

# Vilas County Comprehensive Plan



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## Table of Contents:

Chapter 1 – Demographics	Page 1
Chapter 2 – Natural Resources	Page 14
Chapter 3 – Housing	Page 32
Chapter 4 – Utilities & Community Facilities	Page 39
Chapter 5 – Transportation	Page 49
Chapter 6 – Economic Development	Page 57
Chapter 7 - Land Use	Page 72
Chapter 8 – Intergovernmental Cooperation	Page 87
Chapter 9 – Implementation	Page 92

(All maps are located at the end of the plan document).





# Chapter One

## Demographics

### Background

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A comprehensive plan is a local government's guide to community physical, social, and economic development. Comprehensive plans are not meant to serve as land use regulations in themselves; instead, they provide a rational basis for local land use decisions with a twenty-year horizon for future planning and community decisions.

According to the Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law, a comprehensive plan must address at least nine topics. These are:

- Demographics
- Housing
- Transportation
- Utilities and Community Facilities
- Agricultural, Natural and Cultural Resources
- Economic Development
- Intergovernmental Cooperation
- Land Use
- Implementation

This plan is an update of the 2009 Comprehensive Plan adopted by the county. Much of that plan is brought forward with updated data.

#### [Planning Process](#)

The process to develop the 2009 Vilas County Comprehensive Plan was a very extensive effort. There were several meetings with the Land Use Planning Committee, meetings with the local town

planning groups, and public outreach efforts. The overall process took over a year and a half to complete.

This update relies on the 2009 Plan and efforts just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Census data in chapters one, three and six has been updated with the newer data. All plan goals, objectives and policies in the plan have been reviewed. Some of the maps were updated, including existing land use and future land use.

#### [Plan Setting](#)

Vilas County is located in northern Wisconsin. The county is bounded by the State of Michigan to the North, Forest County to the east, Oneida County to the south, and by Iron and Price Counties to the west. There are fourteen towns and one city within the county. See [Map 1 - Planning Area](#).

#### [Data Sources](#)

Demographics are an important consideration for planning. The review of the socio-economic trends throughout the county is critical to understanding what has occurred and what is likely to occur in the future. Below we look at total population, age distribution, households, educational levels, employment, and income levels. All of these will be examined in some detail.

Data from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey (ACS), in addition to other sources such as the Wisconsin Department of Administration's population projections and the Bureau of Labor Statistics inflation calculator is used throughout this report.

The U.S. Census and the American Community Survey are both produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. The census is a count of the American population and housing units conducted every ten years while the American Community Survey is an estimate of the population and housing released on a yearly basis. Data is included from 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020 and trends are generally analyzed for the twenty-year time frame from 2000 to 2020 in this report. The American Community Survey evolved from the "long form" that a random subset of the population used to receive with the census.

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau started releasing American Community Survey data for all populations on a yearly basis. The availability of these surveys means that communities do not need to wait ten years for the census to assess current trends. Smaller populations, however, such as many of the communities in Vilas County are often difficult to survey. Therefore, the data presented is not always as accurate or consistent as the decennial Census. Furthermore, Census and ACS data is self-reported which can produce its own accuracy issues. However, there are numerous reviews completed to ensure the data is valid. There are few substitutes, if any, for most of the demographic data provided by these sources.

### Population

Population growth has slowed at both the state and the county levels when compared to previous decades. In the 1980s, the County

grew 7.1 percent while the state grew 4.0 percent. In the 1990s, the county grew 18.8 percent while the state grew 9.6 percent. Over the past seventeen years, population growth has been much slower, with Vilas County experiencing only a 2.7 percent increase in population during this time.

In 2010, Vilas County had a total population of 21,430 residents. By 2020, 23,047 persons resided in the county, which is a 7.5 percent increase from the 2010 census total. From 2000 to 2010, the County's population grew by 397 residents, which represents a 1.9 percent increase. Overall, Vilas County's population increased by 9.6 percent between 2000 and 2020. In comparison, the state's population grew by 9.9 percent between 2000 and 2020, with a 3.6 percent increase between 2010 and 2020. The 2022 population estimate for the county is 23,140.

While both Vilas County and Wisconsin grew in population between 2010 and 2020, they differ in the components of population change, natural population change and net migration. From 2010 to 2020, Wisconsin continued to grow as the natural increase from births outpaced deaths and negative net migration from the state. In contrast, Vilas County's population experienced positive net migration but experienced a negative natural increase in population because there were more deaths than births.

**Table 1-1** displays total population for each local unit (minor civil division), the County and the state. Two out of the 14 towns in Vilas County lost population from 2000 to 2020. During this time, the Town of Phelps saw the largest net decrease, losing 112 people. At the same time, the Town of Presque Isle experienced the largest percentage increase, at 56.9 percent. The Town of Lac du Flambeau had the largest net increase, adding 548 people. The City of

Eagle River saw a percentage increase of 12.8 percent.

Not reflected in these population numbers is the seasonal population, particularly the summer visitor season. According to various calculations, the summer population can explode to over 100,000 persons.

The area is a major tourist destination and a popular vacation home area. There are numerous campgrounds, resorts, hotels, short-term rentals, and seasonal housing units in the County. This summertime population places a great demand on County and local government resources.

**Table 1-1: Population**

Minor Civil Division	1990	2000	2010	2020	2000-20 % Change	2000-20 Net Change
Arbor Vitae	2,531	3,153	3,316	3,403	7.9%	250
Boulder Junction	884	958	933	1,057	10.3%	99
Cloverland	768	919	1,029	1,068	16.2%	149
Conover	932	1,137	1,235	1,318	15.9%	181
Lac du Flambeau	2,433	3,004	3,441	3,552	18.2%	548
Land O' Lakes	839	882	861	944	7.0%	62
Lincoln	2,310	2,579	2,423	2,659	3.1%	80
Manitowish Waters	651	646	566	624	-3.4%	-22
Phelps	1,187	1,350	1,200	1,238	-8.3%	-112
Plum Lake	465	486	491	553	13.8%	67
Presque Isle	471	513	618	805	56.9%	292
St. Germain	1,319	1,932	2,085	2,083	7.8%	151
Washington	1,189	1,577	1,451	1,587	0.6%	10
Winchester	354	454	383	528	16.3%	74
City of Eagle River	1,374	1,443	1,398	1,628	12.8%	185
<b>Vilas County</b>						
Vilas County	17,707	21,033	21,430	23,047	9.6%	2,014
State	4,891,769	5,363,675	5,686,986	5,893,718	9.9%	530,043
<i>Source: U.S. Census</i>						

### Age Distribution

Population distribution is important to the planning process. In particular, two groups are examined here. They are the 17 years of age and younger, and the 65 and older population groups. These are often referred

to as dependent populations and have different needs. The younger group requires schools, and the older group is retiring. Comparing these groups over time and to the state, demographic changes in the county are identified.

During the last two decades (2000-2020), the population of the 17 and younger group declined from 20.7% percent of the total population in 2000 to about 16.5% percent of the total county population in 2020, as displayed in [Table 1-2](#). This was a net decrease of 718 persons. Meanwhile the state’s population of children 17 years and younger decreased from 25.5 percent of the population in 2000 to 21.9 percent in 2020, decreasing by 94,435.

Two of the towns did experience net gains in this demographic group from 2000 to 2020, including the Town of Arbor Vitae which has the highest percentage total of children 17 years and younger in its population. The Town of Conover also experienced a net gain in the number of persons 17 and younger. The City of Eagle River also experienced a net gain of 25 residents 17 years and younger during this time. The rest of the towns experienced net declines.

**Table 1-2: Persons 17 Years of Age and Younger**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000 % of Total	2010 % of Total	2020 % of Total	2000-20 Net Change
Arbor Vitae	657	625	860	20.8%	18.8%	25.4%	203
Boulder Junction	167	120	143	17.4%	12.9%	13.3%	-24
Cloverland	154	158	91	16.8%	15.4%	10.0%	-63
Conover	249	200	269	21.9%	16.2%	21.4%	20
Lac du Flambeau	896	950	652	29.8%	27.6%	18.8%	-244
Land O' Lakes	165	116	69	18.7%	13.5%	8.8%	-96
Lincoln	524	432	412	20.3%	17.8%	16.5%	-112
Manitowish Waters	104	54	66	16.1%	9.5%	9.0%	-38
Phelps	248	161	166	18.4%	13.4%	12.5%	-82
Plum Lake	96	63	78	19.8%	12.8%	16.6%	-18
Presque Isle	71	71	26	13.8%	11.5%	5.7%	-45
St. Germain	356	335	277	18.4%	16.1%	13.8%	-79
Washington	321	228	185	20.4%	15.7%	11.6%	-136
Winchester	57	44	24	12.6%	11.5%	5.7%	-33
City of Eagle River	280	252	309	19.4%	18.0%	20.1%	29
<b>Vilas County</b>							
Vilas County	4,345	3,809	3,627	20.7%	17.8%	16.5%	-718
State	1,368,756	1,339,492	1,274,321	25.5%	23.6%	21.9%	-94,435

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

During the same period, the 65 and older age group increased as a percentage of total population from 22.8% percent to 31.1% percent, as shown in [Table 1-3](#). Every town

in Vilas County experienced an increase in persons age 65 and older.

This is mainly due to the aging of the Baby Boomers, the largest generation in American history, and retirees moving into the county. The oldest Baby Boomer will be 75 in 2020 while the youngest Baby Boomer will be 57 years old. Based on increases in life expectancy and advances in medicine, the 65 and older group can expect to grow in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total population.

However, the increase is also due to a lower fertility rate that is shifting the age profile. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 1957, the fertility rate was 3.7 births per woman in the United States.

In 2014, the average was 1.93 which is lower than the 2.1 replacement rate needed to keep a population steady.

Rural Wisconsin counties, including Vilas County, are aging much faster than the state and the nation as a whole. In 2010, the median age in Vilas County was 50.7 years, compared to 37.0 for the state.

Furthermore, in 2020, the percentage of the population that was 65 and older was 31.1 percent, compared to 16.9 percent of the state.

**Table 1-3: Persons 65 Years of Age and Older**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000 % of Total	2010 % of Total	2020 % of Total	2000-20 Net Change
Arbor Vitae	684	776	1,157	21.7%	23.4%	34.1%	575
Boulder Junction	246	309	343	25.7%	33.1%	31.9%	145
Cloverland	221	284	324	24.0%	27.6%	35.5%	171
Conover	232	329	444	20.4%	26.6%	35.4%	246
Lac du Flambeau	504	609	960	16.8%	17.7%	27.7%	559
Land O' Lakes	222	249	234	25.2%	28.9%	29.8%	77
Lincoln	549	591	713	21.3%	24.4%	28.5%	214
Manitowish Waters	190	193	265	29.4%	34.1%	36.3%	80
Phelps	376	400	401	27.9%	33.3%	30.2%	150
Plum Lake	110	135	120	22.6%	27.5%	25.5%	13
Presque Isle	159	237	228	31.0%	38.3%	50.0%	91
St. Germain	483	605	563	25.0%	29.0%	28.1%	245
Washington	309	377	500	19.6%	26.0%	31.4%	287
Winchester	127	141	215	28.0%	36.8%	50.9%	108
City of Eagle River	382	321	354	26.5%	23.0%	23.0%	4
<b>Vilas County</b>							
Vilas County	4,794	5,556	6,821	22.8%	25.9%	31.1%	2,027
<b>State</b>							
State	702,553	755,485	982,799	13.1%	13.4%	16.9%	280,246

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

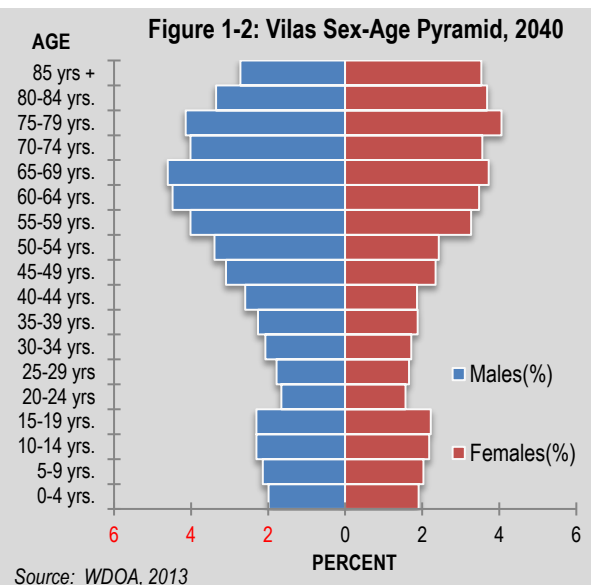
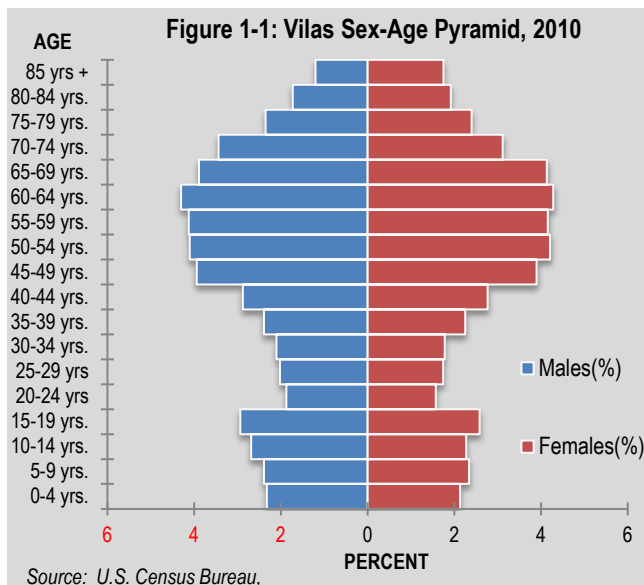
Figure 1-1 and Figure 1-2 below show the population pyramid for Vilas County in 2010 and for 2040. The term “pyramid” has already become a misnomer in Vilas County’s case. Until recently, most communities’ population “bases” were larger than the tops.

Today in the North Central Wisconsin region, many communities’ population age-sex distributions resemble columns rather than pyramids, as is the case in Vilas County. In 2010, 25.9 percent of the population was 65 years and older. This had jumped to 31.1 percent by 2020. By 2040, 37.4 percent of Vilas County’s population is expected to be 65 years or older, a net increase of 3,379 senior citizens.

The decrease in the percentage of 17 and younger persons and the increase in the 65 and older persons will have an impact on the labor force, school system and health care

industry in the county. As the growth in population slows, so will the workforce and ultimately job growth. It will also be difficult to fund public services if employment and tax revenues are not growing, as there is a lower percentage of the population working from which to collect state income taxes and more income coming from Social Security. At the same time, the economy is expected to shift as older adults drive the economy. Healthcare is expected to continue to grow as well as other service providers.

There are a number of actions a community can take to not only address these challenges but to capitalize on the benefits of this age group. Not only do older adults have years of valuable experiences and wisdom, many of the entrepreneurs, and therefore job creators, are at or near retirement age. As Vilas County imports older adults looking to retire in the area, this demographic brings a great amount of spending power in the local economy.



## Households

In 2010, there were 9,658 households in Vilas County following at least three decades in household growth as displayed in Table 1-4. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of

households grew 6.5 percent and grew by 20.4 percent from 2010 to 2020. Generally, the total number of households across the country has been increasing as more people decide to live alone. As a result, the number

of households has increased faster than the overall population. Similarly, the 2020

American Community Survey indicates that the number of households in Vilas County has increased from 2000 to 2020, with an increase of 1,851 households during this time. The number of people per household has decreased during this time, from 2.20 in 2010 to 2.01 in 2020. In 2000 the average number of people per household was 2.29. Much of this decrease is from an ageing population, often with only one person, and families having fewer children.

The number of households is independent of population increase. This is best illustrated by the fact that in most of the local units that lost population over the past seventeen years, such as the Town of Lincoln, actually gained households. The Town of Land O' Lakes, which had a population decrease of 10.9 percent, saw a 1.5 percent increase in the number of households.

**Table 1-4: Households**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000-20 % Change	2000-20 Net Change
Arbor Vitae	1,373	1,501	1,576	14.8%	203
Boulder Junction	445	441	514	15.5%	69
Cloverland	416	470	498	19.7%	82
Conover	483	574	605	25.3%	122
Lac du Flambeau	1,093	1,269	1,684	54.1%	591
Land O' Lakes	412	433	418	1.5%	6
Lincoln	1,111	1,102	1,226	10.4%	115
Manitowish Waters	301	285	418	38.9%	117
Phelps	560	544	660	17.9%	100
Plum Lake	221	235	235	6.3%	14
Presque Isle	241	298	240	-0.4%	-1
St. Germain	887	953	1,077	21.4%	190
Washington	683	679	800	17.1%	117
Winchester	214	190	230	7.5%	16
City of Eagle River	626	684	736	17.6%	110
<b>Vilas County</b>					
Vilas County	9,066	9,658	10,917	20.4%	1,851
<b>State</b>					
State	2,084,544	2,279,768	2,377,935	14.1%	293,391

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020



## Education Levels

Educational attainment improved significantly over the past seventeen years. Over the period, the number of persons who graduated from high school as a percentage of those over 25, increased from 85.4 percent in 2000 to 94.6 percent in 2020. The county increase was reflected in most local units

between 2000 and 2020. Since 2000, Vilas County has had a higher percentage of persons 25 and older who have completed four years of high school or more than the state. This is displayed in [Table 1-5](#).

**Table 1-5: Persons 25 and Older Who Have Completed Four Years of High School or More**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000 % of Total	2010 % of Total	2020 % of Total	2000-20 % Change
Arbor Vitae	1,958	2,144	2,286	83.7%	89.4%	95.3%	16.8%
Boulder Junction	678	930	795	90.5%	95.0%	96.0%	17.3%
Cloverland	651	664	775	88.0%	92.2%	96.8%	19.0%
Conover	722	874	881	82.0%	89.0%	93.4%	22.0%
Lac du Flambeau	1,548	2,168	2,388	81.2%	90.0%	89.8%	54.3%
Land O' Lakes	604	714	631	88.4%	93.9%	97.1%	4.5%
Lincoln	1,686	1,649	1,909	86.9%	92.8%	95.6%	13.2%
Manitowish Waters	483	527	622	89.3%	96.2%	97.6%	28.8%
Phelps	843	989	1,079	82.4%	92.6%	95.6%	28.0%
Plum Lake	371	421	379	93.0%	90.7%	98.7%	2.2%
Presque Isle	381	553	415	93.4%	96.2%	97.9%	8.9%
St. Germain	1,270	1,516	1,570	86.6%	90.1%	96.3%	23.6%
Washington	990	1,064	1,349	86.5%	95.5%	97.1%	36.3%
Winchester	341	230	390	85.7%	91.3%	98.0%	14.4%
City of Eagle River	864	967	860	82.4%	89.1%	87.0%	-0.5%
<b>Vilas County</b>	<b>13,380</b>	<b>15,418</b>	<b>16,329</b>	<b>85.4%</b>	<b>91.7%</b>	<b>94.6%</b>	<b>22.0%</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>2,957,461</b>	<b>3,342,883</b>	<b>3,686,911</b>	<b>85.1%</b>	<b>89.4%</b>	<b>92.6%</b>	<b>24.7%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

The percentage of persons 25 and older with four or more years of college is rapidly increasing within the county, and at a much faster rate than the state, as shown in [Table 1-6](#). In 2020, 27.7 percent of the county, aged 25 years and older, had obtained a bachelor's

degree or higher. This was a 10.1 percentage point increase over 2000. During this same time period, the state's percentage of the population 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher increased 8.4 percentage points. Although Vilas County is gaining



college graduates at a faster rate than the state, the state still has a higher percentage of college graduates than Vilas County.

As the county remains ahead of the state in the percentage of residents who have graduated from high school, the gap in the percentage of residents with a college degree between the county and the state has been shrinking.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 27 percent of jobs in the United States

require a college education. However, other experts believe the percentage to be much higher. Nonetheless, today 37.8 percent of the workforce has an associate’s degree or higher. In Vilas County 38.3 percent of the population has an associate’s degree or higher, compared to 41.8 percent in the state. This could affect job growth if local employers cannot find skilled workers in the area.

**Table 1-6: Persons 25 and Older Who Have Completed Four or More Years of College**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000 % of Total	2010 % of Total	2020 % of Total	2000-20 % Change
Arbor Vitae	393	571	592	16.8%	23.8%	24.7%	50.6%
Boulder Junction	183	242	250	24.4%	24.7%	30.2%	36.6%
Cloverland	139	192	219	18.8%	26.7%	27.3%	57.6%
Conover	136	254	216	15.4%	25.9%	22.9%	58.8%
Lac du Flambeau	286	559	655	15.0%	23.2%	24.6%	129.0%
Land O' Lakes	143	264	235	20.9%	34.7%	36.2%	64.3%
Lincoln	363	339	578	18.7%	19.1%	29.0%	59.2%
Manitowish Waters	129	201	283	23.8%	36.7%	44.4%	119.4%
Phelps	142	251	244	13.9%	23.5%	21.6%	71.8%
Plum Lake	81	92	127	20.3%	19.8%	33.1%	56.8%
Presque Isle	116	215	186	28.4%	37.4%	43.9%	60.3%
St. Germain	227	387	367	15.5%	23.0%	22.5%	61.7%
Washington	199	368	457	17.4%	33.0%	32.9%	129.6%
Winchester	89	65	156	22.4%	25.8%	39.2%	75.3%
City of Eagle River	128	204	224	12.2%	18.8%	22.7%	75.0%
<b>Vilas County</b>	<b>2,757</b>	<b>4,204</b>	<b>4,789</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>27.7%</b>	<b>73.7%</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>779,273</b>	<b>964,725</b>	<b>1,226,547</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>57.4%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

## Employment

In 2020, there were 9,434 residents employed. (Note that these are persons employed and many of them work outside the county.) This reflected a 3.4 percent decrease in the county’s employment since 2010, compared to 3.9 percent growth for the state, as shown in [Table 1-7](#). The decrease in

the number of workers in Vilas County is likely tied to the aging population. The median age in 2020 for Vilas County is 55.1, which is much older than the state median age. When an individual reaches the age of 55 and older, their probability of participating in the labor force drops significantly.

**Table 1-7: Total Employed Persons (16 and older)**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000-20 % Change	2010-20 % Change
Arbor Vitae	1,553	1,646	1,130	-27.2%	-31.3%
Boulder Junction	448	502	532	18.8%	6.0%
Cloverland	422	454	387	-8.3%	-14.8%
Conover	526	562	483	-8.2%	-14.1%
Lac du Flambeau	1,126	1,356	1,439	27.8%	6.1%
Land O' Lakes	391	438	302	-22.8%	-31.1%
Lincoln	1,311	1,040	1,310	-0.1%	26.0%
Manitowish Waters	282	224	340	20.6%	51.8%
Phelps	548	587	568	3.6%	-3.2%
Plum Lake	255	240	265	3.9%	10.4%
Presque Isle	208	263	159	-23.6%	-39.5%
St. Germain	791	955	960	21.4%	0.5%
Washington	674	695	719	6.7%	3.5%
Winchester	199	138	169	-15.1%	22.5%
City of Eagle River	534	664	671	25.7%	1.1%
<b>Vilas County</b>					
Vilas County	9,268	9,764	9,434	1.8%	-3.4%
<b>State</b>					
State	2,734,925	2,871,201	2,983,277	9.1%	3.9%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

## Income Levels

Median household income and per capita income are displayed in [Table 1-8](#) and [Table 1-9](#) respectively. The county median household income rose about 20.2 percent

between 2000 and 2020, compared to a state increase of 22.7 percent. Meanwhile the county per capita income also increased by 27.4 percent, compared to the state increase of 29.4 percent. Note that these changes have not been adjusted for inflation.

During the past two decades, both the county’s median household income and the per capita incomes grew slower than the state rates. Overall, the total county median income is lower than the state level while the county has a slightly higher per capita income than the state level.

likely plays a role, as per person capita incomes within the County have outperformed inflation over time, as per capita income would have been \$28,061 if it rose similarly to inflation. However, the per person capita income in 2020 was \$34,548.

However, when incomes are adjusted for inflation, it is apparent that household incomes have stagnated. Had the median

household income risen with the Consumer Price Index, it would have been \$51,592 in 2020, higher than the actual \$50,039. The decrease in household size during this time

**Table 1-8: Median Household Income**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000-20 % Change	2010-20 % Change
Arbor Vitae	\$36,472	\$43,596	\$46,441	27.3%	6.5%
Boulder Junction	\$34,722	\$39,750	\$55,446	59.7%	39.5%
Cloverland	\$33,897	\$50,000	\$53,250	57.1%	6.5%
Conover	\$31,683	\$41,027	\$48,125	51.9%	17.3%
Lac du Flambeau	\$30,349	\$39,875	\$41,238	35.9%	3.4%
Land O' Lakes	\$29,792	\$36,375	\$45,179	51.6%	24.2%
Lincoln	\$39,196	\$46,055	\$59,881	52.8%	30.0%
Manitowish Waters	\$37,500	\$43,281	\$60,556	61.5%	39.9%
Phelps	\$31,574	\$38,281	\$48,571	53.8%	26.9%
Plum Lake	\$33,529	\$41,667	\$62,431	86.2%	49.8%
Presque Isle	\$41,250	\$59,318	\$73,409	78.0%	23.8%
St. Germain	\$32,969	\$40,642	\$53,466	62.2%	31.6%
Washington	\$34,961	\$50,774	\$67,143	92.1%	32.2%
Winchester	\$32,361	\$42,917	\$69,286	114.1%	61.4%
City of Eagle River	\$23,611	\$25,104	\$33,783	43.1%	34.6%
<b>Vilas County</b>					
Vilas County	\$33,759	\$41,631	\$50,039	48.2%	20.2%
State	\$43,791	\$51,598	\$63,293	44.5%	22.7%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

**Table 1-9: Per Capita Income**

Minor Civil Division	2000	2010	2020	2000-20 % Change	2010-20 % Change
Arbor Vitae	\$17,778	\$26,121	\$31,464	77.0%	20.5%
Boulder Junction	\$19,678	\$26,860	\$32,273	64.0%	20.2%
Cloverland	\$19,912	\$31,072	\$34,856	75.1%	12.2%
Conover	\$18,692	\$24,478	\$32,246	72.5%	31.7%
Lac du Flambeau	\$15,176	\$23,258	\$26,689	75.9%	14.8%
Land O' Lakes	\$18,765	\$34,702	\$33,962	81.0%	-2.1%
Lincoln	\$18,579	\$30,376	\$43,167	132.3%	42.1%
Manitowish Waters	\$21,042	\$37,437	\$44,248	110.3%	18.2%
Phelps	\$17,337	\$23,708	\$34,712	100.2%	46.4%
Plum Lake	\$17,824	\$26,937	\$33,651	88.8%	24.9%
Presque Isle	\$25,798	\$37,602	\$44,560	72.7%	18.5%
St. Germain	\$21,755	\$27,466	\$38,407	76.5%	39.8%
Washington	\$18,544	\$31,765	\$45,237	143.9%	42.4%
Winchester	\$19,720	\$25,488	\$42,524	115.6%	66.8%
City of Eagle River	\$15,876	\$18,923	\$22,934	44.5%	21.2%
<b>Vilas County</b>					
Vilas County	\$18,361	\$27,128	\$34,548	88.2%	27.4%
State	\$21,271	\$26,624	\$34,450	62.0%	29.4%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

## County-wide Planning Issues

During the planning process a variety of issues were discussed that are currently impacting the county or that might impact the county soon. These are touched on in the following chapters of the plan. They are listed in no particular order.

1. Adjusting to a greater number of smaller households.
2. Creating affordable non-transient multi-family and workforce housing.
3. Adjusting to limited population growth.
4. Short-term rental and related transient lodging.
5. Smaller workforce and working population.
6. Lack of municipal infrastructure, especially sewer and water.

## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

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Each of the following comprehensive plan chapters will conclude with a set of goals, objectives and policies, which will be used to guide the future development of the county.

For purposes of this planning process, goals, objectives and policies are defined as follows:

**Goals:** Broad statements that express general public priorities about how the community should approach development issues during the next 20 years. These goals are based on key issues, opportunities and problems that affect the community.

**Objectives:** More specific than goals and are usually attainable through planning and implementation activities. The accomplishment of an objective contributes to the fulfillment of a goal.

**Policies:** Rules or courses of action used to ensure plan implementation and to accomplish the goals and objectives. Policies are intended to be used by decision-makers on a regular basis.

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# Chapter Two

## Natural Resources

### Background

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This chapter reviews the natural resource base in Vilas County. Natural resources not only hold significant ecological value, but they also have great economic, recreational, and aesthetic value. The county must

achieve a balance between protection of those resources and on-going development. This chapter also includes a brief discussion of agricultural and cultural resources.

### County Resources

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Vilas County maintains two departments, Forestry, Recreation & Land Development and Land/Water Conservation and county level committees related to natural resources. There are three planning documents prepared related to these departments. One is the Forestry

Department's Forest Comprehensive Forest Plan, the Land Conservation's & Water Resource Management Plan, and the County Farmland Preservation Plan. All of these documents set policy direction for the county.

### Inventory

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The county's natural resource base encompasses the geography, topography, soils, surface water, watersheds, floodplains, wetlands, groundwater, woodlands, and environmental sensitivity areas. [See Map 2 – Natural Resources.](#)

#### Geography

Vilas County is located in northern Wisconsin and is bounded by Upper Michigan to the north, Forest County to the east, Oneida County to the south, and Iron and Price Counties to the west. The county is approximately 651,000 acres in size including approximately 96,000 acres (15%) of surface water. About three quarters of the county's surface area is covered by forest land

which is held in both public and private ownership.

