

CHAPTER TWO

COUNTY BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly describes the history of Chisago County, its regional context, natural features, people, and government. This overview provides insight into how the county developed, how the county may develop in the future, and the effect future development may have on the County's parks and trails.

HISTORY

In the early 1800s, the area that we now know as Chisago County was a vast area of forests, lakes, wetlands, and prairies. The Chippewa people were the primary residents. However, in accordance with an 1837 treaty, the Chippewa moved out of the area and an influx of European-American settlers arrived. Chisago County was organized in 1851. Logging became the key industry in the area. Sawmills developed in Taylors Falls, Sunrise, and Kost, but by 1914, most of the forests had been cleared and the logging industry declined. Agriculture then became the dominant industry.

Today, agriculture is still the primary land use in the county, but the county is rapidly changing. It is one of the fastest growing non-metropolitan counties in Minnesota, in part, because of its proximity and accessibility to the Minneapolis/Saint Paul metropolitan area and, in part, because of the attraction of its abundant natural amenities. While much has changed over the years, Chisago County is still known for its natural amenities – its rivers, lakes, wetlands, and forests. One goal of this Comprehensive Parks and Trails Plan is to help guide the County in preserving and enhancing the natural amenities that have historically been important, and will continue to be important, to the residents of the county.

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Fig. 2-1. Regional Context

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Chisago County is in east-central Minnesota on the Wisconsin border. It is roughly 35 miles north of the Minneapolis/Saint Paul metropolitan area (see Figure 2.1, Regional Context). The county is well served and accessed by several major highways. Interstate Highway 35 runs north-south through the western portion of the county and US Highway 8 runs east-west through the southern portion of the county. Most of the existing development in the county is along these highway corridors and is within a one-hour commute of the metropolitan area (see Figure 2.2, Regional Highways).

The population of the county is expected to grow, in part, because of the proximity of the county to the metropolitan area. The county attracts residents who work in the metropolitan area, but who seek the quality of life that the county offers. The county also attracts tourists (many of whom are from the metropolitan area) who visit the county to enjoy its scenery and recreation opportunities. In particular, Wild River State Park, Interstate State Park, the Saint Croix River, Chengwatana State Forest, Carlos Avery Wildlife Management Area, and the lakes attract many recreation enthusiasts to the county.

Although Chisago County is a rural county, its proximity to the metropolitan area and its natural amenities contribute to its significance in the region.



Fig. 2.2. Regional Highways

NATURAL FEATURES

MAJOR LANDFORMS

Chisago County consists of three major landforms (see Figure 2.3, Major Landforms). The northwestern and southeastern regions of the county are located in the Grantsburg sublobe till plain (GSTP). This landform is characterized by nearly level to gently rolling plains. It was formed by material carried into the area by the Grantsburg glacial ice sublobe. When the glacier melted, it left behind a vast plain of finely ground deposits. The soils that developed from these deposits are loamy and poorly drained. As a result, wetlands and lakes are prevalent in this landform. Most of the lakes in this area are relatively shallow with a maximum depth of 20 to 40 feet. Elevations in these regions range between 920 and 980 feet above sea level.

The central part of the county is located in the Anoka sandplain (AS). This area formed when the Grantsburg sublobe melted and broad, widely shifting streams spread sand across the land. Some of these streams became

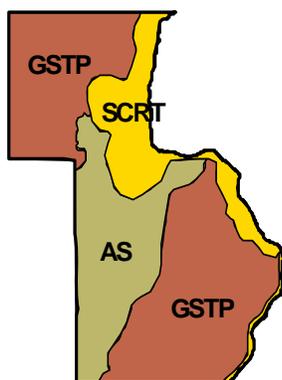


Fig. 2-3. Major Landforms

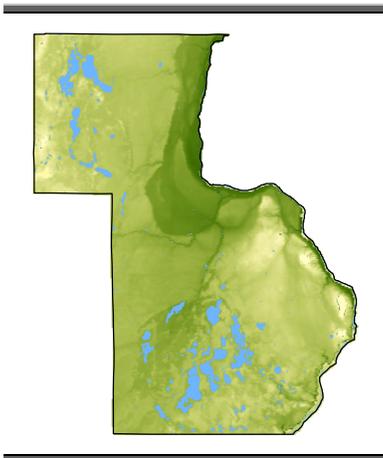


Fig. 2-4. *General Topography*

plugged, and formed large shallow lakes and wetlands. Other lakes and wetlands in the area formed from depressions that were created when chunks of buried glacier ice slowly melted. This region is virtually level with elevations between 840 to 900 feet above sea level.

