

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

The primary purpose of this outdoor recreation plan is to provide continued direction toward meeting the current and future recreation needs of Wood County. This is accomplished through an inventory and analysis of outdoor recreational facilities, asking the public what they are looking for, and the establishment of recommendations to meet identified needs.

Adoption of this plan by the Wood County Board will continue eligibility of the County and local governments for the following grant programs:

- Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program (Stewardship)
- Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
- Federal Recreational Trails Program (RTP)


**Knowles-Nelson
Stewardship Program**
Nature-based recreation
50% grants

- Park shelters
- Canoe/kayak launches
- Land, etc.


**LAND & WATER
CONSERVATION
FUND**
Active & Nature-based recreation
50% grants

- Playgrounds
- Splash pads
- Tennis courts, etc.


Recreational Trails Program (RTP)
Trail-based recreation
80% grants up to \$100,000
(...up to \$250,000 every 3rd year)

Non-profit conservation organizations (NCOs) are eligible to participate in some Knowles-Nelson Stewardship programs. NCOs may adopt a local government's comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (CORP) in which the NCO project is located or use the NCO's land management plans that are required for participation in the Stewardship programs.

This Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) was prepared pursuant to Wisconsin Statute §23.30 Outdoor Recreation Program. This section serves "to promote, encourage, coordinate, and implement a comprehensive long-range plan to acquire, maintain, and develop for public use, those areas of the state best adapted to the development of a comprehensive system of state and local outdoor recreation facilities and services..."

Submission of this adopted CORP to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources at the time of grant application is necessary to be eligible for a variety of Federal and State Aids for outdoor recreation (Chapter NR 50.06(4), Wisconsin administrative code).

1.2 Provisions for Updating Plan

Plan amendments are common and should be considered part of the planning process. They frequently represent good implementation or plan usage and should be acceptable for consideration by local decision makers.

Annual review of the plan recommendations and capital improvement list by the Highway, Infrastructure, & Recreation Committee will keep this plan current. This review may also occur after a large turnover in elected officials after an election.

Annual Review Process:

1. The Highway Infrastructure & Recreation Committee reviews plan and takes a vote to approve what changes to make.
2. County Board adopts plan with changes by resolution.
3. Those changes are now part of the original plan. Make sure those changes, the original plan, and the approval resolution are available to submit to DNR's Community Financial Assistance staff when applying for any state or federal financial assistance.

Full plan update every 5-years

Updating the plan every five years will ensure it aligns with the evolving recreational needs of the County and maintain the County's eligibility for grant programs for an additional five years.

1.3 Planning Process

This plan was prepared under the direction of the Wood County Highway Infrastructure & Recreation Committee, and Wood County Parks and Forestry Department by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission.

Wood County Planning Timeline

Winter 2024-2025 – Staff park analysis, plans reviewed, & demographic data analysis.

February 6, 2025 – Highway, Infrastructure & Recreation Committee meeting – Overview of planning process, discussed questions for countywide survey and how to distribute the survey.

February 2025 – Survey available for 4-weeks. 584 responses. See survey details in Chapter 5.

Spring 2025 – Goals & Objectives developed.

Spring 2025 – All local governments contacted to update their parks and list any possible capital improvements.

May 1, 2025 – Highway, Infrastructure & Recreation Committee meeting – Reviewed survey results, and discussed initial goals & objectives.

Summer 2025 – Draft Plan ready for review.

Fall 2025 – Highway, Infrastructure & Recreation Committee meeting – Draft Plan presented for initial review.

Fall 2025 – Plan ready for approval by Highway, Infrastructure & Recreation Committee and adoption by County Board.

1.4 Reference Plans

Recreational planning has a long-established history in Wood County. The first Wood County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Plan was developed in 1972 as part of a larger county comprehensive development project. Updates of the plan occurred in: 1977, 1984, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2011, 2018, and now 2026. This demonstrates Wood County's commitment to providing quality recreational opportunities for its residents and visitors. Reviewing these documents provides a clearer understanding of the extent of progress made over the years.

This plan builds off of all previous versions of County recreation plans to provide consistency, but also aims to identify ever-changing recreation trends and issues.

Plan summaries that affect outdoor recreation in Wood County are referenced below:

Wood County Countywide Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan, 2025

In 2023-2025, the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission developed this bicycling and walking plan. This plan identifies where existing biking and walking facilities exist. Recommendations in this plan are for facility improvements throughout the County; and non-infrastructure recommendations for encouragement, education, enforcement, evaluation, and other policy recommendations.

Proposed paths and on-road routes from this plan are shown on **Maps 4, 6, 7, & 8**.

Wood County Comprehensive Plan, 2025

NOTE: This plan is under development in 2024-2025.

This plan will be a compilation of demographics, 20-year projections, maps, and community created goals, objectives, policies, and programs that will guide future planning and community decisions for a 10-year period.

Within some of the chapters may be goals, objectives, and policies that relate to outdoor recreation.

Powers Bluff County Park Long Range Master Plan, 2005

This plan was developed by Schreiber/Anderson Associates, Inc. at the request of the Wood County Parks and Forestry Department. The purpose of the plan is to guide the management, development and preservation of Powers Bluff over the next 10 to 15 years.

Powers Bluff County Park Trails Concept Plan, 2018

This plan was prepared by the International Mountain Bicycling Association for Wood County. The plan provides guidance and recommendations for developing a comprehensive trail network at Powers Bluff County Park. The planned trail network is intended to serve the needs of all recreation users by adding upon the existing Powers Bluff trails with new multi-use trails and the creation of bike optimized trails for all ages and ability levels.

Trails Concept Plan is in **Appendix H**.

Wood County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan, 2021–2035

This plan is a management guide for the Wood County Forest and is updated every fifteen years. The mission of the plan is to manage and protect natural resources within the county forest on a sustainable basis for the ecological, economic, educational, recreational, and research needs of present and future residents throughout the county. The report includes a number of recommendations for timber management, wildlife habitat and game management, land acquisition and forest boundary management, biodiversity management, watershed management and tourism.

Designated and undesignated recreational uses of the county forest, along with designated recreation trails, are outlined in Chapter 900.

Designated recreational uses = campgrounds, ATV intensive use area, Richfield 360, picnic/day use areas, swimming areas/beaches, boat landings, waysides, and shooting ranges.

Undesignated recreational uses = hunting, fishing, picnicking/day use, some camping, some motorized travel (on roads), and other identified types of dispersed recreation uses.