The vast amount of surface water and forest land present in Vilas County is the driving force behind the county's economy, which is supported primarily by recreation/tourism and timber production. Vilas County is a popular vacation area for both in-state and out-of-state visitors who wish to enjoy the abundance of natural resources and recreational opportunities provided in this setting. Areas near the lakes and streams, and more recently within the off-water woodlands, have become increasingly popular for vacation property (cottages), home sites, and as recreational areas.

## Topography

Vilas County is included in the Northern Highland physiographic region of Wisconsin. The physical nature of the county was shaped from glacial activity that occurred 10,000 - 25,000 years ago. The last retreat of the glaciers transformed the formerly uneven, rocky terrain of the county into a diverse landscape.

The county's landscape ranges from broad, nearly level glacial outwash plains to rough, broken glacial moraines and areas of pitted outwash. There are three distinct physiographic regions in the county. The drumlins and ground moraines in the eastern portion of the county are characterized by low, smoothly rounded, elongated, and oval ridges that are nearly level to moderately steep and are interspersed with long, narrow drainageways.

The Winegar moraine area in the western portion of the county is characterized by short, steep slopes and ridges, and by numerous wet depressions, most of which have no outlets. Outside of these moraine areas is an outwash plain, characterized by a rolling or hilly topography with many enclosed basins and depressions. In scattered areas on this plain, including the communities of Eagle River, Manitowish Waters, Conover, St. Germain, and Boulder Junction, sand flats are present, while end moraines and drumlins are scattered throughout. The glacial melt is directly related to the amount and location of surface water.

Overall, relief in the county is low. However, the county has some of the highest elevations in the state which range from approximately 1,560 feet above sea level in an area along Squaw Creek in the southwest corner of the county, to 1,845 feet above sea level at Muskellunge Hill.

## Soils

Soils exert a strong influence on the way land is used. Soils affect the cost and feasibility of building site development, the provision of public facilities, and agricultural production capabilities. Knowledge of the potentials and limitations of soil types is necessary to determine how they can best be used and managed. For example, development may be limited on soils which are characterized by poor filtration, slow percolation, flooding/ponding, wetness, steep slope, and subsidence.

A detailed study of the soils of Vilas County was prepared by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which resulted in the Soil Survey of Vilas County, Wisconsin, 1988. The survey includes a detailed identification of the specific soils found throughout the county, and also provides a grouping of soils into generalized soil associations or predominant soil patterns. Further investigation is required for "site-specific" soils information, as is the case with individual soil tests. Soil tests are completed for each new building site application to determine the site's capability to accommodate wastewater loads.

Important to land use planning, the study identifies the limitations of each soil type for certain forms of development. A soil which exhibits a "severe" limitation is one in which one or more soil properties or site features are so unfavorable or difficult to overcome that a major increase in construction effort, special design, or intensive maintenance is required. For some soils rated severe, it may not be feasible to proceed with development.

The soils of Vilas County are primarily sandy and loamy soils which are suited to, and do support, forested/woodland uses. Due to the sandy and droughty nature of the soils, most are of relatively low agricultural value; in



addition, the growing season in the county is rather short.

The following provides a general discussion of the general soil associations found within Vilas County. It should be noted, however, that these general descriptions are only guidelines and should be referred to as such.

The majority of the county (42%) is dominated by the Rubicon-Sayner-Karlin association which includes most of the southern and central portions of the county. The far eastern portion of the county, including primarily the Town of Phelps and portions of Conover and Washington, is dominated by the Champion and Padus-Pence associations. The Champion association comprises 8% of the county and the Padus-Pence association comprises approximately 21%. The Padus-Pence association is also found along the Presque Isle/Boulder Junction border, in the central portion of Land O' Lakes, the Sayner and Star Lake areas, and the majority of southern/central Arbor Vitae. The majority of Winchester and Presque Isle and approximately half of Land O' Lakes, are comprised of the Gogebic-Pence-Fence association which comprises approximately 14% of the county. The Croswell-Dawson-AuGres association is found scattered throughout the county, comprising a total of 8% of the soils. The Loxley-Dawson association and the Keweenaw-Karlin association comprise the remaining 2% and 5% of the county's land area, respectively. These areas are also scattered throughout the county.

### *Metallic and Non-metallic Resources*

The County contains some significant non-metallic deposits, and as such, several

quarries are in operation. Vilas County has an adopted Non-metallic Mining Reclamation ordinance. As such, the county maintains a list of all permitted mines in the county. There are no known metallic deposits within the county.

### *Surface Water*

Surface water resources constitute an extremely valuable part of the natural resource base of Vilas County. Vilas County is home to over 1,320 lakes, more than any other county in Wisconsin, resulting in one of the highest concentrations of inland freshwater lakes in the world. Numerous rivers and streams are also located within the county's boundaries. These surface water resources are vital natural resources, which are held in the public trust by the state. The abundance of water resources provides the public with unique recreational opportunities and the enjoyment of scenic beauty, and therefore plays a primary role in sustaining tourism, the major economic force of Vilas County.

Unfortunately, the quality of these surface water resources is highly susceptible to deterioration from pollutant runoff. Therefore, land uses and related activities must be carefully managed in order to achieve a balance between the level and extent of use, and the maintenance of water quality. This portion of the plan provides a general inventory and discussion of the significant surface waters in Vilas County.

Vilas County contains approximately 101,577 acres of surface water, including lakes, streams, and rivers, which comprise approximately 15.6% of the county's total area. **Table 2-1** provides a breakdown of the total surface water acreage in the county for each community.

**Table 2-1: Surface Water Acreage Vilas County**

Municipality	Water	Islands	Total Surface Water	Percent of County Total	Percent of Municipality
Arbor Vitae	6,055.0	49.5	6,104.5	6.0%	13.4%
Boulder Junction	12,699.6	150.4	12,850.0	12.7%	20.4%
Cloverland	2,639.7	9.7	2,649.4	2.6%	11.8%
Conover	5,396.4	153.9	5,550.4	5.5%	10.1%
Lac du Flambeau	17,923.9	413.6	18,337.5	18.1%	22.4%
Land O' Lakes	8,761.7	87.6	8,849.3	8.7%	14.0%
Lincoln	2,949.8	46.1	2,995.9	2.9%	12.6%
Manitowish Waters	4,502.8	563.4	5,066.2	5.0%	22.1%
Phelps	9,234.6	31.6	9,266.2	9.1%	13.4%
Plum Lake	7,448.8	105.6	7,554.5	7.4%	12.0%
Presque Isle	9,466.6	119.7	9,586.3	9.4%	19.5%
St. Germain	4,522.4	7.3	4,529.8	4.5%	17.6%
Washington	4,142.0	26.6	4,168.6	4.1%	13.7%
Winchester	3,927.3	23.5	3,950.8	3.9%	11.4%
C. Eagle River	117.9	0.0	117.9	0.1%	6.9%
<b>Vilas County</b>					
Vilas County	99,670.7	1788.6	101,577.2	100.0%	15.6%

*Source: Vilas County*

The greatest amount of surface water in the county is located in the Town of Lac du Flambeau (18.1%), followed by the Towns of Boulder Junction (12.67%), Presque Isle (9.4%), and Phelps (9.1%), which, combined, comprise about half of the county’s total surface water. In the Towns of Lac du Flambeau, Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters, and Presque Isle, surface water comprises approximately 20% of each municipality’s total area.

The primary component of surface water in Vilas County is lakes. There are approximately 1,320 lakes in Vilas County, including 563 named lakes and 757 unnamed lakes. There are also 3,383 miles of shoreline in Vilas County. As mentioned previously, this is more lakes than any other county in

the state. When combined with Oneida County, Vilas is located in the heart of the highest concentration of fresh water lakes in the world. However, development around lakes may be affecting water quality and wildlife habitat. Alterations to the shoreline, such as that experienced with development, harms the productivity, diversity, and natural scenic beauty of lakes. Therefore, it is important to protect and maintain the quality of these invaluable resources, not only to ensure the region’s biological integrity, but also to preserve the sociological, cultural, subsistence, and economic values that these lake resources provide.

Historically, lakefront development began after WWII, as families began to seek

waterfront property as a “getaway”. However, the period between 1965 and 1995, development exploded. Over that period there was over a 215% increase in the number of dwelling units on lakes in northern Wisconsin. This ever-increasing demand for land near water has resulted in significant impacts to lakefront property values. This is especially evident in more recent years as lakefront property is becoming harder to find. In fact, because lake water quality is significantly affected by surrounding land use, this significant increase in lakeshore development has already led to an apparent decrease in water quality on many lakes, ultimately changing the very nature of lake ecosystems. Water quality often changes as a result of increased levels of such nutrients as nitrogen and phosphorus which are direct results of residential development activities including private sewer systems, lawn fertilizers, etc., and the removal of natural shoreline vegetation.

Vilas County officials and supporting agencies are continuously faced with the challenge of balancing the continuing development pressures and their stewardship responsibilities to maintain the ecological integrity of the lakes with the county’s need to provide basic economic opportunities.

In addition to the significant number of lakes in the county there are also numerous rivers and streams, some of which interconnect lakes. The major river system which travels through Vilas County is the Wisconsin River, which originates at Lac Vieux Desert in the Town of Phelps. Overall, there are no widespread water quality problems with streams in the county. Beavers and beaver dams probably cause the most nuisance problems by obstructing flows and changing fish habitat. However, shoreline development and development pressures are increasing river resource management issues.

## *Watersheds*

Surface water quality is directly affected by the land uses of the area which drain to it, which is called its watershed. A watershed is an interconnected area of land in which water drains to a common point, such as a stream, lake, or wetland. All lands and waterways are within one watershed or another. In Wisconsin, watersheds vary in scale from major river systems to small creek drainage areas, and typically range in size from 100 to 300 square miles. In relation, river basins are defined within the state which encompasses numerous watersheds. There are 32 river basins in Wisconsin which range in size from 500 to over 5,000 square miles. The WDNR prepares water quality management plans for each river basin which identify the sources of water quality problems and identify management objectives that the WDNR, local communities, counties, and other agencies should take to protect and improve the water resources within the basin.

The majority of Vilas County lies within two basins - the Upper Chippewa River Basin in the west/northwest, and the Upper Wisconsin River Basin in the central, southern, and eastern areas. In addition, a small portion in the east is included in the Upper Green Bay Basin and the northern section of the county flows north into the Lake Superior drainage basin. Overall, 13 watersheds are included within the county either completely or partially.

## *Floodplains*

Floodplains include land that has been or may be covered by floodwater during the regional flood. The regional flood may be expected to occur on a particular lake, river, or stream once in every 100 years. Areas susceptible to flooding are considered unsuitable for development because of risks

to lives and property. Therefore, from a planning perspective, floodplains are a very important land use feature. Construction or development within these areas should be limited to uses that are associated with the floodplain, such as recreational activities, wildlife applications, or open space areas.

The most recent source for identifying areas subject to flooding in Vilas County is the Flood Hazard Boundary Map (FHBM) for Vilas County developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which became effective in 1981. The Flood Hazard Boundary Map delineates the special flood hazard areas within the county. In 2012, Vilas County received updated FIRM maps. These areas are primarily located along major rivers and streams, along with several creeks. Floodplains are also present around several lakes in the county; however, the areas subject to flooding around these typically do not extend much past the existing shoreline. The county adopted a Floodplain Zoning Ordinance as well.

The FHBMs are intended to be interim maps prior to the completion of a more detailed FEMA study, and therefore may not include all flood hazard areas. Additional field checking may be required to determine whether or not a given area is in the floodplain before development is authorized or denied.

## Wetlands

Wetlands are part of the region's hydrologic and ecological structure. They act as sources, sinks, or routes for water, materials (e.g., nutrients, pollutants), energy, and biological activity. Maintaining the integrity of wetlands promotes a region's health and sustains its capability to survive disturbance. It also affects the beneficial functions and values that wetlands provide to society such as:

- Wetlands act as a natural filtering system for nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrates, and thus aid in maintaining surface water and groundwater quality.
- Wetlands are very productive wildlife habitat, and consequently provide recreational activities such as hunting, trapping, and bird watching.
- Wetlands provide open/green space and reduce soil erosion.
- Wetlands recharge groundwater supplies, the source of drinking water for Vilas County's residents.
- Wetlands attenuate flood flows which decreases the risk of flood damage to property owners.
- Wetlands maintain base flows of streams and watercourses, which is important to the continued well-being of aquatic ecosystems and associated wildlife habitat.
- Wetlands serve as a natural buffer protecting shorelines and streambanks.

The State of Wisconsin's operational definition of a wetland is defined as an area where water is at, near, or above the land surface long enough to be capable of supporting aquatic or hydrophytic vegetation and which has soils indicative of wet conditions. Most wetlands are dominated by plants that can tolerate various degrees of flooding, with species composition and productivity dependent on the variations in water patterns and human activities (e.g., cultivation, grazing, logging).

The **Natural Resources Map** delineates wetlands (2.5 acres and greater) as determined by the WDNR’s digital Wisconsin Wetland Inventory (WWI) maps from 1996. These wetlands may not reflect all areas considered wetlands by the DNR, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), or the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. As indicated on the map, wetlands of varying sizes are scattered throughout the county.

Wetlands comprise approximately 110,632 acres of land in Vilas County, or 17% of the county’s total area. These wetlands include a wide diversity of wetland types ranging from emergent/wet meadow to scrub/shrub, to deciduous and coniferous, forested wetlands. **Table 2-2** displays wetland acreage calculation for each community. Wetlands are concentrated in the Towns of Conover, Lac du Flambeau, Lincoln, Manitowish Waters, and Winchester. All have over 20 percent of area as wetlands.

Due to the significant environmental functions served by wetlands, there is a complex set of local, state, and federal regulations which places limitations on the development and use of wetlands, especially in shoreland areas. Counties are mandated to establish shoreland-wetland zoning

districts. The Vilas County Shoreland Zoning Ordinance regulates use and development in all shoreland areas (within 300' of navigable streams, 1000' of lakes), including all shorelands which are designated as wetlands on the Wisconsin Wetland Inventory maps.

The WDNR regulates the placement of structures and other alterations below the ordinary high-water mark of navigable streams, lakes, and wetland areas. In addition, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has authority over the placement of fill materials in many wetlands, while the USDA incorporates wetland preservation criteria into its crop price support programs. Therefore, prior to placing fill or altering a wetland resource, the appropriate agency(ies) must be contacted to receive authorization. Ultimately, development within wetland areas should be avoided due to the benefits earlier described.

**Table 2-2: Wetland Acreage by Municipality Vilas County**

Municipality	Wetlands (Acres)	Percent of Total Wetlands	Percent of Total Area
Arbor Vitae	5,117.6	4.6%	11.5%
Boulder Junction	8,821.4	8.0%	14.2%
Cloverland	3,812.0	3.4%	17.2%
Conover	11,579.8	10.5%	21.3%
Lac du Flambeau	18,716.6	16.9%	23.0%
Land O’ Lakes	11,719.3	10.6%	18.7%
Lincoln	5,441.5	4.9%	23.0%



Manitowish Waters	6,746.3	6.1%	29.4%
Phelps	8,475.4	7.7%	12.5%
Plum Lake	6,639.3	6.0%	10.8%
Presque Isle	8,586.7	7.8%	17.8%
St. Germain	3,057.7	2.8%	12.0%
Washington	3,685.4	3.3%	13.7%
Winchester	8,141.1	7.4%	23.8%
C. Eagle River	92.2	0.1%	5.5%
<b>Vilas County Total</b>			
Vilas County Total	110,632.3	100.0%	17.0%
<i>Source: WDNR, Wisconsin Wetland Inventory</i>			

## Groundwater

Groundwater is an extremely important resource in Vilas County as it is the source of the entire county's potable water supply and serves many agricultural, commercial, and industrial purposes as well. Because of its importance, a greater understanding of groundwater is needed to gauge existing and potential threats to its quantity and quality.

Groundwater is comprised of rainfall (or snowmelt), which percolates down through the soil until it reaches the zone of saturation, often called an aquifer. Water in an aquifer then travels from its source to a discharge point such as a well, wetland, spring, or lake. During periods of increased precipitation or thaw, this vast resource is replenished with water moving by gravity through permeable soils down to the water table. In some instances, groundwater moves because of pressure created by a confining layer of impervious rock or clay soils. This is referred to as an artesian system. The groundwater system is the source of potable water in Vilas County.

Regional groundwater flow in Wisconsin tends to follow surface topography, and usually enters the aquifer in upland areas and

flows towards low points in the drainage basin.

In the north central Wisconsin region, deposits of sand and gravel are highly permeable and yield large quantities of water both for recharge and to wells. Less expansive recharge areas also are found in areas where decomposed and fractured granite lies at or near the surface.

Contamination of groundwater almost always results directly from land uses associated with modern society. Almost anything which can be spilled or spread on the land has the potential to seep through the ground and enter the groundwater. The impacts of improper land uses or waste management are usually determined by the physical characteristics of that area. By locating, constructing, and operating development and waste management systems appropriately, these negative effects can be minimized.

Most groundwater contamination is related to poorly-sited land uses such as agricultural manure, petroleum, and salt storage in areas of high groundwater tables or fractured bedrock. Contamination of groundwater reserves can also result from such sources as improperly placed or maintained landfill

sites, private waste disposal (septic effluent), excessive lawn and garden fertilizers and pesticides, and leaks from sewer pipes. Runoff from livestock yards and urban areas, improper application of agricultural pesticide or fertilizers, and leaking petroleum storage tanks and spills can also add organic and chemical contaminants in locations where the water table is near the surface. Once groundwater contamination has occurred, successful remediation can take years, or may never occur, depending upon the pollutant. Therefore, when considering specific land uses for an area, it is vital to consider the relationships between the land, the proposed/actual use, the physical characteristics, and the potential for contamination to help ensure that groundwater contamination does not occur. Protection of these groundwater reserves is necessary to ensure adequate quality water to all users.

Groundwater elevations ranging from approximately 1,560 feet above mean sea level in the southwest to 1,780 feet above mean sea level in the east. Elevations primarily range in the mid-1,600s. A comparison between the county land surface elevation to groundwater elevation indicates that the water table is very high (near land surface) in the county as land elevations range from approximately 1,560 to 1,845 feet above mean sea level. The depth to groundwater is generally less than 50' throughout the county, and is typically less than 20'. Shallow depths coupled with highly permeable sandy soils means the groundwater in Vilas County is highly susceptible to contamination. Much of Vilas County is susceptible to groundwater contamination.

Groundwater flow in the county is generally southwesterly, flowing into Iron, Price, and Oneida counties. Major discharge areas are the Wisconsin River system and the Upper

Chippewa system (Manitowish River). Therefore, contamination that enters the groundwater today in Vilas County can have serious consequences tomorrow in other counties.

### Woodlands

Forest cover is a key environmental, economic, and aesthetic feature. Expansive forest lands provide recreational and aesthetic opportunities for residents and tourists, and also function as sources of commercial timber production. In addition, woodland cover plays a key role in the function and value of sensitive environmental areas like steep slopes, wetlands, and floodplains. Regulations concerning removal of woodland vegetation may be necessary to protect natural scenic beauty, control erosion, provide critical wildlife habitat, and reduce effluent and nutrient flows into surface water bodies/courses. Therefore, the preservation and protection of forest resources is critical to sustain and enhance both the economic and environmental health of Vilas County.

The presettlement composition of forest land in Vilas County primarily included two forest types. Approximately one half of the county included pine forests composed of white pine and red pine mixtures with few hardwoods. A common belief of presettlement forests is that extensive pine forests covered most of northern Wisconsin. This forest type was actually very limited even before settlement, with the most extensive block occurring in Vilas and Oneida counties. The remaining half of the county was comprised of hemlock, sugar maple, and yellow birch with mixtures of white and red pine. This forest type was the largest, most characteristic forest composition type in northern Wisconsin.

Between the mid-1800s and early 1990s, forests throughout Wisconsin were almost entirely cut. White pine, and to some extent red pine, was the concentration of early logging practices, which virtually eliminated the white pine seed source in northern Wisconsin. Remaining forests were logged for commercial and industrial purposes or were cleared for agriculture. Through the years, Vilas County has regained much of its forest cover, although the species composition is not the same as that of presettlement times. Overall, forest cover comprises approximately 76.9% of the county's total area.

### Areas of Critical Environmental Sensitivity

Areas of critical environmental sensitivity are those unique elements/areas of the natural resource base which should be preserved, and therefore excluded from urban/intensive development. Typically, areas of critical environmental sensitivity include wetlands, floodplains/floodways, critical shorelands, areas of steep slope

(especially those adjacent to wetlands and shorelands), publicly-owned scientific and natural areas (i.e., fish and wildlife habitats), and identified archaeological sites. The protection of such areas is intended to 1) protect the health, safety, and welfare of the general public, 2) protect surface water and groundwater quality, 3) reduce damage from flooding and stormwater runoff, and 4) maintain important wildlife habitats or recreational areas.

State natural areas were acquired to protect the state's natural diversity, provide sites for research and environmental education, and serve as benchmarks for assessing and guiding use of other lands in the state. Natural areas are defined as tracts of land or water, which have native biotic communities, unique natural features, or significant geological or archeological sites. These sites do not have much facility development, though there may be a designated trail on the site. There are numerous state natural areas (SNA) located within Vilas County. **Table 2-3** identifies each of these areas.

**Table 2-3: State Natural Areas\* in Vilas County**

1. Allequash Lake and Pines SNA (No.508) is 398 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
2. Anvil Lake Trail SNA (No. 449) is 980 acres located in the CNNF.
3. Aurora Lake SNA (No. 127) is 250 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
4. Beaver Creek SNA (No. 478) is 697 acres located in the CNNF.
5. Bittersweet Lakes SNA (No. 34) is 1,070 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
6. Black Tern Bog SNA (No. 49) is 26 acres located in the Town of Arbor Vitae.
7. Blackjack Springs SNA (No. 308) is 1,395 acres located in the CNNF.
8. Border Lakes SNA (No. 411) is 2,383 acres located in the Town of Presque Isle.
9. Camp Lake and Pines SNA (No. 506) is 243 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
10. Chippewa Trail SNA (No. 440) is 897 acres located in the CNNF.
11. Day Lake SNA (No. 189) is 209 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
12. Devine Lake and Mishonagon Creek SNA (No. 507) is 1,186 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
13. Dunn Lake SNA (No. 237) is 954 acres located in the Town of Presque Isle.



14. Haymeadow Creek SNA (No. 479) is 957 acres located in the CNNF.
15. Headwater Lakes SNA (No. ) is 2,893 acres located in the CNNF.
16. Johnson Lake Barrens and Springs SNA (No. 107) is 1,125 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
17. Kentuck Lake SNA (No. 442) is 291 acres located in the CNNF.
18. Lake Alva Birch-Hemlock SNA (No. 509) is 314 acres in the NHAL State Forest.
19. Lake Laura Hardwoods SNA (No. 500) is 852 acres in the NHAL State Forest.
20. Lost Canoe SNA (No. 108) is 1,119 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
21. Mary Lake SNA (No. 264) is 44 acres located in the Town of Presque Isle.
22. Nell Lake SNA (No. 672) is 117 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
23. Nixon Lake SNA (No. 186) is 737 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
24. Trout Lake Conifer Swamp SNA (No. 21) is 25 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
25. Pappoose Creek Pines SNA (No. 503) is 563 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
26. Pat Shay Lake SNA (No. 446) is 736 acres located in the CNNF.
27. Plum Lake Hemlock Forest SNA (No. 26) is 747 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
28. Rice Creek SNA (No. 504) is 435 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
29. Spruce Grouse Swamp SNA (No. 540) is 400 acres located in the Town of Conover.
30. Toy Lake Swamp SNA (No. 22) is 2,308 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
31. Trout River SNA (No. 505) is 108 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.
32. Upper Buckatabon Springs SNA (No. 609) is 279 acres located in the Town of Conover.
33. Van Vliet Hemlocks SNA (No. 673) is 412 acres located in the NHAL State Forest.

\*The Department of Natural Resources listed the following areas within Vilas County:  
 CNNF = Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest  
 NHAL = Northern Highland American Legion (State Forest)  
 Note that there may be restrictions and guidelines by agencies and organizations other than the DNR.

Most of the areas of critical environmental sensitivity within Vilas County are already managed/regulated at the federal, state, and/or county level, such as wetlands, floodplains, shoreland buffer zones, and publicly-owned scientific and natural areas.

In addition, the WDNR maintains a listing of all rare, threatened, and endangered species and natural communities within the state.

### *Public Ownership*

There are a variety of major landowners in the county, including the federal and state governments. See Map 6 - Ownership.

### Federal Ownership

Lands in the county owned by the federal government total approximately 53,969 acres (8.3% of land in county), and are primarily part of the Nicolet National Forest, but include some Chequamegon National

Forest lands. The majority of this acreage is located in the Town of Phelps where the Nicolet National Forest comprises 37,578.1 acres, or 54.2% of the town. The remaining federally-owned lands are generally located in Washington and Lac du Flambeau with relatively small amounts in the Towns of Conover and Lincoln and the City of Eagle River.

#### Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

Of the more than 1.5 million total acres of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Vilas County contains 54,504 acres within its boundaries, or about 9% of its total land area.

The Nicolet National Forest (NNF) is the larger section which is located on the eastern side of the County, in the Towns of Phelps, Conover, and Washington. This area is located in the Eagle River-Florence Ranger District totaling 48,017 acres.

Chequamegon National Forest (CNF) is the smaller portion of the National Forest in Vilas County containing 6,487 acres, and is located on the west edge of the County. All of this land is located in the Town of Lac du Flambeau, and is part of the Medford-Park Falls Ranger District.

Land acquisition for inclusion in the National Forest is done on a “willing seller” basis. However, the Forest Service has identified types of land they would be interested in acquiring, which include land with threatened and/or endangered species present, land within the “forest block” which can therefore be easily and efficiently managed, land adjacent to lakeshores, and in general any lands which warrant protection. The Forest Service also entertains land exchanges, however the agency will not sell land. The acquisition of land by the Forest Service is variable.

#### State of Wisconsin Ownership

Within the county, the state of Wisconsin owns the majority of the publicly-owned land with approximately 149,733 acres (23% of land in county), the majority of which is included in the Northern Highland - American Legion State Forest (NHAL). It was established in 1925 to protect the headwaters of the Wisconsin, Flambeau and Manitowish rivers. Today the forest is the largest and most-visited state property in Wisconsin, and occupies a total of over 220,000 acres in Vilas, Oneida, and Iron Counties.

The NHAL state forest not only provides abundant recreational opportunities, but is also a working forest which provides for timber management and production. The NHAL state forest is managed using sustainable forestry practices to provide a combination of recreational opportunities, timber production, aesthetics, watershed protection, and habitat for a variety of plant and animal species. Ultimately, the management goal is to benefit the people of Wisconsin, both current and future generations. The acquisition of property for inclusion in the NHAL state forest is based on “willing sellers”.

Every municipality in the county has some state forest land within its boundaries, except for the City of Eagle River. There is also a state designated Fishery Area – called the Plum Creek Fishery and a State Wildlife Area called the Powell March Wildlife Area.

#### Vilas County Ownership

Vilas County owns 39,502 acres, most of which is part of the Vilas County Forest (VCF), comprising 6.1% of the county’s total area. Approximately 60% of the county-owned land is located in the Town of Conover, 19% in the Town of Cloverland, and

14% in the Town of Plum Lake. The remaining 7% is distributed in the Towns of Land O' Lakes, Lincoln, with small portions in Lac du Flambeau and Washington. The VCF provides abundant recreational opportunities, and is also a working forest which provides for timber production.

In terms of acquisition of property for inclusion in the Vilas County Forest, the plan is to obtain lands as they become available. The desire is to obtain those properties which would result in the "filling in" of the existing forest boundary block which is currently rather fragmented. In recent years the County has been relatively unsuccessful in acquiring property due to continually rising land prices, and the county cannot compete with the private market at these prices. The County will trade isolated lands for in-fill parcels.

The significant amount of land in public ownership (federal, state, and county) in the county provides many benefits including the following:

- Long-term preservation of the county's "northwoods" character. In a time of rapid development of private land within the county, lands in public ownership remain "untouched", providing the basis for the county's northwoods appeal which is sought by tourists and recreational enthusiasts.
- Provides the basis for recreational and aesthetic opportunities, the driving force behind the county's tourism-focused economy.
- Requires minimal services from local units of government, therefore less cost. Contrary to popular belief, publicly-owned land does not burden the tax base of local municipalities.

In fact, the higher assessments and property taxes generated by development are often offset by the increased services that must be provided, whereas minimal services are required by local government to support public lands. In addition, the recreationalists/tourists who utilize public lands will bring money to the local economy during their stay in the area.

- Provides managed commercial timber production which is an integral part of the regional and national economy for consumer goods.

#### Tribal Ownership

Tribal lands comprise approximately 4.5% of the county's total acreage. Most are located in the Town of Lac du Flambeau which comprises the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation. A small amount of tribal land in the Town of Phelps has been acquired as part of the Lac Viex Desert Reservation.

#### Town Ownership

Town-owned lands comprise less than 1% of the county's total acreage. Primarily, town-owned land is used for town facilities such as administration buildings, community centers, garages/maintenance buildings, fire stations, etc. Several towns such as Land O' Lakes, Presque Isle, and Washington own forest land for the purpose of commercial timber production.

#### Private Ownership

It is important to identify how the remaining woodlands in the county are (or are not) managed and the value private landowners place on maintaining their wooded property.