The eastern part of the county is located in the Saint Croix River terraces (SCRT). The runoff from the melting Grantsburg sublobe formed large glacial lakes that were drained by rivers that flowed through the Saint Croix Valley. The first of these rivers cut wide terraces into the sand and gravel deposits of the valley. Later, the Saint Croix River cut deep into the underlying bedrock and created additional terraces and bedrock bluffs. This region has a variety of landforms including flood plains, steep rock outcroppings, and bogs. Elevations in this area range from 700 to 850 feet above sea level. The southeastern part of this region has the steepest slopes with bedrock outcroppings averaging 40 to 50 feet in height.

Figure 2-4, General Topography shows the landforms of the county as reflected in the topography. The darker greens represent the lower elevations and the lighter yellows represent the higher elevations. The greatest elevation changes are in the Saint Croix River terraces.

EARLY 1800s VEGETATION

The vegetation of the early 1800s related strongly to the existing landforms. For example, maple-basswood and oak forests covered the upland areas of the Grantsburg sublobe till plain. Smaller areas of tamarack swamps occurred in the lowlands and white pine forests occurred in upland patches. Fires in this area were infrequent and small due to the many lakes, wetlands, and poorly drained soils throughout much of the area.

Marshes, wetlands, and tamarack swamps dominated the low areas of the Anoka sandplain (like the present site of Carlos Avery Wildlife Management Area). Oak woodland and brushland dominated the upland areas. Small patches of prairie and oak savanna were scattered throughout the area. White pine forests occurred around some lakes and wetlands.

Floodplain forests were present throughout much of the low areas of the Saint Croix River terraces. Hardwood swamps, tamarack swamps, and lowland hardwood forests occurred on the higher river terraces.

Figure 2-5, Early 1800s Vegetation, shows a map of the assumed vegetation in the area at the time. The map is based on Marschner's analysis of public

