



MEMORANDUM

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

Date: June 30, 2025
To: CLFLWD Board of Managers
From: Mike Kinney, District Administrator
Subject: Greenbelt & Open Space Plan Scope of Work



District Wide

Background/Discussion

Per the Board's request, Emmons & Olivier Resources has prepared a scope of work and cost estimate to complete a Greenbelt & Open Space Plan. This effort picks back up after the District has undergone some separate but related planning processes including flood resiliency planning and strategic planning.

The District's newly adopted Strategic Plan includes several values and priorities that can be tied to the Greenbelt & Open Space initiative:

- Top Initiative: Greenbelt & Open Space – build the plan and have the Board validate the plan (see enclosed scope of work to build the plan).
- Top Initiative: Public Engagement – increase public recognition, increase public relations. The Greenbelt & Open Space initiative may provide opportunities to do this.
- Top Initiative: Education and Outreach – expand education and outreach for flood resiliency, enhance interagency communication. The Greenbelt & Open Space initiative may provide opportunities to do this.
- Value: Fiscal accountability – ensure efficient use of resources. Leveraging grants has been mentioned many times throughout the process and is a high priority. Note that Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund grants require all acquired sites be publicly accessible for hunting/fishing as feasible.
- Value: Collaboration and community engagement – foster partnerships and empower informed stewardship. It will be imperative to work with partners to fulfill this initiative – seek shared objectives.

Budget Considerations

The enclosed scope of work includes a cost estimate of \$89,578 for this work. There is insufficient funding in the 2025 budget for this work. The Board is currently working on budgeting for 2026. The draft 2026 budget workbooks have included an estimated 2025 yearend expense of \$50,000 for the Greenbelt & Open Space Plan. Expenses like this result in a negative expense-revenue balance at the end of the year, thus reducing the District's reserve fund (note that the year-end reserve fund balance must be sufficient to cover operating



MEMORANDUM

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

expenditures for the first six months of the following year). The draft 2026 expense budget has \$10,000 currently budgeted for this effort.

The District recently submitted a grant application to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund (LSOHF) in the amount of \$3.3 million for the first phase of implementation of the Greenbelt & Open Space initiative. Within this grant request, \$300,000 is marked for professional services (e.g., engineering, surveys, legal). Ideally, the Greenbelt & Open Space Plan would be finished prior to beginning implementation. However, given the lack of available funds in the 2025 budget, the Board may wish to conduct this effort in phases so it may be at least partially funded with the LSOHF grant, assuming the grant is awarded. Grant awards won't be confirmed until they go through the legislature next spring, but we will have a good idea of grant awards around December of this year. Note that the LSOHF received a total of \$500 million in grant applications this year, and there is only about \$150 million available to award.

The MN Pollution Control Agency will offer another round of Local Climate Action planning grants later this summer/fall. The maximum grant award under this program is \$50,000. We could wait until this RFP is released and apply for funding for this effort.

In any case, the Board must reconcile this estimated cost with its ongoing budgeting efforts. This overall effort must be prioritized among the many other high priority activities the District is engaged in. We can either cut costs elsewhere or increase revenues by aligning this project's timeline with the timeline of available grants (e.g., Lessard-Sams and/or MPCA Local Climate Action).

Staff recommend the Board discuss this matter so that it aligns within the context of the current budgeting process.

Attached

Greenbelt & Open Space Plan Scope of Work

Project Name | Greenbelt and Open Space Planning**Date** | 6.30.2025**To / Contact info** | CLFLWD Board of Managers**Cc / Contact info** | District Administrator – Mike Kinney
District Engineers – Greg Graske & Anne Wilkison**From / Contact info** | Kevin Biehn & Alexander Furneaux - EOR**Regarding** | Requested budget approval for next steps

BACKGROUND

The Comfort Lake Forest Lake Watershed District (CLFLWD) has explored opportunities to further its mission to protect and improve water resources through the development/preservation of regional greenbelt & open space planning, hereafter referred to as greenway.

To date CLFLWD's interest in this regional planning approach has primarily been focused on water resource protection & resiliency through the mechanisms of capital improvement projects such as flood storage, stream restoration, vegetative buffers, water quality improvement projects, protection of unique and sensitive wetland area, etc. Greenways inherently can have other functions such as social, recreational, and economic community benefits. Considering how these functions might be accommodated at the outset provides value by better informing decisions that provide flexibility for partners and constituents to realize co-benefits through the development of regional greenways.

Ultimately, CLFLWD will look to partners and stakeholders to help realize additional greenway objectives, including but not limited to public use via a joint implementation effort. As CLFLWD has been leading this initial visioning step, it is recommended that these components, which may be considered outside of traditional Watershed District purview, continue to be considered at this early planning phase. Creating space to plan that includes these additional greenway functions presents the opportunity to create buy-in from partners and stakeholders to promote collaboration on this initiative. It also opens the door for other types of funding and grants that may prioritize these additional elements.