In 2018, over 35,000 acres of woodlands were enrolled in the various WDNR forest management programs such as the Managed Forest Law, Forest Tax Law, and Woodland Tax Law programs, totaling approximately 4% of the county's total acreage. These programs provide tax relief to landowners of enrolled property in return for the landowner entering into a contract to manage the land as forest land for a specified length of time. Property enrolled in these programs will likely remain under management through the planning period and possibly beyond, as many of the contract agreements associated with these programs are 25 years or longer in length. The towns with the largest amount of land enrolled in such programs include Land O' Lakes (6,765.4 acres), Lac du Flambeau (4,490 acres), and Presque Isle (2,272 acres). Overall, each town in the county has some acreage enrolled in one or more of these programs.

Over 15,500 acres (2.4% of the county's total acreage) are owned by private entities for industrial purposes, such as for paper making and lumber. Some of the major industrial forest owners include Consolidated Papers, Four States Timber Venture Industrial Investors, and Pukall Lumber Company, along with some others. Corporate ownership of these lands has been changing rapidly in recent years through acquisitions and mergers. Most of the industrial forest property is located within the Town of Winchester where over 9,000 acres is managed for industrial use, comprising more than 25% of the town's acreage. In addition, the Towns of Land O' Lakes and Lac du Flambeau also contain rather large amounts of forest land which is currently owned and managed for industrial purposes.

The importance of identifying lands which are currently owned for industrial purposes

is that major land use impacts could occur if the large, contiguous tracts of industrial forest lands would ever be sold, divided, and/or used for private purposes other than timber production. Some sale of blocks of industrial forestland is occurring now. Such private uses may significantly change the landscape and impact the county's rural character in these areas. However, a large amount of the industrial forest land is also enrolled in the WDNR's forest management program(s), and therefore is contractually obligated to remain forested for some time. In essence, the very large tracts of industrial forest add to the county's rural, wooded, northwoods character and appeal, and generally provide large areas for public hunting and other outdoor recreational activities.

Conservation/educational organizations own over 3,500 acres in the county comprising approximately 0.6% of the county's total area. These organizations are primarily established with the intent of managing and maintaining woodlands and other natural features for the purpose of providing recreational, educational, or aesthetic opportunities, and for the protection/preservation of natural resources. School district property is also included in this section. Approximately 50% of conservation and educational organizational ownership is located in the Town of Winchester. Such ownership includes the Pappoose Creek Hunting Club, which comprises approximately 1,120 acres. Conservation/educational organization property within the county primarily includes sportsman/hunting clubs, youth camps, and conservation association ownership.

The remaining acreage, which comprises approximately 35% of land in the county, is not enrolled in any type of formalized management program. This land typically

includes existing intensive development (i.e., residential, commercial, industrial). These private uses may have the largest impact on the county's rural character and quality of natural resources if not properly planned for.

In recent years, the demand for private forest land has increased dramatically. The reason for this can be primarily attributed to the decreasing available supply of waterfront property. As the amount of available waterfront property in the county declines, the demand for forest land has been increasing. Private woodland management

will continue to have significant impact in Vilas County. Private landowners should be encouraged to participate in the Managed Forest Law program, or engage in some other form of formalized forest management practices such as the tree farm programs sponsored by the paper companies, to ensure the preservation and health of the county's woodland resources and wildlife habitat.

## Agricultural Resources

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In 2014 the county adopted a Farmland Preservation plan. Per state statute 66.1001, the comprehensive plan law, that plan becomes a component of the County's Comprehensive Plan. See the Farmland Preservation Plan for more detailed information on agriculture.

The soils of Vilas County are primarily sandy and loamy soils which are suited to, and do support, forested/woodland uses. Due to the sandy and droughty nature of the soils, most are of relatively low agricultural value; in addition, the growing season in the county is rather short.

Row crop agriculture, dairy and animal production are not major activities in Vilas County. Forest products continue to dominate the county as well as some specialized crops, such as cranberries in the western portion of the county.

According to the recent 2017 Census of Agriculture, there were 67 active farms in the county, covering about 5,600 acres of land. Fruits, nuts and berries were the major products, followed by forage hay and alfalfa. Many of these would be considered hobby farms.

## Cultural Resources

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The earliest inhabitants of Vilas County were members of the Chippewa band of Native Americans; the first recorded white settler was a man named Ashman who established a trading post in Lac du Flambeau in 1818. In the 1850s migrants from New England, primarily from Vermont and Connecticut, constructed wagon roads and trails through Vilas County including the Ontonogon Mail Trail and a Military Road from Fort Howard to Fort Wilkins in

Copper Harbor, Michigan. Logging began in the late 1850s. Loggers came from Cortland County, New York, Carroll County, New Hampshire, Orange County, Vermont and Down East Maine in what is now Washington County, Maine and Hancock County, Maine. Many dams were built throughout the county to assist loggers as they sent their timber downstream to the lumber and paper mills in the Wisconsin River valley.

Vilas County was set off from Oneida County on April 12, 1893 and named for William Freeman Vilas, a Civil War officer, postmaster general, secretary of the interior and Wisconsin senator. Logging continued to be the major industry until the most of the original timber was harvested. Following the timber era numerous farms were established. Most of these disappeared and the area turned to tourism. The many lakes become an attraction for visitors and resorts and seasonal cottages boomed. That tourism culture still exists in the county today.

Within the county there are several historic buildings listed on the National Registers of Historic Places. In total there are eighteen listed, including the Eagle River Stadium and the Government Boarding School at Lac du Flambeau.

There are also several museums in the county that preserve the area's history. Some of these are listed below:

Eagle River Historical Society/Southside Museum

Located at 1181 Hwy 45 and open Memorial Day through Labor Day Weekend.

George W Brown Jr Ojibwe Museum and Cultural Center

Located at 603 Peace Pipe Rd in downtown Lac du Flambeau and open Mid-March through Mid-November

Land O'Lakes Historical Society  
[www.landolakeshistory.org](http://www.landolakeshistory.org)

Northern Waters Museum  
6490 Chippewa Drive, Land O'Lakes and open May 30 to Sept 29

Northwoods Children's Museum  
346 W Division Street, Eagle River WI 54521

Phelps Historical Museum  
Located: 4534 Highway E, in downtown Phelps and open May 1 through Oct 31

Vilas County Historical Museum Hwy 155 Main St, Sayner and open May to June

## Goals, Objectives & Policies

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### Goals:

1. Preserve, protect, and enhance the ecological quality, function, and other values of the county's land and water resources.
2. Preserve forest integrity throughout Vilas County.
3. Protect the ability of existing areas of farmland to remain in agricultural use.
4. Protect the ability of existing areas of forestry and farmland to remain in those uses.
5. Conserve productive forest and farmland.
6. Preserve the county's most important and sensitive natural resources and areas.
7. Protect and enhance surface water, ground water, and shoreline quality.
8. Encourage and explore measures to decrease point and non-point source pollution and run-off.
9. Preserve, protect, and promote historical features, buildings, and sites in Vilas County.

### Objectives:

1. Support integration and implementation of the Vilas County Land and Water Resource Management Plan and future updates adopted by Vilas County.
2. Discourage development within environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands, floodplains, lowlands, steep slopes, and contiguous forest or farmland areas.
3. Coordinate lakeshore development with Vilas County's lakes classification system, Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, and the Comprehensive Plan.
4. Maintain natural buffers and building setbacks between land uses and lake, stream, creek, river, and wetland areas.
5. Preserve the county's scenic beauty, history and heritage, and archeological resources.
6. Work with local governments to protect natural and cultural resources.
7. Support integration and implementation of the Vilas County Forest Comprehensive 10 Year Plan and future updates adopted by Vilas County.
8. Encourage land trades or acquisitions that maintain blocks of contiguous public forest lands and minimize isolated residential and other development.
9. Continually explore options for more effective incentives, voluntary measures, and other land use practices for retaining the county's large, contiguous forestry tracts.

15. Encourage landowner and community support for development of forest management plans and voluntary enrollment in forest conservation programs.
  16. Recognize the right to practice forestry as critical for public and private land stewardship.
  17. Examine population density and road development standards for consistency with forestry management practices.
  18. Work cooperatively with the WDNR and other forestry agencies and organizations in sponsoring workshops and educational materials regarding sound forest management practices and programs.
  19. Conserve forest lands for sustaining the long-term commercial production of timber products and other values of forest ecosystems.
  20. Maintain the integrity and viability of existing agricultural areas so that farming practices can occur without conflict with non-agricultural uses.
  21. Encourage retaining large, contiguous, farmland tracts.
  22. Implement farmland preservation and other programs as requested by agricultural property owners.
  23. Maintain the integrity and viability of existing forestry and agricultural areas so that those practices can occur without conflict with other uses.
  24. Encourage retaining large, contiguous, forestry and farmland tracts.
- See the policies as identified in the County's Comprehensive Forest Plan, Land & Water Resource Management Plan, and Farmland Preservation Plan.



# Chapter Three

## Housing

### Background

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This chapter examines housing characteristics in Vilas County. Housing is an important component of land use. The physical location of housing determines the demand and cost of many public services and facilities. In addition, housing characteristics are related to the social, aesthetic, and economic conditions of the community.

This section will provide the county with information about the current housing stock, as well as identify significant changes that have occurred over time. Information is presented about the occupancy/vacancy characteristics,

housing values, trends in seasonal/recreational housing, and the equalized valuation of Vilas County.

#### *County Resources*

The county does not deal directly with housing. There is no formal committee or county department that has responsibility in this area. This is an area that may be addressed in future updates of this plan.

### Inventory

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#### *General Housing Characteristics*

**Table 3-1** provides general information about the housing supply for Vilas County from 2000 to 2020, including a breakdown of units by year-round and seasonal, and a comparison of persons per household. Year-round units include all occupied units and vacant year-round units (for rent, for sale, rented or sold but not yet occupied). Seasonal units are those units, which are used for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

A recent housing study was completed in 2021 by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission for the five counties of Forest, Langlade, Lincoln Onieda and Vilas. That study identifies the need for more housing options at all spectrums of the housing market, especially the rental and workforce housing segments. Housing is becoming a major issue for communities.

**Table 3-1: Housing Supply, Vilas County**

	2000	% of Total	2010	% of Total	2020	% of Total	% Change 2000-20
Total Units	22,397	100.0%	25,116	100.0%	26,150	100.0%	16.8%
Year Round Units	9,810	43.8%	10,810	43.0%	12,658	48.4%	29.0%
Occupied Units	9,066	40.5%	9,658	38.5%	10,917	41.7%	20.4%
Owner Occupied	7,416	33.1%	7,722	30.7%	8,577	32.8%	15.7%
Renter Occupied	1,650	7.4%	1,936	7.7%	2,340	8.9%	41.8%
Vacant Year Round Units	744	3.3%	1,152	4.6%	1,741	6.7%	134.0%
Seasonal/Recreational Units	12,587	56.2%	14,306	57.0%	13,492	51.6%	7.2%
Persons per Household	2.29	N/A	2.20	N/A	2.01	N/A	-12.2%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

Vilas County experienced a 17 percent increase in housing units between 2000 and 2020, including increases in the number of both year-round and seasonal units.

Vilas County has been experiencing an uptick in the proportion of homes that are utilized year-round. In 2000, year-round homes accounted for only 44% of the County's housing stock, while in 2020, slightly less than half (48.4%) of the County's housing stock were year-round units. This increase in year-round units can likely be attributed to the conversion of seasonal housing to permanent, year-round residences.

The average household size in Vilas County declined from 2.29 in 2000 to 2.01 in 2020. The declining household size is a trend experienced nationwide which is expected to continue. The trend implies more housing units occupied by fewer people, resulting in increased land use consumption.

Based on the 2000 and 2020 census data, an average of 188 housing units per year were added within the county during this 20-year period.

### *Seasonal and Recreational Housing Trend*

Vilas County offers both residents and visitors year-round recreational opportunities with its abundance of natural resources which define its "northwoods character". The attractiveness of this asset is demonstrated by the dominance of seasonal/recreational housing units in the county. In addition, 2017 Wisconsin Act 59, which prohibits local governments from restricting the rental of single family homes for a term of seven days or more, has changed the reasons lakefront dwellings are being purchased and developed. They are no longer used by one family on occasional weekends, but rather used as lodging facilities.

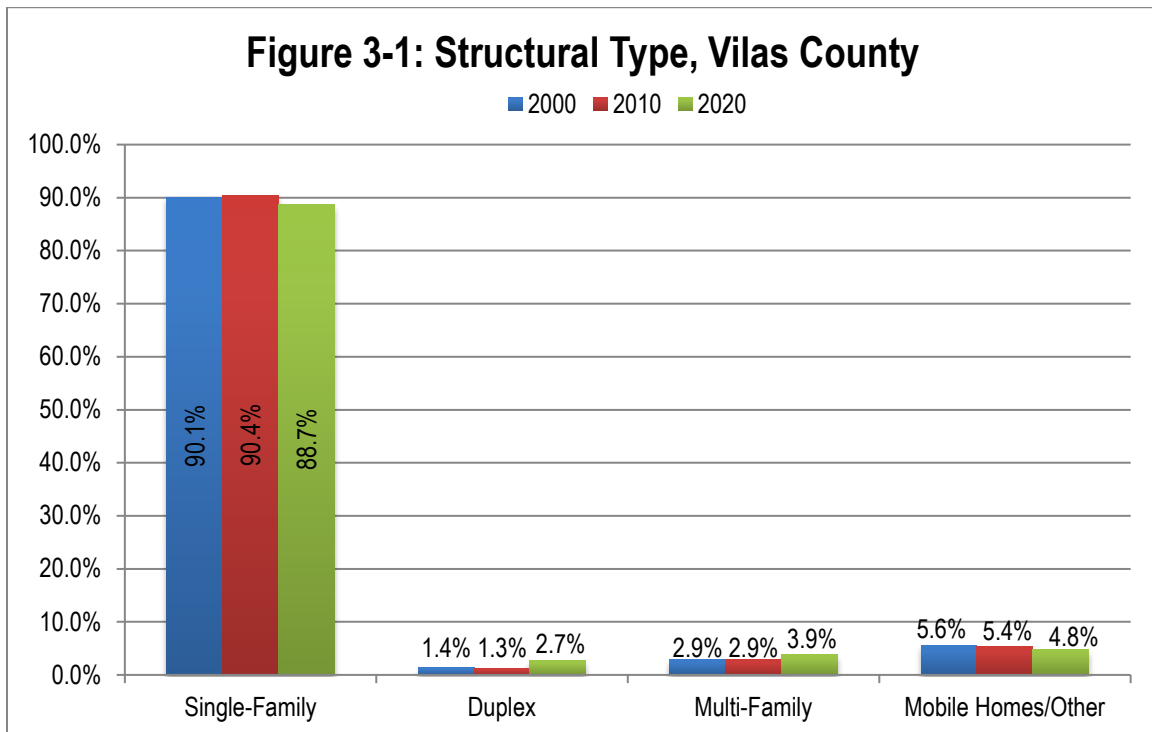
As indicated in Table 3-1 above, the percentage of housing units in Vilas County for seasonal/recreational use (51.6%) is extremely significant when compared to that throughout the state where such units comprise only about 7% of the state's total housing stock.

### *Structural Type*

A comparison of the structural type of housing units in Vilas County in 2000, 2010 and 2020 is

illustrated in [Figure 3-1](#). The majority of the county’s housing stock is single-family units, which comprised over 90% of the county’s total housing units in 2000 and nearly 89% in 2020. This is indicative of the conversion of seasonal units to year-round units, resort conversions to single family, and increased single family unit

development. Mobile homes/Other housing units refers to mobile homes, trailers, and living quarters that are occupied, or could be occupied, which do not fall into any of the other categories. Examples include houseboats, railroad cars, campers, vans, etc.



### [Comparative Housing Value](#)

A comparison of housing stock values in Vilas County for 2000 and 2020 is presented in [Figure 3-2](#), while [Figure 3-3](#) identifies the median housing value of all municipalities in Vilas

County in 2020. The housing values are based on specified owner-occupied units only.

The majority of owner occupied housing units, over 30%, were valued at \$300,000 or Greater in 2020.

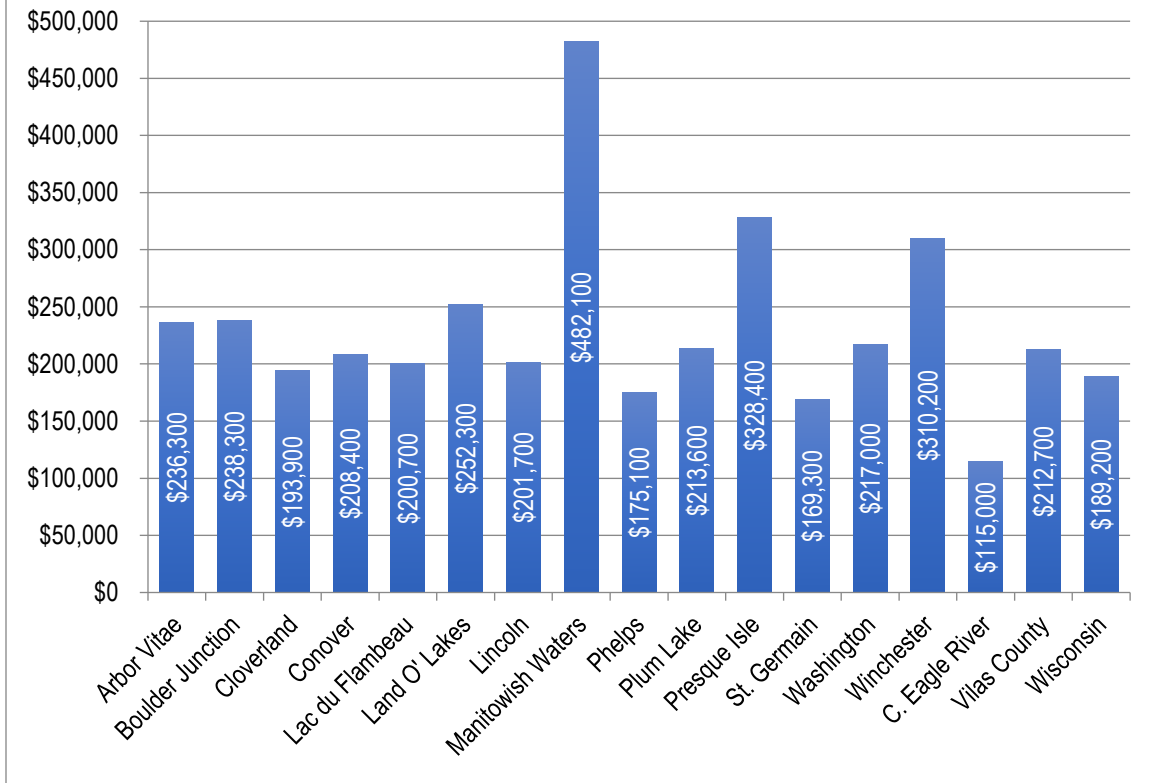
**Figure 3-2: Vilas County Housing Values 2000-2020**



Housing values over \$100,000 grew to 82.7% of the county total in 2020, a significant increase over 2000. The trend implies significant increases in housing values will

continue as new housing units are of much higher value, and it mirrors the increased land and shoreland costs over the decade.

**Figure 3-3: Comparative Median Housing Values, Vilas County 2020**



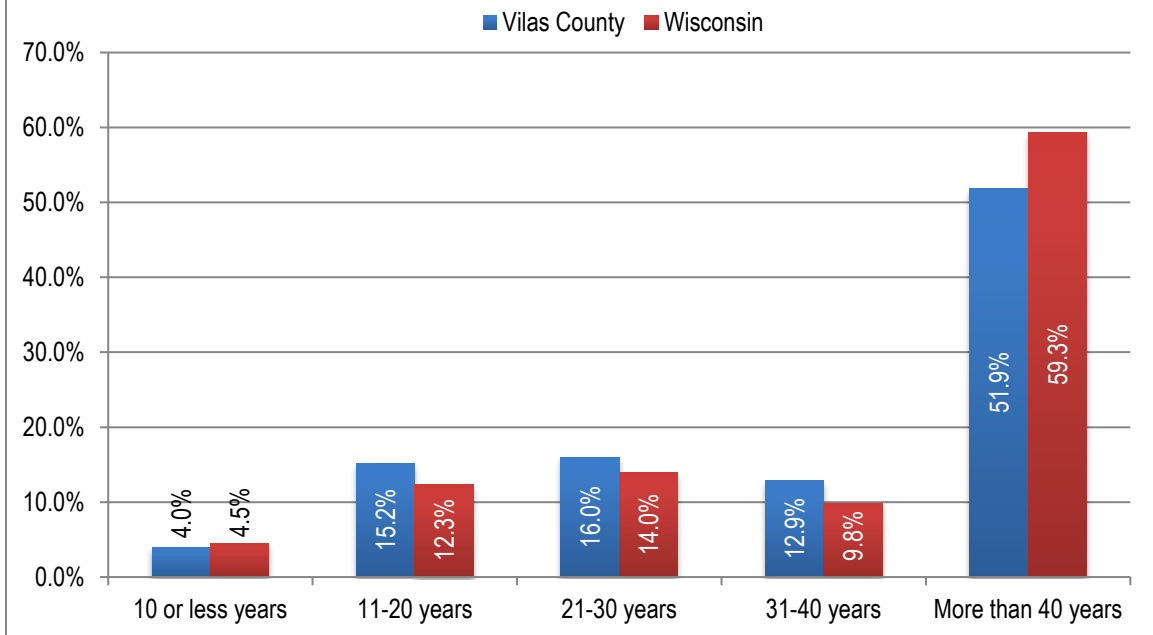
Median housing values in the County overall were higher than the statewide median in 2000, at \$212,700 and \$189,200, respectively. Housing units in the Town of Manitowish Waters had the highest median value of all municipalities within the county, having a median value of \$482,100, followed by Presque Isle at \$328,400. This may be attributed to the fact that Manitowish Waters has the greatest amount of shoreline of all towns in the county where waterfront development tends to be quite

expensive. The City of Eagle River's median housing value was the lowest of municipalities in the county at \$115,000, followed by the Town of St. Germain at \$169,300.

*Age of Housing Units*

Figure 3-4 presents the age of the housing stock in Vilas County. The data is presented in terms of the year the housing structures were built.

**Figure 3-4: Age of Housing Units, Vilas County 2020**



In 2020, over half (52%) of the housing units in Vilas County were older than 40 years old, compared to 59% of the housing units in the State of Wisconsin. Both of these percentages are higher than in 2000, when approximately 32% of the housing units in Vilas County were constructed more than 40 years ago as compared to nearly 44% for the State of Wisconsin. This indicates that the development of new housing has slowed within both Vilas County and Wisconsin since 2000.

### **Building Permit Data**

An additional measure that assists in the illustration of the growth in residential housing for Vilas County is building permit activity for new residential and commercial units.

Using information from the Vilas County Zoning Department Annual Reports.

The average number of single-family permits issued per year by Vilas County has been declining since 1990.

In the 1990s (1990 to 1999), the county approved about 3,301 single-family permits, or about 330 per year for the decade.

- In the 2000s (2000 to 2009), the county approved about 2,700 single-family permits or about 301 each year for the decade.
- Between 2010 and 2020, the county approved 1,531 single-family permits, or about 139 per year.

Overall, while the average number of building permits issued has decreased since 1990, there still has been a large increase in building activity in Vilas County during this time.

## Goal & Objectives

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### Goal:

Provide opportunities for a broad range of housing choices that will meet the needs of all residents while maintaining the predominantly rural forested and lakeshore residential character of Vilas County.

### Objectives:

1. Provide for a wide choice of housing types serving different age levels, income, and need.
2. Support local, regional and state efforts and programs to provide housing development or rehabilitation in Vilas County for individuals of low to moderate income.
3. Guide housing development to areas capable of serving it, such as lands served by existing roads, public utilities, parks or other services.
4. Encourage high quality construction, enforcement, and maintenance standards for old and new housing.
5. Utilize various programs and concepts that can encourage creative ways to preserve rural character and natural resources and incorporate the environment into development, including PUDs.
6. Encourage maintenance and rehabilitation of historically significant homes that will encourage their existence.
7. Encourage subdivision designs and locations of residential development that protect residential areas from incompatible land uses.
8. Support redevelopment efforts, which serve to enhance community values; enhance natural resources and recreation; and minimize the costs of providing services.
9. Encourage conservation subdivisions as development options that provide for protection of natural resources and open space while promoting clustered residential development that minimizes the costs of providing services.
10. Explore creative options to add more housing units throughout the county within the existing zoning regulations.

The county policy is to support existing efforts related to housing.



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# Chapter Four

## *Utilities & Community Facilities*

### Background

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Utilities and community facilities are important components of the county and are often used as a measure of the quality of life. Community facilities generally include sanitary sewer and water systems, gas and electric services, public buildings, land, and administration that serves the population. Thus, the level of service is generally balanced with the demand for service and the user's ability or interest in paying for the service. Local features such as parks, schools,

utilities, and protective services must be considered in relation to the future development they are intended to support, not just the current demand for services. In addition, the location, quality, and capacity of planned improvements can also influence the location and pace of development. The locations of various public facilities are displayed on [Map 3 – Utilities & Community Facilities](#).

### County Resources

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The county does not own or operate many of the utilities or community facilities mentioned above. However, the county does provide various administrative services, law

enforcement, and health services, among others. There are several standing committees that oversee these services.

### Administrative Facilities and Services

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Vilas County's administrative facilities are located at the Vilas County Courthouse, located at 330 Court Street in Eagle River. The courthouse was constructed in 1936 and was expanded with the Courthouse Annex in 1985. In 2017 a major addition was completed to the facility. The Courthouse is used for County business and administration, County Board meetings, and

the meetings of the County's various committees. The Courthouse houses all of the County's departments, with the exception of the Forestry and Highway Departments. In addition, each of the County's 15 municipalities, 14 Towns and one City, have their own local government facilities.

## Law Enforcement

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Law enforcement in Vilas County is provided in majority by the Vilas County Sheriff's Office, and in part by the City of Eagle River Police Department, and the Lac du Flambeau Tribal Police. Coordination and shared service agreements are in place between Vilas County and the other two departments.

### *Vilas County Sheriff's Office*

Police protection for Vilas County is provided by the Vilas County Sheriff's Office which is located at 330 Court Street, in the City of Eagle River. The department operates the "Enhanced 911" or E-911 throughout the county. Upon receiving a call, E-911 allows the dispatcher to see the address to which the phone is billed, the township of the call, as well as the appropriate link for fire and first responder services for the call. Therefore, the Vilas County Sheriff's Office is able to adequately serve even its most remote, rural communities.

### *Lac du Flambeau Tribe Law Enforcement Agreement*

Vilas County annually enters into agreement with the Lac du Flambeau Band of Chippewa Indians for shared law enforcement. The Lac du Flambeau reservation is located in part in Vilas County. The Tribe has its own tribal police department. Vilas County and the Lac du Flambeau Tribe have successfully worked together to address tribal enforcement, and that relationship should continue throughout the planning period.

### *City of Eagle River Police Department*

Police protection services for the City of Eagle River are provided by the Eagle River Police. The Department is located at 525 E. Maple Street, in the City of Eagle River. Dispatching for the department is provided by the Vilas County Sheriff's Department. The department provides mutual aid to, and receives mutual aid from, the County Sheriff's Department. The department responds outside the city at the request of the Sheriff's Department to handle calls or provide backup for deputies.

The relationship between the County and City is good and should be continued. Current conditions, such as the boundary configuration of the City of Eagle River and the Town of Lincoln, existing shared service arrangements, and the coordinated intergovernmental cooperation developed through planning and growth management projects, suggests that future sharing of police services between the City and the Town is a possibility.

The sheriffs department indicated the increased seasonal population is likely an attributable cause to the increase in complaints/reports, as there is a direct relationship between population increases and the resultant increase in police services necessary to adequately administer law, safety, and protection.

## Fire, Rescue, and Medical Facilities

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Vilas County does not provide fire, rescue, or EMS services or facilities. All provisions of service are either provided by the municipal volunteer fire departments or by medical facilities in the area that provide ambulance and emergency care. Fire protection and rescue services and facilities for Vilas County are provided by separate fire and EMS departments which are located throughout the county. Vilas County's rescue/first responder services are generally the same departments that provide fire protection services. The City of Eagle River and Towns of Lincoln, Cloverland, and Washington are members of the Eagle River Joint Municipal Fire Commission. Each municipality pays a proportionate fair share based upon the equalized assessed value on real estate to support department operations. In these areas, EMS services are provided by Eagle River Memorial Hospital.

The 12 area departments rely on volunteers to provide service; however, it is becoming more and more difficult to find volunteers. All fire departments within the county operate with mutual service agreements, as well as with surrounding counties.

The adequacy of the fire protection within Vilas County can be evaluated by the Insurance Service Office (ISO) by the Grading Schedule for Municipal Fire Protection. This grading system provides a guideline which many municipalities follow

when planning for improvements in their existing fire protection services. The grading schedule is based upon several factors including: fire department equipment, alarm systems, water supply system, fire prevention programs, building construction, and distance of potential hazard areas from a fire station. The rating is on a scale of one to ten, with one representing the best protection and ten representing the most unprotected community.

Most county residents can access medical services from the hospital in Eagle River or in Minocqua/Woodruff and Rhinelander in Oneida County. Eagle River Memorial Hospital is a critical access care hospital. In addition, there is the Grandview Hospital in Ironwood that also provides some health care needs for residents. Current medical facilities appear adequate to provide medical services over the 20-year planning period. However, EMS is becoming a concern. Every year it is more challenging to provide this service. Vilas County already has a high median age and as the population continues to age, demand for emergency services, assisted living, and nursing facilities will increase. Vilas County should anticipate the increased demand, in conjunction and cooperation with the private sector, to address the anticipated service demands and the employees/volunteers to staff them.

