in Labor Force	4,080	36.9% of total

Table A1.4 Industries Served by Buffalo County Residents Over the Age of 16

Rank	Industry	% Employed
1	Educational services, health care and social assistance	22.2%
2	Manufacturing	19.8%
3	Retail Trade	9.9%
4	Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, and mining	9.5%
5	Construction	7.8%
6	Transportation and warehousing and utilities	7.6%
7	Professional, scientific and management and administrative and waste management services	5.1%
8	Arts, entertainment, and recreation and accommodation and food services	4.6%
9	Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	3.9%
10	Public administration	3.3%

U.S. Census Bureau- 2023 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates (DP03)

Chapter 2

Table A2.1 Comparison of Population Density

	Population Density	Population Total	Population Density	Population Total
	2010		2020	
Wisconsin	105.0	5,726,398	108.8	5,893,718
Buffalo County	19.9	13,587	19.7	13,317
Jackson County	20.7	20,449	21.4	21,145
Pepin County	32.2	7,469	31.5	7,318
Trempealeau Co.	39.3	28,816	42.0	30,760
Eau Claire County	154.8	98,736	165.7	105,710
Pierce County	71.5	41,019	73.5	42,212
Wabasha Co., MN	41.4	21,664	40.9	21,387
Winona County, MN	82.2	51,461	79.3	49,671

2000 US Census Bureau

Table A2.2 Monthly Housing Costs as a Percentage of Household Income

	Owner		Rental	
Household Income	Buffalo County	Wisconsin	Buffalo County	Wisconsin
Less than \$20,000	8.4%	4.9%	25.4%	17.0%
Less than 20 percent	0.2%	0.2%	0%	0.2%
20 – 29 percent	0.7%	0.3%	7.9%	1.5%
30 percent or more	7.5%	4.4%	17.5%	15.3%
\$20,000 to \$34,999	8.9%	7.5%	12.2%	16.8%
Less than 20 percent	1.6%	1.4%	1.0%	0.8%
20 – 29 percent	2.3%	1.9%	2.0%	2.3%
30 percent or more	4.9%	4.1%	9.2%	13.7%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	11.4%	8.6%	15.2%	15.2%
Less than 20 percent	4.6%	3.2%	4.5%	1.6%
20 – 29 percent	2.0%	2.2%	5.0%	6.1%
30 percent or more	4.8%	3.3%	5.7%	7.4%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	18.2%	16.9%	19.4%	19.0%
Less than 20 percent	9.0%	8.5%	11.3%	7.0%
20 – 29 percent	4.8%	4.7%	7.5%	8.7%
30 percent or more	4.4%	3.8%	0.7%	3.3%
\$75,000 or more	52.8%	61.4%	14.3%	26.1%
Less than 20 percent	39.8%	47.9%	13.1%	20.4%
20 – 29 percent	10.6%	10.8%	1.1%	5.0%
30 percent or more	2.4%	2.7%	0.1%	0.7%
Zero or negative income	0.4%	0.6%	0%	1.9%

Table A2.3 Total Housing Units by Year and Municipality

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
T. of Alma	137	157	157	171	166
T. of Belvidere	182	218	222	219	223
T. of Buffalo	277	263	277	316	343
T. of Canton	115	109	112	126	108
T. of Cross	118	118	141	165	166
T. of Dover	158	147	156	199	196
T. of Gilmanton	176	173	180	190	192
T. of Glencoe	175	171	180	208	187
T. of Lincoln	109	106	106	123	98
T. of Maxville	125	120	123	152	143
T. of Milton	173	181	227	253	261
T. of Modena	154	148	155	161	152
T. of Mondovi	166	183	165	200	210
T. of Montana	107	113	116	122	114
T. of Naples	182	190	231	278	266
T. of Nelson	263	237	265	291	286
T. of Waumandee	193	193	198	217	215
C. of Alma	438	414	495	488	479
C. of Buffalo City	425	447	492	577	555
C. of Fountain City	389	410	470	467	442
C. of Mondovi	1,031	1,082	1,232	1,303	1,289
V. of Cochrane	209	216	197	234	222
V. of Nelson	176	190	201	204	193
Buffalo County	5,478	5,586	6,098	6,664	6,506

US Census Bureau| 2020 Decennial Census| H1

Table A2.4 Age of Housing Units- 2023

Year Structure Built	Estimate	Percent
Built 2020 or later	20	0.3
Built 2010 to 2019	291	4.4
Built 2000 to 2009	794	12.1
Built 1990-1999	697	10.6
Built 1980-1989	494	7.5
Built 1970-1979	979	15.0
Built 1960-1969	548	8.4
Built 1950-1959	542	8.3
Built 1940-1949	467	7.1
Built 1939 or earlier	1,714	26.2

US Census Bureau| 2023 5 Year Community Survey| DP04

Table A2.5 Housing Permits Issued 2019-2023

	New Dwellings	Replacement Dwellings	Trailer Homes	Recreational Dwelling	Change of Use to Dwelling
2019					
Number of Permits	26	2	3	5	0
Median Value	186,900	205,400	48,700	43,350	—
Highest Value	713,000	224,000	132,800	90,800	—
Lowest Value	23,400	186,800	26,800	31,900	—
2020					
Number of Permits	14	4	0	1	2
Median Value	188,950	275,000	—	8,900	129,550
Highest Value	516,300	277,200	—	8,900	152,100
Lowest Value	13,400	168,400	—	8,900	107,000
2021					
Number of Permits	18	2	2	2	0
Median Value	181,300	237,400	49,000	19,650	—
Highest Value	344,000	314,400	52,100	28,000	—
Lowest Value	5,900	160,400	45,900	11,300	—
2022					
Number of Permits	23	4	1	6	1
Median Value	287,900	252,800	28,000	20,900	119,800
Highest Value	783,000	411,100	28,000	60,608	119,800
Lowest Value	42,200	153,600	28,000	4,400	119,800
2023					
Number of Permits	17	4	4	1	0
Median Value	246,600	167,200	51,700	8,600	—
Highest Value	569,700	458,200	54,700	8,600	—
Lowest Value	13,400	140,700	47,500	8,600	—