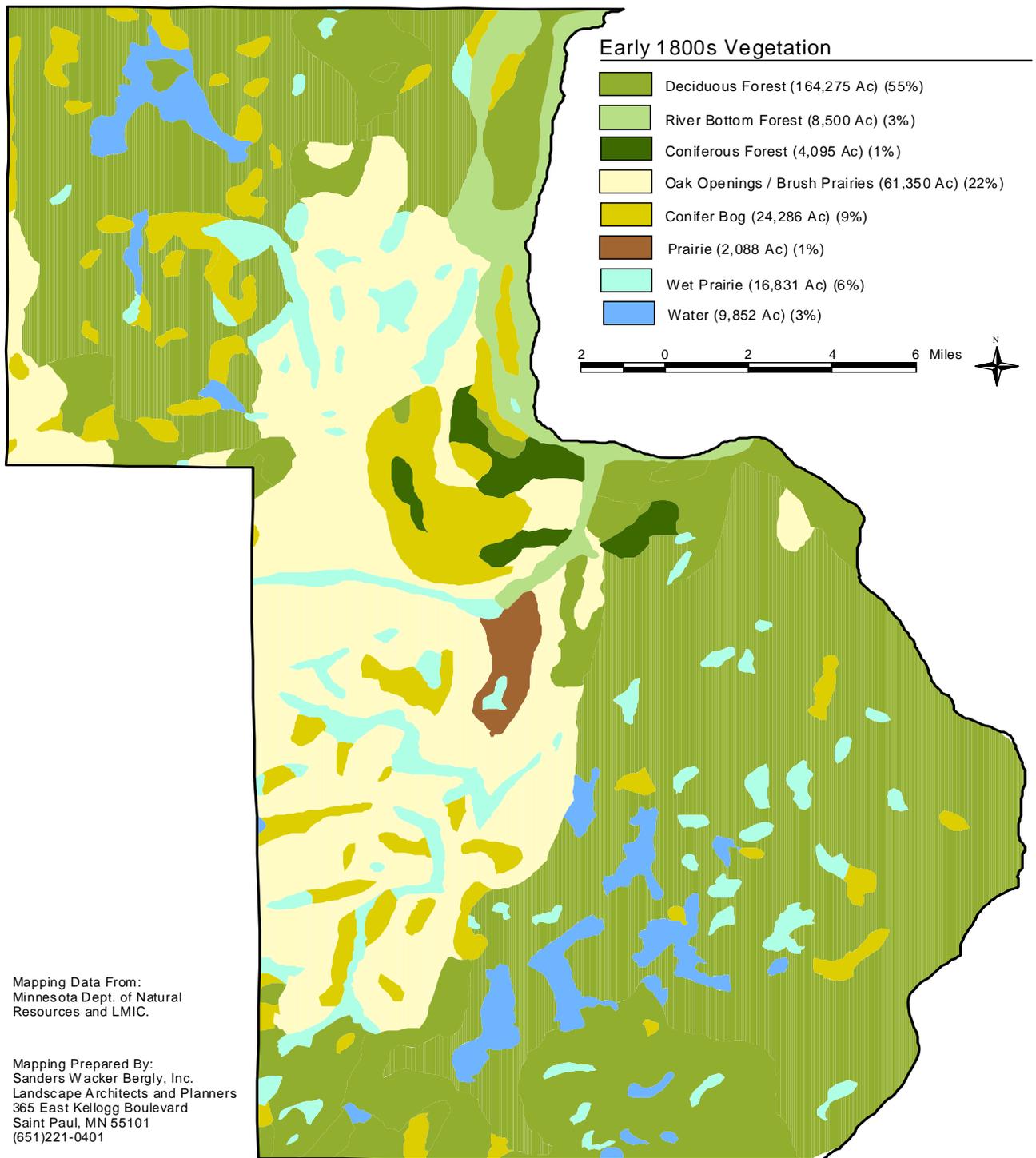
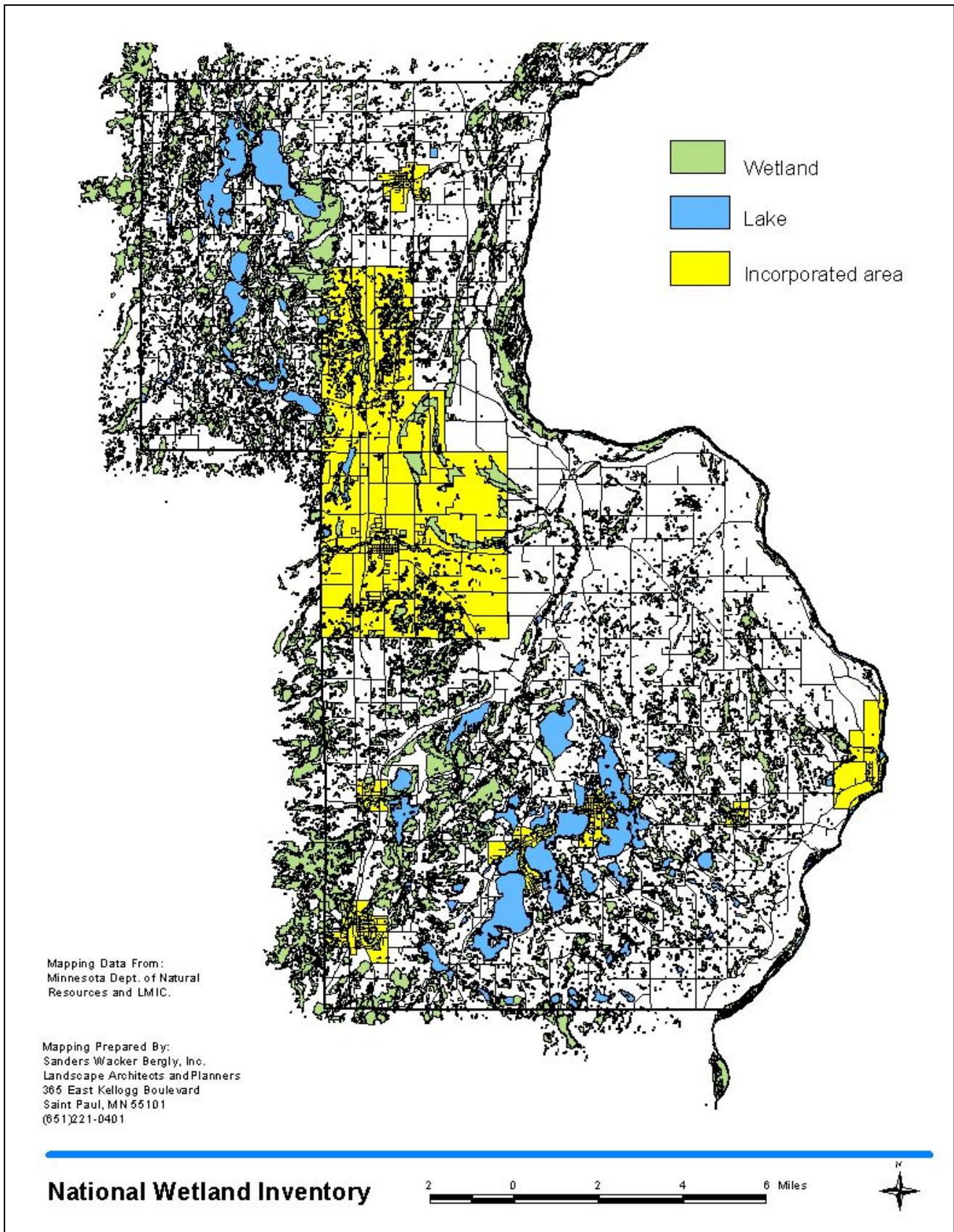