## Solid Waste Management/Recycling

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Waste collection and recycling services for county residents are primarily provided by private collection services through individual contracts throughout the county. With the exception of Land O' Lakes, all waste is transported to the Vilas County Landfill

located on County Highway G in Cloverland. The landfill also allows individuals to drop-off waste.

The City of Eagle River and all Towns except Land O' Lakes are members of the Vilas

County Landfill Venture Group, an organization commissioned to construct and operate the Vilas County Landfill. Each participating Vilas County municipality has a commissioner, or representative, in the Venture Group an elected body which manages overall operations. The landfill located along on CTH G opened in 1989 and was originally designed with a 20-year life span. Additional land was purchased, and operational changes were made to extend the life of the facility. In addition to the active landfill located on CTH G there are 10 closed (inactive) landfills located throughout the county within the communities of: Arbor Vitae (2 closed sites), Boulder Junction, Cloverland, Conover, Lincoln, Manitowish Waters, Plum Lake, Presque Isle, St. Germain, and Winchester.

Waste drop-off and recycling facilities are scattered throughout the county, including locations in: Arbor Boulder Junction, Conover, Eagle River, Lac du Flambeau, Land O' Lakes, Manitowish Waters, Phelps, Presque Isle, Sayner, St. Germain, and the Town of Washington. Another trend in the solid waste industry is centralizing town recycling facilities and drop-off sites. The combining of facilities can reduce manpower and costs per user but may not be as accessible to some residents. It is recommended the County review this opportunity during discussions with the Landfill Venture Group during assessment of solid waste planning. Vilas County currently serves as the responsible unit for state recycling grants, and provides those funds to the communities to support the local recycling programs.

## Public Sanitary Sewer Service

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In Vilas County, wastewater is either treated by public sanitary sewer systems or by private, on-site septic systems. According to the 2010 census, approximately 25 percent of county residents are provided with sanitary sewer, and 75 percent have private on-site waste disposal systems. Most households within the City of Eagle River are served by a public sewer system as are some of the households in the Towns of Arbor Vitae, Lac du Flambeau, Land O' Lakes, and Phelps

The County does not have a sewer service area plan, nor is it required to develop one. There is no coordination of land use relative to sanitary district policy since it is regulated at the local level, over which Vilas County has little authority. New or expanded sanitary systems would allow for more growth opportunities, especially related to housing and small business development and may become a requirement for existing developed areas.

This section provides an overview and recommendations for both the public and private treatment systems in Vilas County.

Nearly all development within Vilas County's unincorporated areas utilizes on-site sewage systems. Most systems in the county include a typical gravity-flow design, where waste flows from the house to a septic tank, and from the tank to an absorption field. The wastewater is partially purified as it moves through the soil. There are several variations of system types that may allow for treatment of wastewater, therefore allowing a parcel to become buildable. Vilas County has a Private Sewage System Ordinance adopted to promote and protect public health, safety, and welfare as well as groundwater and surface water supplies by assuring the proper siting, design, installation, inspection, maintenance, and management of private sewage systems and non-plumbing sanitation systems.

In Wisconsin, the state regulates the siting, design, installation, and inspection of most private on-site treatment systems. The state plumbing code SPS 383 allows both conventional and advanced pre-treatment systems for residential development. The rules have significant implications for rural land use. Properties that before could not be developed with conventional septic systems can now meet the sanitary codes for a pre-treatment system. This has been less of an issue in Vilas County as the County does not allow holding tanks as a system of choice, which is a positive attribute to the code. This means that soils absorption options must be deemed not viable prior to a holding tank being permitted to occur for a new development.

### *Other Potential Public Systems*

State law authorizes the creation of additional public sanitary districts and utility districts. Other units of government in Vilas County may wish to form such districts in areas of planned or existing intensive development, or in areas with known septic problems. Candidates for such areas include several of the small, unincorporated “villages” such as Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters, St. Germain, and Sayner. In addition, the dense lakeshore development around the county can lead to reduced water quality in the lakes due to effluent infiltration. The lakeshore development areas are also candidates, some in the shorter term, for public system development.

## Public Water and Water Supply

Municipal wells are located in the same communities in Vilas County that have public sewer, including Arbor Vitae, Land O’Lakes, City of Eagle River, Phelps, and Lac du Flambeau. All residents rely on

groundwater for their drinking water supply. Recharge areas must be assessed for contamination potential due to development or non-compatible land use practices.

## Educational Facilities

Educational services for Vilas County are provided by multiple public school districts: including the Northland Pines School District, Lakeland School District, and Phelps School District.

### *Northland Pines School District*

The Northland Pines School District serves the central third of the county and includes two high schools, two middle schools, and four elementary schools. Northland Pines High School is located at 1800 Pleasure Island Road in the City of Eagle River, and

houses grades 9-12. SOAR Charter High School is located within the Eagle River Elementary building. The facility was constructed in 2006. There have not been any additions or upgrades to the facility in recent years. The school's maximum capacity is 600 students. There were 471 students enrolled in the 2021-2022 school year.

Northland Pines Middle School provides educational facilities for grades seven and eight. The school is located at 1700 Pleasure Island Road in Eagle River. SOAR Charter Middle School is housed in the Land O’ Lakes Elementary building. The school was

constructed in 1995 and is 160,000 square feet. This facility also houses elementary students in grades K-4. The maximum capacity of the facility is 1,230 students (including elementary students). There were a total of 184 middle school students enrolled in 2021-2022.

There are four elementary schools in the district, Eagle River Elementary, Land O'Lakes Elementary, St. Germain Elementary, and Montessori Learning Center. Eagle River Elementary is located within the Northland Pines Middle School facility. The school serves students in grades 4K-8, and there were a total of 471 students enrolled in 2021-2022.

The Land O'Lakes facility opened in 1997 and provides education to grades 4K-4. This facility, like the one in St. Germain, is 48,000 square feet, and has a maximum capacity of 381 students. In the 2021-2022 school year there were 57 students enrolled.

St. Germain Elementary School serves students in grades 4K-4 and opened in 1997. The facility is 48,000 square feet and has a maximum capacity of 381 students. There were a total of 85 students enrolled for the 2021-2022 school year.

### *Lakeland School District*

Lakeland Union High School (UHS) serves the western third of the county. Lakeland Union High School is located at 9573 State Highway 70 in Minocqua (Oneida County). Lakeland UHS had a total of 752 students enrolled in 2021-2022.

Within this district three elementary schools serve area residents. They are the North Lakeland Elementary School, a 4K-8 facility located in Manitowish Waters, Lac du Flambeau Elementary School, a 4K-8 facility located in Lac du Flambeau, and Arbor Vitae-

Woodruff Elementary, also a K4-8 facility located in Arbor Vitae.

### *Phelps School District*

Phelps School District provides educational facilities for the Town of Phelps. All grades (kindergarten – 12) are all located in one facility, which is located on Old School Road in the Town of Phelps.

The existing school was originally constructed in 1938, with additions completed in 1978 and again in 1996. Upon completion of the additions, the school increased to a current size of 82,884 sq. ft., and can accommodate approximately 300 students. During the 2021-2022 school year, there were a total of 94 students enrolled in grades 4K through 12.

In addition to school related objectives, the school building provides a location for various community related activities. The commons area is utilized by the town for various meetings and programs, the weight room is open for use, open gym is provided for the public, and people may also walk in the gym in the morning before the school day begins.

### *Private*

There are two private schools operating within Vilas County. Christ Lutheran School provides educational instruction for preschool and kindergarten through eighth grades. Christ Lutheran School is located at 111 N. 3rd Street in Eagle River.

Located in the Town of Land O' Lakes is the Conserve School. This school is located on Black Oak Lake on approximately 1,200 acres. The school was founded in 2002 and is geared toward students with an interest in natural resources and conservation. The school provides a semester long immersion in



natural studies and is designed primarily for high school juniors.

### Technical College

Vilas County is located in the Nicolet Area Technical College district, which has its main campus in Rhinelander. The Nicolet

College District includes all of Oneida, Vilas and Forest counties, and roughly the northern half of Lincoln County, the northwestern third of Langlade County, and the southeastern corner of Iron County. About 1,500 students take credit classes each semester, with nearly 10,000 people a year utilizing some aspects of the college.

## Electrical and Natural Gas Facilities

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Xcel Energy, Wisconsin Public Service, WE Energies, and Eagle River Light & Water provide electrical service and natural gas service throughout the county.

Eagle River Light and Water services the City of Eagle River and the immediate surrounding. Wisconsin Public Service

serves most of the county with both gas and electric service. WE Energies services the northern half of the Town of Washington with electric and all of the Towns of Phelps, Conover, and Land O' Lakes with both electric and natural gas. Xcel Energy serves the Towns of Presque Isle, Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters, and Winchester.

## Parks and Open Space

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There is a variety of park, recreation, and open space areas located through Vilas County, varying from active recreational facilities to community parks, neighborhood parks, special purpose parks, school recreation areas, and trail systems for various uses. Vilas County adopted the Vilas County Outdoor Recreation Plan in 2019. The

Outdoor Recreation Plan should continue to be utilized and updated as necessary to be concurrent with recreation development projects (such as the county-wide bicycle trails project) and the associated grant program eligibility requirements.

## Libraries

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Vilas County residents are served by several libraries located throughout the county. They are:

1. Boulder Junction Public Library  
5386 Park Street, Boulder Junction
2. Frank B. Koller Memorial Library  
5761 N. Hwy. 51, Manitowish Waters
3. Lac du Flambeau Public Library  
622 Peace Pipe Road, Lac du Flambeau
4. Irma Stein Public Library  
8306 School Loop Rd., Presque Isle
5. Walter E. Olson Memorial Library  
203 N. Main, Eagle River
6. Eleanor Ellis Library  
4495 Town Hall Rd., Phelps
7. Plum Lake Library  
8789 Peterson St., Sayner
8. Winchester Public Library  
2117 Lake St., Winchester
9. Land O'Lakes Public Library  
4242 CTH B, Land O' Lakes

10. Arbor Vitae residents are served by the Minocqua Library in Oneida County.

Each of the libraries is funded by and serves the respective communities in which it is located. The County is not directly involved with library operations or funding. The Walter E. Olsen Memorial Library in Eagle River serves the City of Eagle River and the Towns of Cloverland, Conover, Lincoln, St. Germain and Washington through a joint service and cost share agreement. Each library operates independently but shares programs such as the interlibrary loan program. The Olsen Memorial Library is the largest library in terms of volume, space, and materials. Most of the libraries are relatively small with limited budgets and rely

extensively on volunteer labor to maintain operations. Not all towns in Vilas County have libraries or direct library service.

Based on the density and seasonal nature of population, Vilas County should be adequately served by the existing library structure over the 20-year planning period, assuming the local library system can be financially maintained. It is recommended the library administrators continue to work with their respective communities on reviewing the funding formulas for library services. As the local libraries receive funding through state shared revenues, and with the recent budget issues, library service providers across the state must monitor funding closely.

## Goals, Objectives, and Policies

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### Goals:

1. Promote the public health, safety, and general welfare of Vilas County.
2. Ensure the provision of reliable, efficient, and well-planned utilities to adequately serve existing and future development.
3. Maintain and enhance year-round recreational opportunities and facilities within the county while minimizing user conflicts.
4. Promote quality schools and access to educational opportunities for everyone.
6. Encourage appropriate utility development in environmentally sensitive areas.
7. Encourage development of fiber optic cable systems, DSL, wireless web technology, high speed, broadband Internet access, and other high technology development to service throughout the county.
8. Ensure that existing and new technologies are available throughout the county.
9. Support integration and implementation of the Vilas County Outdoor Recreation Plan and future updates adopted by Vilas County and/or local communities.

### Objectives:

1. Continue to evaluate the service demands and capabilities of County law enforcement in coordination with anticipated growth.
2. Protect the lives, property, and rights of all residents and guests through law enforcement and fire protection.
3. Support local coordination of joint service agreements.
4. Plan and coordinate the location and use of utilities with other agencies, affected jurisdictions, interested parties, and individuals.
5. Continually monitor the location, condition, and capacity of existing and future public utilities in order to efficiently and cost effectively serve existing users and planned service areas.
10. Follow the recommendations of the County's Outdoor Recreation Plan (ORP) when making park acquisitions and development decisions.
11. Monitor and update the ORP based on recommendations of this Comprehensive Land Use Plan and any other local opportunity to maintain relevance and grant potential.
12. Continually evaluate the need, conditions, and maintenance requirements of public access to waterways.
13. Pursue state and federal funding programs, which can aid in the development and acquisition of parks, trails, scenic areas, open space,

and environmentally significant areas.

14. Recognize the need to accommodate all age groups and abilities in recreational pursuits.
15. Work with and support service clubs and organizations related to the maintenance and development of recreational facilities and activities.
16. Increase coordination of planning efforts with local school districts in order to coordinate anticipated future growth.
17. Continue coordination and support of libraries in their efforts to increase community services, education, and social relevance.
18. Support school districts and local community organizations in their sponsorship of childcare programs and early developmental programs.
19. Support high quality preschool, K-12, higher education, and continuing adult educational opportunities for Vilas County residents.

Policies:

1. Ensure that schools, public safety, health care, and other community facilities are of the highest quality without placing undue financial burden on county taxpayers.
2. Assure public health and groundwater quality when permitting and monitoring private on-site wastewater and wells.
3. Maintain current information on the availability of various services, including broadband, at the county level.
4. Encourage land acquisition and development strategies for parks, as outlined in the County Outdoor Recreation Plan.
5. Encourage the development of a comprehensive county-wide multi-use trail plan that includes facilities for hikers, bikers, ATVs, snowmobiles, as well as the disabled and elderly, and that ties together attractions and natural and cultural resources throughout the county.
6. Work with higher education institutions to share facility space for training opportunities in the county.
7. Support efforts to bring funding for broadband expansion to the county.

# Chapter Five

## Transportation

### Background

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Vilas County's transportation system includes roads, airports, lakes and rivers, various types of trails, as well as utility corridors. The transportation system supports the movement of people and products within a community and connects to areas beyond.

Of critical importance in rural counties is the road system. Generally, it represents the

greatest investment by the County and local governments.

A well-designed road system can result in many benefits and long-term cost savings for a community. Being an integral aspect of the county, it plays a major role in the efficiency, safety, and overall desirability of the community as a place to live and work.

### County Resources

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The county maintains a Highway Department responsible for the network of County Highways throughout the county. A

standing county Highway Committee provides oversight.

### Existing Road Systems

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In analyzing the road system, several aspects and factors should be examined to discern possible shortcomings as well as plan for future needs. Analysis of traffic patterns through the examination of the road system, review of traffic counts, study of accident reports, discussion with individuals at the local, county, and state levels, and finally, a field survey of the roads can assist in providing possible recommendations relevant to the system.

The road system is composed of three levels of government jurisdiction. These include the State and Federal highway systems, the County system of trunk highways, and the

system encompassing the local municipal roads. See [Map 4 - Transportation](#).

#### [Roadway Classifications](#)

The three levels of jurisdictional roadway, State and Federal, County, and Local, often times are considered to approximate the functional classification of roads used for planning and design purposes. The division of roadways into the functional classes, arterials and collectors, represents a breakdown relative to the principal service the roadway is intended to serve. The functional classification is generally the basis

of funding, constructing, and maintaining the various levels of roadway. This classification for rural areas often results in the use of the state and federal roads as arterials, while county and town roads serve as collectors within the system.

Although the definitions are somewhat formal, they attempt to explain the principal role of each type of roadway. While the four classes appear to be set apart, the sharp distinctions are more subtle. For discussion and planning purposes, however, these more specific definitions are applied.

### Principal Arterial (highways)

The principal function is to provide the most efficient movement for relatively large volumes of traffic at increased speeds. Movement to and from other road facilities is limited to controlled interchanges. Regional movement of traffic contributes an increasing portion of the traffic counts.

### Minor Arterial

The principal function is to provide efficient traffic movement for larger volumes of traffic. Little or no direct access is strived for with non-local destinations comprising a major portion of the traffic.

### Major Collector

The principal function is to provide an intermediary link between efficient movement of arterials and accessibility of local roadways. They serve to funnel or collect traffic from local roadways to arterials. More efficiency of movement is strived for in favor of accessibility.

### Local Roadways

The principal function is to provide traffic with access to and from property. It is the grass roots classification where accessibility for vehicles and pedestrians is emphasized, and efficiency of movement is secondary.

As previously noted, these functional classifications are generally equated with the jurisdictional divisions. In the more developed, larger urban communities, this relationship may not be as rigid, where the local community constructs and maintains all classes of the roadway system. In the typical rural transportation system, however, the jurisdictional and functional classifications maintain a closer relationship. The greatest emphasis of traffic in rural areas is generally on non-local, efficient movement whereas local access is secondary due to relatively low population densities. [Table 5-1](#) displays the functional class breakdown in Vilas County.

**Table 5-1: Road Mileage by Jurisdiction and Functional Class in County, 2022**

Jurisdiction	Functional Classification			Totals
	Arterial	Collector	Local	
U.S. and State	82.19	48.65	0.00	130.84
County*	0.00	204.25	0.00	204.25
All Towns	0.00	152.68	953.89	1,106.57
City of Eagle River	5.37	5.92	18.76	30.05
<b>Totals</b>	<b>87.56</b>	<b>411.50</b>	<b>972.65</b>	<b>1,471.71</b>

Source: WisDOT & NCWRPC

Based on WisDOT qualifications of the roadway classifications, Vilas County has the service of two principal arterials, two minor arterials, 19 major collectors, and 24 minor collectors. USH 51 and USH 45/STH 32 are principal arterials. STH 70 and a portion of STH 17 are minor arterials. State Highways 155, 17, and 47 and County Highways A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, M, N, O, P, S, W are major collectors. Chain O' Lakes Road, Sugar Maple Road, North Farming Road, Buckhorn Road, Razorback Road, Birchwood Drive, Big St. Germain Drive, Sunset Road, Oxbow Road, Pomeroy Lake Road, Indian Village Road, Buckatabon Road, Airport Road, West Shore Road, South Shore Road, Little Trout Road, Croker Road, Matke Road, Illinois Street, North Creek Road, Hall Road, Bayview Road, Dairyman's Road, and Boulder Lane are minor collectors.

### Traffic Counts

Traffic volume is an indicator of roadway use and as such the Wisconsin Department of Transportation maintains a traffic count program. There are several sites where counts are conducted in the county. [Table](#)

[5-2](#) below displays the annual average daily traffic counts (AADTs) for 2002, 2010, and 2019 for 15 locations in Vilas County. Note that the most recent traffic counts for these locations are mapped out on the [Transportation Map](#).

Between 2002 and 2019, daily traffic levels decreased throughout Vilas County, with only 2 of the 15 traffic count locations listed in [Table 5.2](#) experiencing an increase in traffic volume. However, traffic levels have actually been increasing since 2010, indicating that the decreases in daily traffic volumes occurred between 2002 and 2010. The largest percentage decrease in traffic volumes between 2002 and 2019 occurred at the State Highway 70: west of State Highway 155 location, where daily traffic volume decreased by over 28 percent. However, this location also experienced the largest percentage increase in daily traffic volume between 2010 and 2019. It is worth noting that most of the dramatic changes in daily traffic volumes happened at locations along State Highway 70.

**Table 5-2: Traffic Counts**

Location	2002	2010	2019	% Change 2002-2019	% Change 2010-2019
STH 70: east of USH 51	6,620	4,900	5,800	-12.4%	18.4%
STH 70: west of STH 155	5,720	2,800	4,100	-28.3%	46.4%
STH 47: west of CTH H	3,830	3,800	4,100	7.0%	7.9%
STH 70: south of STH 155	8,160	4,500	6,000	-26.5%	33.3%
STH 70: 0.5 miles west of CTH O	6,930	3,500	5,400	-22.1%	54.3%
USH 51-STH 70: 1 mile north of STH 47	15,340	13,200	13,100	-14.6%	-0.8%
STH 70: east of USH 45	6,560	4,600	6,000	-8.5%	30.4%
USH 51: northwest of CTH H	4,280	3,600	3,900	-8.9%	8.3%
USH 45-STH 32: 0.5 mile south of STH 70	7,240	5,100	6,200	-14.4%	21.6%



STH 17: north of USH 45/STH 32	2,530	2,300	2,600	2.8%	13.0%
STH 17: north of CTH E	1,170	820	1,100	-6.0%	34.1%
USH 45-STH 32: north of CTH B	3,360	2,200	2,800	-16.7%	27.3%
USH 45-STH 17-32: north of Spruce Street	15,150	12,300	14,900	-1.7%	21.1%
STH 17-70: west of Railroad Street	10,340	9,700	10,000	-3.3%	3.1%
USH 45-STH 32: south of CTH G	7,510	8,400	10,200	35.8%	21.4%

Source: WisDOT

In addition to the annual average daily traffic counts, traffic count forecasts were prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation for several locations within Vilas County. **Table 5-3** shows the projected Annual Average Daily Traffic Counts from base year 2019 to forecast year 2040.

The largest percentage increase in traffic volume is projected to occur at the USH 51-STH 70: 1 mile north of STH 47 location, with an additional 4,560 motor vehicles expected or an increase of 35 percent. Overall, traffic volumes are projected to increase at 9 of the 15 locations listed in Table 5-3, while 5 locations are projected to have decreases in traffic volumes during this time. It should be noted that a traffic count forecast was not conducted for the STH 70: 0.5 miles west of CTH O location.

**Table 5-3: Traffic Count Forecasts 2019-2040**

Location	2019	2020	2030	2040	Forecasted % Change 2019-2040
STH 70: east of USH 51	5,800	5,850	6,290	6,730	16.0%
STH 70: west of STH 155	4,100	4,340	4,780	5,220	27.3%
STH 47: west of CTH H	4,100	3,820	3,820	3,820	-6.8%
STH 70: south of STH 155	6,000	6,530	7,160	7,790	29.8%
STH 70: 0.5 miles west of CTH O	5,400	NA	NA	NA	NA
USH 51-STH 70: 1 mile north of STH 47	13,100	13,880	15,770	17,660	34.8%
STH 70: east of USH 45	6,000	5,710	6,100	6,480	8.0%
USH 51: northwest of CTH H	3,900	3,960	3,960	3,960	1.5%
USH 45-STH 32: 0.5 mile south of STH 70	6,200	5,920	6,600	7,280	17.4%
STH 17: north of USH 45/STH 32	2,600	2,210	2,210	2,210	-15.0%
STH 17: north of CTH E	1,100	820	820	820	-25.5%
USH 45-STH 32: north of CTH B	2,800	2,380	2,380	2,380	-15.0%
USH 45-STH 17-32: north of Spruce Street	14,900	14,200	14,200	14,200	-4.7%
STH 17-70: west of Railroad Street	10,000	10,410	10,410	10,410	4.1%

USH 45-STH 32: south of CTH G	10,200	9,780	10,480	11,120	9.0%
Source: WisDOT					

### Roadway Conditions

To assess the condition of the county’s roadways, the Vilas County Highway Department uses the WISLR (Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads) system developed by the University of Wisconsin Transportation Information Center for measuring the condition of their roadways. The rating system is called PASER, which stands for Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating. Although there are different scales for concrete, asphalt, sealcoat, gravel and unimproved roads, they are generally based on a scale ranging between "1" (very poor condition) to "10" (excellent condition). Every other year the road network is rated and that rating is used for the determination of improvements.

### Access Control

Highway access management is planning the number and location of driveways and intersections to help maintain safe, efficient

movement of traffic and to provide safer access to and from adjacent property. While growth and development are good for area economies, they often result in too many access points located too close together. As a result, traffic congestion increases, conflicts between land use and highway traffic grow, and crashes increase. There are a number of State statutes and administrative rules that require WisDOT to regulate access on State Trunk Highways.

The most frequently used form of access management by WisDOT is the purchase of access rights. This statute allows WisDOT to acquire property and interests for highway purposes. There are a number of projects in Vilas County that are managed through the administrative access control statute. This statute gives WisDOT the statutory authority to designate controlled-access highways in certain corridors. The Vilas County Highway Department and most municipalities have permit requirements for access to their road systems.

## Air Transportation

Vilas County has five public-use airports including Eagle River Union Airport, Lakeland/Noble F. Lee Memorial Airport in Arbor Vitae, King's Land O' Lakes Airport, Manitowish Waters Airport and Boulder Junction Airport. County residents also have access to commercial air service in Rhinelander for passenger and air freight.

Eagle River Union, Lakeland/Noble F. Lee Memorial and Land O' Lakes are classified as Medium General Aviation (GA) Airports which means they support most single and multi-engine GA aircraft, including those

aircraft commonly used by businesses. These airports support regional and instate air transportation needs.

The FAA service level provided by Eagle River Union and Lakeland/Noble F. Lee Memorial identified as "Local" indicating they supplement local communities by providing access primarily to intrastate and some interstate markets. These airports are also defined as the backbone of the GA system and are typically located near larger population centers. Most users of these airports are piston aircraft supporting

business and personal needs. Flights to and from local airports are typically intrastate or regional. During the summer tourist season, there is a Northwoods Shuttle Service between Eagle River and Chicago four days a week.

Land O' Lakes service level is "Basic", meaning it supports GA activities such as emergency service, charter or critical passenger service, cargo operations, flight training and personal flying. These airports provide a community airport that allows for private GA flying and links the community to the national airport system.

The Manitowish Waters and Boulder Junction Airports are classified as Small GA which primarily supports single-engine GA aircraft but may also accommodate small twin-engine GA aircraft and occasional business aircraft activity. Manitowish Waters' service level is also "Basic", but Boulder Junction does not have a FAA service level rating.

Continued expansion / enhancement to all these facilities is anticipated. In addition, all five airports have Height Limitation Zoning ordinances in place. These are three-mile zones around the boundary of the airport that protect flight lines from tall structures and other obstructions.

The Rhinelander-Oneida County Airport, located about 20 miles south of the county border, also serves Vilas County. This is a Commercial Service airport with regularly scheduled passenger service by Delta Air Lines to and from the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. Air freight is flown by carriers on contract with FedEx and UPS. The airport also supports military and medical flights, general aviation, on-demand charter, flight instruction, aircraft rental and maintenance. Total annual air operations are about 31,000 with approximately 25,000 passenger enplanements. Additional passenger services are available at Ironwood and Iron Mountain Airports in Michigan.

## Rail Transportation

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Railroad facilities do not exist in Vilas County. The nearest railroad facilities are

located in Rhinelander, approximately 20 miles from the Vilas County border.

## Goal, Objectives, and Policies

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### Goal:

1. To provide an integrated, efficient and economical transportation system that affords mobility, convenience and safety and that meets the needs of all citizens, including transit-dependent and disabled citizens, while maintaining the rural character of the County.

### Objectives:

1. Maintain and expand the efficiency, safety and functionality of the County's existing transportation system, which links the urban center with outlying towns, adjacent communities and the region.
2. Encourage a balanced transportation network that provides a choice in the type of mode (i.e. car, bus, aircraft, bike, walking, etc.) easy transfer between modes and transportation opportunities for those without use of an automobile.
3. Achieve close coordination between development of transportation facilities and land use planning and development.
4. Preserve the scenic value along select roadways.
5. Seek Rustic Road designation where appropriate to help preserve the special roadways within the County and promote them for economic development/tourism and recreational purposes.

### Policies:

1. Work with the Department of Transportation and the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission to ensure that the County's transportation system is coordinated with surrounding regional systems and that the County's interests are well served when major transportation facilities or programs are proposed.
2. Work with WisDOT on corridor preservation for all federal and state highways.
3. Support coordination and consolidation of specialized transit by a variety of agencies that serve the County's elderly and handicapped residents.
4. Plan for extension of County highways and other major arterials as necessary to complete connections, provide for appropriate routes for trucks and emergency vehicles and serve planned development areas.
5. Consider future road locations, extensions, or connections when reviewing development plans and proposals.
6. Work with local governmental units to plan for a network of interconnected roads in planned development areas to control highway access, preserve rural character, and improve access to these areas.

8. Space roadway access according to minimum standards to increase safety and preserve capacity.
8. Avoid land uses that generate heavy traffic on roads that have not been constructed or upgraded for such use.
9. Plan for new developments to minimize extensive road construction and avoid burden to towns for maintenance. Consider assisting towns with implementing road impact fees for new development projects that place a burden on or require upgrading of town roads.
10. Work with the towns to implement Town Road Management Plans to provide for the appropriate maintenance of town roads.
11. Protect communities and airports from incompatible land uses that could interfere with the safe operation of airports and pose hazards to the public.

There are additional policies that are developed by the Highway Committee and the County Highway Department.

# Chapter Six

## *Economic Development*

### Background

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The economic base of the community serves as an important driver for current and future land use. Economic characteristics include such components as the size of the civilian labor force, employment growth, employment by industry, unemployment rates, and commuting patterns.

For Vilas County, much of the economic base is centered around the tourism industry and other natural resource-based businesses.

The lake-rich area is also attractive for seasonal/recreational homes and serves as a major retirement area.

Assessment of these components of the economic base provides an important historical perspective on current land use patterns and provides insights that help to predict possible future directions and opportunities for growth of the local economy.

### Related Economic Studies

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#### [Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\), 2021](#)

Vilas County is one of ten counties included in the North Central Wisconsin Economic Development District as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). The NCWRPC is the agency responsible for maintaining that designation. As part of the designation, the NCWRPC annually prepares a CEDS. This report summarizes and assesses economic development activities over the past year and presents new and modified strategies to promote growth.