Designated recreation trails = hiking trails, all types of biking trails, equestrian trails, ski trails, snowmobile trails, ATV trails, motorcycle trails, and other motor vehicle trails.

Wood County Forest Mission:

The mission of the Wood County Forest is to manage, conserve and protect natural resources on a sustainable basis for present and future generations. These resources, such as those provided by the County Forest, are the base for addressing the ecological and socioeconomic needs of society.

County Forest resources should be protected from natural catastrophes such as fire, insect and disease outbreaks, and from human threats such as encroachment, over-utilization, environmental degradation and excessive development. While managed for environmental needs including watershed protection, protection and maintenance of biotic diversity, these same resources must also be managed and provide for sociological needs, including the production of raw materials for wood-using industries that provide a wide variety of products fulfilling consumer demands, and provisions for recreational opportunities.

Management must balance local needs with broader state, national, and global concerns through integration of sound forestry, wildlife, fisheries, endangered resources, water quality, soil, and recreational practices. Management will provide this variety of products and amenities for the future with sustainable forest management practices.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Bicycle Facilities Network Plan, 2018

The purpose of this 2018 plan is to “recommend policies, programs, and facilities to improve the safety, viability, convenience, and attractiveness of bicycling and walking for transportation.” This plan also serves to bridge the gap between local community planning and State plans, as well as fill in gaps where improvements for bicycling and/or walking end in local community plans, to create a regional network of safe walking and bicycling.

Goals of the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan:

- Mobility – The Trail System must enhance bicyclists’ ability to get around the Region including access to key destinations such as schools, parks, retail areas, and other public facilities.

- Functionality – New off-road routes, improved existing street routes, signage and marking, and route promotion must be combined to function as a system that is easy and desirable to use.
- Safety – Every bicyclist and pedestrian in the North Central Region deserves a system that is safe for travel.
- Connectivity – The Trail System must provide a seamless transportation system on multiple levels including; internally to all areas of a community; externally to outlying neighbors around the Region; and becoming a part of the bigger picture of a statewide trails network.

Forest Legacy Program

The purpose of the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program is to identify and protect environmentally important private forestlands threatened with conversion to non-forest uses, such as subdivision for residential or commercial development. The Wisconsin DNR administers this federal program in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's Forest Legacy Program aims to keep forests as forests by protecting large unfragmented blocks of forest lands that provide the highest conservation value and public benefit, and minimize conversion of forests to non-forest uses through the purchase of conservation easements. Conservation easements convey a "purchased" set of negotiated property rights, while allowing landowners to continue to own and manage their land, including the right to sell.

Landowner participation is entirely voluntary. A project can be:

- a fee transaction (the landowner sells the land to the state); or
- a conservation easement that restricts development and uses that impact the conservation values present on the property while ensuring sustainable forest management.

With a conservation easement, the land remains in private ownership and keeps forests as forests.

Project applications go through a competitive process at both the state and national level. It is important to note that projects may take several years to complete.

Land must be:

- located within one of Wisconsin's five Forest Legacy Areas (see map in **Appendix E**);
- 75% forested or have additional trees planted to meet the forest cover requirement; and
- owned by someone who is willing to sell or donate the interest in perpetuity.

Landowners must also practice sustainable forestry according to a management plan prepared by a natural resource professional.

State Trails Network Plan

This 2001 document (revised in 2003) clarifies a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (WDNR) role and strategy in the provision of all types of trails. The plan identifies a series of potential trail corridors that would link existing trails, public lands, natural features, and communities. This statewide network of interconnected trails would be owned and maintained by municipalities, private entities, and partnerships of the two. Preserving transportation corridors, such as old rail lines, is specifically discussed as a very important strategy in the creation of recreational and alternative transportation corridors.

The following potential trails in Wood County are shown on **Map 3**.

Segment 4 – Green Bay to Mississippi River

This segment is an important link in a long-distance east/west corridor across the state. From City Point to Wisconsin Rapids, the option of remaining on the rail corridor or using roadways should be considered.

NCWRPC Note: *From Plover to the west, this railroad is still active through all of Wood County. From Plover to the east, this segment is the Tomorrow River State Trail. The plan shows that Segment 4 between Plover and Wisconsin Rapids is within the STH 54 corridor. Since STH 54 has a large stretch of 55 mph, then a more comfortable ride for drivers and bicyclists would be to create an off-road path along one side of the highway.*

Segment 18 – Tomahawk to Wisconsin Dells

It is important to note that Segment 18 links with potential corridors in the Northern and South Central regions to create a continuous trail route from Ashland, on Lake Superior, to the Wisconsin/Illinois state line.

From Stevens Point to Wisconsin Dells, a potential trail route using roadways is recommended that generally would follow the Wisconsin River and its flowages and may provide access to Roche-A-Cri and Buckhorn State Parks for trail users. With the support of the counties, this could become a designated bike route. Paved shoulders should be included with any future road improvements. The Ice Age Trail crosses this potential corridor near the intersection of County Highway Z and State Highway 82.

NCWRPC Note: *From Stevens Point to Wisconsin Rapids, this route could include the scenic STH 66 corridor and a variety of local roads. Since STH 66 is 55 mph, then a more comfortable ride for drivers and bicyclists would be to create an off-road path along one side of the highway that connects local roads at both ends of the highway between Stevens Point and Wisconsin Rapids.*

Segment 47 – Marshfield to Merrillan

This potential trail corridor is combination of a rail line and roadway that will link these two communities as it passes through many small towns. This segment will connect to West Central Region Segment #4 in Merrillan. Roadways may be necessary for the completion of this section as a portion of the rail corridor is in private ownership.

NCWRPC Note: *It appears that only about 0.7 miles of this corridor is in semi-public hands (WI Public Service), so all of this potential corridor in Wood County would be in road right-of-ways.*

Segment 52 – Wausau to Marshfield

Marathon County also recognizes this abandoned rail corridor from Wausau to Marshfield as having significant trail potential. After rail line abandonment in the early 1980s the county took part of the rail right-of-way for tax purposes. A section near Wausau serves as a power line corridor by Wisconsin Public Service (WPS), which apparently would not object to sharing the right-of-way with trail users. Sections of the corridor have reverted back to adjacent landowners, but there may be opportunities for easements or the use of lightly traveled local roads.

Segment 64 – Ladysmith to Marshfield

This potential trail corridor is a combination of rail line and highway right-of-way that continues into Northern Region as Segment #64 to Ladysmith. This segment passes through numerous wildlife areas and several small communities.