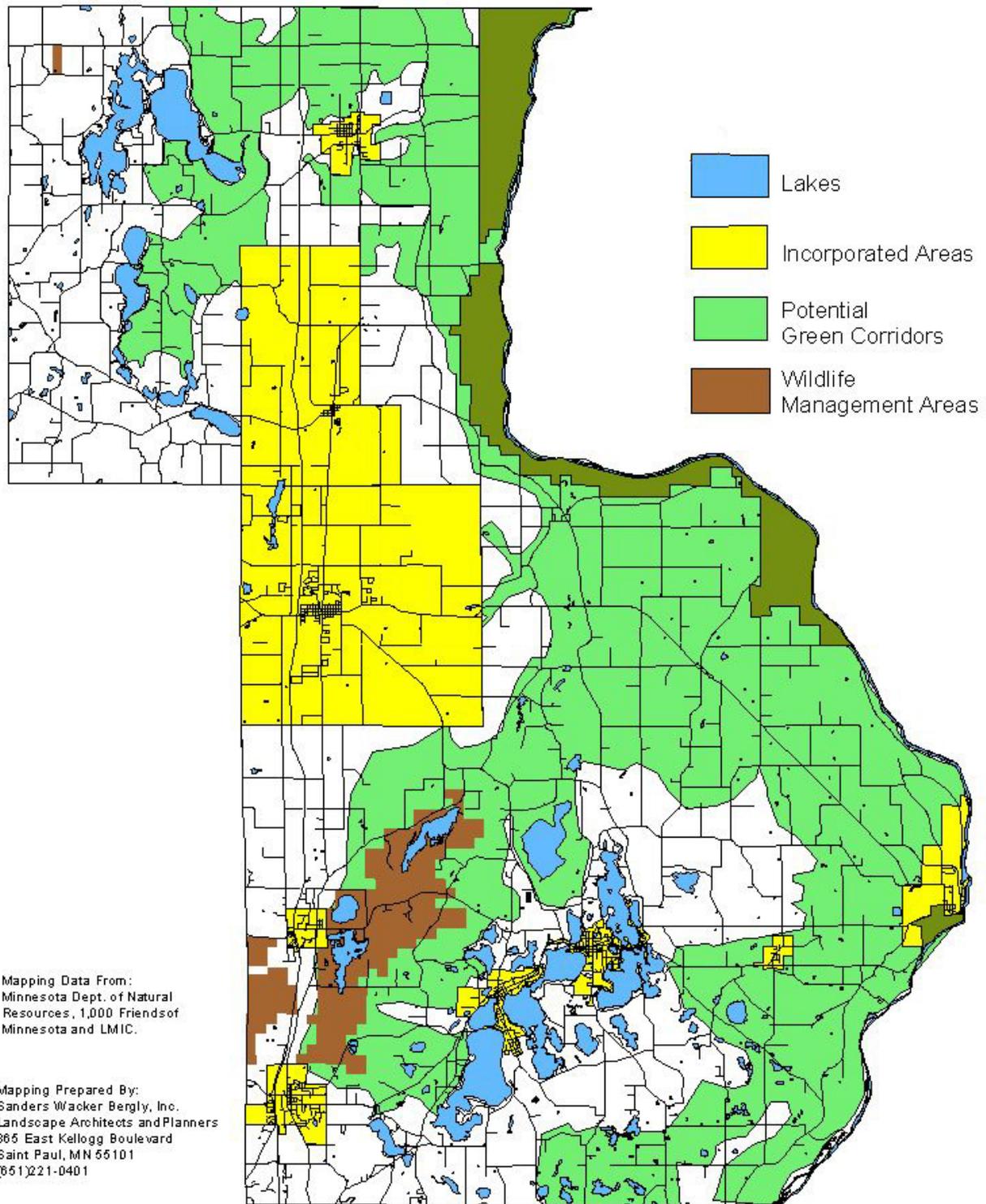