#### [Regional Recovery Plan \(RRP\), 2022](#)

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission prepared a Regional Recovery Plan for the ten-county region in response to the pandemic. The RRP reviews in detail the economic condition of the region and identifies trends and issues facing the local economy.

The RRP focused on five basic areas: Broadband, Childcare, Housing & Transportation, Tourism & Hospitality, and Workforce and Talent Attraction. The following are the recovery goals for each of these areas:

## Broadband

- Create universal broadband infrastructure throughout the Region.
- Bring high performance broadband service throughout the Region.
- Make broadband affordable and competitive.
- Advance digital literacy and inclusion.

## Childcare

- Expand childcare slots to allow parents a reasonable commute to their childcare center.
- Maintain high quality childcare throughout the Region.
- Make childcare affordable to the diverse workforce base throughout the Region.
- Recognize the entire Regional childcare network that includes licensed centers and more informal unlicensed childcare providers.
- Help the Regional childcare network to pool resources and leverage economies of scale.

## Housing & Transportation

- Create additional housing stock to match demand.
- Encourage development of a broad array of housing styles including high density, multi-family, and missing middle housing.
- Encourage housing that accommodates seniors, those with special needs, and those that are extremely low income.
- Create a greater variety of transportation options.

## Workforce & Talent Attraction

- Develop and maintain a talented and skilled workforce.
- Develop an ecosystem for creating, attracting, expanding, and retaining business to the Region.
- Create a sense of place and sense of community for the Region and support to the individual communities within the Region to do the same.

## Tourism & Hospitality

- Foster recovery within the Tourism and Hospitality sectors throughout the Region.
- Implement policies and practices that create sustainability in both the Tourism and Hospitality industries.
- Identify best practices with relation to the Tourism and Hospitality industries to create continued growth and interconnectedness with the greater Regional economy.

## [ALICE Study of Financial Hardship: Wisconsin](#)

This report, developed in part by Northwoods United Way based in Rhinelander, described the households in Vilas County that are above the federal poverty level but still struggle to afford basic household necessities. These households are considered to be ALICE -Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed households. “ALICE” households are largely employed but do not earn enough in wages to meet the “household survival budget,” which does not allow for any savings. The report states that many “ALICE” households work in fields that provide vital services, such as retail,



health care, child care, and security, but cannot make ends meet on the income from these jobs.

- The “ALICE” report shows that 30 percent of Vilas County households are either below the federal poverty level or are considered to be “ALICE” Households, compared to the 23 percent of households statewide that are either below the federal poverty level or considered to be “ALICE” households. This indicates that the average household in Vilas County is relatively more financially challenged than the average Wisconsin household at-large.

## Vilas County Comprehensive Plan, 2009

The previous Vilas County Comprehensive Plan guides county decision-makers on a wide array of issues through 2030. Chapter Six of this plan discusses economic development in Vilas County. The Plan establishes the following goals relating to bolstering economic development in the County.

- Encourage a variety of economic development opportunities appropriate to the resources and character of Vilas County.
- Enhance career opportunities and living wage jobs in an economy that is compatible with our natural resources and reflects the needs of the entire community.
- Enhance and diversify the economy consistent with other Vilas County goals and objectives

## Labor Force

This section examines four factors related to the county’s labor force. These factors are labor force, unemployment, workforce

participation, and education & training. **Table 6-1** displays a variety of information related to the county labor force

**Table 6-1: Labor Force Indicators**

Indicator	2000	2010	2020	Change 2000-20	% Change 2000-20
Labor Force	9,869	10,718	9,998	129	1.3%
Employed	9,268	9,764	9,434	166	1.8%
Unemployment Rate	6.1%	5.2%	3.0%	-3.1%	-50.8%
Participation Rate	57.0%	58.1%	53.3%	-3.7%	-6.5%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

Overall, the labor force has increased from 9,869 in 2000 to 9,998 in 2020. That represents an increase of 1.3 percent, while Wisconsin's labor force increased by 7.8 percent during this time. The labor force is defined simply as the number of persons, sixteen and over, employed or looking to be employed. Persons over sixteen who are students, homemakers, retired, institutionalized, or unable/unwilling to seek employment are not considered part of the labor force.

As identified earlier in the plan, the county has experienced population growth over the last two decades, although that growth is not the same among all age groups. In 2000, over 20 percent of the population was 17 and under, while about 23 percent were 65 and older. By 2020, about 16.5 percent of the population was 17 and under, while the 65 and older population grew to over 31 percent. These population trends create issues for the expansion of the local labor force.

In 2000, 9,268 members of the labor force were employed, and that number grew to 9,434 in 2020. Meanwhile, the labor force decreased to 9,998 in 2020, however, it still resulted in a 1.3 percent increase over the twenty-year period.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Vilas County had 6.1 percent unemployment compared to the state rate of 3.2 percent. By 2020, unemployment dropped to a rate of 3.0 percent for the County while the state rate decreased to 2.3 percent. Unemployment is defined as the difference between the total civilian labor force and the total persons employed. Stay-at-home parents, retirees, or

persons not searching for employment are not considered unemployed because they are not considered to be part of the "labor force".

A significant portion of the decreases in the county's labor force has been due to the decrease in participation rate. Workforce participation is a measure expressed in terms of a percentage of persons not actively seeking employment divided by the total working age population. These persons may not seek employment due to retirement, disability, choose to be a home care provider, or simply are not looking for work. In any event, these people are not receiving unemployment benefits, nor are they seeking employment in any capacity.

In 2000, about 57 percent of the population over 16 actively participated in the labor force. Between 2000 and 2020, Vilas County experienced a 6.5 percent decrease in labor force participation rate, a significantly faster decrease than the County's decrease in labor force. The national participation rate in 2020 was 63.4 percent, and the State of Wisconsin's participation rate was 66 percent. Overall, the County has a labor force participation rate that is significantly less than state average, which can partially be attributed to the county's high median age.

Worker productivity has often been cited as one important reason for the strength of Wisconsin's economy. Both education and training are critical to maintaining productivity. The level of educational attainment is an important indicator of the skills of the labor force. Formal education and job training reflect a community's ability to provide a labor force for certain types of

industry. Educational attainment in Vilas County is slightly higher than the state average in terms of those with a high school diploma or better, but the County is slightly lower than the state in terms of bachelor's degrees or higher.

Training is another labor force indicator. Partnerships between local businesses,

governments, and educational institutions are very useful in developing the Regional economy. Institutions such as UW-Stevens Point and Nicolet Technical College often direct their programs to the training needs of local workers and businesses. Organizations such as the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board are important to this process as well.

## Employment by Industry

Employment by industry within an area helps to illustrate the structure of the economy. Historically the State of Wisconsin has had high concentrations of employment in the manufacturing sector of the economy. Recent trends show a decrease in the concentration of employment in manufacturing and increasing levels of employment in the service industry. In contrast, Vilas County has had relatively low employment in manufacturing, and much higher employment in service and retail sectors due to the large tourism industry.

**Table 6-2** provides data on the employment distribution by industry for Vilas County for 2000 and 2020. In 2020, the highest employment was in the Leisure & Hospitality sector with 18.8% of the workers. The Education & Health Services sector followed with 17.5% of the workers, then retail trade with 14.0% and construction at 9.4%. Employment for manufacturing of durable and nondurable goods in Vilas County decreased from 643 in 2000 to 521 in 2020.

Industry	2000		2020	
	#	% of Total	#	% of Total
Agriculture & Natural Resources	231	2.5%	313	3.3%
Construction	1,107	11.9%	889	9.4%
Manufacturing	643	6.9%	521	5.5%
Wholesale Trade	264	2.8%	122	1.3%
Retail Trade	1,457	15.7%	1,318	14.0%
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	324	3.5%	321	3.4%
Information	145	1.6%	134	1.4%
Financial Activities	425	4.6%	593	6.3%
Professional & Business Services	489	5.3%	861	9.1%
Education & Health Services	1,666	18.0%	1,647	17.5%

Leisure & Hospitality	1,536	16.6%	1,773	18.8%
Public Administration	521	5.6%	405	4.3%
Other Services	460	5.0%	537	5.7%
Total	9,268	100.0%	9,434	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2016-2020

**Table 6-3** compares Year 2020 employment by industry between Vilas County and Wisconsin. Vilas County has a significantly higher percentage of employment than the state in the Leisure & Hospitality sector as well as in the agriculture, retail trade, and

construction sectors. Conversely, Vilas County has a significantly lower percentage of employment than the state in employment for the manufacturing of durable and non-durable goods.

**Table 6-3: Employment by Industry in Vilas County - 2020**

Industry	Vilas County (Percent)	Wisconsin (Percent)
Agriculture & Natural Resources	3.3%	2.2%
Construction	9.4%	5.9%
Manufacturing	5.5%	18.0%
Wholesale Trade	1.3%	2.7%
Retail Trade	14.0%	11.0%
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	3.4%	4.6%
Information	1.4%	1.6%
Financial Activities	6.3%	6.1%
Professional & Business Services	9.1%	8.6%
Education & Health Services	17.5%	23.4%
Leisure & Hospitality	18.8%	8.2%
Public Administration	4.3%	3.5%
Other Services	5.7%	4.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: American Community Survey 2016-2020

## Commuting Patterns

**Table 6-4** identifies commuting patterns for Vilas County residents based on the 2015-2019 American Community Survey. Nearly

half of the workers residing in the county also worked in the county (49.0%), although the percentage of residents working in Vilas

County declined from 71.3% in 2000. Oneida County was the location of business and industry where nearly one fourth of Vilas County’s residents (17.4%) were employed in 2019, a slightly lower percentage than in 2000 (23.1%). About 18% of the County’s

workers commuted to other Wisconsin counties not listed in Table 6-4. About 3.6% commuted out of state, mostly to Michigan. Virtual working will likely impact commuting patterns in the future.

**Table 6-4: Location of Workplace - 2019**

Location	Number	Percent
Vilas County	4,117	49.0%
Oneida County	1,491	17.7%
Marathon County	285	3.4%
Dane County	236	2.8%
Milwaukee County	159	1.9%
Brown County	140	1.7%
Wood County	128	1.5%
Outagamie County	116	1.4%
Gogebic County (Michigan)	115	1.4%
Portage County	115	1.4%
All other Locations	1,501	17.9%
<b>In-State</b>		
In-State	8,099	96.4%
<b>Out of State</b>		
Out of State	304	3.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,403</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*Source: U.S. Census on the Map*

## Income Characteristics

As displayed in Chapter 1, the County median household income rose 23.3% from \$33,759 in 2000 to \$41,631 in 2010 and rose again up to \$50,039 in 2020. Median household income within Vilas County has increased at a slower pace than in Wisconsin, especially since 2010. Vilas County’s median household income in 2020 was \$50,039, which is significantly lower

than Wisconsin’s median household income of \$63,293 in that same year. Vilas County’s median household income remains just 79% of the statewide median.

The large number of retirees living within Vilas County also contribute personal income in the form of transfer payments such as retirement fund income, social security,

and others. In Vilas County, transfer payments account for more of the personal income of residents than proprietor income. When compared with the rest of Wisconsin

and the United States, the level of transfer payments is more than twice the percent of total income.

## Tourism & Seasonal Residents

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Tourism is a major component in Vilas County's economy, as thousands of visitors travel to the area to take advantage of more than 1,300 lakes, large public forest lands, and diversity of recreational resources. Accommodations such as motels, resorts, campgrounds, and other lodging facilities generate an influx of visitors and business to Vilas County. There are approximately 4,700 rooms and 3,100 campsites that are available throughout the county. Also worth noting is the impact of 2017 Wisconsin Act 59, which allows rentals of single-family homes for stays of seven or more days. This has fundamentally changed the housing market in the area.

In addition to visitors to the town, people owning seasonal/recreational homes in the area can out-number the local residents during peak times during the summer. In Vilas County, 13,492 housing units are used for seasonal/recreational or occasional use according to the 2016-2020 American Community Survey. With these housing units, an estimated 53,968 additional

seasonal residents may be housed in Vilas County communities during the peak summer season, greatly adding to the resident population. Seasonal homeowners also contribute expenditures for area goods and services.

When the numbers of overnight visitors, day visitors, and seasonal residents are added to Vilas County's resident population, the area communities are estimated to service over 100,000 people during the peak of the summer season.

Vilas County ranked 14th among the 72 counties in Wisconsin in 2020 for total tourism expenditures. According to annual estimates prepared by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, travelers to Vilas County spent \$241.2 million in 2020.

## Strengths and Weaknesses for Attracting and Retaining Businesses

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Over the years a variety of efforts have been undertaken to examine county strengths and weaknesses related to business attraction and retention.

Those efforts identified the following constraints to retaining and expanding the existing economic base: limited availability of financing for expanding businesses, the limited workforce, limited availability of improved business sites, perceptions of distance to major markets, limitations of local markets, limited use of business assistance programs for start-ups, impacts of development on natural resources, and lack of large-scale convention and conference facilities.

Over the years, a number of programs have been implemented to address these weaknesses, however many remain as constraints for attracting and retaining businesses. Local chambers of commerce formed the Vilas County Chamber of Commerce for cooperative efforts to develop

and enhance the tourism industry. More recently was the creation of the Vilas County Economic Development Corporation (VCEDC).

A major strength for Vilas County remains its world-class outdoor recreation and natural resources. These are strong attractions for business owners who would like to bring their business where they may already recreate and/or own a seasonal home. Community safety in the northwoods is also becoming increasingly attractive as an incentive for business relocations, especially with the increase in home-based business opportunities. Health care services in the region are also very strong as they support the large retirement population.

A weakness in rural areas, is the lack of infrastructure, particularly public sewer and water. Without that type of infrastructure many types of development are limited, such as multi-family or industrial uses.

## Types of Businesses Desired

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Several communities in Vilas County have conducted community planning surveys over the years. Most of these were conducted nearly twenty years ago as part of preparation of their local comprehensive plans. These include the Towns of Arbor Vitae, Manitowish Waters, Winchester, St. Germain, Washington, Presque Isle, Phelps,

Land O' Lakes and Lincoln along with the City of Eagle River. Although dated, these still have some relevancy to today.

Tourism-oriented, retail, service, and light industrial businesses were consistently selected as types of businesses the local communities should attract to Vilas County.

Some communities had very specific business needs identified such as a service station and supermarket in Arbor Vitae, technology and home-based businesses in Washington, and hardware/lumber, supermarket, and bakery in Phelps.

Conversely, industry other than light industry was not well accepted in most communities in Vilas County. In the Town of Washington survey, 82% of the respondents felt the Town should discourage heavy industry (exceeded only by casinos at 86% and adult entertainment at 84% who felt these should be discouraged).

There was a mixed response among the communities on support for developing industrial/business parks. In Winchester, for example, nearly 85% of the survey respondents felt the Town should not be financially involved in developing industrial/business parks. The same was true in Manitowish Waters (76% of respondents) and Arbor Vitae (71%). In St. Germain, just 13% of those surveyed supported having the Town purchase land for development of light industrial/business parks.

A majority of City of Eagle River (53%) and Town of Lincoln (72%) respondents though, favored purchasing and developing a joint industrial park using intergovernmental cooperation. In Eagle River/Lincoln, more survey respondents agreed the area should provide increased promotion and information, and should share costs between the municipalities to bring sewer and water to a light industrial area.

Some communities asked about other types of assistance they could provide to help attract businesses. More survey respondents in Presque Isle, Washington, and St. Germain felt no incentives should be offered. In Phelps the number of responses for providing financial incentives and technical assistance to businesses met or exceeded the number against providing incentives. In Winchester, more than two thirds were against the Town helping to create jobs for either new or current residents.

In Manitowish Waters though, respondents were generally in favor of providing physical, technical, and financial assistance for the downtown area businesses. Eagle River/Lincoln surveys also supported business recruitment, decorative street lighting, and other improvements targeted to the downtown commercial district.

In St. Germain, 70% of respondents felt large retailers and fast-food chains should be discouraged from locating in the town. Similar results were found in Manitowish Waters, with 69% opposed to large retail stores and 78% against fast food chain restaurants. In Phelps, more people felt fast food restaurant should be encouraged than discouraged (155 for, 121 against), but reversed their opinion on superstores (201 against, 178 for).

Aesthetics is an important issue for commercial and industrial developments across Vilas County as communities strive to retain and enhance their northwoods character. In Arbor Vitae, a large majority of survey responses (84%) felt there should be aesthetic requirements for commercial and



industrial developments. Similar responses were received in Eagle River (65% in favor of such requirements), Lincoln (68%), Manitowish Waters (88%), Phelps (73%), St. Germain (82%), Washington (90%), and Winchester (86%).

A current issue that would surely be identified today as an area of concern for the continued development of the county would be access to and quality of broadband internet service.

## Economic Development Programs

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A variety of local institutions are available to local businesses in addition there are numerous programs available from county, regional, state, and federal sources related to economic development.

### *County Programs:*

#### Vilas County Economic Development Corporation

The Vilas County Economic Development Corporation provides innovative leadership and regional infrastructure to improve the economic well-being of businesses, communities and residents; promote creation and retention of viable businesses and quality jobs; and provide increased opportunities for education strengthening workforce development. Website: [www.vilascountyedc.org](http://www.vilascountyedc.org).

#### Lac du Flambeau Workforce & Training Center

The Workforce and Training Center in Lac du Flambeau opened in 2022. This tribal lead project will provide a new training space for various trades and manufacturing skills and will provide entrepreneurial education and assistance. The facility was

funded, in part, by a grant from the US Department of Commerce - Economic Development Administration. The NCWRPC provided planning and grant assistance to this effort.

### *Regional Programs:*

#### Central Wisconsin Economic Development Fund

The Central Wisconsin Economic Development Fund (CWED) Revolving Loan Program works with entrepreneurs and their lenders to structure financing packages for start-up and expanding businesses to encourage economic growth in the area. CWED loans usually have low interest rates, reduced collateral requirements, and flexible terms. Website: [www.cwedfund.com](http://www.cwedfund.com).

### *State Programs:*

#### Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) works with more than 600 statewide partners, including regional economic development organizations, academic institutions and industry groups. WEDC helps to enhance communities, supports business

development, advances industry innovation, taps global markets, and develops a talented workforce to promote economic growth. WEDC works with both businesses directly and local governments. They have a variety of programs for each. Website: [www.wedc.org](http://www.wedc.org)

#### Wisconsin Small Cities Program (CDBG Program)

The Wisconsin Department of Administration provides federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to eligible municipalities for approved housing and/or public facility improvements and for economic development projects. Economic Development grants provide loans to businesses for such things as: acquisition of real estate, buildings, or equipment; construction, expansion, or remodeling; and working capital for inventory and direct labor. Vilas County has been awarded this grant as part of nine-county consortium. Website: [doabcd@wisconsin.gov](mailto:doabcd@wisconsin.gov)

#### Transportation Economic Assistance (TEA)

This program is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and provides funding assistance for the cost of transportation improvements necessary to enhance major economic development projects. Web site address: [www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov/aid/tea.htm](http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov/aid/tea.htm)

#### Other State Programs

Technology Development grants and loans; Customized Labor Training grants and loans; and Major Economic Development Project grants and loans. Redevelopment of environmentally contaminated lands is another economic development option with PECFA and state Brownfields initiatives.

Once reclaimed, these sites could be available for potential commercial redevelopment with limited liability concerns.

Small business development has been the focus of multiple efforts by UW-Extension, Nicolet College, area chambers, and the Small Business Development Center at UW-Stevens Point.

#### *Federal Programs:*

##### Economic Development Administration (EDA)

EDA manages a variety of programs, including a public works grant program and a technical assistance grant program. Any local unit of government is eligible but must meet certain distress criteria. The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission is the designated partner with EDA. Contact the NCWRPC directly or visit the EDA website at: [www.eda.gov](http://www.eda.gov).

##### U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA – RD)

The USDA Rural Development program is committed to helping improve the economy and quality of life in all of rural America. Financial programs include support for such essential public facilities and services as water and sewer systems, housing, health clinics, emergency service facilities, and electric and telephone service. USDA-RD promotes economic development by supporting loans to businesses through banks and community-managed lending pools. The program also offers technical assistance and information to help agricultural and other cooperatives get

started and improve the effectiveness of their member services. Web site address: [www.rurdev.usda.gov](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov).

#### Small Business Administration (SBA)

SBA provides business and industrial loan programs that will make or guarantee up to 90 percent of the principal and interest on loans to companies, individuals, or government entities for financing in rural areas. Wisconsin Business Development Finance Corporation acts as an agent for the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) programs that provide financing for fixed asset loans and for working capital. Web site address: [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov).

In addition, the Lac du Flambeau area, as part of the NiiJii Enterprise Community, was designated as an federal Enterprise Community in 1999. NiiJii is a partnership between the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin and the Sokaogon Chippewa Community of Mole Lake,

together with eight municipal partners in northern Wisconsin. The effort fosters Native entrepreneurs and creating jobs. Website address: [www.niijii.org](http://www.niijii.org).

#### Opportunity Zones (OZ)

The Federal 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) established Opportunity Zones to incite private investment in designated economically challenged communities throughout the United States. Private investment in Opportunity Zones is encouraged through tax incentives.

Wisconsin has 120 designated Opportunity Zones, including census tracts in Eagle River and the Lac du Flambeau Tribal lands. An Opportunity Zone is an economically distressed community where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment.

# Goals, Objectives, and Policies

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## Goals:

1. Encourage a variety of economic development opportunities appropriate to the resources and character of Vilas County.
2. Enhance career opportunities and living wage jobs in an economy that is compatible with our natural resources and reflects the needs of the entire community.
3. Enhance and diversify the economy consistent with other Vilas County goals and objectives.

## Objectives:

1. Work in cooperation with the local communities to enhance their economic development.
2. Continuously determine current employment characteristics and identify existing and future employment needs.
3. Support the Vilas County Economic Development Corporation (VCEDC) a county-wide economic development organization.
4. Evaluate infrastructure as necessary to facilitate economic growth.
5. Identify and pursue business and industry sectors for potential growth in the county.
6. Create and maintain a current overall economic development plan for the county.
7. Continuously pursue state, federal, and other funding resources to facilitate the

recruitment and expansion of business and industry sectors appropriate for the county.

8. Encourage and support educational institutions to develop training programs needed by the area's businesses to meet identified needs and future needs.
9. Support the revitalization of small community downtown areas.
10. Provide assistance in identifying suitable properties for development consistent with local plans and any site design or design review criteria.

## Policies:

1. Cooperate with local, regional, and other agencies and organizations to coordinate economic development activities where appropriate.
2. Include all communities, residents, and the private sector in the dialogue about economic development.
3. Promote business development that will help diversify and expand the economic base, create living-wage jobs, and operate in a manner that is compatible with our natural resources.
4. Promote and enhance Vilas County's tourism industry in cooperation with the Vilas County Tourism & Publicity Department, the Vilas County Chamber of Commerce, local

- chambers and municipalities, and other organizations.
5. Recognize that community resources to maintain and enhance the quality of life for Vilas County residents are critical to economic development.
  6. Promote a plan for an adequate supply of land for commercial and industrial needs.
  7. Recognize the value of, and support entrepreneurship.
  8. Help retain and grow existing businesses and new opportunities in Vilas County.
  9. Promote the expansion of career opportunities and living wage jobs.
  10. Advocate for better access to higher education resources in the county.
  11. Advocate for telecommunications infrastructure and other technology related to development and expansion.

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# Chapter Seven

## *Land Use*

### Introduction

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This is the seventh of nine chapters that comprise the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan. This chapter is based on the statutory requirement for a compilation of goals, objectives, maps, and policies to guide the future development of the County. The land use chapter also provides a brief explanation of planning resources, implementation tools, a review of the planning efforts which have occurred in the county to date, an inventory and analysis of existing land uses by classification, a future land use discussion, and concludes with goals, objectives and policies.

There are 14 state planning goals contained in the Comprehensive Planning legislation.

All of these relate to land-use planning, with three being directly related. These are: (1) Encouragement of land uses, densities, and regulations that promote efficient development patterns and relatively low municipal, state governmental, and utility costs, (2) Planning and development of land uses that create or preserve varied and unique urban and rural communities, and (3) Balancing individual property rights with community interests and goals.

The Land Use Chapter brings together all of the previous chapters to provide a general framework for future growth in the county. Each adopted Town Plan provides additional information specific to that town.

### County Resources

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Vilas County has several departments that have some relationship to land use. The primary department is Zoning & Planning, which is responsible for administration of the county zoning, issuance of building and septic permits, and general code enforcement. The Land and Water Conservation Department is responsible for soil and water conservation, related planning, and education. The Forestry,

Recreation, and Land Department manages all county lands, including the county forest, and coordinate recreation throughout the county.

All of these departments have standing county level committees that provide policy oversight, including Zoning & Planning, Forestry, Recreation & Land, and Land and Water Conservation.

## Previous Planning Efforts

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### County

There are a variety of specialized county plans that relate to some degree to land use. These plans include:

County Land & Water Resource Management Plan, 2015: The primary intent of this plan is to identify strategies to protect the quality and quantity of the county's soil and water resources. NCWRPC provided assistance preparing this plan.

County Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2019: This plan's primary purpose is to identify existing recreational facilities and identify needed facilities for a five-year period. A variety of information is included in that plan, such as trail information, park inventory and future needs. NCWRPC provided assistance preparing this plan.

### Local

Several Vilas County communities have recently completed town level comprehensive plan updates, some are working to complete updates, while others have not updated their plans. The state comprehensive planning law states that every ten years a comprehensive plan must be updated.

The Towns of Arbor Vitae, Cloverland, Conover, Lac du Flambeau, Land O'Lakes, Lincoln, Manitowish Waters, Phelps, Plum Lake, Presque Isle, St. Germain, Washington, and Winchester have completed plans. The Town of Boulder Junction is the only town without a plan

### Land Use Planning Tools

#### Zoning Regulations

There are two basic types of zoning: General and shoreland.

General Zoning has been a tool used by units of government since the 1920's in Wisconsin. Zoning provides a reasonable protection of property rights of landowners by minimizing incompatible uses. Generally, zoning identifies a variety of broad districts that identifies the primary allowable or permitted uses, as well as a list of permitted uses with some conditions, called conditional uses. Often a district will list non-permitted uses. The ordinance establishes detailed regulations concerning how land may be developed, including setbacks, the density or intensity of development, and the height and bulk of building and other structures. These districts are displayed on an official zoning map. Currently eleven towns utilize county general zoning.

While the zoning map and land use map do not need to directly match at the time the land use map is adopted, the intent is that the land use map will serve as a guide indicating how the property should eventually be zoned. Changes to the zoning districts should only be made if they are consistent with the adopted future land use map. However, there may be situations where changing the zoning district boundary makes sense and is in the best interest of the community. If changing the zoning would result in a conflict with the future land use map, the land use map should also be changed.

Generally, the future land use map should only be changed if it does not accurately



reflect the community’s desired land use pattern.

Shoreland Zoning is mandated by state law and is administered by the county. The intent of shoreland zoning is to control development near waterways, in the most sensitive environmental areas. The area defined by state law is the area within 300 feet of a stream or river or to the landward side of the floodplain and 1000 feet of a lake, flowage, or pond. The county has jurisdiction throughout all fourteen towns for shoreland zoning, regardless if they have county zoning, local town zoning or no zoning.

A Floodplain Ordinance was adopted by the County in 2014. This ordinance regulates all areas that would be covered by the regional flood or base flood as shown on the Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) or other maps approved by DNR.

### Land Division Regulations

The purpose of a land division or subdivision ordinance is to regulate and control the division of land to: Further the orderly layout

and use of land; prevent the overcrowding of land; lessen the congestion on streets and highways; and facilitate adequate provision for water, sewage and other public improvements. A subdivision ordinance includes technical requirements, design standards for plats and certified survey maps, and required improvements (i.e. stormwater detention, public and private sewage, land dedication).

Local units of government may also elect to have a separate land division ordinance if it is more restrictive than the county ordinance.

### Official Mapping

Counties have limited official mapping powers; cities and villages have much greater powers. Counties may prepare plans for the future platting of lands, or for the future location of streets, highways, or parkways in the unincorporated areas of the county. In addition, counties may adopt highway-width maps showing the location and width of any existing streets or highways, which are planned to be expanded; however, the municipality affected must approve the map.

## Generalized Existing Land Use

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The vast majority of the county is forested and rural in character with scattered low-density residential and other uses; there are some areas of higher-density residential development, especially along lakeshores and scattered along town and county roads throughout the county.

Beginning with aerial photography, a land use analysis process is completed to categorize how land is currently being used. Each type of use has its own characteristic that can determine compatibility, location, and preference to other land uses.

Examining the way land is used now is important to understanding future land use needs.

Generalized existing land use categories include: Agriculture, Commercial, Industrial, Woodlands, Residential, Transportation, Open Grassland, Outdoor Recreation, Government/Public/Institutional, and Water.

An Existing Land Use Map provides a “birds eye view” of existing development patterns in the county. Easily observed are the vast

woodlands, including wetlands, as well as the major agricultural areas in the county. See [Map 5 – Generalized Existing Land Use](#).

Using this map, calculations were made with a geographic information system (GIS) to determine acreage calculations. Note that these are generalized and are not intended to be exact, but rather provide an overview of what the land is being used for now. The information is displayed in [Table 7-1](#).

Woodlands were identified as the largest land use in the county. Over 76 percent of the county is considered woodlands, although much of this is also wetland. The second largest use is water, with about 15 percent of the total. Combined these two uses represent about 91 percent of the land use in the county. Residential uses make up only about 6 percent of the total.