Buffalo County Department of Land Management Data- GCS Permit Tracking, 2025

Chapter 3

Table A3.1 State/County/Town Certified Mileage

Municipality Name	Gross Miles	State Miles	% of System	County Miles	% of System	Municipal Miles	% of System	State Jurisdiction by			County Jurisdiction by			Municipal Jurisdiction		
								Arterial	Collector	Local	Arterial	Collector	Local	Arterial	Collector	Local
T. Alma	47.18	8.45	18%	20.53	44%	18.20	39%	8.48				14.53	6.00			18.20
T. Belvidere	51.78	6.88	13%	14.11	27%	30.79	59%	6.88				14.11			2.43	28.36
T. Buffalo	48.78	7.52	15%	13.38	27%	27.88	57%	7.52				13.38				27.88
T. Canton	55.16	0.42	1%	25.31	46%	29.43	53%	0.42				17.04	8.27			29.43
T. Cross	53.55	8.81	16%	9.89	18%	34.85	65%		8.81			6.66	3.23			34.85
T. Dover	62.71	7.02	11%	18.15	29%	37.54	60%		7.02			15.53	2.62		2.05	35.49
T. Gilmanston	50.76	14.68	29%	13.52	27%	22.56	44%	5.38	9.3			8.79	4.73		0.43	22.13
T. Glencoe	68.34	6.80	10%	12.76	19%	48.78	71%		6.8			12.76			2.11	46.67
T. Lincoln	39.78	11.26	28%	16.47	41%	12.05	30%		11.26			9.85	6.62			12.05
T. Maxville	53.27	6.26	12%	25.36	48%	21.65	41%	6.26				5.25	20.11			21.65
T. Milton	37.49	7.47	20%	3.84	10%	26.18	70%	5.5	1.97				3.84		1.03	25.15
T. Modena	52.52	2.88	5%	26.64	51%	23.00	44%	2.88				19.00	7.64			23.00
T. Mondovi	51.10	9.68	19%	15.51	30%	25.91	51%	8.21	1.47			8.59	6.92			25.91
T. Montana	60.08	0.00	0%	24.03	40%	36.05	60%					18.11	5.92		6.00	30.05
T. Naples	61.77	7.56	12%	18.71	30%	35.50	57%	7.56				13.02	5.69			35.50
T. Nelson	86.35	13.75	16%	36.85	43%	35.75	41%	13.75				14.34	22.51			35.75
T. Waumandee	60.85	7.12	12%	11.90	20%	41.83	69%		7.12			11.90				41.83
V. Cochrane	5.79	0.62	11%	0.79	14%	4.38	76%	0.62				0.79			0.76	3.62
V. Nelson	4.51	2.13	47%	0.07	2%	2.31	51%	2.13				0.07				2.31
C. Alma	23.17	8.28	36%	3.49	15%	11.40	49%	8.28				1.71	1.78		0.63	10.77
C. Buffalo City	21.62	0.10	0%	3.32	15%	18.20	84%	0.1				3.32			0.75	17.45
C. Fountain City	15.94	6.06	38%	1.37	9%	8.51	53%	4.52	1.54			1.11	0.26			8.51
C. Mondovi	25.08	4.10	16%	1.85	7%	19.13	76%	4.1				1.85			0.70	18.43
Total Miles	1037.58	147.85		317.85		571.88		92.59	55.29	0.00	0.00	211.71	106.14	0.00	16.89	554.99

	State	County	Municipal
Target Goals as Percentage of System (per DOT Criteria)	6-12%	18-24%	68-72%
Current Percentage	14.2%	30.6%	55.1%

Chapter 4

Table A4.1 CMAR GPA scale

Score	Grade	Grade Point	Grade Meaning	Response Range
100-91	A	4.0	Good	Voluntary
90-81	B	3.0	Satisfactory	Voluntary
80-71	C	2.0	Marginal	Recommendation
70-61	D	1.0	Poor	Action
<61	F	0.0	Fail	Action

Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 208.05

Table A4.2 County Facilities

Facility Name	Year of Original Structure	Additions and Renovations
Alma Highway shop	1969	Completion of additional storage building- 2015 Renovation of conference room-2015
Urne Highway shop	1973	-----
Mondovi Highway shop	1930	Completion of shop Renovation and addition- 2015
Waumandee Highway Shop	1978	-----
Fountain City Highway Shop	1984	Completion of storage building-2024
Buffalo County Court House	1962	Southern addition (including jail)- 1988

Chapter 5

Table A5.1 Change in Farm Size From 1910 to 2022

Year	No. of Farms*	Average Size of Farms (ac)	Land in Farms (ac)
1910	2,161	189	408,081
1920	2,089	200	418,261
1925	2,076	196	406,520
1930	2,042	200	407,919
1935	2,144	193	413,529
1940	2,045	204	418,228
1945	2,002	210	421,057
1950	1,828	222	405,124
1954	1,682	235	395,848
1959	1,524	253	385,678
1964	1,436	268	384,882
1969	1,264	286	362,061
1974	1,180	310	365,770
1978	1,147	321	367,839
1982	1,105	331	365,259
1987	1,036	340	352,360
1992	982	329	323,482
1997	1,000	309	308,581
2002	1,128	280	316,132
2007	1,229	250	307,035
2012	1,061	288	305,302
2017	966	303	293,130
2022	896	346	309,976

* A farm is defined by the USDA as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the year. This includes government payments for programs such as the USDA's conservation reserve.

Table A5.2 Trout Streams in Buffalo County

Local Waterbody Name	Miles of Trout Stream	Trout Class	Additional Counties
Armour Creek	3.79	CLASS II	
Bear Creek	2.5	CLASS III	Pepin
Center Creek	4.35	CLASS II	
Cooke Valley Creek	2.8	CLASS III	
Danuser Creek	7.07	CLASS II	
Deer Creek	4	CLASS II	
Doelle Creek	5.07	CLASS III	
Eagle Creek	5.6	CLASS II	
Eagle Creek	8.47	CLASS II	
Elk Creek	3.32	CLASS II	
Elk Creek	13.19	CLASS II	Trempealeau
Harvey Creek	2.36	CLASS III	
Harvey Creek	1.45	CLASS III	
Kilness Creek	4.05	CLASS III	
Little Bear Creek	8.82	CLASS II	
Little Waumandee Creek	11	CLASS II	
Little Waumandee Creek	10.11	CLASS II	
North Branch Little Bear Creek	5.4	CLASS II	
North Branch Little Bear Creek	1.39	CLASS II	
Hoyts Creek	0.72	CLASS III	
Hoyts Creek	8.44	CLASS III	Eau Claire
Rossmann Creek	3.66	CLASS II	
Elk Creek, South Fork	5.06	CLASS III	
Sport Valley Creek	3.44	CLASS III	Trempealeau
Spring Creek	2.88	CLASS II	
Tamarack Creek	3.05	CLASS II	
Tamarack Creek	1.87	CLASS II	
Tamarack Creek	3.83	CLASS II	
Traverse Valley Creek	2.86	CLASS II	Trempealeau
Trout Creek	8.48	CLASS II	
Botana Valley Creek	6.16	CLASS II	
Newton Valley Creek (Shoe Creek)	4.27	CLASS II	Pepin
Owen Valley Ck. (31-10) Trib. To North Branch Of Little Bear	2.16	CLASS III	
Swinns Valley Creek	8.49	CLASS II	
Unnamed Cr T24n R12w S5 (5-9)	3.27	CLASS II	
Weisenbeck Valley Creek T23n R13w S2 (2-3)	5.15	CLASS II	
Yeager Valley Creek	4.43	CLASS II	
Waumandee Creek	6.92?	CLASS II	