Fig. 2-5. Early 1800s Vegetation





Green Corridor Opportunity Areas

2 0 2 4 6 Miles



land survey notes and landscape patterns. Marschner identified that in the early 1800s roughly 58% of the county was deciduous forests, 1% coniferous forests, 22% oak openings and brush prairies, 1% prairie, and 18% lakes, wetlands, and bogs.

RECENT CHANGES IN VEGETATION AND LAND USE

Since the early 1800s, significant changes have occurred in Chisago County. In the early 1800s, over half of the county was forested. However, starting in the mid 1800s and lasting through the early 1900s, most of the forested land was harvested then converted to farmland. By 1990, a little over one-quarter of the county was forested and roughly one-third of the county was cultivated. Today, most large tracts of forests exist in the Saint Croix River Valley. Urban development has occurred primarily along the Interstate Highway 35 and US Highway 8 corridors. See Figure 2-6, 1990 Land Use / Land Cover, for additional information.

DEMOGRAPHICS

This section describes how the population of Chisago County has changed over the years and how the population will likely change in coming years. Planning implications are discussed throughout the Comprehensive Parks and Trails Plan.

HISTORICAL CENSUS DATA – 1850 THROUGH 2000

There are three significant periods related to population growth in Chisago County: 1) 1850 to 1900, 2) 1900 to 1960, and 3) 1960 to the present. From 1850 to 1900, the population of the County grew 87%. This tremendous growth relates to an influx of European-American settlers and to the growth of the logging industry in the area.

By the early 1900s, most of the forests in the county had been cleared, sawmills began to close, and lumberjacks left the county for other employment opportunities. Also, farming practices significantly changed during the 1900s. Advances in farm machinery required fewer people to farm larger areas. As a result, from 1900 to 1960, the population of Chisago County declined by 1%.

From 1960 to 1990, the population of Chisago County increased by 43%. Several factors contributed to this growth. Improvements in the transportation system allowed cities along Interstate Highway 35 and U.S.