**Table 7-1: Generalized Existing Land Use, 2020**

General Category	Acres	Percent
Agriculture	4,629	0.7%
Commercial/Business	3,974	0.6%
Industrial (includes quarries)	1,388	0.2%
Governmental/Public/Institutional	1,622	0.2%
Open Lands	1,594	0.2%
Outdoor Recreation	1,790	0.3%
Residential	37,518	5.8%
Transportation	6,267	1.0%
Woodlands	495,393	76.1%
Water	96,713	14.9%
<b>Total Acres</b>	<b>650,886</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: WROC & NCWRPC 2020

### [Agriculture](#)

Very little productive agricultural land exists within Vilas County in terms of traditional agriculture and production of cash crops. In fact, such uses comprise less than 1% of the county's total land uses. The Town of Washington has the largest area of tillable land in the county. Sandy soils and a limited growing season make cash cropping very difficult.

However, cranberry operations in the Town of Manitowish Waters have been a very

strong agricultural component in terms of production and for generating tourism.

### [Commercial/Business](#)

Commercial uses are found throughout the county. In all less than 1% of the county's land is in this use. Commercial uses include hotels, motels, and resorts which are located throughout the county, particularly along lakeshores. It also includes commercial developments located along highways, such as gas/service stations, gift shops, restaurants, etc. Other commercial uses include those uses which provide goods and

services required by both year-round and seasonal populations such as grocery stores, medical facilities, banks, etc.

There are several small communities with concentrations of development, including a mix of residential and commercial, with the largest being the City of Eagle River. There is concentrated commercial in the form of local downtown areas in several towns such as Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters, St. Germain, Phelps, Presque Isle, Sayner, and Land O' Lakes to name a few. The downtown areas play a large role in Vilas County's community character and northwoods aesthetic. Most of the local business activity is located along the road system, scattered throughout the county. Higher concentrations of commercial uses exist along the state and federal highways, including STH 70, USH 45, and USH 51. Much of the local business activity is home-based, and consists of local trade, service, and retail.

### *Government/Institutional/Public*

Such uses are comprised of lands used for public schools, cemeteries, active and closed landfill sites, transfer stations/recycling sites, public facility and service buildings (i.e., municipal buildings, community centers), and provision of community utilities and services such as power, gas, and telephone. In addition, religious camps and scout camps are included here. These uses make up less than 1% of overall land uses.

### *Industrial*

Industrial uses in Vilas County are very low and comprise less than 1% of the county's total existing land use. The majority (70%) of industrial uses in the county consist of active and abandoned gravel pits. Because of the desire for municipal water, sewer, fire protection, cheap land and other services,

most industrial uses are typically located in incorporated municipalities, which is why the highest concentration of industrial use occurs in the City of Eagle River. Although historically industrial uses have been segregated from residential areas, certain industrial facilities may be compatible with these areas if there is an adequate buffer and protection. Because protection of the natural environment, including water, air, and forest resources is so important in Vilas County, heavy polluting industries will likely not be a part of the area's industrial growth. The City of Eagle River has the county's only fully serviced industrial park.

### *Open Lands*

Open lands are areas that have no development and are clear of large concentrations of trees, such as open wetlands or fallow farm fields. Less than 1% percent of land is in this use.

### *Outdoor Recreation*

Vilas County has many areas that are dedicated for public parks and outdoor recreation. With an array of recreational resources provided from local, county, state, and federal sources, the effects of a growing population and accompanying service demands will place greater demands on the recreational facilities. Less than 1% of the county is used for parks and recreation, but that does not include the vast resources of land and outdoor recreation found in the Nicolet and Chequamegon National Forests, the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest, and the Vilas County Forest.

### *Residential Uses*

Residential development makes up about 6% of the total land uses in Vilas County. Residential uses are split into four

categories: single family, single family with business, two-family residential, and multi-family residential. Residential development patterns can be generally characterized into four categories. These include: 1) high and low density lakeshore residential, 2) community and neighborhood concentrations, 3) remote subdivisions, and 4) rural, large-parcel forestry/residential.

A majority of residential development occurs along or in close proximity to the lakeshore areas. Lakeshore development has occurred on the majority of the county's lakes which are 50 acres or greater. As the larger lakes have become developed, the trend has shifted the development pressure to the numerous smaller-sized lakes (less than 50 acres) and rivers. Much of the lakeshore development consists of second homes and seasonal conversions to permanent housing and short-term rentals. Scattered low-density development is occurring in many areas of Vilas County, radiating outward from the lakeshore areas and along town roads and county highways.

### Transportation

Transportation uses are the roadways that run throughout the county. This also includes airports. These uses make up about

1% of the county. No railroad facilities are located in the county.

### Woodlands

Over three-fourths of the county is comprised of forest or woodlands. The majority of this land in forest use is owned and managed by public entities including the U.S. Forest Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the Vilas County Forestry Department. Much of this land is used for commercial timber production as well as recreation uses.

These areas are not only used by local residents, but also attract people from around the state and nation, thus protection of these areas is important to maintaining the county's vibrant tourist economy. Protection of environmentally sensitive areas, such as riparian and forested habitats and floodway areas, whether on public or private land, is important for the same reason.

### Water

Surface water comprises almost 15% of the land area in Vilas County. The development pattern is a direct reflection of the location of lakes, rivers, and streams

## Public Land Ownership

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Publicly owned lands have had a significant impact on the development patterns of the county. Nearly 46 percent of the county's total area is owned by public entities, such as the National Forest Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Vilas County, local governments, and tribal lands.

Vilas County owns over 40,000 acres. Most of these lands are held as part of county

forests and are managed for timber production. The county maintains a Forest Plan to manage the county forest in a sustainable basis for present and future generations. The Plan contains information about forest resource planning, outdoor recreation planning, silvicultural practices, aesthetic management zones, trails and access control, as well as biological community information.

Table 7-2 displays the various ownership by acreage and that is shown on the Ownership Map.

Table 7-2: Public Ownership			
Public Ownership	Total Acreage	% of Total Public Ownership	% of County Acreage
Nicolet-Chequamegon (Federal)	54,607	18.3%	8.4%
Northern Highland (State)	161,298	54.1%	24.8%
Vilas County Forest/Lands	40,374	13.5%	6.2%
Town/City	13,296	4.7%	2.0%
Tribal Lands	22,723	10.1%	4.4%
Totals:	298,298	100%	45.8%

Source: NCWRPC, 2023

Public ownership provides long-term protection against development in these areas. Additionally, a significant amount of land in Vilas County and other northern Wisconsin counties is owned and managed

for the production of timber for industrial uses. The most significant amount of industrial forestland in Vilas County is located in the Town of Winchester.

## Demographics Affecting Land Use

Population, housing, and employment are the three most critical demographic factors that influence land use patterns. These factors and their associated influence on the county’s land use are responsible for much of the current development pattern in the county.

To determine future land use needs, projections were obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) for population and Economic Modeling Specialists (EMSI) for employment. Housing unit projections are based on both full-time and part-time population demands. According to these sources, the full-time population of the county is projected to increase slowly, while

housing units and employment are projected to increase at higher rates.

### Population

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) population projections are displayed in Table 7-3. The DOA projections indicate a six percent growth over the 20-year period from 2025 to 2040. DOA population projections indicate a 2040 population of 23,890. These projections were prepared following the 2010 Census and are lower than the previous projections that were prepared following the 2000 Census.

Table 7-3 displays the projected population in five-year increments for 2025, 2030, 2035

and 2040. Note that population peaks in 2030, declines in 2035 and 2040.

## Housing

Over the last twenty years there have been significant changes in the number of housing units in the County. The Great Recession had a significant impact on the housing industry, not just in the county, but nationwide. New housing unit construction has still not recovered.

Housing will continue to be needed throughout the county as the population continues to increase and there is continued demand for seasonal housing. The number of natural features in the county, primarily its numerous lakes, is a major factor in the existing development pattern of the county. The effects of the desire of property owners to establish seasonal or permanent residences along lakes and other water bodies in Vilas County are unmistakable, as major residential developments exist along the majority of the county's lakes. The desire for lakefront property is further compounded by 2017 Wisconsin Act 59, which allows rental of homes for periods of seven days or more.

As displayed in Table 7-3 there will be 1,300 additional residents in the county by 2040. Based on projected population growth and existing persons per household of 1.89 we can determine about 700 new units would be needed for county residents. The demand for seasonal housing will continue as well. Overall, housing units will increase by just

over 5 percent. Three major trends are likely to continue throughout the planning period relating to lake/waterfront development:

- ✓ Conversion of seasonal to permanent residences will increase as the baby-boomer generation migrates northward for its retirement location.
- ✓ Waterfront development pressure and cost of shoreline property will increase as fewer lakefront properties are available.
- ✓ Large, privately-owned parcels adjacent to lakes will likely face heavy development pressure for subdivision.
- ✓ Pressure as the result of 2017 Wisconsin Act 59 allowing rentals of seven days or more.

Table 7-3 displays the projected increase for housing units in five-year increments for 2020, 2025, 2030, 2035 and 2040.

## Employment

Employment in the County is expected to continue to increase. The EMSI model projects steady employment growth over the twenty-year time period. Overall growth is expected to grow at almost thirteen percent.

Table 7-3 displays the projected employment increases in five-year increments for 2025, 2030, 2035 and 2040.



Table 7-3: Population, Housing & Employment Projections				
	2025	2030	2035	2040
Population DOA	23,645	24,395	24,305	23,890
Housing Units NCWRPC	26,245	26,595	26,945	27,295
Employment EMSI	9,741	10,032	10,332	10,644

## Land Demand

As the County’s population grows there is demand for more housing and employment opportunities. The previous projections highlighted those needs. This section determines the amount of land needed to support those new uses based on existing land use averages.

### Residential:

The overall residential land demand is based on the addition of 1,400 units or about 70 per year. Assuming a county wide average of about 2 acres of land needed per unit, we arrive at 140 acres per year or an average of about 700 acres of residential land is expected to be needed every 5 years to accommodate anticipated population growth by the year 2040. Much of this land will convert from forest uses.

### Industrial, Commercial, and Agricultural:

Commercial and industrial development is subject to market forces and difficult to predict. Agricultural demand will remain stable over the period, so no additional land is needed. In fact, some of the additional acres needed for other uses will likely be converted from existing agricultural uses.

Currently there are about 4,000 acres of commercial land and about 1,400 acres of industrial land. There is no trend information available for either commercial or industrial lands in the county. Therefore, we make a general assumption that over the twenty-year planning period that these uses both increase by 20 percent, or about 800 acres for commercial uses and about 280 acres for industrial uses. Thus, for each five-year period about 200 and 70 acres are needed for commercial and industrial uses respectively. See [Table 7-4](#).

**Table 7-4: Land Use Demand in Acres**

	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Residential	700	700	700	700	700
Commercial	200	200	200	200	200
Industrial	70	70	70	70	70

Source: NCWRPC

Between 2020 and 2040, it is anticipated that approximately 970 acres will be needed every five-years to support residential, commercial, and industrial development

demands in the county. Over the twenty-year period about 3,880 acres will be needed to meet the land demands in the Vilas County.

## Future Land Use

The county future land plan was developed using the locally adopted town plans. Note that some plans are more current than others. All of these locally developed and adopted plans were combined into one general county future land use map. This map represents the preferred long-term land uses in each town. The county relied upon the local units to create their own plan.

Although a future land use map is advisory and does not have the authority of zoning, it is intended to reflect community desires and serve as a guide for local officials to coordinate and manage future development.

### Land Use Categories

Much like the existing land use map process several future generalized land use planning categories were established. Some towns utilized these categories during the development of their own plan, while others developed similar type categories, and others have utilized existing zoning as the basis for future land use. The resulting future land use map was prepared to present a generalized overview of the county.

The Thirteen basic land use categories used here are generally consistent with the local town plan categories. However, there are deviations, therefore the town plans provide the greatest detail and are the official plan for the town. Those plans should be used for decision-making.

The future land use categories are defined below:

#### Residential

Identifies areas recommended for residential development typically consisting of smaller lot sizes, such as lakeshore development.

#### Rural Residential

Identifies areas that are recommended for less dense residential development, consisting of larger minimum lot sizes than the residential category. These areas will also allow a mixture of residential uses, and provide a good transition from more dense development to the rural countryside.



### Multi-Family Residential

Identifies areas for higher density residential development, such as apartments.

### Commercial

Identifies areas recommended for commercial development, as well as existing commercial establishments located throughout the county, including resorts.

### Mixed Use

Identifies areas that have a variety of existing uses and no particular recommended use. Uses could range from residential to recreational to commercial.

### Industrial

Identifies areas recommended for industrial development, as well as existing industrial areas located throughout the county.

### Governmental (Institutional-Public)

Identifies existing or planned governmental/institutional/public facilities within the county, including recreational facilities.

### Agricultural

Identifies areas to be preserved for the purpose of general crop farming or the raising of livestock.

### Forestry

Identifies areas of large woodlands within the county.

### Transportation Corridors

Identifies the existing road network along with the recommendations for improved and safe traffic movement in the county. This also includes rail corridors and airports.

### Tribal

This identifies Tribal lands.

### Outdoor Recreation

Identifies areas for active recreation, such as golf courses and ball fields.

### Preservation & Open Space

Contains sensitive environmental areas, such as 100-year floodplains as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, DNR wetlands, steep slopes, and open water. This could include endangered species habitat or other significant features or areas identified by the county.

For administration purposes, current adopted town plans would be the primary basis for future decision making. Several towns are currently under county zoning, while some towns have town level zoning in addition to other land related regulations. Landowners need to seek information from both the town and the county related to planning and zoning issues. In addition, surrounding all five airports in the county are Height Limitation Zoning Ordinances (HLZO) that must be considered in land use decisions. See various airport HLZO maps for information.

### *Future Land Use Map*

The Future Land Use map is not the same as the Existing Land Use map. The existing land use map categorizes the way land is being used today, while the intent of the future land use map is to identify areas for future development. Often times there is overlap, but the purpose of each map is very different. Several county or town zoning classifications may be appropriate in each of the various categories above. See [Map 7 - Future Land Use](#).

Both of these maps are also different from a zoning map. All three relate to land use, but all have a different purpose. One examines the way land is being used, one legally displays what land could be used for today and one shows what lands are intended to be used for in the future.

To create the future land use map at the county level, all of the town plans were combined into a composite map. Note that some dated town plans were used where no current updated plan was available, since that was best information available. The dates of each plan are displayed on the Future Land Use Map. Since most of the towns utilize several different plan categories they were all consolidated into some general categories, as defined above. The local plan maps are incorporated into this planning process, but are generalized for presentation purposes only. Therefore, the official future land use map is contained in the individually adopted town plans.

The Future Land Use Plan map is not a zoning map either. The Future Land Use Plan map is general in nature and was developed as a general guide for future development in the county. Although general, the future land use plan map indicates appropriate future land uses, and as a result shows where rezonings may occur. In many areas the existing zoning districts

already reflect the desired future land uses; while in other areas, zoning map or text changes may be required to meet some of the desired future land uses.

The identification of desired future land use types through the map does not imply that an area is immediately appropriate for rezoning. Given service demands and a desire for controlled growth, careful consideration to the timing of zoning decisions is essential. In some places, it may be desirable to rezone land to reflect the planned land use designations as soon as possible. In other cases, it may be appropriate to wait to rezone the area until an actual development proposal is brought forward.

One of the goals of this land use plan is to balance individual private property rights with the town's need to protect property values community-wide, minimize the conflicts between land uses and keep the cost of local government as low as possible. An essential characteristic of any planning program is that it be ongoing and flexible.

Periodic updates to the plan are needed to maintain that it is reflective of current trends, such as when towns officially update their plan.

## Redevelopment Opportunities

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The most efficient development utilizes existing public services and infrastructure; these areas are referred to as “*Smart Growth*” areas. Currently, the majority of existing services are located in the City of Eagle River and where sewer and water systems are in place, such as Arbor Vitae, Lac du Flambeau,

Land O' Lakes, and Phelps. These areas have existing infrastructure and service capacity.

The use of existing infrastructure and services is more cost-effective; therefore, new commercial, industrial, and higher density residential development should be located in these areas. Areas where sewer & water and

other infrastructure and services are not available should have minimal industrial and commercial development and only scattered residential development, where appropriate.

There are some scattered sites throughout the county that may be appropriate for redevelopment and reuse, such as vacant and underutilized buildings.

## State Land Use Programs

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There are two state level programs that relate to land use. These are outlined below:

### *Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Program:*

The state comprehensive planning law is significant in many ways. The law created for the first time a definition of a comprehensive plan; it requires that most local units of government have a plan; it sets requirements for public participation; and requires that the plan be consistent with local implementations tools. Most important, is that it maintains that the process be locally driven so all local units of government decide their own future.

The law was signed in 1999 and has been revised by the signing of two additional bills. The first is AB 872, containing “technical revisions” which was signed in 2000. The second bill, signed in 2004, was AB 608, which reduced the number of items that must be consistent with the plan to three, these are: official mapping, subdivision ordinances and zoning ordinances. Taken together these bills represent the most substantial revision of the State’s planning enabling laws in over half a century.

The law (§66.1001 WI Stats.) requires all jurisdictions within the state that exercise

control over land-use to prepare a comprehensive plan. It lays out the nine required chapters of the plan and requires a public participation process. Jurisdictions that do not have a comprehensive plan in place may not engage in certain actions that impact land-use. Vilas County prepared its first comprehensive plan under this law in 2009 with the assistance of the NCWRPC.

### *Working Lands Initiative:*

The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative was passed as a part of the state’s 2009-2011 biennial budget process. The goal of the Working Lands Initiative is to establish large preservation areas for current and future agricultural uses. The two main components relate to:

- Expanding and modernizing the state’s existing farmland preservation program; and
- Establishing agricultural enterprise areas (AEAs).

The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative required that each county update its Farmland Preservation Plan. Vilas County prepared its Farmland Plan in 2015. No exclusive farmland zoning was designated in the county.

# County Goals, Objectives, and Policies

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## Goals:

1. Provide for a well-balanced mix of residential, business, industrial, recreational, forestry, and other uses to serve the future needs of Vilas County and to maintain the area as a desirable place to live and work.
2. Work cooperatively with Town and City governments to promote coordinated land use and a compatible development pattern that respects private property rights; to minimize land use conflicts and negative development impacts; to carefully consider the use, location, and density of development and how it affects the natural resources, community character, anticipated growth, and need for utilities and services.
3. In conjunction with local municipalities, retain and preserve the rural, “Northwoods” aesthetics and related quality of life.

## Objectives:

1. Guide the use, location, and density of development within both public and private lands consistent with the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan.
2. Designate, maintain, and regulate an adequate quantity of suitable lands for future residential, commercial, forestry, industrial, recreational, and other uses in accordance with the

Comprehensive Plan and public input.

3. Focus new areas of growth within or near existing areas of development where adequate public facilities and services exist or are planned for expansion and where there is adjacent existing compatible development.
4. Encourage the clustering of new business, residential, commercial, and industrial development into planned development areas in order to promote defined development districts, conserve resources, and maintain the character of the area.
5. Encourage public land management in a manner compatible with Vilas County Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives, policies, and programs.
6. Work directly with the Towns and City to plan for a compatible land use pattern throughout Vilas County. Incorporate town plans when updated.
7. Promote development patterns, which provide current and future residents with a diversity of lot sizes and uses.
8. Ensure that future land use policies and decisions are based on sound planning techniques and are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

9. Promote flexibility and provide for incentives to encourage desired outcomes.
10. Encourage early identification of potential negative impacts from development proposals and promote strategies to minimize those impacts on neighbors, the community, and the natural resources.
11. Encourage new commercial or business development to be consistent with and complement adjacent land uses and character through such items as architecture, landscaping, signage, lighting, exterior building materials, and color.
12. Increase enforcement of existing nuisance, design, or aesthetic ordinances and support local enforcement or development of ordinances such as those that address signage, junk vehicles, white goods, and illegal dumping.
13. Encourage natural buffers where they exist and encourage native tree planting or tree replacement in areas without natural buffers to minimize the potential of land use conflicts and further promote the rural atmosphere of the county.

See the policies as identified in the County's Zoning and Land Division Ordinances, Comprehensive Forest Plan, Land & Water Management Plan, as well other regulations.

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# Chapter Eight

## Intergovernmental Cooperation

### Background

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The purpose of this chapter is to overview intergovernmental cooperation, inventory existing cooperative efforts, identify potential opportunities, and establish goals, objectives, and policies to promote intergovernmental cooperation.

The issue of intergovernmental cooperation is increasingly important; since many issues cross over political boundaries, such as watersheds, labor force, commuter patterns, and housing. Communities are not independent of each other, but rather dependent on each other. The effects from growth and change on one spill over to all surrounding communities and impact the region as a whole.

State-wide, Wisconsin has over 2,500 units of government and special purpose districts. Having so many governmental units allows for local representation, but also adds more players to the decision making process.

In general terms, intergovernmental cooperation is any arrangement by which officials of two or more jurisdictions coordinate plans, policies, and programs to address and resolve issues of mutual interest. It can be as simple as communication and information sharing, or it can involve entering into formal intergovernmental agreements and sharing resources such as equipment, buildings, staff, and revenue.

### Benefits

There are many reasons intergovernmental cooperation makes sense. Some examples include:

- **Trust:** Cooperation can lead to positive experiences and results that build trust between jurisdictions. As jurisdictions communicate and collaborate on issues of mutual interest, they become more aware of one another's needs and priorities. They can better anticipate problems and work to avoid them.
- **Cost Savings:** Cooperation can save money by increasing efficiency and avoiding unnecessary duplication. Cooperation can enable some communities to provide their residents with services that would otherwise be too costly.
- **Consistency:** Cooperation can lead to consistency of the goals, objectives, plans, policies, and actions of neighboring communities and other jurisdictions.
- **Address Regional Issues:** Communicating and coordinating their actions, and working with regional and state jurisdictions, local communities are able to address and resolve issues, which are regional in nature.

The major beneficiary of intergovernmental cooperation is the local resident. They may not understand, or even care about, the details of a particular intergovernmental issue, but residents can appreciate their benefits, such as costs savings, provision of needed services, a healthy environment, and a strong economy.

### Trends

A variety of factors, some long-standing and others more recent have brought the issue of governmental cooperation to the forefront. Some of these factors include:

- Local governments financial situation;
- Opportunity to reduce costs by working together;
- Elimination of duplication of services;
- Population settlement patterns and population mobility; and
- Economic and environmental interdependence.

In addition, as more jurisdictions create comprehensive plans and share them with surrounding communities, new opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation will be identified.

### Intergovernmental Coordination Tool

## Existing / Potential Intergovernmental Conflicts

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No major intergovernmental concerns/conflicts were identified, although there were some issues identified.

Towns that have their own zoning and other land regulations create an extra step for land owners, since they have two sets of regulations and procedures to work with.

The primary tool used for intergovernmental cooperation is the shared service agreement.

### ✓ Shared Service Agreements

Wisconsin Statute s.66.0301, formerly 66.30, entitled "Intergovernmental Cooperation"; does enable local governments to jointly do together whatever one can do alone. Typically, intergovernmental cooperation and coordination refers to the management and delivery of public services and facilities. It is also dependent upon a defined geographic area within which cooperation and coordination may be feasible.

Intergovernmental agreements prepared using this statute, are the most common form of agreement and have been used by communities for years, often in the context of sharing public services such as police, fire, or rescue. This type of agreement can also be used to provide for revenue sharing, determine future land use within a subject area, and to set temporary municipal boundaries. However, the statute does not require planning as a component of any agreement and boundary changes have to be accomplished through the normal annexation process. Shared service agreements are utilized to allow this type of cooperation.

Towns should develop local regulations and enforcement capacity to deal with nuisance issues, since these are local not county level issues.

Annexation conflicts and boundary disputes between the City of Eagle River and the Town of Lincoln may occur if the city expands.



No potential intergovernmental conflicts were identified in this process. The process for resolving some of these conflicts will in part be achieved by meeting with the

surrounding towns when significant issues of mutual concern arise, including across the state border to Michigan.

## **Inventory & Trends**

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Currently there are numerous intergovernmental relationships and some general agreements in place. The following is a summary of existing and potential cooperative efforts.

### *County & Towns*

There are a variety of agreements in place with the towns, surrounding counties and other agencies.

Vilas County directly and indirectly provides a number of services to the Towns and the City of Eagle River. Some of these services include: Highways, Sheriff, Emergency Management, Public Health, and Courts. Mutual aid agreements are in place with surrounding jurisdictions for emergency services, including into Michigan. There is a tri-county agency with Forest and Oneida related to health services. The IT department provides technical support for the Eagle River and LDF Tribal Police Departments. The county is also instrumental in working as a liaison between the towns and the State for recycling and waste disposal fund.

The County Highway Department maintains and plows County, state and federal highways throughout the county and provide plowing under contract with some of the towns. The County Sheriff's Office provides protective services through periodic patrols and on-call 911 responses. The Sheriff also manages the 911-dispatch center, not only for police protection, but also for ambulance/EMS response and dispatching the town fire departments. The

Forestry and Outdoor Recreation Department maintains a county-wide park system and county forest system for the use and enjoyment of all residents. The Land Information Department also maintains a robust geographic information system for the entire county.

In addition, the County Zoning & Planning Department administers general and shoreland zoning throughout the county, as well as regulating non-metallic mining reclamation and wireless communication towers.

The county also cooperatively works with local community chambers of commerce to help promote the County.

### *School Districts*

There are several school districts within the County, including Lakeland School District, Northland Pines School District, and Phelps School District.

The technical college that serves the area is the Nicolet Area Technical College. There is no permanent campus in the county, the nearest locations are located in Minocqua and Rhinelander.

### *Lac du Flambeau Tribe*

The county has a long-standing relationship with the Lac du Flambeau Tribe a band of the Lake Superior Chippewa. The county had a number of agreements with the tribe, especially related to law enforcement. The

Lac du Flambeau Reservation was officially established by the Treaty of 1854.

### *North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission*

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) was formed under §60.0309 Wis. Statutes as a voluntary association of governments serving a ten-county area. Vilas County is a member of the NCWRPC, which includes all of its local units of government. Typical functions of the NCWRPC include (but are not limited to) land use, transportation, economic development, intergovernmental and geographic information systems (GIS) planning and services.

### *State and Federal Government*

The Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources and Transportation are the primary agencies the county might deal with regarding development activities. Many of the goals and objectives of this plan will require continued cooperation and coordination with these agencies.

The Wisconsin DNR takes a lead role in wildlife protection and sustainable management of woodlands, wetland, and other wildlife habitat areas, as well as some land use issues, while Wisconsin Department of Transportation is responsible for the planning and development of state highways, railways, airports, and other transportation systems. State agencies make a number of grant and aid programs available to local units of government. Examples include local road aids, the County Road Improvement Program (CHIP) and the Priority Watershed Program. There are also a number of mandates passed down from the state that the county must comply with, such as the biannual pavement rating submission for the Wisconsin Information System for Local Roadways.

In Wisconsin, most federal programs are administered by the state, so the county would be dealing with the responsible state agency with regard to federal programs and regulations.

## Goal, Objective, and Policies

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As in the previous chapters of this plan, a series of goals, objectives, and policies are identified.

Goal:

1. Seek mutually beneficial cooperation with all levels of government.

Objective:

1. Maintain current agreements and explore additional opportunities with adjacent communities, including solid waste and recycling, protective services, and border aquatic and terrestrial invasive species.

Policies:

1. Meet with surrounding communities and counties to discuss issues of mutual concern, including those in Michigan.
2. Study cost sharing or contracting with neighboring counties to provide more efficient services or public utilities.
3. Maintain a close relationship with the School Districts related to facility planning.
4. Encourage towns to develop local comprehensive plans.

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# Chapter Nine

## Implementation

### Overview

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This is the ninth and final chapter of the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan. It outlines the various implementation tools available to the County and describes how each of the chapters of the comprehensive plan will be integrated and made consistent with the other chapters of the comprehensive plan. Also included is an overview of the process to adopt, amend, update and evaluate the comprehensive plan.

The Vilas County Comprehensive Plan, along with locally adopted comprehensive plans, is intended to help guide growth and development in the County. To be effective, this plan should be actively used as a tool to guide decisions concerning:

1. The development and implementation of programs and support systems that further the goals and objectives set forth in this plan.
2. The implementation of specific actions as identified in this plan.
3. The implementation and enforcement of regulatory ordinances based on the goals and objectives identified in this plan.
4. The establishment of a continued planning process providing for periodic review and updates to this plan.

### Existing Implementation Tools

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There are two primary types of implementation tools: Regulatory and Non-regulatory. Regulatory approaches involve implementing various rules and regulations, mainly related to land use regulations. In particular, the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations comprise the principal regulatory devices used to protect existing development and guide future growth and development. Non-regulatory approaches generally involve decisions related to policy and about how the County will spend its financial resources.

#### Regulatory Tools

As discussed in the Land Use Chapter, there are three basic implementation tools that the County can use to implement this comprehensive plan. These are 1) General & Shoreland Zoning, 2) Land Division Ordinance, and 3) Official Mapping.

These tools apply to different degrees in different areas of the County. General zoning applies only to those eleven towns that have adopted County zoning, while Shoreland zoning applies to the entire county outside of the incorporated area of Eagle River. Meanwhile, the land division ordinance applies to the entire county

(outside of the city) unless a town has adopted a more restrictive ordinance. Official mapping applies throughout the entire county, but is a very limited tool. These tools are all detailed more in the land use chapter.