Table A5.3 Public Parks in Buffalo County

Name	Type	Location	Attractions & Facilities
Merrick	State Park	Milton	Boating, fishing, picnic areas, pet-friendly area, reservable shelters, wooden river stairway, wildlife viewing.
Big Swamp Wildlife Area	State Wildlife Area	Canton	Hunting (rabbit, squirrel, deer), trapping, hiking, bird watching, tamarack swamp, and upland hardwoods.
Nelson-Trevino Bottoms	Wildlife Area / State Natural Area	Nelson	Wilderness hiking (short trail), large wildlife populations, rare species, undisturbed floodplain forest, and sloughs.
Wandering Rock	State Natural Area	Nelson	Wilderness hiking, limestone cliffs, bird watching, connection to Thrive! Park
Tiffany Wildlife Area	State	Nelson/Maxville	Hunting, trapping, hiking/skiing (unmarked), canoeing, rafting, primitive camping (permit only), berry picking, bird watching.
Trempealeau River Meadow	State Natural Area	Cross	Wetland/sedge meadow viewing, bird watching (grassland species), deep-water marshes, and nature photography.
Whitman Dam Wildlife Area	State	Near Lock and Dam #5	Hunting (small game, deer, waterfowl), trapping, hiking, wildlife viewing, and bird watching.
Buena Vista Park	Municipal	Alma	Scenic overlooks of the Mississippi River and surrounding forests.
Buffalo City Park	Municipal	Buffalo City	Tennis and volleyball courts, ice skating, picnic shelters, playgrounds, and open grass areas.
Foelsch Riverside Park	Municipal	Buffalo City	10-acre woodland with meandering walking trails for wildlife viewing.
Goose Lake Memorial Park	Municipal	Cochrane	Heated pool, picnic areas, and Canadian Geese migration viewing.
Harmonia Park	Municipal	Waumandee	Children's recreational area and picnic area.
Memorial Park	Municipal	Mondovi	Joseph Peterson Arboretum, shelters, volleyball, and baseball/softball fields. (Pool/tennis nearby at school).
Mirror Lake	Municipal	Mondovi	Playground equipment, picnic areas, shelters, and a public boat landing.
Riecks Lake Park	Municipal	Alma	Tundra Swan migration staging area, confluence of Buffalo & Mississippi Rivers, and scenic sunrises.
Sharps Point Park	Municipal	Mondovi	Veteran's Memorial and reservable shelters.
Thrive Park	Municipal	Nelson	25-acre park with dog friendly bluff top trails offering panoramic views of the Mississippi
Tourist Park	Municipal	Mondovi	Campsites (reservable), public shelters, historic log cabin, and a museum.
Veteran's Memorial Park	Municipal	Buffalo City	Shelters, baseball/softball fields, and a concession stand.

Table A5.4 Endangered, Threatened and Species of Concern in Buffalo County

Common Name	Scientific Name	Group	Federal Status
State Endangered Species			
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	Bird	Species of Concern
Blanchard's Cricket Frog	<i>Acris blanchardi</i>	Frog	-
Bluntnose Darter	<i>Etheostoma chlorosoma</i>	Fish	-
Butterfly	<i>Ellipsaria lineolata</i>	Mussel	-
Crystal Darter	<i>Crystallaria asprella</i>	Fish	Species of Concern
Eastern Massasauga	<i>Sistrurus catenatus</i>	Snake	Listed Threatened
Ebonyshell	<i>Fusconaia ebena</i>	Mussel	-
Elephant Ear	<i>Elliptio crassidens</i>	Mussel	-
Forster's Tern	<i>Sterna forsteri</i>	Bird	-
Goldeye	<i>Hiodon alosoides</i>	Fish	-
Higgins Eye	<i>Lampsilis higginsii</i>	Mussel	Listed Endangered
Pallid Shiner	<i>Hybopsis amnis</i>	Fish	-
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Bird	-
Sheepnose	<i>Plethobasus cyphus</i>	Mussel	Listed Endangered
Skipjack Herring	<i>Alosa chrysochloris</i>	Fish	-
Small Skullcap	<i>Scutellaria parvula</i> var. <i>parvula</i>	Plant	-
Spectaclecase	<i>Cumberlandia monodonta</i>	Mussel	Listed Endangered
State Threatened Species			
Bell's Vireo	<i>Vireo bellii</i>	Bird	-
Big Brown Bat*	<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	Mammal	-
Black Buffalo	<i>Ictiobus niger</i>	Fish	-
Blue Sucker	<i>Cycleptus elongatus</i>	Fish	-
Brittle Prickly-pear	<i>Opuntia fragilis</i>	Plant	-
Buckhorn	<i>Tritogonia verrucosa</i>	Mussel	-
Cerulean Warbler*	<i>Setophaga cerulea</i>	Bird	Species of Concern
Fawnsfoot	<i>Truncilla donaciformis</i>	Mussel	-
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Bird	-
Henslow's Sparrow	<i>Centronyx henslowii</i>	Bird	Species of Concern
Hill's Thistle*	<i>Cirsium hillii</i>	Plant	Species of Concern
Kentucky Warbler	<i>Geothlypis formosa</i>	Bird	-
Little Brown Bat*	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Mammal	-
Monkeyface	<i>Theliderma metanevra</i>	Mussel	-
Paddlefish	<i>Polyodon spathula</i>	Fish	-
Pale Green Orchid	<i>Platanthera flava</i> var. <i>herbiola</i>	Plant	-
Red-shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	Bird	-
River Redhorse	<i>Moxostoma carinatum</i>	Fish	-
Rock Pocketbook	<i>Arcidens confragosus</i>	Mussel	-
Salamander Mussel	<i>Simpsonaias ambigua</i>	Mussel	Proposed Endangered
Shoal Chub	<i>Macrhybopsis hyostoma</i>	Fish	-
Tricolored Bat*	<i>Perimyotis subflavus</i>	Mammal	-
White Lady's-slipper	<i>Cypripedium candidum</i>	Plant	-
Wing Snaggletooth	<i>Gastrocopta procera</i>	Snail	-
Wood Turtle	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	Turtle	Species of Concern
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	Bird	-
State Species of Special Concern or Proposed Endangered			
Blanding's Turtle	<i>Emydoidea blandingii</i>	Turtle	Species of Concern
Rusty Patched Bumble Bee	<i>Bombus affinis</i>	Bee	Listed Endangered

*On Wisconsin's Sensitive Species List | WIDNR Data 2025

Figure A5.1 Overview of Major Soil Series in Buffalo County



Figure 3.—Soil associations and relief in Buffalo County.

1. Silty soils of the rolling limestone uplands and Steep stony and rocky land: Dubuque, Fayette, Steep stony and rocky land.
2. Loamy soils of the rolling to hilly sandstone uplands: Gale, Hixton.
3. Sandy soils of the rolling to hilly sandstone uplands: Boone, Hixton.
4. Sandy soils of stream terraces: Sparta, Plainfield.
5. Silty soils of stream terraces: Bertrand, Richwood.
6. Loamy terrace soils underlain by sand on stream terraces: Meridian, Tell.
7. Wet organic and mineral soils of bottom lands: Peat and Muck, Ettrick, Wallkill.
8. Soils of overflow bottom lands: Loamy alluvial lands, Marsh.