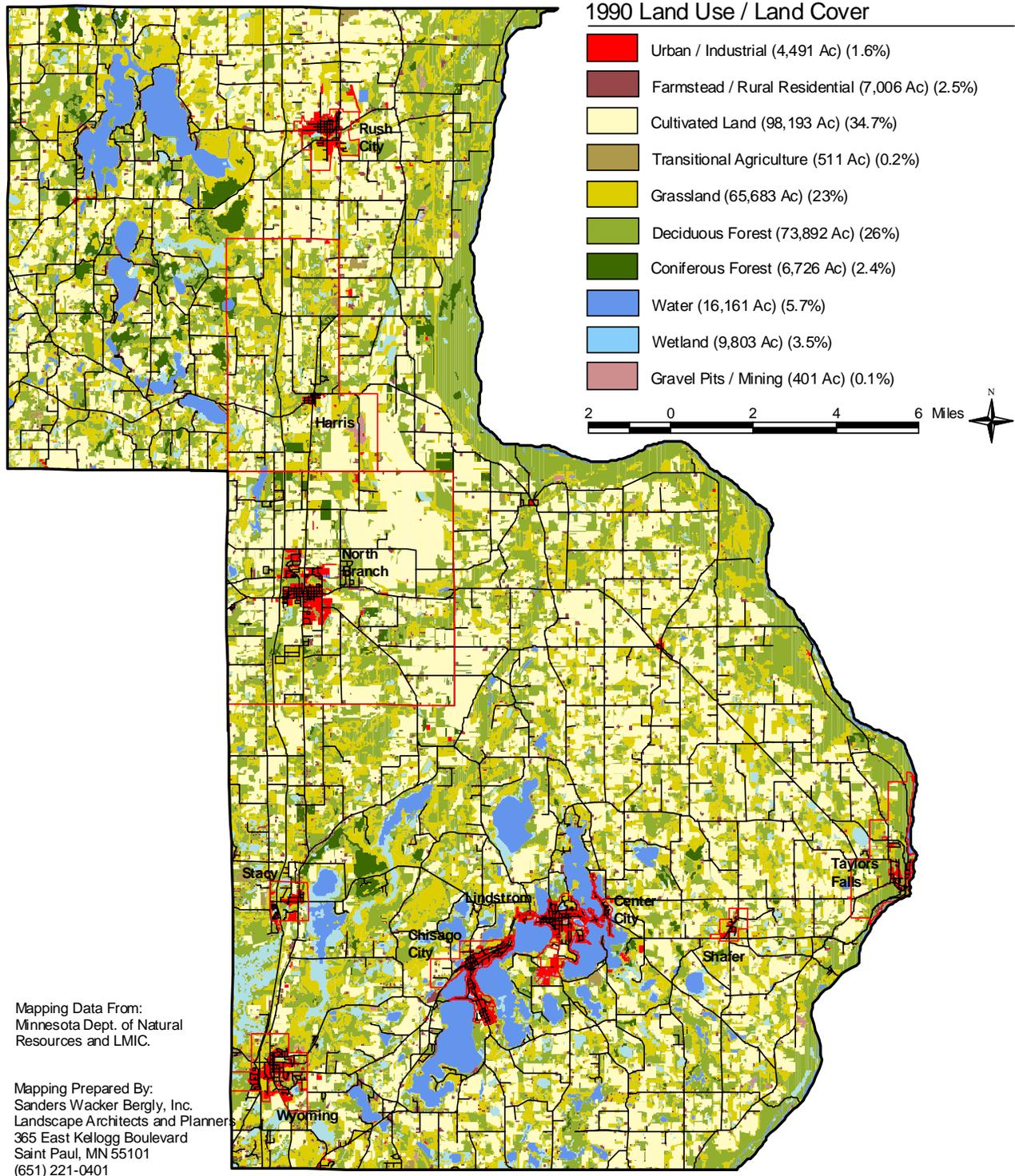


Figure 2-6. 1990 Land Use / Land Cover

During the 1800s, the county's natural resources (especially the forests) attracted great numbers of European-American settlers to the county. Today, the county's natural resources continue to attract people to Chisago County.