### General & Shoreland Zoning

Zoning is used to manage and control how land is used and developed. The general purpose of zoning is to minimize undesirable side effects resulting from development by segregating and/or buffering incompatible uses and by maintaining standards that ensure development will not negatively impact the community's character or environment. The zoning map indicates where specific types of development can and should be located. Zoning districts shown on the zoning map should be coordinated with the land use plan and map. The General Zoning Ordinance was last updated in 2021.

Shoreland Zoning is mandated by state law and is administered by the county level. The intent of shoreland zoning is to control development near waterways, in the most sensitive environmental areas. The area defined by state law is the area within 300 feet of a stream or river and 1000 feet of a lake or pond. The Shoreland Ordinance was last updated in 2017.

### Subdivision Ordinance

Land Division or subdivision regulations serve an important function by ensuring the orderly development of unplatted and/or undeveloped land. These regulations provide the procedures and standards for dividing a large parcel of land into smaller parcels. Land Division ordinances set forth reasonable regulations for lot sizes, road access and design, public utilities, parks and open space, and other improvements necessary to ensure that new development does not conflict with surrounding land uses and/or cause

unreasonable burdens on provision of services. The way lands are divided plays a key role in the orderly development of a community. The Vilas County Subdivision Control Ordinance was last updated in 2016.

### Official Mapping

Under State Statute 236.46, counties have limited official mapping powers, mainly related to adopting highway-width maps for expanding current highways and for indicating the location and width of expanding proposed new highways.

### Non-regulatory Tools

Vilas County annually prepares both an operational budget as well as a capital improvement plan. In addition, each County department, as well as agencies funded by the County, set objectives and prepare work plans. Another major policy effort to be undertaken by the County is the Strategic Plan.

### Annual Operating Budget

Vilas County prepares a budget each year and it is one of the most important policy documents prepared. It is a statement of the prioritization and allocation of financial resources to achieve certain objectives over a specific time period. The budget is based on the needs of county residents, priorities set by the County Board, and the related work plans identified by each Vilas County department.

The budget and the services provided by that budget are instrumental in achieving the goals and objectives of the plan.

### Capital Improvement Plan

A Capital Improvement Program (CIP) of Capital Fund is a blueprint for planning the County's major capital expenditures. A

Capital Fund is simply a method of planning for and scheduling expenditures for public improvements over a period of several years in order to maximize the use of limited public funds.

Vilas County sets up various Capital Improvement Funds with the following goals:

- Protect the County's investment in its buildings, equipment, improvements and infrastructure.
- Develop the most cost effective way to manage the County's assets through a comprehensive process that cuts across departments, boards and committees.
- Recognize the need to preserve and maintain existing assets over acquiring new assets.

The Capital Improvement Program is usually composed of two parts - a capital budget and a capital program. The capital budget is the upcoming years spending plan for capital items. The capital program is a plan for capital expenditures that extends five years beyond the capital budget. Public improvements or expenditures typically considered in a CIP include: major non-recurring costs and a service life of 7 years or more, rolling stock and equipment replacement that is of critical importance to the functioning of the department involved.

Each year the CIP is reviewed and extended one year to compensate for the previous year that was completed. This keeps the improvement program current and allows for modifications to meet changing needs. It coordinates community planning, financial capacity, and physical development. The preparation of a CIP is a joint responsibility between County administration and various departments. The County Board approves the CIP as part of the Annual Budget.

### Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is an organizational management activity that is used to set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, ensure that employees and other stakeholders are working toward common goals, establish agreement around intended outcomes/results, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment. It is a disciplined effort that produces fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, who it serves, what it does, and why it does it, with a focus on the future. It usually focuses on a 3 to 5 year time-period. An effective strategic plan articulates not only where an organization is going and the actions needed to make progress, but also how it will know if it is successful. The strategic plan is a document used to communicate the organizations goals and the actions needed to achieve those goals. The comprehensive plan provides the foundation for the strategic plan process.

### Other planning and zoning related regulations

Although the County is usually not directly involved in either annexation or extra-territorial zoning, it may be asked for general information or recommendations related to either of these.

Annexation is the statutory process for transferring lands from unincorporated areas (towns) to incorporated areas (cities and villages). Annexations are usually initiated by landowners to transfer their land into a city or village. Cities and villages can only accept or reject the petition. As a result, annexations often become contentious between local governments.



Annexations often provide the trigger for lengthy and expensive legal struggles between competing community land use visions, and for tax base and community identity. A more constructive approach may be to explore intergovernmental agreements. The methods of intergovernmental cooperation available to address annexation-related issues include: general intergovernmental agreements; municipal boundaries fixed by court judgment; boundary change by cooperative plan agreement; and revenue sharing agreements.

Under state law, a city or village has certain land use authorities for Extraterritorial Plat Review within 1½ to 3 miles depending on the size of the community. This applies automatically if the city or village adopts a subdivision ordinance or an official map. This allows the city or village to influence the pattern of development outside their corporate limits. There is also the potential for extra-territorial zoning to be implemented in this area as well. This gives cities and villages the right to review and approve any land division within the 1½ or three mile area. In order to exercise extraterritorial zoning it is necessary for the city or village to form a committee with the adjacent town, in which both parties have three representatives. A majority of committee members must agree and the governing body of both jurisdictions must adopt whatever agreement is reached in order for extraterritorial zoning to go into effect.

## *Consistency Review*

The State of Wisconsin planning legislation requires that the Comprehensive Plan describe how each of the required chapters will be integrated and made consistent with the other chapters of the plan. Since Vilas County completed all planning chapters simultaneously, no known inconsistencies exist. It is noted that some overlap naturally exists between chapters. The Comprehensive Plan also references previous and concurrent related planning efforts to ensure they are considered in planning decisions in conjunction with the recommendations of this document. Recommendations from other plans have been incorporated in this plan as deemed appropriate, to foster coordination and consistency between plans. Some related plans, are incorporated by reference in this plan and are essentially considered appendices of this plan even though they are separate documents.

In the future, as plan amendments occur, it is important that consistency reviews be conducted. These reviews will ensure that the plan is up-to-date. It is also critical that as towns make comprehensive plan amendments, those amendments are forwarded to the County for inclusion in the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan. This should ensure that the Zoning & Planning Committee is using the most current information available.



## Plan Adoption, Amendments, Updates, and Evaluation

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While this comprehensive plan is intended to provide a long-term framework to guide general development, it must also respond to continuous changes that occur that may not have been foreseen when the plan was adopted. It is appropriate that some chapters of the plan are rarely amended while others are subject to updating on a more regular basis. Plan maps should also be updated periodically. In general, key maps, such as the future land use map, should be reviewed annually to make sure they are still current.

### Plan Adoption

The first step in implementing this plan involves the Zoning & Planning Committee passing a resolution recommending adoption of the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan by the County Board. Next a public hearing is held to allow public comment on the document. Following that the County Board must adopt the plan by ordinance. Adoption formalizes the plan document as the framework to guide local development decisions over the next 10 to 20 years. The adopted plan should also be recognized as a tool for communicating the County's land use policy and goals and objectives regarding coordination of growth and development.

Upon plan adoption, Vilas County should review the Vilas County Zoning Ordinance, including both map and text, to be consistent with local comprehensive plans. In addition, the various departments that are impacted by this plan should develop actions to implement the plan.

### Plan Amendments

The comprehensive plan, including the

future land use map should be periodically reviewed and updated to adjust for unforeseen changes or events that were not considered at the time the initial plan and land use map were developed.

If circumstances do arise that require text or maps to change the Planning and Zoning Committee should review and recommend adoption by the County Board. Amendments may be appropriate throughout the lifecycle of the plan, particularly if new issues emerge or trends change. These amendments will typically consist of minor changes to the plan text or maps. Large-scale changes or frequent amendments to meet individual development proposals should be avoided or the plan loses integrity. The public should be notified of proposed plan amendments to allow an opportunity for review and comment.

In towns where an officially adopted comprehensive plan exists, future amendments and updates to any town plan should be promptly forwarded to the Vilas County Zoning & Planning Department. Receipt of town plan will allow staff and the Zoning & Planning Committee to make recommendations that are based on the amended town plan. These local future land use maps will also become the basis for future amendments to the County's future land use map.

### Plan Updates

From time to time the plan may need to be updated. According to the State comprehensive planning law, State Statute 66.1001, comprehensive plans must be updated at least once every ten years. As opposed to the more routine amendments described above, plan updates should involve

re-writing of whole sections of the plan document and significant changes to supporting maps.

A plan update should include a thorough examination of the County's goals and objectives based on an analysis of current growth trends and major changes that have occurred since the plan was initially adopted or last amended. Plan updates must be formally adopted following the same procedure described above for initial plan adoption.

### *Plan Evaluation*

This plan should be evaluated at least every 5 years. Members of the County Board, standing committees, County staff, and any other local decision-making bodies should periodically review the plan and identify areas that might need to be updated. The evaluation should involve first reviewing the goals and objectives to ensure they are still relevant and reflect current community desires. Then the strategies and actions should be reviewed and refined to eliminate completed tasks and identify new approaches if appropriate. Many of the policies identified in the plan are continuous or on-going and should also be monitored to measure the plan's overall success. Thus, many of the objectives and their related actions can be accomplished in the short term, say 1 to 5 years. However, some will take longer to accomplish, say 6 to 10 or more years.

As part of the comprehensive planning process, a number of goals, objectives, and policies were developed. When implemented these are intended to provide direction to County staff and its committees, as well as the board of supervisors.

To measure progress towards meeting these goals, objectives, and policies, a variety of actions need to take place. Therefore, the task to measure plan progress, is as simple as determining if any action was taken or not. That information will provide guidance to the County Board on when specific actions are to be initiated. Based on the targets, measures of progress in achieving implementation of the comprehensive plan can be examined.

A periodic "Plan Status" report could be prepared to summarize the progress toward implementation. This report might be jointly developed by various County departments, as related to their involvement in the implementation of the goals, objectives, and policies developed within this plan.

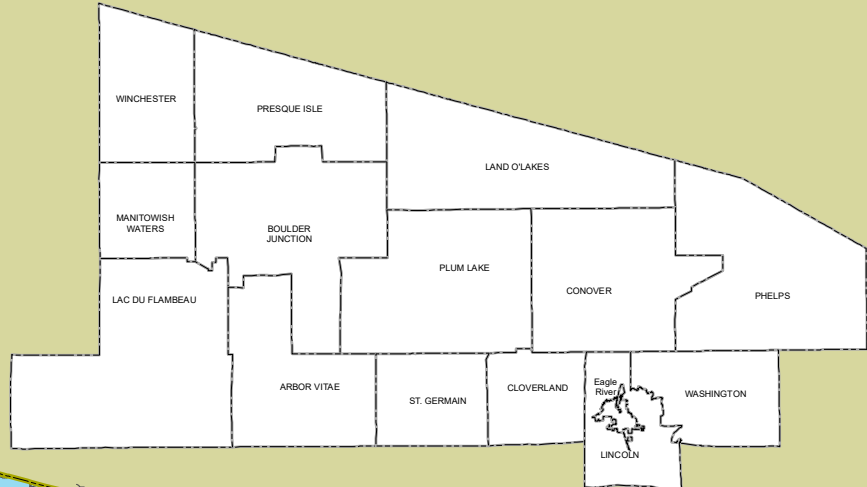
The Vilas County Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a "living" document. Periodic amendment and update of the plan is critical to ensure that it is accurate and consistent with the needs and desires of the County. The specific policy statements are meant to serve as the mechanisms for achieving the goals and objectives, which were defined throughout the planning process. Ultimately, the success of the planning process will be measured by the future quality of life experienced by both residents and visitors to Vilas County.

# Maps



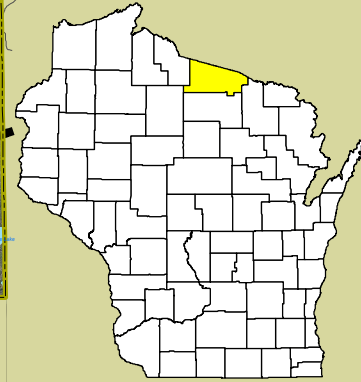
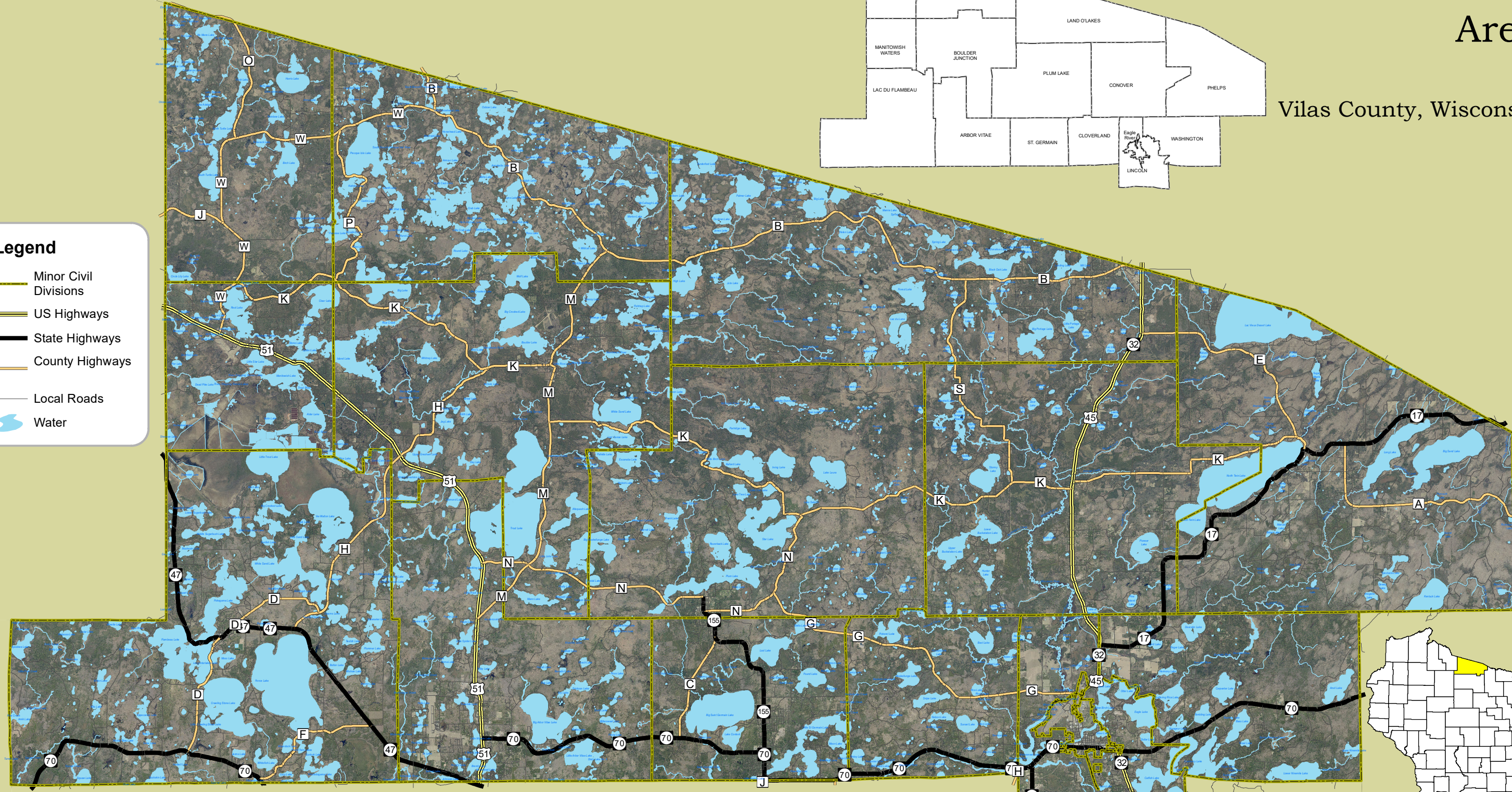
# Map 1 Planning Area

Vilas County, Wisconsin

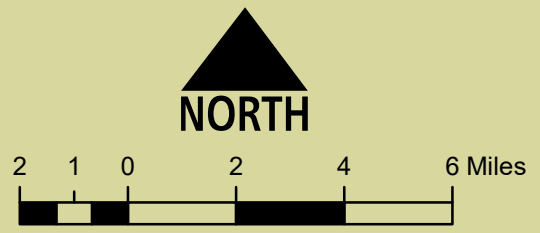


**Legend**

- Minor Civil Divisions
- US Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Water



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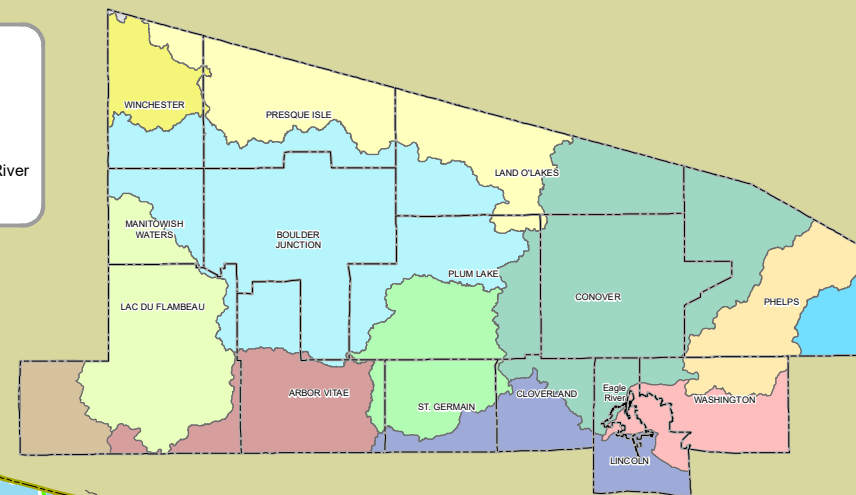


# Natural Resources

Vilas County, Wisconsin

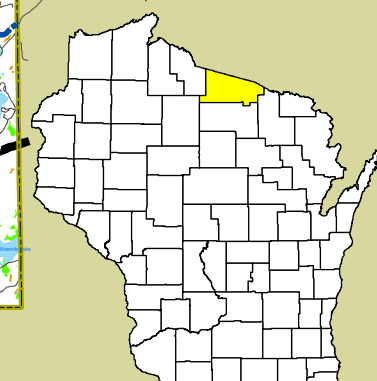
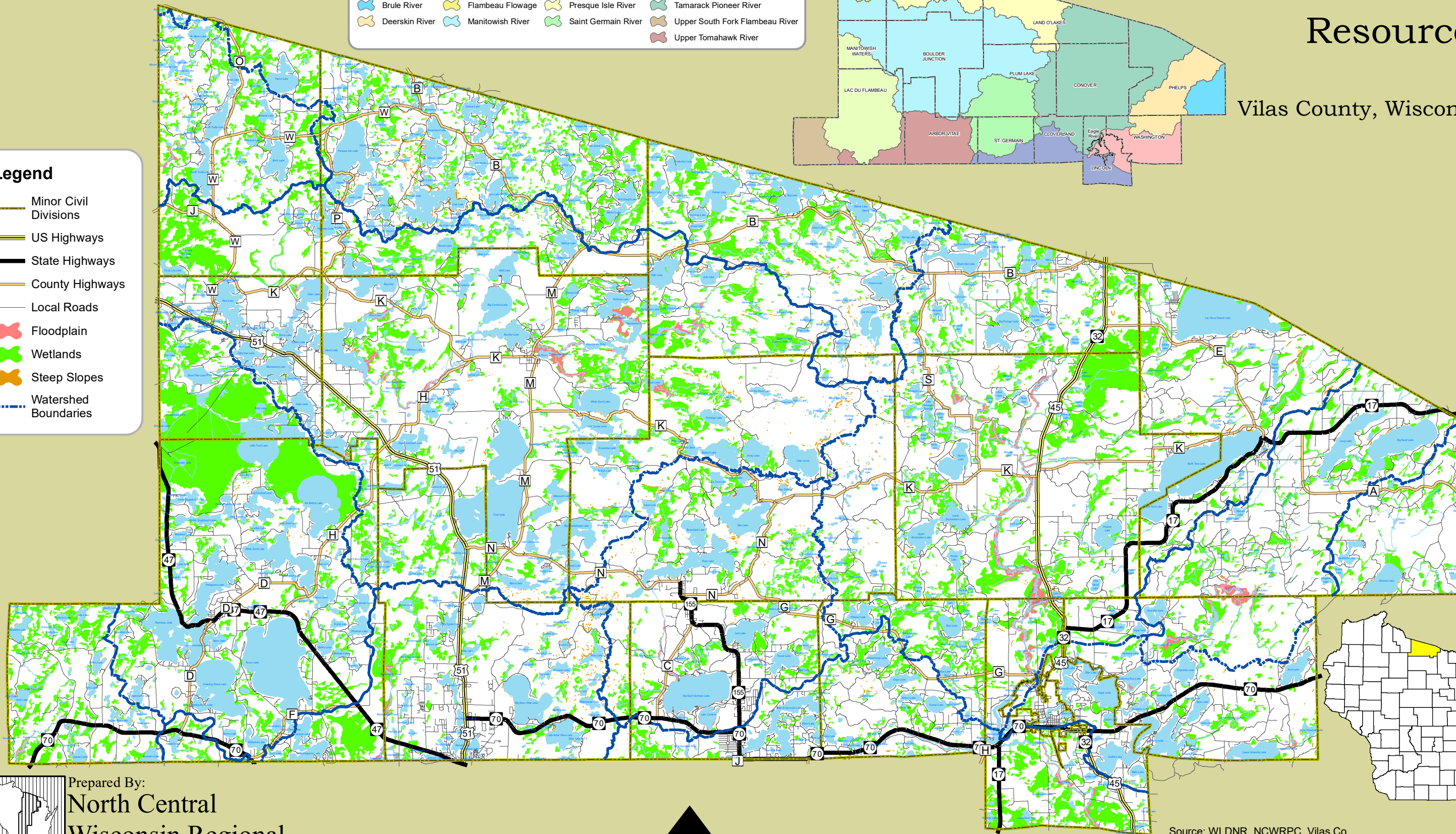
### Watersheds

- |  |                |  |                  |  |                      |  |                                 |
|--|----------------|--|------------------|--|----------------------|--|---------------------------------|
|  | Bear River     |  | Eagle River      |  | Montreal River       |  | Sugar Camp Creek                |
|  | Brule River    |  | Flambeau Flowage |  | Presque Isle River   |  | Tamarack Pioneer River          |
|  | Deerskin River |  | Manitowish River |  | Saint Germain River  |  | Upper South Fork Flambeau River |
|  |                |  |                  |  | Upper Tomahawk River |  |                                 |



### Legend

- Minor Civil Divisions
- US Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads
- Floodplain
- Wetlands
- Steep Slopes
- Watershed Boundaries



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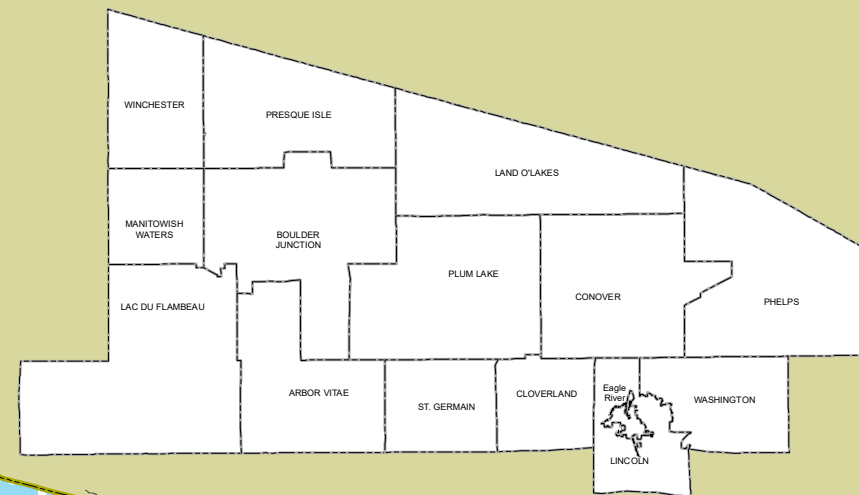
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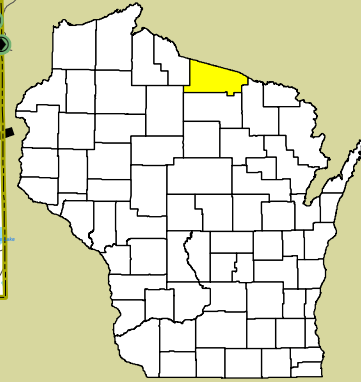
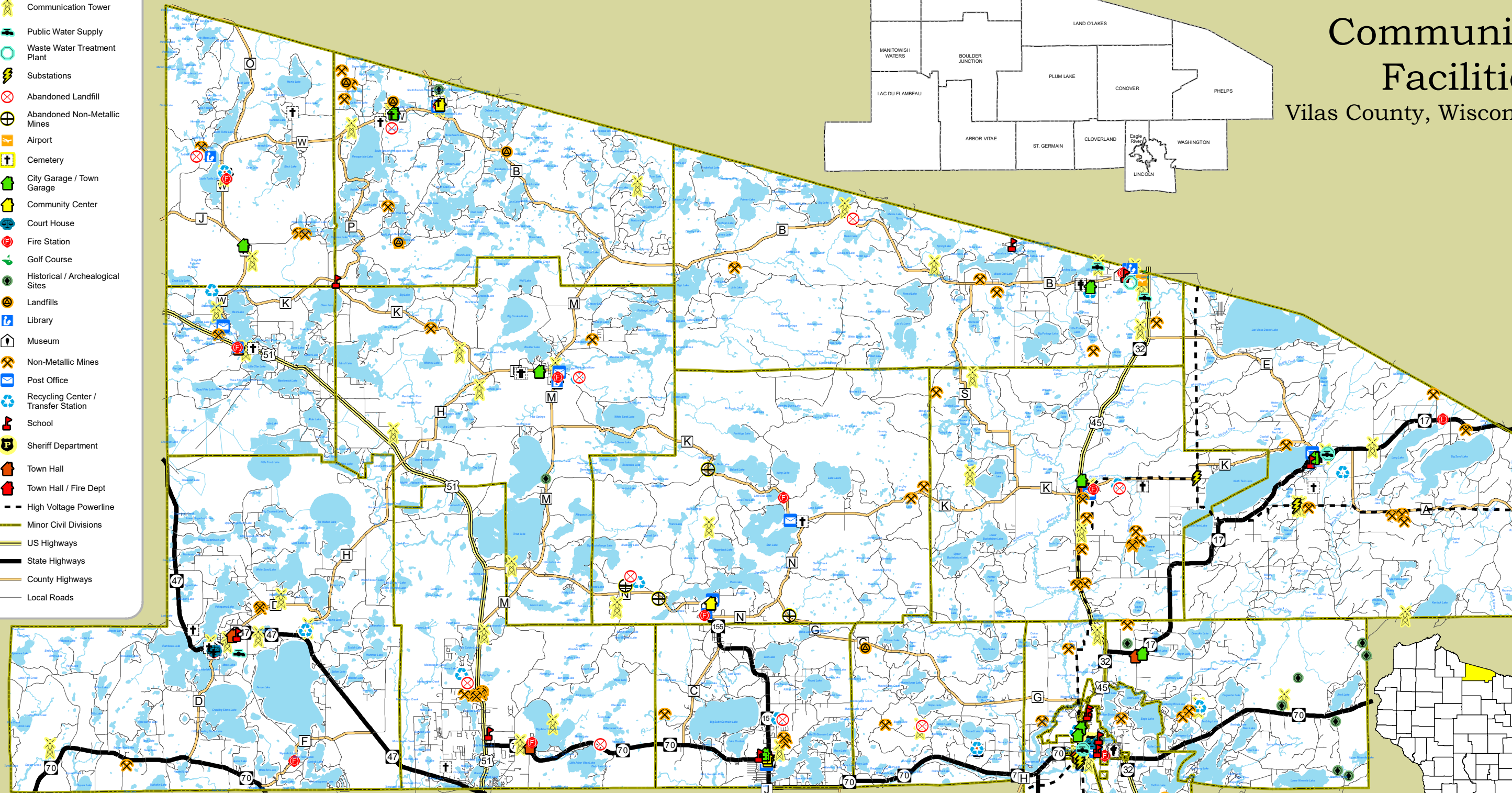
# Utilities & Community Facilities

Vilas County, Wisconsin

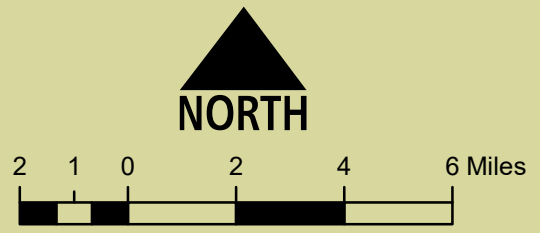


## Legend

- Communication Tower
- Public Water Supply
- Waste Water Treatment Plant
- Substations
- Abandoned Landfill
- Abandoned Non-Metallic Mines
- Airport
- Cemetery
- City Garage / Town Garage
- Community Center
- Court House
- Fire Station
- Golf Course
- Historical / Archeological Sites
- Landfills
- Library
- Museum
- Non-Metallic Mines
- Post Office
- Recycling Center / Transfer Station
- School
- Sheriff Department
- Town Hall
- Town Hall / Fire Dept
- High Voltage Powerline
- Minor Civil Divisions
- US Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads



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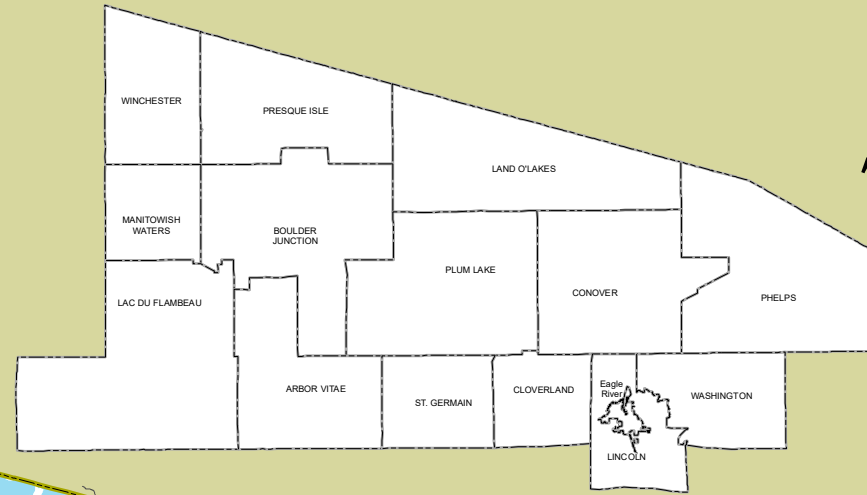


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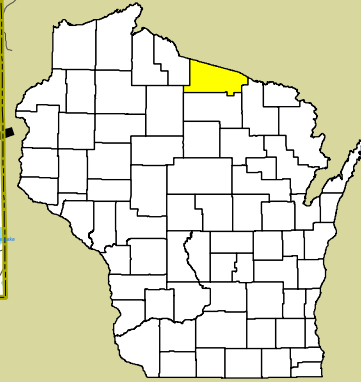
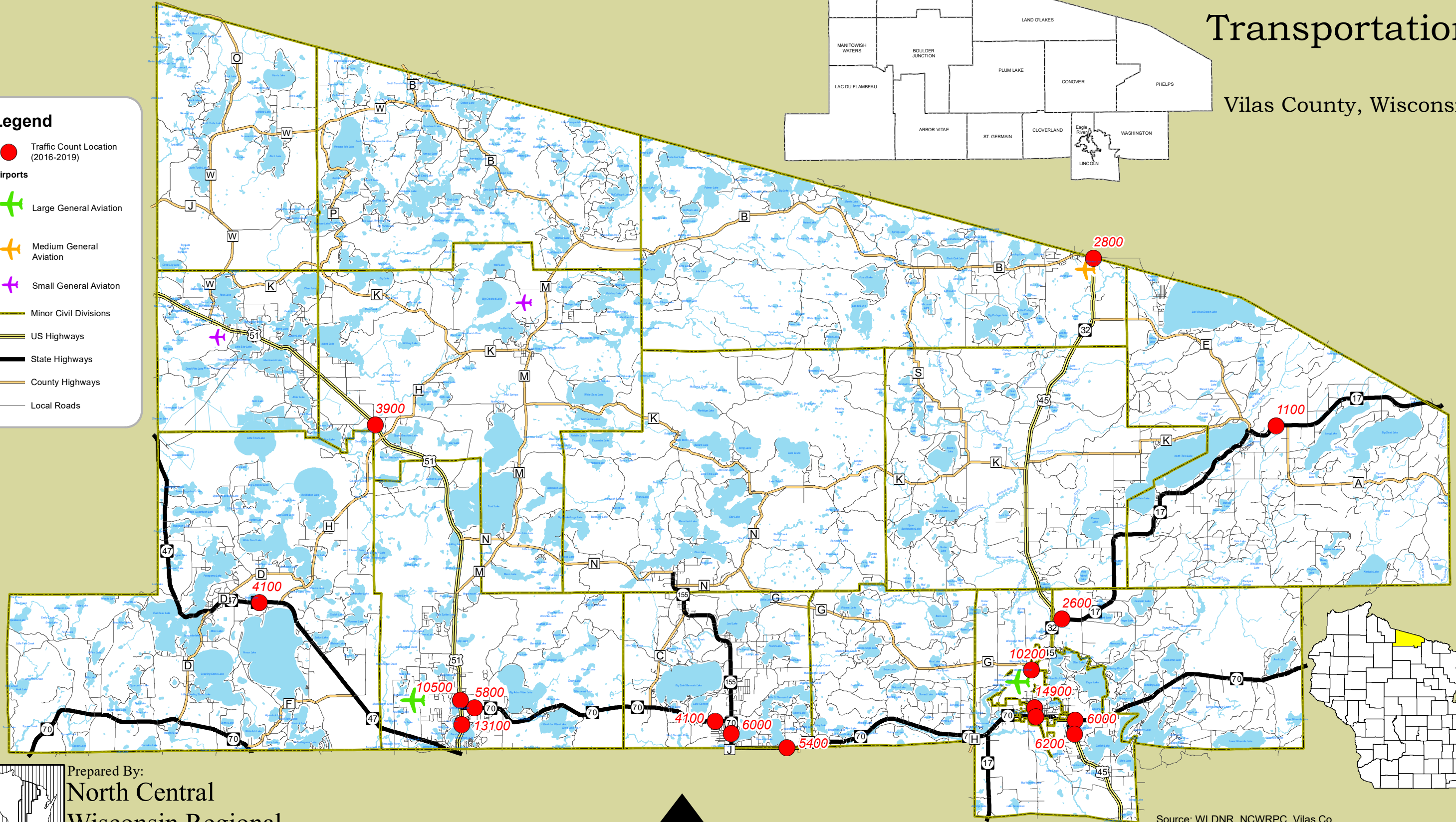
# Transportation

## Vilas County, Wisconsin



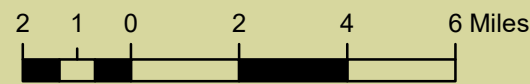
### Legend

- Traffic Count Location (2016-2019)
- Airports**
- ✈ Large General Aviation
- ✈ Medium General Aviation
- ✈ Small General Aviation
- Minor Civil Divisions
- US Highways
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Local Roads



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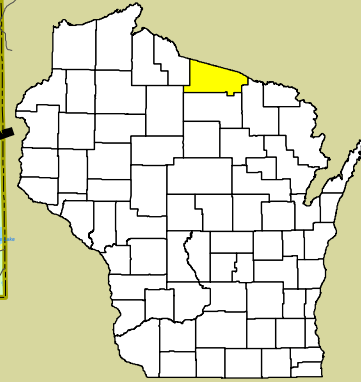
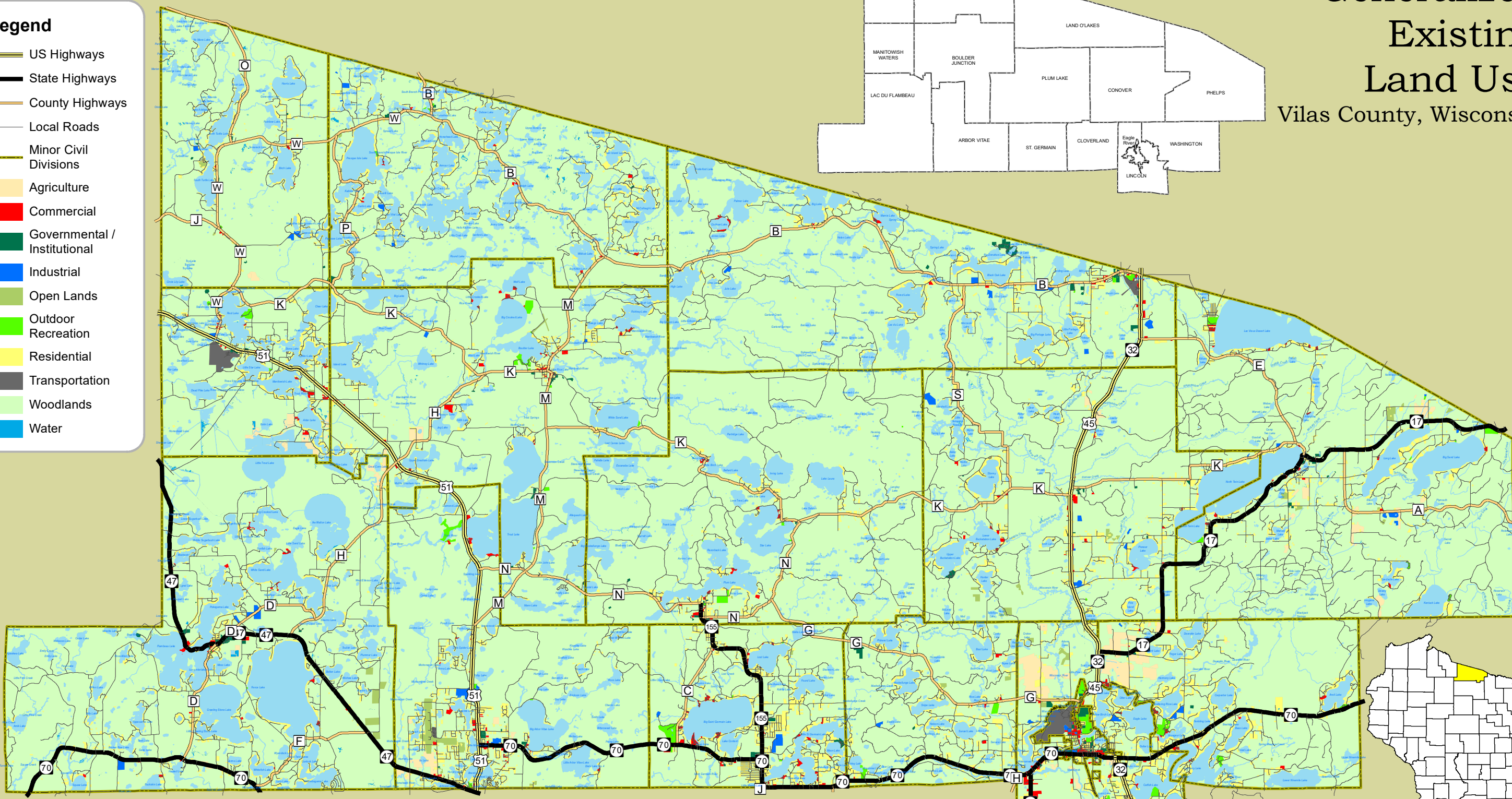
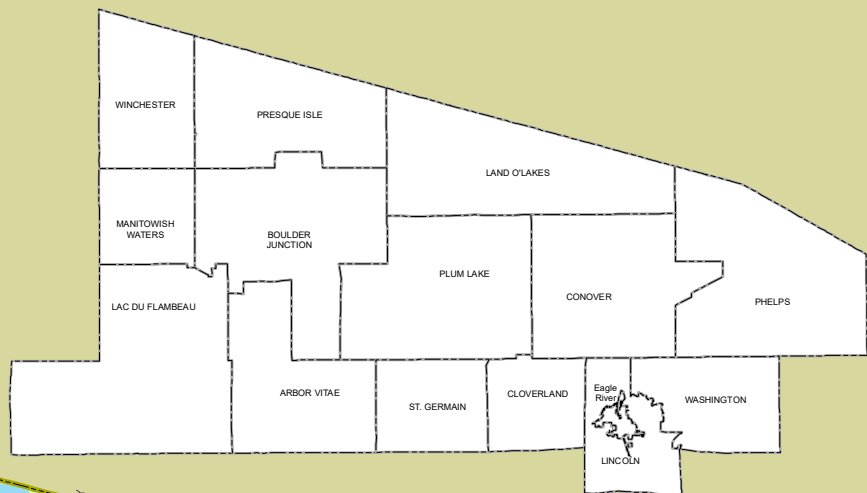
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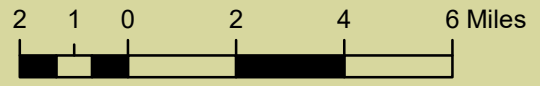
# Generalized Existing Land Use Vilas County, Wisconsin

**Legend**

-  US Highways
-  State Highways
-  County Highways
-  Local Roads
-  Minor Civil Divisions
-  Agriculture
-  Commercial
-  Governmental / Institutional
-  Industrial
-  Open Lands
-  Outdoor Recreation
-  Residential
-  Transportation
-  Woodlands
-  Water



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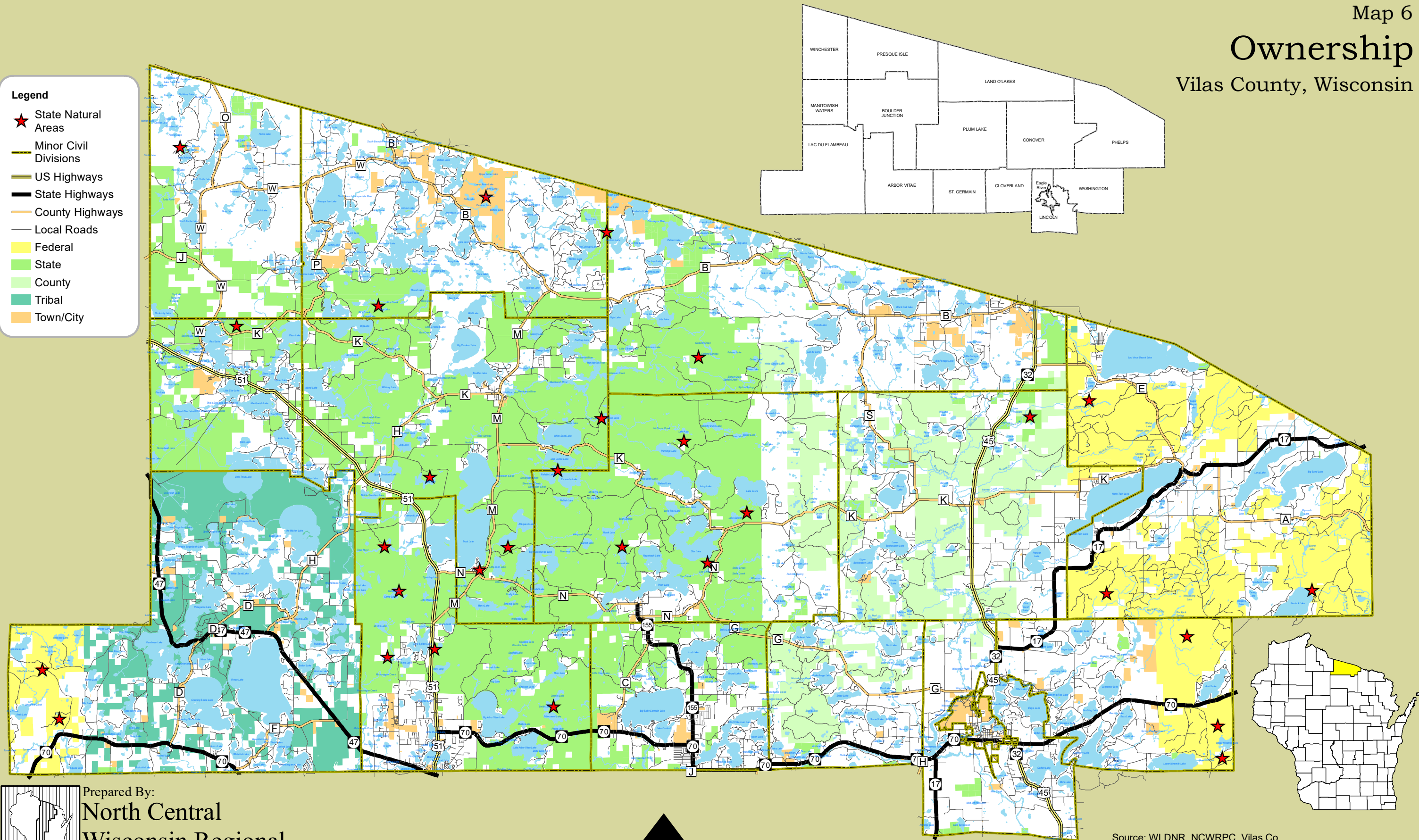


# Ownership

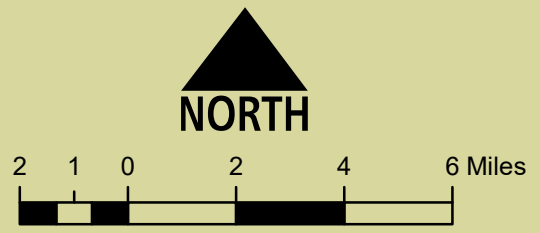
Vilas County, Wisconsin

**Legend**

- ★ State Natural Areas
- Minor Civil Divisions
- == US Highways
- == State Highways
- == County Highways
- Local Roads
- Federal
- State
- County
- Tribal
- Town/City



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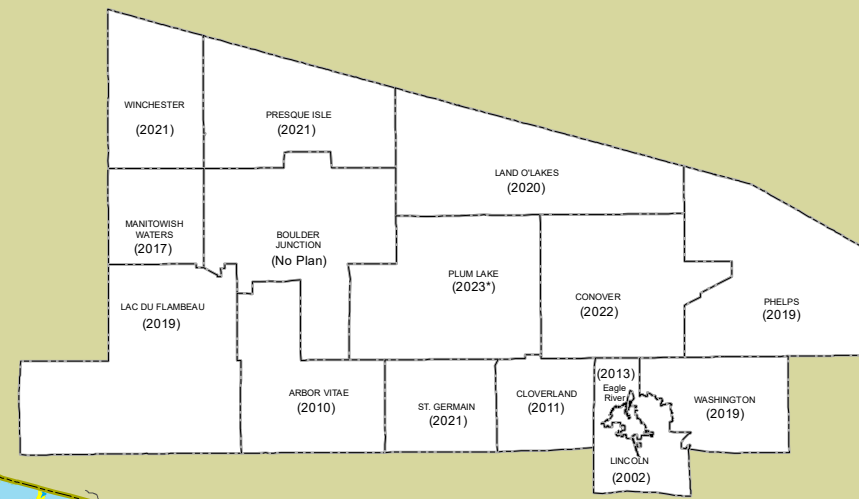


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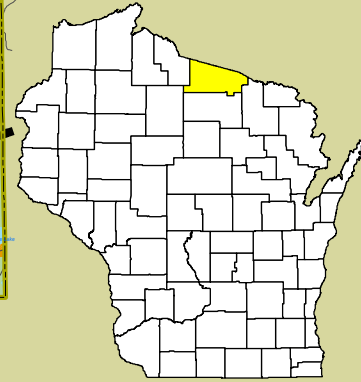
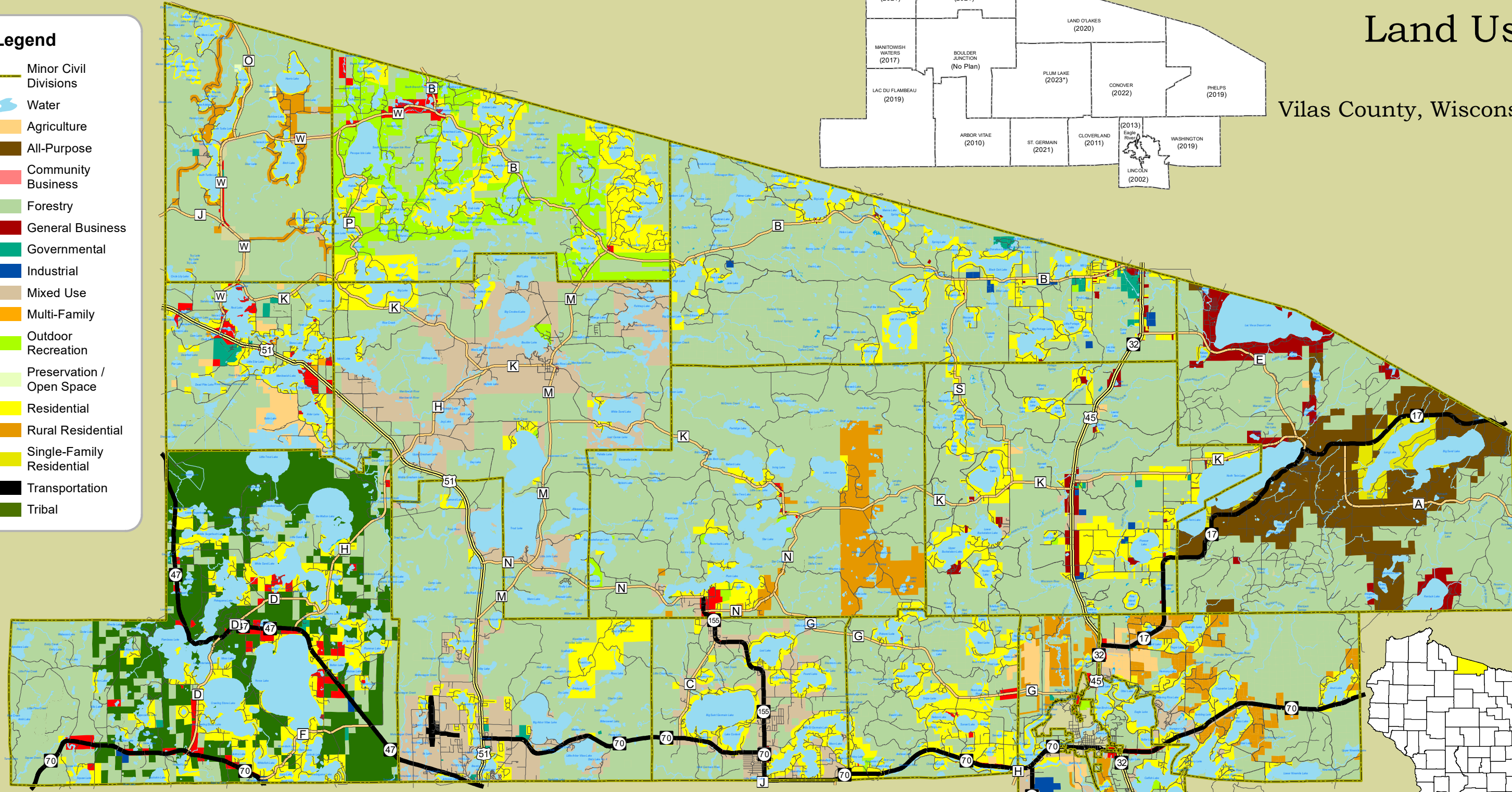


# Future Land Use

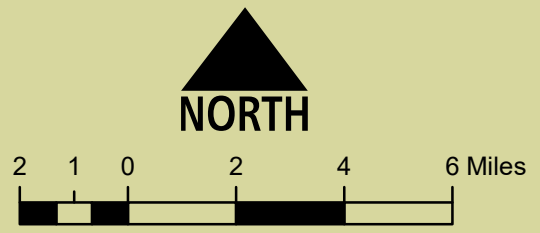
Vilas County, Wisconsin



- Legend**
- Minor Civil Divisions
  - Water
  - Agriculture
  - All-Purpose
  - Community Business
  - Forestry
  - General Business
  - Governmental
  - Industrial
  - Mixed Use
  - Multi-Family
  - Outdoor Recreation
  - Preservation / Open Space
  - Residential
  - Rural Residential
  - Single-Family Residential
  - Transportation
  - Tribal



Prepared By:  
**North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission**  
 210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403  
 715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, Vilas Co  
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 \* See Towns for more detailed information.

# Appendix A

## Public Participation Plan

# **VILAS COUNTY**

## **Public Participation Plan**

### **I. Background**

The County recognizes the need to engage the public in the comprehensive planning process. This document sets forth the techniques the County will use to meet the goal of public participation. Therefore, this Public Participation Plan forms the basic framework for achieving an interactive dialogue between citizens, local decision makers, and staff.

The creation of the Public Participation Plan is a task required in meeting the requirements of Wisconsin's Comprehensive Planning Legislation (66.1001). As the planning process develops, it should be expected that deviations from the plan may occur.

### **II. Objectives**

The following is a list of objectives for the public participation plan:

- That the residents, land owners, and other interested parties become fully aware of the importance of participating in the development of the Comprehensive Plan.
- That the public has opportunities to provide their input to the plan process.
- That the public has access to all written information and all maps created throughout the planning process.
- That there is input from the broadest range of perspectives and interests in the community possible.
- That input is elicited through a variety of means (electronic, printed, and oral) in such a way that it may be carefully considered and incorporated into the process.
- That this process of public involvement strengthens the sense of community.

The goal will be to inform, consult and involve the public and the communities served during each phase of the planning process. Hopefully, this will help balance the issues related to private property rights.

### **III. Techniques**

The public participation plan for the comprehensive planning process will incorporate the following:

1. All meetings for the planning process will be posted and open to the public.
2. Plan meeting handouts will be maintained by the County and available for review by the public.
3. The draft plan will be reviewed by various department heads and related organizations.
4. When the draft plan is prepared it will be available at County Courthouse, the library, and on a website.
5. The draft plan will be distributed to all surrounding communities for comment.
6. A Public Hearing will be held prior to plan adoption by the County Board of Supervisors.

# Appendix B

## Adoption Resolution

**Resolution of the Vilas County Zoning & Planning Committee  
Recommending Adoption of the 2023 Vilas County Comprehensive Plan Updates**

1           **WHEREAS**, Section 66.1001(4), Wisconsin Statutes, establishes the required procedure  
2 for a local government to amend a comprehensive plan, and Section 66.1001(2)(i) requires that a  
3 comprehensive plan be updated no less than once every ten years; and

4           **WHEREAS**, the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan has not been updated since adoption  
5 in 2009; and

6           **WHEREAS**, the Zoning & Planning Committee has the authority to recommend that the  
7 Vilas County Board of Supervisors amend and update the County's comprehensive land use plan  
8 under Section 66.1001(4)(b); and

9           **WHEREAS**, the Vilas County Zoning & Planning Committee has prepared the attached  
10 Vilas County Comprehensive Plan, containing all maps and other descriptive materials, to be the  
11 updated comprehensive plan for the County under Section 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes.

12           **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Vilas County Zoning & Planning  
13 Committee hereby recommends the adoption of the attached updated Vilas County  
14 Comprehensive Plan as the County's comprehensive plan under Section 66.1001(4), Wisconsin  
15 Statutes.

16           **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Zoning & Planning Committee hereby  
17 recommends that, following a public hearing, the County Board adopt an ordinance to constitute  
18 official approval of the updated Vilas County Comprehensive Plan as the County's  
19 comprehensive plan under Section 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes.

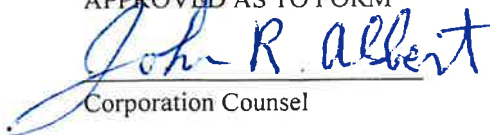
Dated this 3<sup>rd</sup> day of August, 2023

FISCAL COMMENT

- Included within Resolution  
 Not applicable

\_\_\_\_\_  
Finance Director

APPROVED AS TO FORM

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Corporation Counsel

HR REVIEW

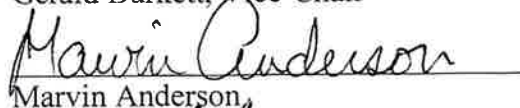
- Approved  
 Not applicable

\_\_\_\_\_  
Human Resources Manager

**Zoning & Planning Committee**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Biszak, Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Gerald Burkett, Vice-Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Marvin Anderson

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Richard Logan

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Patrick Weber

# Appendix C

## Adoption Ordinance



## ORDINANCE 2023 - 09

**RE: An Ordinance to adopt the updated Vilas County Comprehensive Plan**

**WHEREAS**, Pursuant to Sections 59.69(2) and (3), Wisconsin Statutes, Vilas County is authorized to prepare and adopt a comprehensive plan as defined in Section 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes and did so on November 10, 2009; and

**WHEREAS**, Section §66.1001(2)(i), Wisconsin Statutes requires that the Comprehensive Plan be updated every ten (10) years; and

**WHEREAS**, the Vilas County Board of Supervisors has adopted written procedures designed to foster public participation in every stage of the preparation and revision of a comprehensive plan as required by Section 66.1001(4)(a), Wisconsin Statutes; and

**WHEREAS**, the Zoning and Planning Committee has prepared the attached Vilas County Comprehensive Plan, containing all maps and other descriptive materials, to be the updated comprehensive plan for the County under Section 66.1001, Wisconsin Statutes; and

**WHEREAS**, the Zoning and Planning Committee has adopted a resolution recommending to the County Board of Supervisors the adoption of the attached document entitled the "Vilas County Comprehensive Plan" containing all of the elements specified in Section 66.1001(2), Wisconsin Statutes; and

**WHEREAS**, a public hearing was held on November 2, 2023 at the Vilas County Courthouse, in compliance with the requirements of Section 66.1001.1001(4)(d), Wisconsin Statutes.

**NOW THEREFORE**, the Vilas County Board of Supervisors in session this 14<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2023 does ordain as follows:

Section 1. Any existing ordinances, codes, resolutions, or portions thereof in conflict with this ordinance shall be and are hereby repealed as far as any conflict exists. Section 2.

This ordinance shall take effect upon passage and publication as provided by law.

Section 3. If any claims, provisions or portions of this ordinance amendment are adjudged invalid or unconstitutional by a court of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this ordinance shall not be affected thereby.

Section 4. The Vilas County Board of Supervisors does, by the enactment of this Ordinance, formally adopt the attached Vilas County Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Section 66.1001(4)(c) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

**SUBMITTED BY: Zoning & Planning Committee**

s/Michael Biszak, Chair

Gerald Burkett, Vice-Chair

s/Marvin Anderson

s/Richard Logan

s/Patrick Weber

Motion by H. Tomlanovich, seconded by L. Edwards to adopt. Discussion. All voted aye. Carried.

I, Kimberly A. Olkowski, Clerk of Vilas County, Wisconsin, do hereby certify that the attached ordinance is a true and correct copy of Ordinance 2023-09 which was adopted by the Vilas County Board of Supervisors on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2023.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kimberly A. Olkowski  
Vilas County Clerk

Vilas County  
Comprehensive Plan  
2023