Figure A5.2 Landscape Cross Section and Soil Profiles of Major Soil Series in Buffalo County

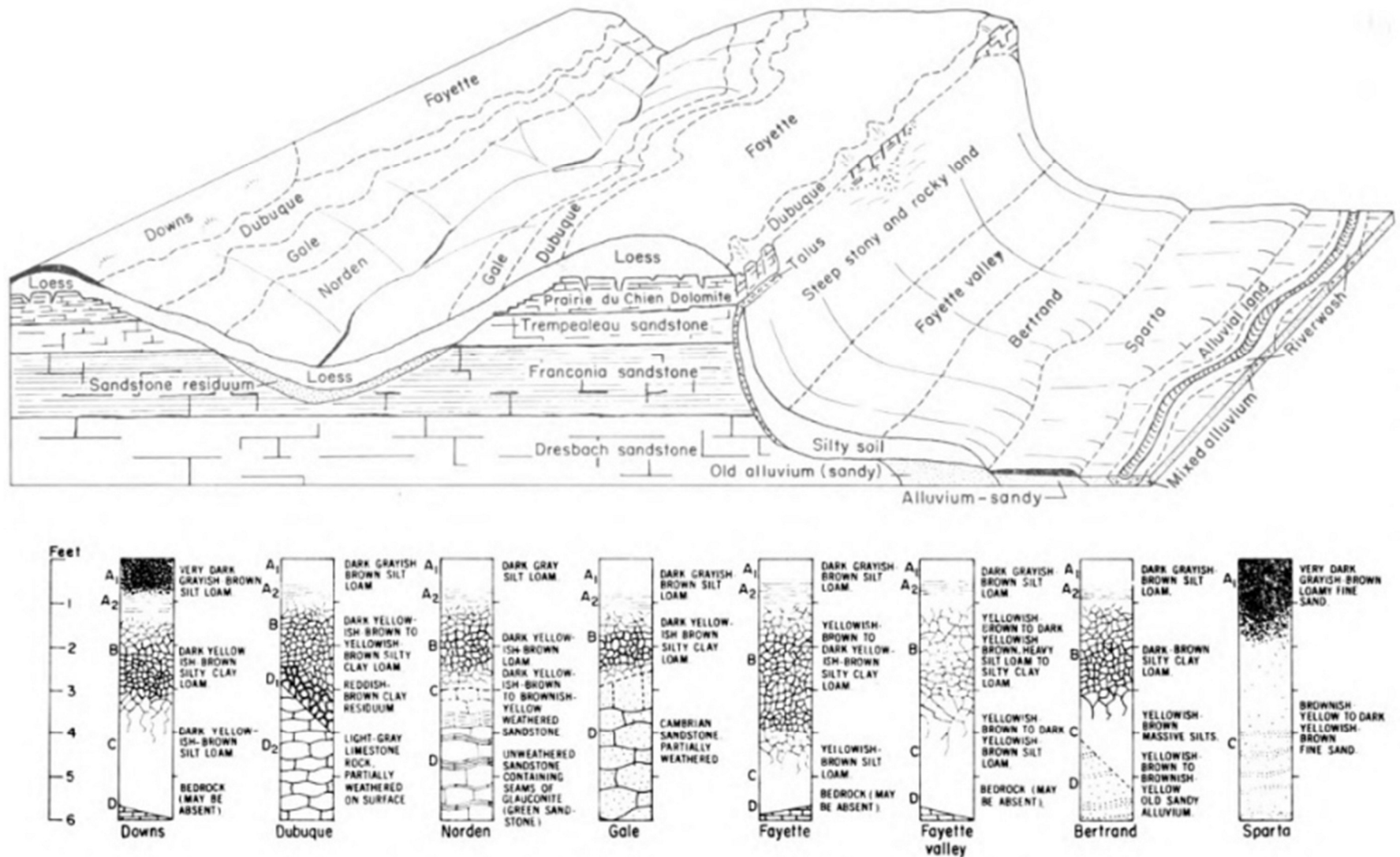


Figure 4.—Soil landscape of Buffalo County showing relationships among major soil series.

Chapter 8

A Land Use History of Buffalo County

Early History: Long before the founding of Buffalo County in 1854, the native inhabitants of the area took advantage of the region's many waterways and established villages where canoes could be utilized. In 1680, an Eastern Dakota village of about 1,000 people was reported on the banks of the Mississippi, hunting bison up the Buffalo River.

It was not until the age of steamboats that the first substantial number of Europeans arrived in the area. Steamboats making the trek up the Mississippi River in the 1840s were hungry for fuel, sometimes burning one cord of wood per hour. Fuelwood was logged from the bluffs and brought to wood yards where steamboats were serviced. Two of these Mississippi wood yards eventually became Fountain City and Alma. Perhaps, one could argue that fuel production and transportation were Buffalo County's first industries.

Early Transportation: Over time steamer traffic increased, bringing with it additional trade and residents to these developing settlements, eventually leading to the establishment of European-American agriculture in what would become the Town of Cross in 1850. Despite being the primary land use in Buffalo County today, the growth of production agriculture was much slower than the development of other industries in the county. The natural terrain of the county made road building slow and tedious, constraining farms producing market-bound agricultural products to the initial settlements near the river and leaving much of the interior of the county in its original state of mesic prairie/ oak savanna for another quarter of a century. With time roads improved and technologies changed, opening nodes of trade in Arcadia and Mondovi when railroad lines were constructed in these communities. This led to a boom in commodity agriculture in the 1860s and 1870s, forever changing the physical, economic, and cultural landscape of Buffalo County.

The early days of the automobile brought some change to Buffalo County as well. Milk hauling became easier, further concentrating community development near the railroad and the Mississippi River, forcing many local creameries in the interior of the county to close. Nonmetallic mining operations also proliferated with the expansion of paved roadways. But the condition of roads continued to limit travel into the 1930s when sections of state highway in the county were still earthen road. It wasn't until after World War II that Buffalo County reached its current epoch in transportation and land use.

Modern Transportation: The advent of the interstate highway greatly shifted commercial development away from the communities within Buffalo County. Rapid travel further reduced trade nodes within the region, concentrating both river and railway access outside of Buffalo County. This significantly reduced community development throughout the county. However, the opening of interstate highways also brought the rural life of Buffalo County much closer to the commuter and to the recreationist, something that would stir the residents of Buffalo County to grapple for formal land use control in the 1960s.

Development of Zoning in Buffalo County: According to an article in the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation (1966), “undesirable land use changes alarmed the citizens of Buffalo County.” A rapidly changing landscape prompted residents to ask the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors for help in establishing a zoning ordinance to avoid growing land use problems such as: “[...] increased nonfarm rural housing with septic tank problems, taverns located near schools and residences, fishing and hunting cabins constructed on floodplains, and other objectional changes.”