Wisconsin Land Legacy Report, 2006-2056

This report is a comprehensive inventory of the special places that will be critical to meeting future conservation and outdoor recreation needs for the next 50 years. Some of the questions asked to guide the creation of this report were: Which lands and waters remain unprotected that will be critical for conserving our plants and animals and their habitats? What gaps exist now (and will likely emerge in the future) in providing abundant and satisfying outdoor recreation? How can we most effectively build upon the state's existing investment in protected lands to fill conservation and recreation gaps? What special places will our children and grandchildren wish we had protected? The study focused on identifying what of our state or regionally significant green infrastructure remains to be protected.

The report recommends protection of these lands by using federal, state, and local funding opportunities; along with possibly creating new kinds of incentives for landowners, working to draft comprehensive plans, or offering different types of technical assistance.

Each Wood County Legacy Area is summarized below with 5 stars representing the highest level for that category:

CG Central Wisconsin Grasslands

Size	Large
Protection Initiated	Moderate
Protection Remaining	Moderate
Conservation Significance	★★★★★
Recreation Potential	★★★

MW Middle Wisconsin River

Size	Large
Protection Initiated	Limited
Protection Remaining	Moderate
Conservation Significance	★★
Recreation Potential	★★★★★

SM Sandhill – Meadow Valley – Wood County State Wildlife Areas

Size	Large
Protection Initiated	Substantial
Protection Remaining	Limited
Conservation Significance	★★★★★
Recreation Potential	★★★

YW Yellow River

Size	Large
Protection Initiated	Moderate
Protection Remaining	Moderate
Conservation Significance	★★★★★
Recreation Potential	★★

Other Areas of Interest

[Cranmoor Wetlands \(Wood County\)](#)

This large wetland area is located within former Glacial Lake Wisconsin and is between large Wood County Forest properties. The area contains extensive wet meadows and marshes and an impressive array of wetland plant and wildlife species amidst a series of cranberry operations. Although altered, the wetlands have relatively few invasive plants and the potential to support rare plants is high.

[Powers Bluff \(Wood County\)](#)

This 300' high monadnock (an isolated remnant hill) is round-shaped due to the erosion-resistant durability of the quartzite. This contrasts with other less durable sandstone bluffs in the area that have weathered parallel to their vertical planes giving them very steep slopes. Dominant trees on the bluff are sugar maple, yellow birch, and bitternut hickory with scattered red oak, white ash, and basswood. The forest floor is strewn with boulders and two boulder trains extend southeast and southwest from the bluff, suggesting that glacial ice moved over and around the bluff. The area is known to harbor Native American historical features. Although the bluff is part of the Wood County park system, there is interest in expanding protection efforts to further meet both conservation and recreation needs.

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2019-2023

NOTE: This plan is undergoing revision in 2024-2025.

Every five years, the Wisconsin DNR publishes a SCORP as required by the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965. At its core, this SCORP is used to help allocate federal funds equitably among local communities, but the document also transcends many levels of outdoor recreation discussion and policy.

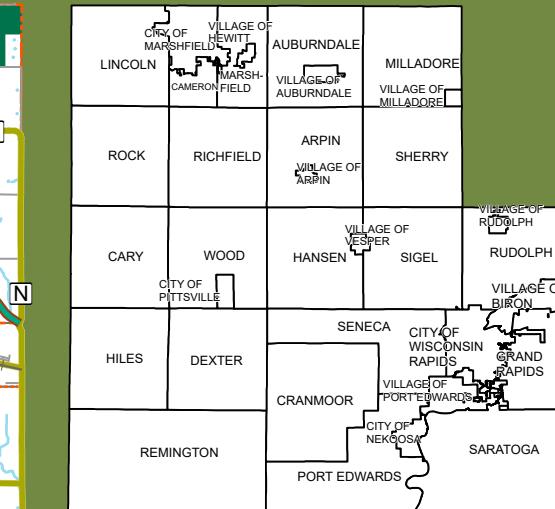
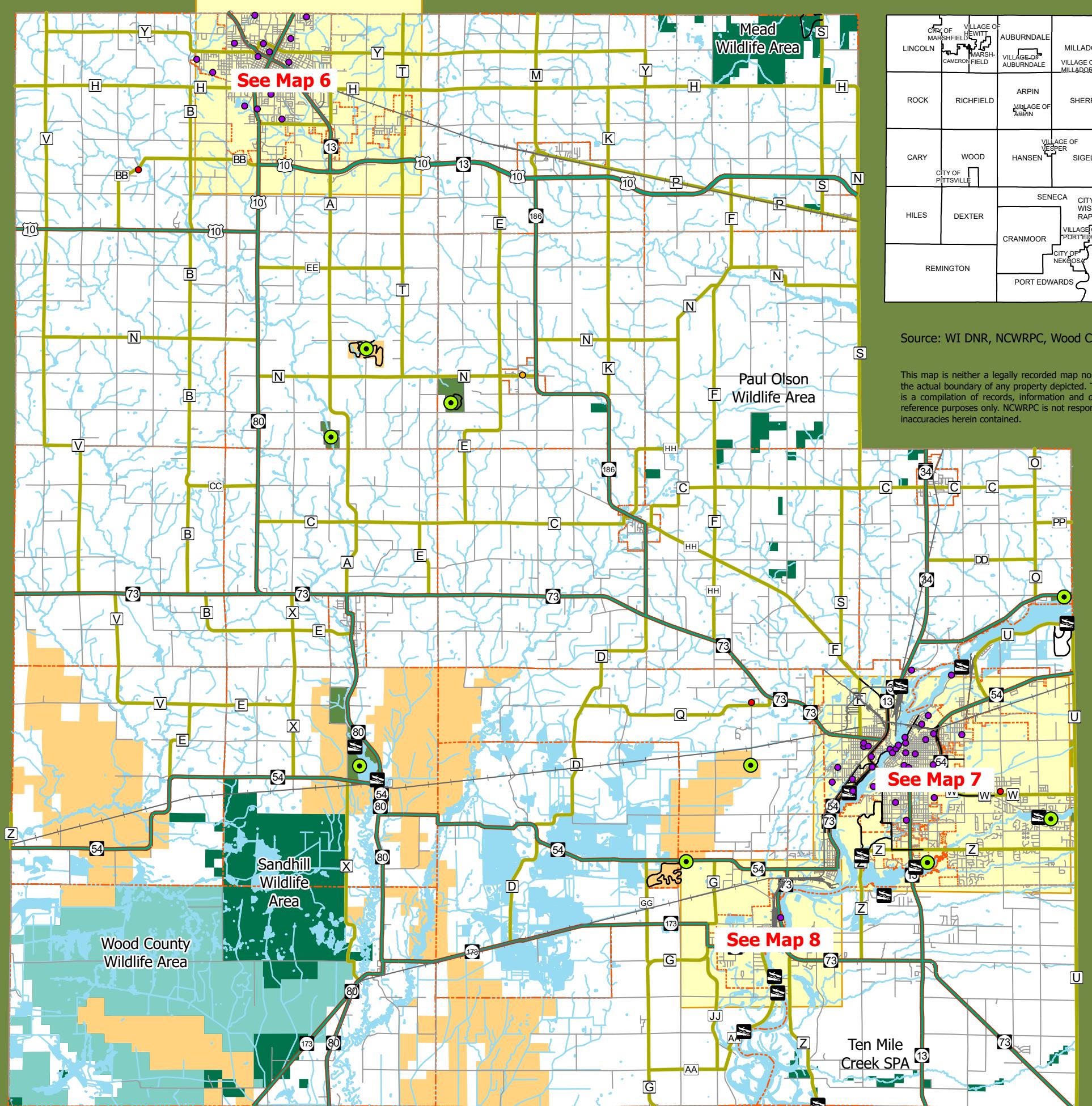
This SCORP lays out five overarching goals for outdoor recreation:

1. Boost participation in outdoor recreation.
2. Grow partnerships.
3. Provide high-quality experiences.
4. Improve data to enhance visitor experiences and benefits.
5. Enhance funding and financial stability.

- Park Design and Location Criteria from SCORP are described in **Appendix A**.
- SCORP identified outdoor recreation needs are in **Appendix D**.

Outdoor Recreation

Wood County, Wisconsin



Legend

- Minor Civil Divisions
- Interstate Highways
- US & State Highways
- County Highway
- Local Roads
- Railroad
- Water
- Trails
- Boat Launches
- Parks
- County
- City
- Town
- Village
- State Wildlife Area
- County Park Area
- Public County Owned
- County Forest
- County Wildlife Area



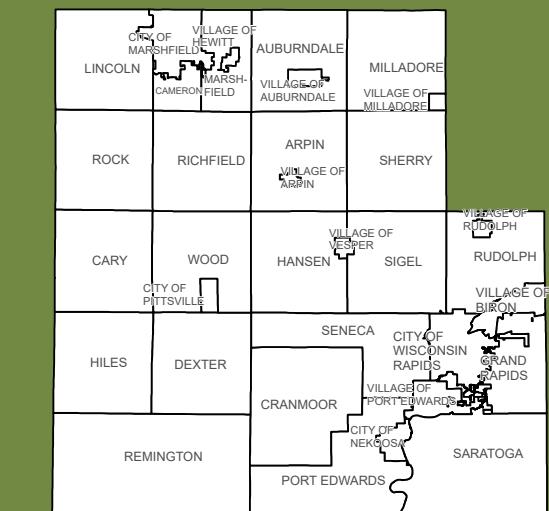
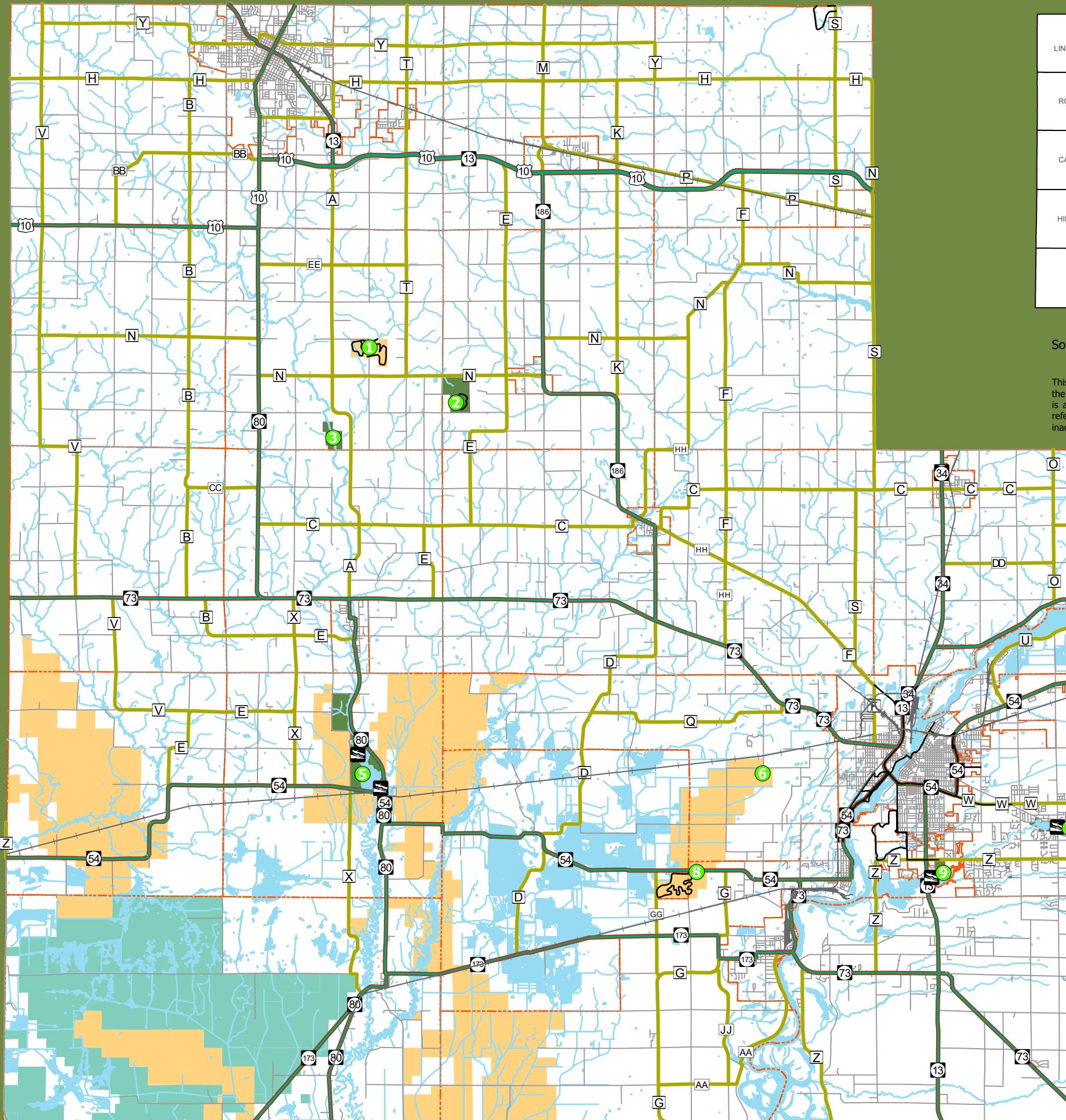
1.5 0.75 0 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles

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Map 2

County Administered Outdoor Recreation

Wood County, Wisconsin



Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, Wood County

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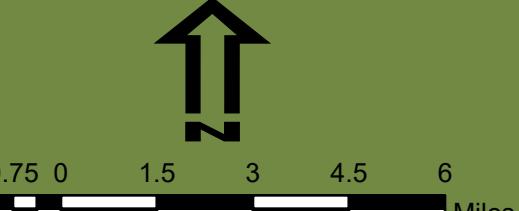
ID	NAME
1	Richfield 360 County Forest
2	Powers Bluff County Park
3	North Wood County Park
4	Wood County Cera Park
5	Dexter County Park
6	Wood County Rifle Range
7	South Wood County Park
8	ATV Intensive Use Area
9	NEPCO Lake County Park

Legend

- Minor Civil Divisions
- Interstate Highways
- US & State Highways
- County Highway
- Local Roads
- Railroad
- Water
- Trails
- County Boat Launches

Parks

- County
- County Forest
- County Park Area
- Public County Owned
- Wood County Wildlife Area

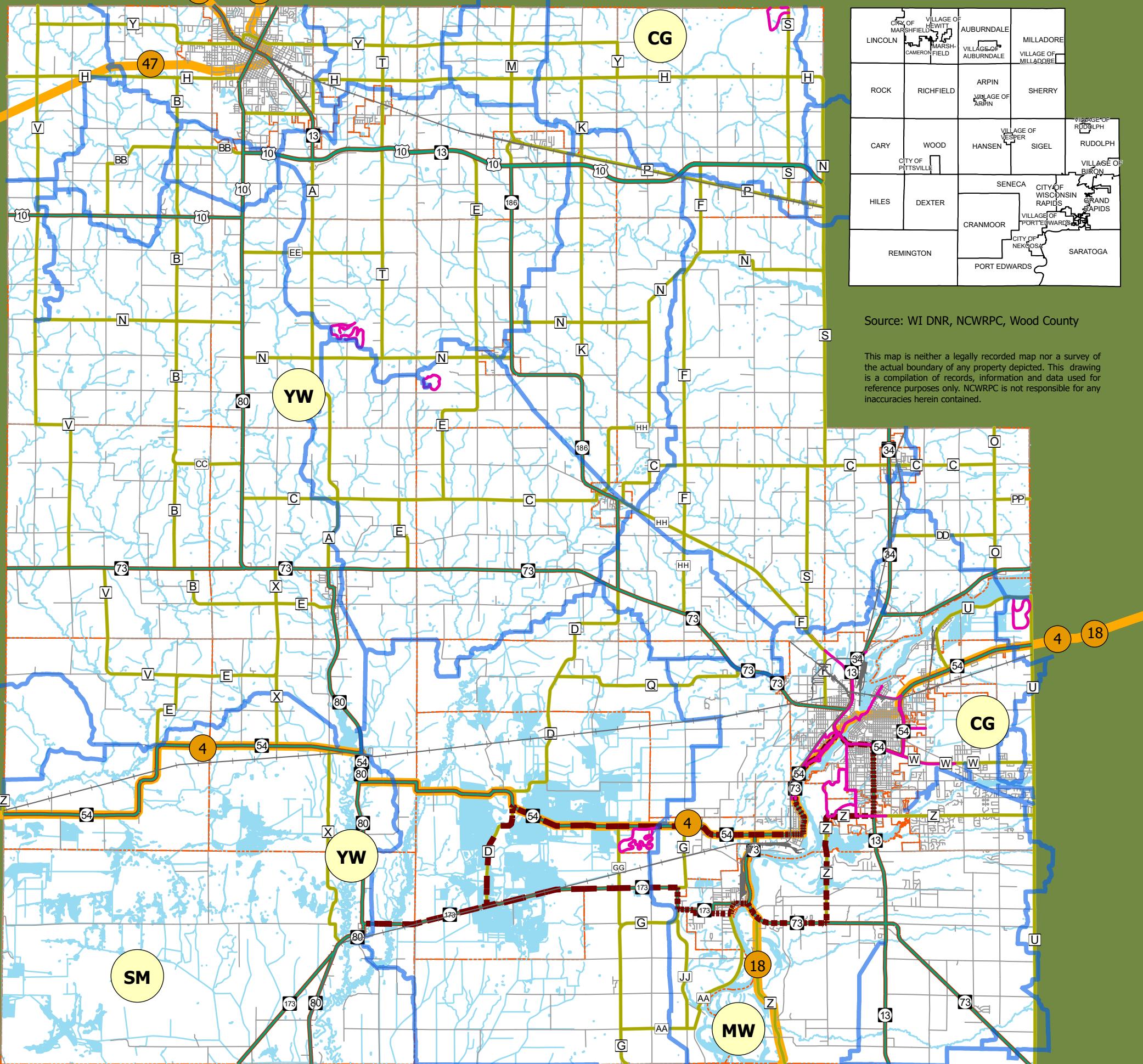


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Map 3

Legacy Places and Potential Trails

Wood County, Wisconsin



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Map 4

Existing and Planned Bicycle Facilities Wood County, Wisconsin

Wood County, Wisconsin

The map illustrates the Town of Remington, New York, with its various settlements and boundaries. The settlements include:

- Lincoln:** Contains the **CITY OF MARSHFIELD**, **VILLAGE OF HEWITT**, and **MARSH-CAMERON FIELD**.
- Rock:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF AUBURNDALE**.
- Cary:** Contains the **CITY OF PITTSVILLE**.
- Hiles:** Contains the **DEXTER** settlement.
- Remington:** Contains the **CRANMOOR** settlement.
- Richfield:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF AUBURNDALE**.
- Wood:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF ARPIN**.
- Auburndale:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF ARPIN**.
- Hansen:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF VESPER**.
- Arpin:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF ARPIN**.
- Vesper:** Contains the **SIGEL** settlement.
- Seneca:** Contains the **CITY OF WISCONSIN RAPIDS**.
- Port Edwards:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF PORT EDWARDS**, **CITY OF NEOSHO**, and **PORT EDWARDS**.
- Milladore:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF MILLADORE**.
- Sherry:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF SHERRY**.
- Rudolph:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF RUDOLPH**.
- Biron:** Contains the **VILLAGE OF BIRON**.
- Grand Rapids:** Contains the **GRAND RAPIDS** settlement.
- Saratoga:** Contains the **SARATOGA** settlement.

Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, Wood County

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Legend

- Minor Civil Divisions
- Interstate Highways
- US & State Highways
- County Highway
- Local Roads
- Railroad
- Water
- Bicycle Facilities
 - Existing Off-Road
 - Existing Bike Lane
 - Existing Shared Road
 - Existing Wide Paved Shoulder
 - Proposed Off-Road
 - Proposed Bike Lanes
 - Proposed Shared Road
 - Proposed Sidewalk
 - Proposed Wide Paved Shoulders

***NOTICE**

Each proposed bike route becomes a bike route when the County:

1. Officially designates by ordinance one of the segments or part of a segment per WI State Statute 349.23; and
2. Installs bike route signs



A scale bar at the bottom of the map, consisting of a horizontal line with tick marks and numerical labels: 1.50, 75, 0, 1.5, 3, 4.5, and 6. Below the scale bar, the word "Miles" is written.

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Parks, Recreation, & Open Spaces Plan

Map 5

Local Government Outdoor Recreation Wood County, Wisconsin

Wood County, Wisconsin

The map displays the 18 townships of the Town of Remington, each with a unique color and boundary. The townships are: Lincoln, Rock, Cary, Hiles, Remington, Cranmoor, Port Edwards, Hansen, Arpin, Richfield, Wood, Pittsville, Port Edwards, Nekoosa, Seneca, Rudolph, Sigel, Sherry, and Milladore. Several villages are also shown as irregularly shaped areas within the townships: Village of Hewitt, Village of Auburndale, Village of Milladore, Village of Arpin, Village of Vesper, Village of Rudolph, Village of Biron, and Village of Port Edwards. The map also includes the City of Marshfield, the City of Auburndale, and the City of Nekoosa.

Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, Wood County

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ID	Name
1	Ebbe Park
2	Auburndale Park
3	Milladore Park
4	Lindsey Park
5	Kandy Kane Park
6	Rudolph Community Park
7	Vesper Community Park
8	Vesper Recreation Center
9	Lions Club Ball Park
10	Riverside Park
11	George Nielsen Memorial Park
12	Biron Park
13	Babcock Baseball Park
14	Babcock Community Park



1.5 0.75 1.5 3 4.5 6 Miles

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Parks, Recreation, & Open Spaces Plan

See Map 6

Audubon School Forest

Marshfield Senior High School Forest

Pittsville Public Schools Forest

See Map 7

See Map 8

Map 6

Marshfield Area Outdoor Recreation

Wood County, Wisconsin

Legend

- Minor Civil Divisions
- Interstate Highways
- US & State Highways
- County Highway
- Local Roads
- Railroad
- Water
- Schools
- Existing Off-Road Path
- Existing Bike Lane
- Existing Shared Road
- Existing Wide Paved Shoulder
- Proposed Off-Road Path
- Proposed Bike Lanes
- Proposed Shared Road
- Proposed Sidewalk
- Proposed Wide Paved Shoulders
- Parks

Source: WI DNR, NCWRPC, Wood County

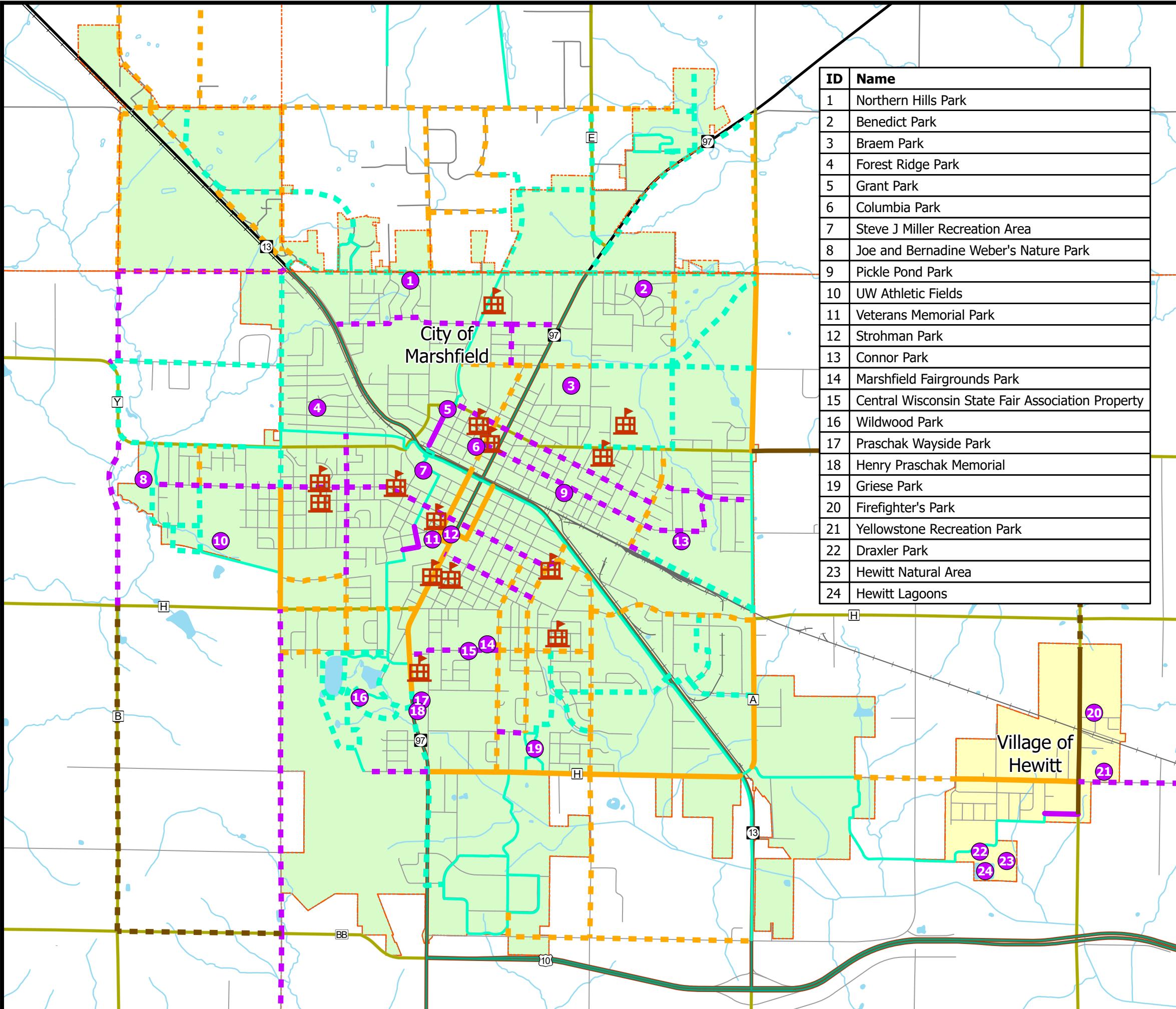
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Parks, Recreation, & Open Spaces Plan