Highway 8 to have easy access to a greater area. Consequently, businesses and industries prospered in these areas. In addition, people seeking a rural lifestyle moved to the county from the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Many of these people were attracted to the natural and rural amenities of the county. And, because of the relatively easy commute to the Twin Cities area, many of these people were able to live in the county, but work in the metropolitan area. In essence, the natural resources that attracted European-American settlers to the county in the 1800s also attracted residents in the 1960s to the present.

The U.S. Census shows that in the year 2000, Chisago County had a population of 41,101. This is an increase of 35% from the 1990 population of 30,521 and an increase of 60% from the 1980 population of 25,717. In recent years, Chisago County has been one of the fastest growing counties in the state.

POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Before the 2000 U.S. Census data was released, the State Demographic Office estimated the population of Chisago County was 39,860 in the year 2000. As discussed above, the U.S. Census shows that the 2000 population was actually 41,101. Consequently, the State's estimate was conservative and it follows that its population projections are also conservative. Although the State will likely revise its projection for Chisago County based on the results of the 2000 census, revised projections were not yet available at the writing of this plan. Therefore, the following population projection from the State is likely conservative and should be adjusted upward.

The State is projecting that in the year 2020, the population of Chisago County will be 52,680 (a 32% increase from the estimated 2000 population). However, if we assume that the population growth rate will be the same between the years 2000 and 2020 as it was between the years 1980 and 2000, then we can assume the population of Chisago County will be roughly 68,500 in the year 2020. Regardless of what the actual population will be in the year 2020, it is clear that the population will continue to grow. This growth may affect the County Park system in several ways: 1) the need for additional recreation opportunities will likely increase, 2) pressure to develop in the rural and natural areas will likely increase, and 3) revenues from future development may help fund future park development.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Not only is it important to know how many people live in Chisago, but it is also important to know key characteristics of the population – for example,

The U.S. Census showed that the population of Chisago County was 41,101 in the year 2000. Assuming the population growth rate remains constant, Chisago County could have 68,500 residents by the year 2020.

their age, household status, employment status, and where they live in the county. Knowing about these characteristics can help the County plan for facilities and uses that respond to the recreation needs of the population. The section briefly describes population characteristics of the county as they relate to parks and recreation – see Chapter 4: Trends, Issues, and Vision for additional information.

Age. Although people of all ages participate in a full range of recreation activities, in general, younger people favor more active recreation activities (like soccer, skiing, and swimming) and older people favor more passive recreation activities (like nature walks and picnics). The State Demographic Office is projecting that the 55 and older population will significantly increase from the year 2000 to 2020. It is not projecting as significant of an increase in the younger population.

Households. The majority of households in the county involve married couples with children. However, in the future a larger percentage of married couples will not have children living with them. There will also be more households with children that will have only one parent in the household. More households will involve a single person living alone or sharing a dwelling unit with other single, unrelated people. Given the trend for more single person households and smaller family sizes, it follows that household size will also decrease. Therefore, because the county's population will continue to grow and household size will likely decrease, the County will need to plan accordingly to allow for development of an adequate amount and variety of housing. This in turn will affect the type and location of parks, trails, and open space in the county.

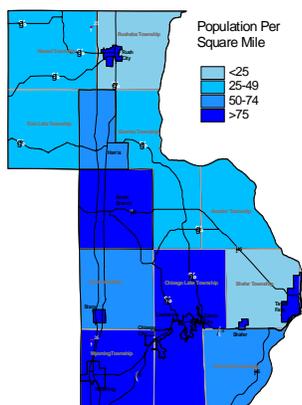


Fig. 2-6. Population per Square Mile

Employment Status and Population Centers. The employment and growth centers in the county are primarily along the Interstate Highway 35 and U.S. Highway 8 corridors. Because most of the existing and future development is and will be along these corridors, it provides residents with an option of living in the county, but working in the Twin Cities or somewhere else. The location of existing and future residential development will not only affect the need for additional park and recreation opportunities in these areas, but it could also affect the preservation or enhancement of open space in these areas. Figure 2-6, Population per Square Mile, shows the current population centers in the county.