Several UW extension agents and resource technicians assisted with the development of the ordinance by identifying existing land uses and considering future land uses, establishing six primary land use districts, each with three supplementary overlay district classifications: steep soils, wet soils, and suitable soils. The overlay districts were created using soil survey maps and a list of identifying individual soil map units was created for each of the three overlay districts. These overlay districts provided additional controls based on the unique characteristics of each soil map unit that might cause problems for a particular land use.

The 1965 Buffalo County Zoning Ordinance was unique at the time because it not only considered the compatibility of neighboring land uses, but it also considered the compatibility of land uses with the specific soil type located on a property. This resulted in a complex code that relied heavily upon an accurate USDA soil survey and an active Board of Adjustment. The ordinance was far from perfect, and this was known by its creators, but it came at a crucial time before the existence of many state and federal environmental regulations, thus filling a void for land use controls when few model ordinances existed.

Table A8.1 Real Estate Valuation Summary

Town	Residential	Commercial	Manufacturing	Agricultural	Undeveloped Land	Agricultural Forest	Productive Forest Lands	*Other	Total
Alma	\$15,016,600	\$839,000	\$0	\$1,560,100	\$948,550	\$7,388,100	\$4,879,600	\$12,590,400	\$43,222,350
Belvidere	\$35,093,700	\$2,457,600	\$0	\$1,734,100	\$560,200	\$6,730,400	\$6,945,600	\$13,800,200	\$67,321,800
Buffalo	\$59,458,200	\$3,507,100	\$112,100	\$846,425	\$1,331,400	\$8,716,400	\$6,597,500	\$12,062,800	\$92,631,925
Canton	\$11,736,300	\$31,200	\$59,200	\$2,078,550	\$1,007,400	\$6,157,200	\$1,357,550	\$10,514,600	\$32,942,000
Cross	\$26,780,200	\$889,400	\$0	\$2,047,200	\$1,623,350	\$8,564,500	\$5,021,800	\$12,302,400	\$57,228,850
Dover	\$18,718,100	\$403,900	\$134,600	\$1,678,518	\$1,720,500	\$4,270,800	\$2,040,300	\$7,513,700	\$36,480,418
Gilmanton	\$20,010,200	\$1,105,600	\$0	\$1,940,700	\$1,887,525	\$8,133,000	\$3,272,700	\$8,900,500	\$45,250,225
Glencoe	\$10,359,200	\$1,054,000	\$447,200	\$2,110,300	\$283,200	\$5,538,150	\$2,217,200	\$17,852,800	\$39,862,050
Lincoln	\$8,262,100	\$392,500	\$0	\$1,956,900	\$891,200	\$8,857,200	\$4,629,900	\$8,855,800	\$33,845,600
Maxville	\$12,160,400	\$516,900	\$880,900	\$2,095,200	\$183,000	\$11,728,000	\$4,903,400	\$12,415,000	\$44,882,800
Milton	\$61,991,400	\$4,377,000	\$532,400	\$966,800	\$1,253,800	\$4,045,600	\$2,379,400	\$7,495,800	\$83,042,200
Modena	\$23,188,000	\$1,298,400	\$0	\$2,233,050	\$1,606,900	\$9,442,400	\$4,313,500	\$7,828,400	\$49,910,650
Mondovi	\$33,395,700	\$1,882,300	\$619,900	\$3,042,750	\$1,100,500	\$5,515,900	\$3,587,200	\$9,336,500	\$58,480,750
Montana	\$11,384,100	\$74,200	\$0	\$2,394,700	\$710,600	\$8,914,600	\$2,692,700	\$14,805,900	\$40,976,800
Naples	\$38,521,200	\$881,400	\$0	\$2,393,900	\$2,302,450	\$4,572,300	\$1,550,700	\$16,759,950	\$66,981,900
Nelson	\$38,760,200	\$1,303,100	\$639,400	\$2,136,600	\$3,523,150	\$11,194,400	\$5,887,350	\$11,194,400	\$74,638,600
Waumandee	\$29,045,800	\$3,057,000	\$689,900	\$2,790,600	\$1,069,650	\$7,326,900	\$3,182,950	\$19,277,600	\$66,440,400
Total	\$453,881,400	\$24,070,600	\$4,115,600	\$34,006,393	\$22,003,375	\$127,095,850	\$65,459,350	\$203,506,750	\$934,139,318

Buffalo County Treasurer, 2024 Real Estate Valuation Summary (in thousands of dollars)

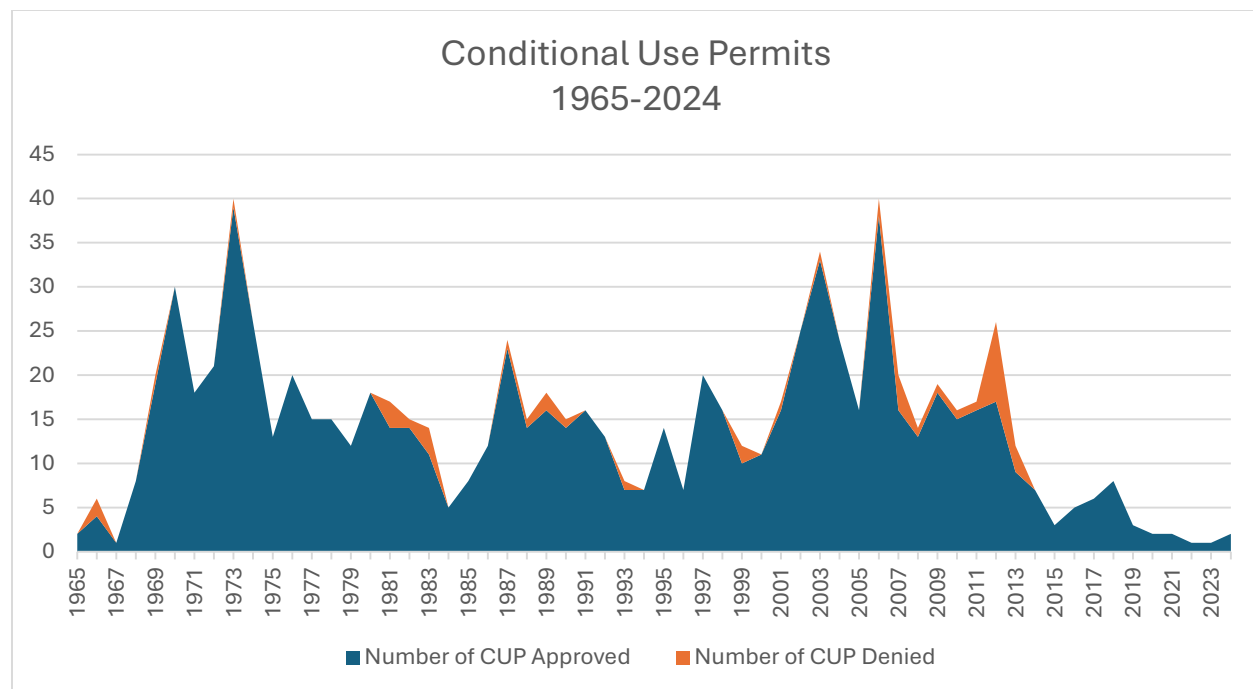
*Other is defined as the area in a parcel (improvements and land) not devoted primarily for agricultural use, such as house, barn, silo, road right-of-way and lawn around the house.