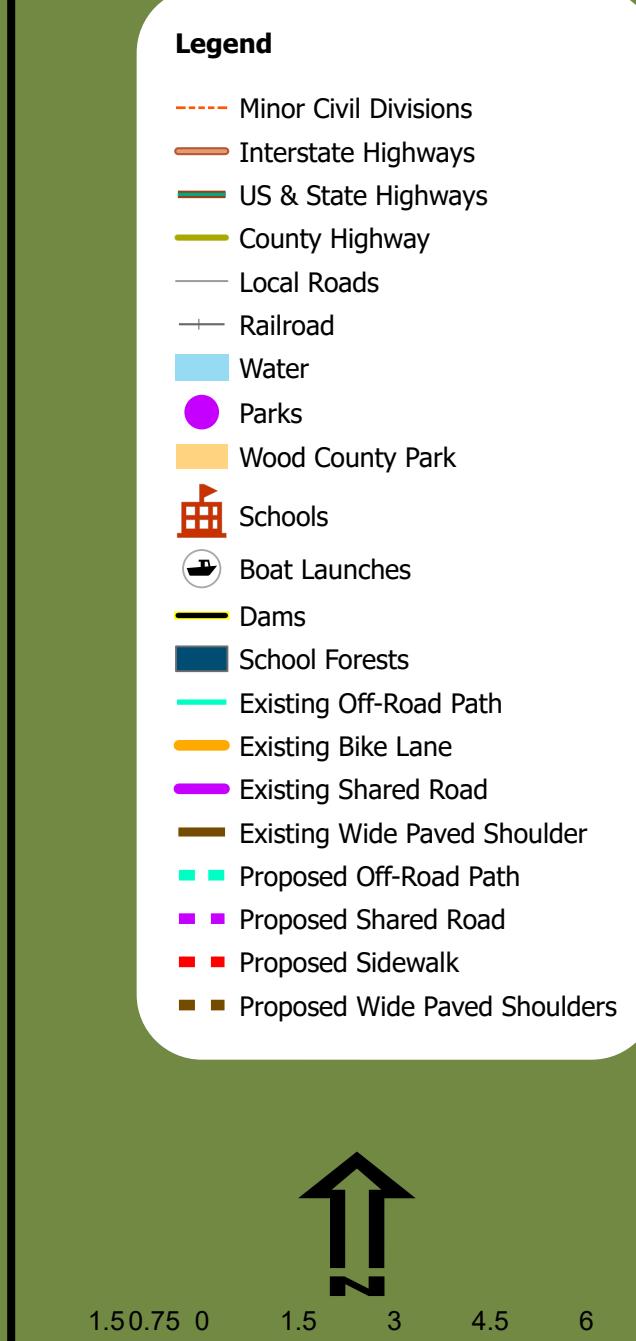
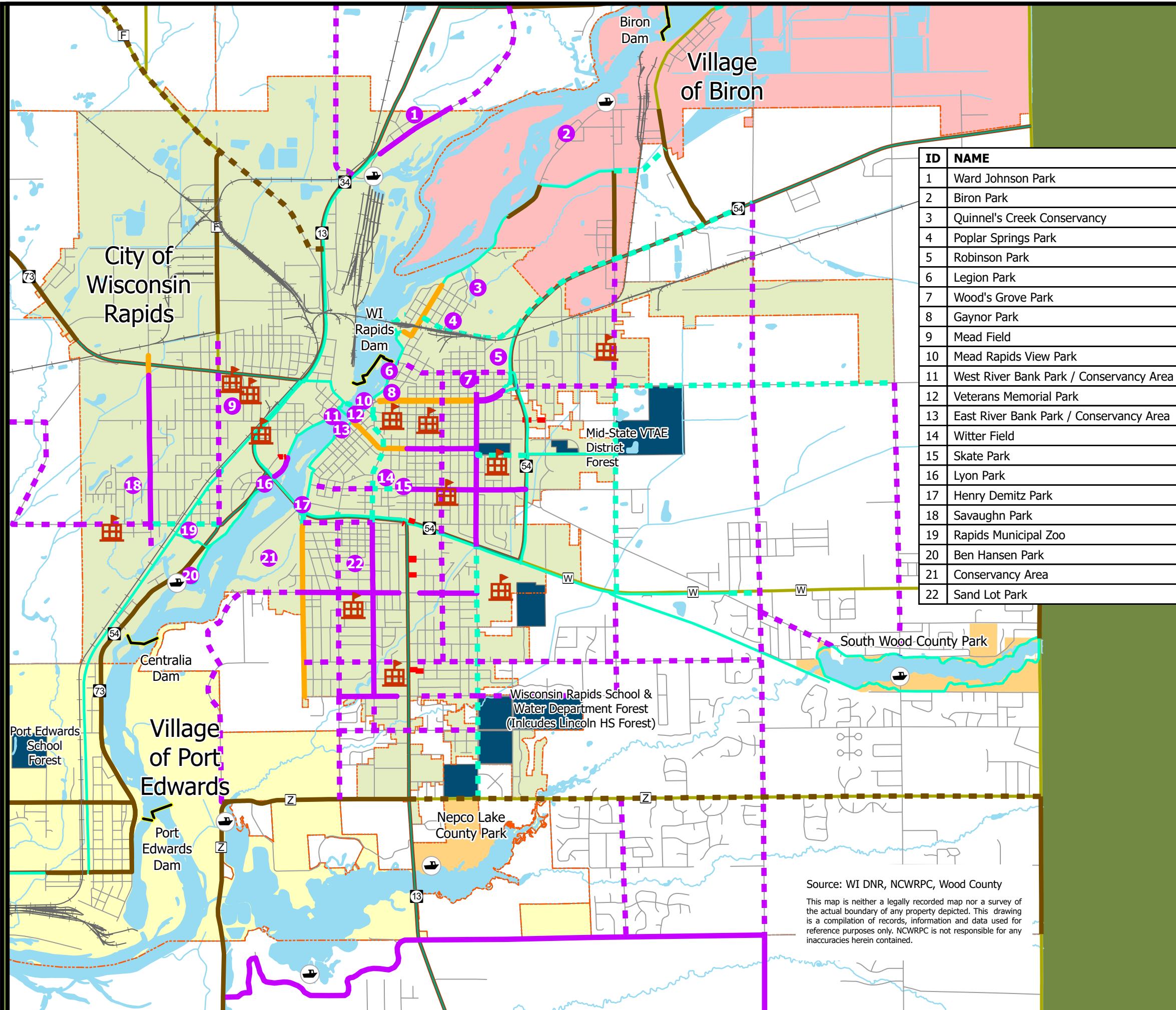
ID	Name
1	Northern Hills Park
2	Benedict Park
3	Braem Park
4	Forest Ridge Park
5	Grant Park
6	Columbia Park
7	Steve J Miller Recreation Area
8	Joe and Bernadine Weber's Nature Park
9	Pickle Pond Park
10	UW Athletic Fields
11	Veterans Memorial Park
12	Strohman Park
13	Connor Park
14	Marshfield Fairgrounds Park
15	Central Wisconsin State Fair Association Property
16	Wildwood Park
17	Praschak Wayside Park
18	Henry Praschak Memorial
19	Gries Park
20	Firefighter's Park
21	Yellowstone Recreation Park
22	Draxler Park
23	Hewitt Natural Area
24	Hewitt Lagoons