Table A8.2 Zoning Permits by Dwelling Type

	New Single Family Dwelling	Addition to Single-Family Dwelling	Replacement Single-Family Dwelling	Change of Use to Single- Family Dwelling	Mobile Home	Recreational Dwelling
2019						
Number of Permits	26	4	3	0	2	2
Mean Value	239,103	52,350	188,933	0.00	90,750	58,350
Highest Value	713,000	96,900	224,000	0.00	132,800	84,200
Lowest Value	31,900	2,000	156,000	0.00	48,700	32,500
2020						
Number of Permits	16	1	5	2	0	1
Mean Value	199,338	40,900	263,300	129,550	-	89,000
Highest Value	516,300	-	346,100	152,100	-	-
Lowest Value	13,400	-	168,400	107,000	-	-
2021						
Number of Permits	17	1	2	0	2	2
Mean Value	281,200	15,100	237,200	-	49,000	19,650
Highest Value	409,600	-	314,000	-	52,100	28,000
Lowest Value	5,900	-	160,400	-	45,900	11,300
2022						
Number of Permits	20	9	3	2	1	4
Mean Value	285,120	36,833	272,500	81,000	28,000	29,902
Highest Value	783,000	81,100	411,100	119,800	-	60,608
Lowest Value	11,300	11,400	153,600	42,200	-	12,400
2023						
Number of Permits	18	16	6	0	4	1
Mean Value	258,468	64,588	228,700	-	51,400	8,600
Highest Value	569,700	152,600	458,200	-	54,700	-
Lowest Value	134,000	9,000	88,900	-	47,500	-

Buffalo County Permit Tracking Database

Figure A8.1 Number of Conditional Use Permits Approved/ Denied Over Time



Permit Statistics Summary

Sanitary Permits

Average number of sanitary permits issued annually: 85

Average number of permits issued for replacement systems annually: 36

Average number of permits issued for new systems annually: 49

Zoning Permits

Average number of zoning permits issued annually since 1965: 107

Average number of zoning permits issued annually 1965-2017: 104

Average number of land use permits issued annually since 2018-2025: 130

Less than 0.5% of zoning/ land use permit applications had been voided, withdrawn or denied since 1965.

Board of Adjustment Permits

Average number of annual conditional use permit (CUPs) hearings since 1965: 14

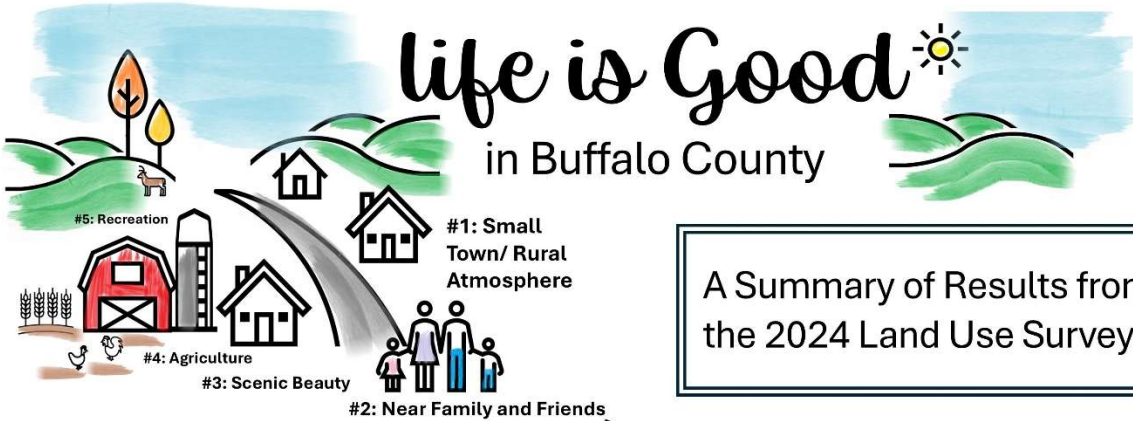
Average number of CUP hearings held annually 1965-2017: 16

Average number of CUP hearings held annually 2018-2025: 3

Average number of variance hearings held annually since 1965: 7

Average number of annual variance hearings 1965-2017: 8

Average number of annual variance hearings 2018-2025: 2



A Summary of Results from the 2024 Land Use Survey

The Top 5 Reasons People Live in Buffalo County

Nearly **9 in 10** respondents rated their **quality of life** as **good or excellent**



More than **70%** of respondents felt their **quality of life** would **stay the same or improve** in the next 10 years.

Background

Buffalo County is in the process of updating its Comprehensive Land Use Plan that was first adopted in 2013. Because this plan is used to administer the zoning and subdivision ordinances of Buffalo County, it has a real impact on the lives of its residents. While the plan was written with public participation, much has changed in the past decade.

Throughout the update process, the Buffalo County Department of Land Management is seeking input as it strives to draft a plan that best reflects the current and future needs of Buffalo County's residents.

Between April 1st and July 20th, 2024 more than 250 individuals completed the Buffalo County Land Use Survey. The information on this set of posters was compiled from the results of the survey and will be presented to the plan writing work group and Land Management Committee prior to the adoption process.

Resources

Respondents were asked to identify how important it is for **planning and zoning regulations** to do the following (ranked from most important to least as selected by respondents):

1. **Protect Groundwater Quality- Very Important**
2. **Protect Surface Water Quality- Very Important**
3. **Preserve Scenic Views- Very Important**
4. **Protect Wildlife Habitat- Very Important**
5. **Preserve Open Space - Very Important**
6. **Protect Wetlands- Very Important**
7. **Protect Air Quality- Important**
8. **Preserve Cultural/ Historic Sites- Important**
9. **Protect Native Prairie Land- Important**

The majority of respondents found *all* of these actions to be important!



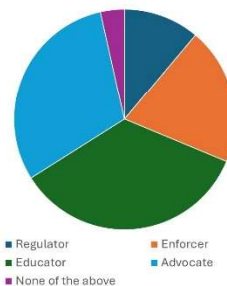
78%

of respondents had a private well

Nearly **25%** of respondents had their drinking water tested last year

Administration

Respondents were able to indicate what role(s) they believe Buffalo County should play in protecting and preserving the quality of life and shared natural resources of the county (results below).



Overwhelmingly, respondents chose Educator and Advocate- meaning that they'd like the county to provide educational materials to inform citizens of ordinances and regulations as well as pursue outside funding to match local funds to preserve natural areas and farmland.

About **40%** of respondents with a private well **treated their drinking water**. The most common form of treatment was a water softener, followed by in-refrigerator filters.

Satisfaction

Respondents were asked to rate the following **services in Buffalo County** as Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. They are listed below, ranked from highest average rating to lowest.