Map 7

Wisconsin Rapids Area Outdoor Recreation

Wood County, Wisconsin



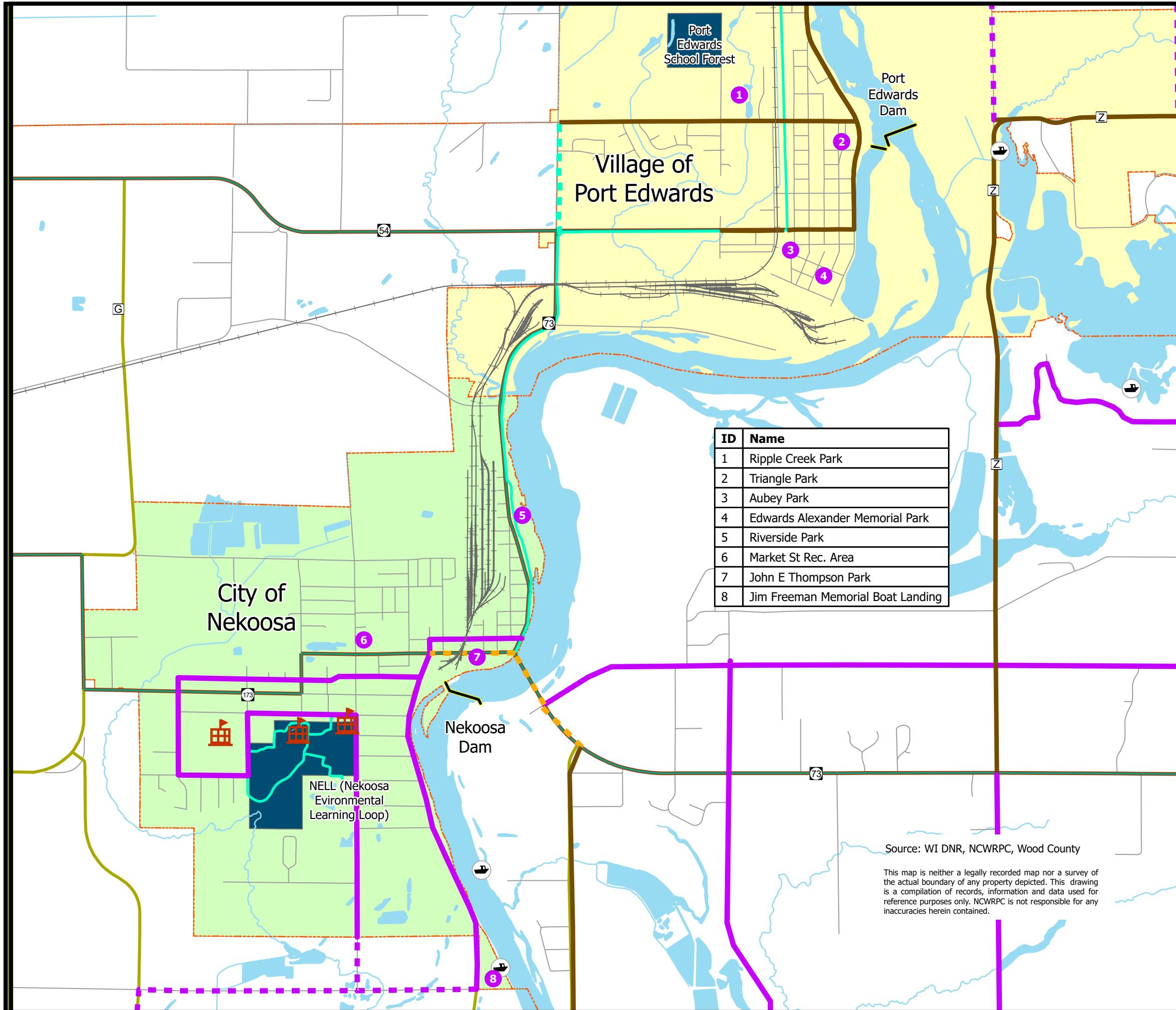
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Parks, Recreation, & Open Spaces Plan

Map 8

Nekoosa & Port Edwards Area Outdoor Recreation

Wood County, Wisconsin



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Parks, Recreation, & Open Spaces Plan