1. **Emergency Dispatch Services (911)- Good**
2. **Sheriff Services- Good**
3. **County Offices- Good**
4. **County Court Services- Good**
5. **Public Libraries- Good**
6. **Parks- Good**
7. **Public Schools- Good**
8. **Public Health- Good**
9. **Local Recycling Programs - Good**
10. **Aging/ Disability Services- Good**
11. **Road Maintenance- Fair**
12. **Senior Living/ Care Facilities- Fair**

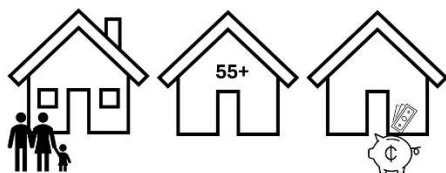


Life is Good in Buffalo County (Part II)

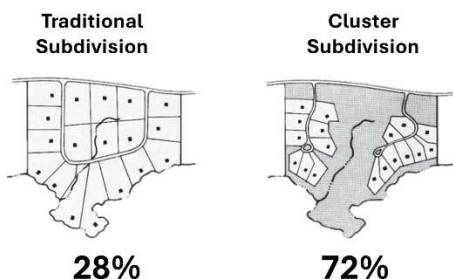
Neighborhoods and Housing

About **70%** of respondents said that the **appearance of residences and businesses** in their neighborhood was **important or very important** to them. Only 6% indicated that appearance was not at all important to them.

The majority of respondents **agreed** that Buffalo County needs **more single-family dwellings** as well as **senior and affordable housing**.



However, most respondents **disagreed** with the statement that additional housing units were needed when it came to mobile home parks, seasonal and recreational homes, freestanding mobile homes, housing subdivisions, condominiums, and duplexes.



Traditionally, rural subdivisions have been designed on large lots as in the diagram (above left). An alternative layout for rural housing is the “cluster” concept, which has smaller lots and permanently preserved open space as in the diagram (above right). **Respondents were asked which approach to rural subdivisions they prefer. A strong majority selected the cluster subdivision design.** However, it should be noted that most respondents did not agree with the statement that Buffalo County needed more housing subdivisions.

Agriculture

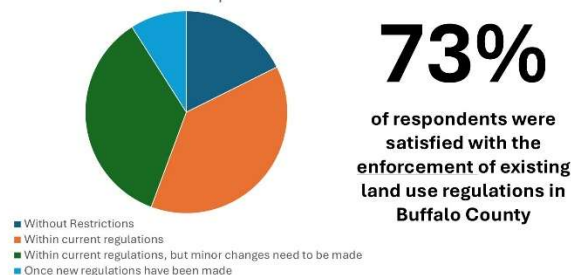
Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statements below. Their average level of agreement for each statement is as follows:

- “Productive ag land should be allowed to be used for non-farm uses.” -Disagree 👎
- “Too much farmland is being converted to non-farm uses.” -Agree 👍
- “Local ag production should be encouraged and marketed locally.” -Strongly Agree 👍👍
- “Conflicts between farms and neighbors (dust, noise, and odors) are common in Buffalo County.” -Disagree 👎

Regulations

Residents were asked to indicate how they believe landowners should be able to develop their property (pie chart below). Exactly one third of respondents believed that land use should be regulated under current/ existing ordinances. Slightly less (30%) thought that minor changes should be made to the existing regulations. The remainder of respondents either indicated that new regulations should be made or residents should be allowed to freely develop their land without any restrictions.

Landowners in Buffalo County should be allowed to develop their land...



Economic Development

Respondents **strongly agreed** that **Local Tax Dollars** should be used to **attract and retain** new & existing **jobs**.

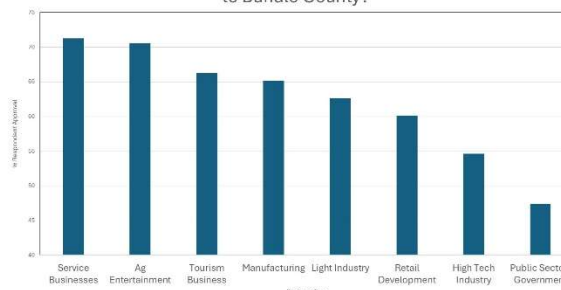
Respondents **agreed** that **businesses** should be located in designated areas such as business or industrial parks or downtown.



When asked about specific forms of renewable energy respondents, on average, agreed that **hydro-power** should be pursued as a form of **economic development** in Buffalo County. On average, respondents **disagreed** with statements indicating that **wind-energy** and **biofuels** should be pursued. The consensus on **solar-energy** development was **nearly evenly split between agreement and disagreement**.

Respondents were also asked to rank types of businesses by their importance to attract to Buffalo County. Service businesses, agricultural entertainment, and tourism businesses were the leaders.

What Types of Businesses are Most Important to Attract to Buffalo County?



life is Good in Buffalo County

(Part III)

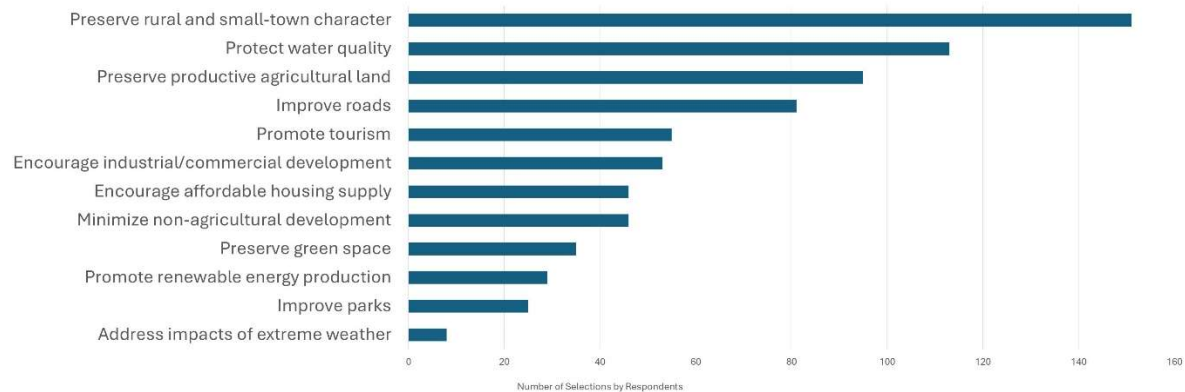
Weather

On average, respondents believed it was **important** for planning and land use regulations address the impacts of extreme and more frequent weather events such as flooding, drought, and storms.

However, as can be seen under the 'Priorities' heading, addressing the impacts of extreme weather was respondent's least concern when compared to other land use and planning items.

Priorities

Near the end of the survey, respondents were asked to select the THREE most important actions that they believe the county should pursue. **Preserving rural and small-town character** topped respondents' lists. The rest of the results can be seen on the bar graph below.



Summary of Results

The 2024 Buffalo County Land Use Survey captured a snapshot of opinions from adult residents and landowners across all towns and municipalities of the county. The majority of the participants lived in rural unincorporated areas served by a private well.

Most respondents were **satisfied** with their quality of life as well as many of services offered in Buffalo County. They also expressed the importance of **protecting all natural resources through education and grant writing services** provided by county offices.

As indicated time and time again in the survey, **the protection of the rural and small-town character of Buffalo County is of the utmost importance to respondents**- even, seemingly, at the expense of development. According to most respondents, **economic development should be focused on service industries and ag-tourism**.

Participants

Participants were asked to provide general information about their demographics following the survey. This information is compared with census data to see how representative the survey sample was of Buffalo County's residents and communities.

Males were slightly under-represented. 50.8% of Buffalo County is male.

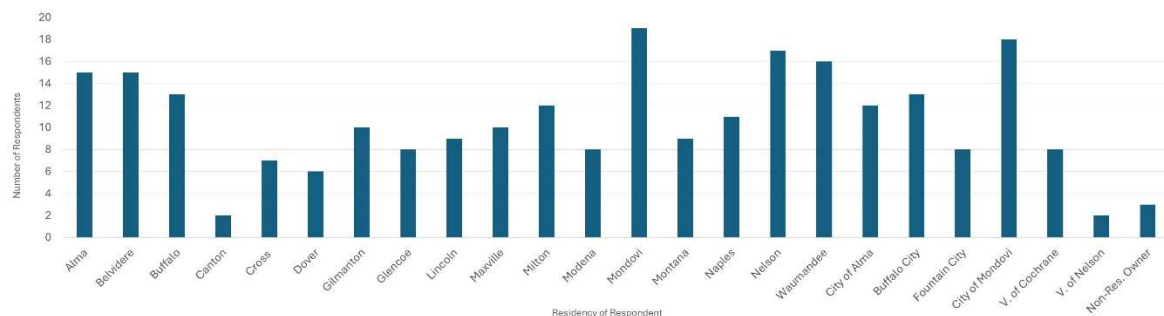
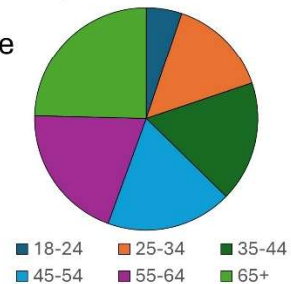
Those older than 65 years old were part of the most under-represented group of respondents. They represented 24.6% of respondents but are about 29.3% of the county's adult population.

252
Respondents
(≈1.8% of Buffalo County's Population)

48% Male 52% Female



Age of Respondents



If you could change one thing about Buffalo County, what would it be?

We read through each survey and then had a computer summarize all 138 responses.

Here's the result:

"Respondents discussed the challenges faced by Buffalo County, including the high prices of land, the conversion of homes to rental properties, and the high water costs in the city. They believe that small town-rural living should never change, and that communication is key to making this work for all.

The respondents also mentioned the need for more business to keep the younger generation around, as many homes are being converted to rental properties that end up in disrepair, dragging down property values. They also discuss the need to increase taxes on absentee landowners and the tax break programs that out-of-state landowners put their property in as soon as they buy it in Buffalo County.

Respondents also discussed the state's need to change the managed forest law to allow county school systems to receive tax dollars from the vast number of acres put into MFL for recreation purposes. They also discuss the sky-high prices of land, the precedence given to out-of-area hunting land then rented to local farmers, and the poor road conditions.

The respondents also discuss the increase in factory farms, which are causing devastation to the air and water quality. They argue that much of this is on the state, but the county can put ordinances in place to stop the expansion.

Lastly, the respondents highlighted the high propensity of out-of-state landowners who only use the land for deer hunting and enroll their land in tax-free programs, further hurting Buffalo County's economy. This lack of management and the high price of land make it difficult for regular people to own land or farmers to own the land on which the farms are located.

In conclusion, respondents to the survey question emphasize the importance of addressing these issues and working with local government to ensure a better quality of life for the community."

of a property conveys no special status, rights or benefits to the owners. The Historical Society lists 461 AHI records for Buffalo County. Contact the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation for more information about the inventory.

The Archaeological Site Inventory (ASI)- A collection of archaeological sites, mounds, unmarked cemeteries, marked cemeteries, and cultural sites throughout Wisconsin. Similar to the AHI, the ASI is not a comprehensive or complete list; it only includes sites reported to the Historical Society. The Historical Society estimates that less than 1% of the archaeological sites in the state have been identified. Wisconsin law protects Native American burial mounds, unmarked burials, and all marked and unmarked cemeteries from intentional disturbance. The Historical Society lists over 150 ASI records for Buffalo County. Contact the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation for more information about the inventory.

The National Register of Historic Places- is the official national list of historic properties in America worthy of preservation, maintained by the National Park Service. The State Register is Wisconsin's official listing of state properties determined to be significant to Wisconsin's heritage and is maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society Division of Historic Preservation. Both listings include sites, buildings, structures, objects, and districts that are significant in national, state, or local history. There are currently 13 registered places within Buffalo County.



Figure 5.8 The Fugina House in Fountain City is on the National Register of Historic Places for its Prairie School style Architecture (Jonathunder, 2014)

The establishment of a historical preservation ordinance and commission- is one of the most proactive methods a community can take to preserve cultural resources. A historical preservation ordinance typically contains criteria for the designation of historic structures, districts, or places, and procedures for the nomination process. The ordinance further regulates the construction, alteration and demolition of a designated historic site or structure. A community with a historic preservation ordinance may apply for Certified Local Government (CLG) status, with the Wisconsin State Historical Society. Once a community is certified, they become eligible for:

- Matching sub-grants from the federal Historic Preservation Fund,
- Use of Wisconsin Historic Building Code,
- Reviewing National Register of Historic Places nominations allocated to the state.

While Alma and Fountain City both have historic preservation ordinances on their books, no other local government in Buffalo County (including the County itself) has such an ordinance. There are no Certified Local Governments in Buffalo County.

Disclaimer: Consistency Between Farmland Preservation and Comprehensive Land Use Plans

The Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan shall be considered part of the Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and therefore the documents must be internally consistent. Though they may be adopted separately, the planning component of each shall be considered the same document rather than two separate plans.

If there are any inconsistencies between the Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan and the Buffalo County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, the Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan shall supersede the Buffalo County Comprehensive Use Plan. This applies to any inconsistencies that appear in maps or text contained in the plan. In the event that any inconsistency is identified on a map, a note shall be added to the map legends (farmland preservation and land use) explaining that the farmland preservation plan takes precedence. If any inconsistency appears in text, the appropriate language shall be added to the text where the inconsistencies are present.

Goals and Objectives

Continue to conserve Buffalo County's soils

Bolster soil conservation initiatives by connecting existing producer led groups, staying competitive in grant programs, and staying true to the county's 10-year Land and Water Resource Management Plan (2022-2031).

Update the Buffalo County Farmland Preservation Plan in 2027. Reach out to new towns to see if they would be interested in joining farmland preservation (ANR-40) zoning. Recertify both the farmland preservation plan and the farmland preservation zoning ordinance with DATCP before December 31, 2028.