REINTRODUCTION

Initial planning has occurred for two pilot study areas within the District. Concepts were developed for the Sunrise River corridor between Forest Lake and Comfort Lake (Figure 1) and the JD-6 subwatershed (Figure 2). Findings were presented to the CLFLWD Board of Managers at 3.21.2021, 11.30.2021, and 2.1.2022 meetings/workshops. The 2.1.2022 presentation is enclosed for reference. No direct greenway deliverables have been produced by EOR since the 2.1.2022 engagement. Per Board direction, EOR is advancing a scope of work to advance greenway products and take the next prudent steps to illustrate the benefits of such an approach to the District and its Partners.

The approach at this stage is to focus solely on the Sunrise River corridor and to advance products which will serve as a model should the District desire to replicate District-wide or with other corridors. A sum fee & expense of \$89,578 is advanced for the next steps (Tasks 1 -5).



Figure 1 – Sunrise River Corridor Concept

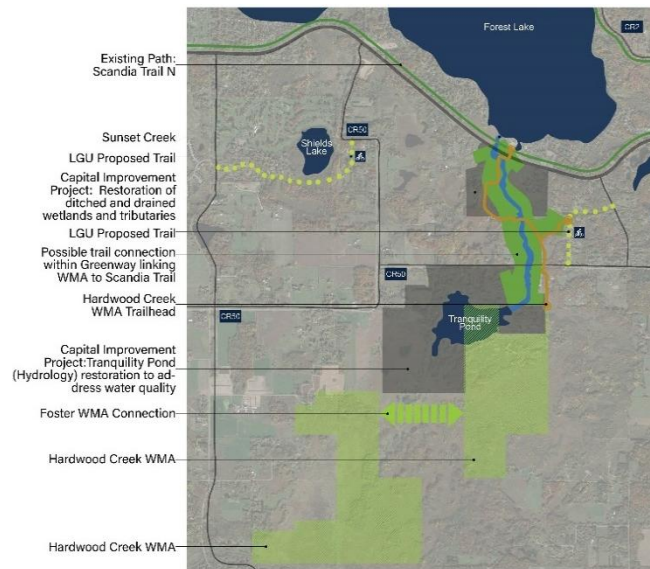


Figure 2 –JD-6 Study Area Concept



Figure 3 – Representative greenway typology for the Sunrise River Corridor

WORK PLAN

Via past work, the District has a solid conceptual understanding of how a greenway can potentially advance the District’s mission within the Sunrise River corridor. The primary objective of this proposed next step is to further the understanding of the costs/benefits to achieving water quality, flood resiliency, and habitat enhancement at a greenway scale.

Secondarily, to aid the Board in determining its future position on the public use component(s) of a potential greenway and to communicate such opportunities with potential partners, each of the tasks/deliverables identified herein will address each of the following distinct greenway approaches to public use. Among the numerous differences identified and vetted, the availability and likely weighting of grant funding will be allocated across the distinct approaches. These scenarios are organized from greatest stakeholder involvement and necessary collaborative planning to least/no stakeholder involvement and necessary collaborative planning:

Note:

Public use benefits (e.g., recreation via trail) are mentioned throughout this scope. If such uses are to be realized, it is assumed that they would be accomplished (planned, financed, operated, etc.) via partner(s). Since CLFLWD is (initially) leading the discovery of greenways, public use is being considered at this early stage as it is essential to plan for at the beginning and necessary to illustrate such opportunities to potential partners.

- **Fully integrated greenway planning.** Opportunities to connect land parcels together with environmental and recreational benefits are planned and coordinated across the entire corridor in advance. *For example, a fully connected greenway with planned trail linkage(s) are identified and planned.*
- **Partially integrated greenway planning.** Opportunities to connect land parcels together with environmental and public benefits are planned in advance but are not physically connected to each other. *For example, planned public use of individual parcels or portions of the corridor for birdwatching.*
- **Opportunistic greenway planning.** Opportunities are welcomed and considered as individual or small groups of land parcels are added to the greenway, however public use is not planned or prioritized in advance, potentially limiting which public uses are achievable. *For example, identifying public use opportunities as parcels are added to the greenway may pose challenges if existing plans water quality improvement plans did not consider implications presented by desired public uses, such as how access in wetland areas can be mitigated.*

Task 1 - Further develop Greenway Typologies and (water resource) Capital Improvement Projects

Advance schematic design and typical approach to the three distinct segments of the Sunrise River corridor (Figure 4):

- Forest Lake Conservation Area [approximately Forest Lake to Washington/Chisago County Border]
- Shallow Pond Restoration [approximately Washington/Chisago County Border to 256th Street]
- Sunrise River Restoration [approximately 256 Street to Comfort Lake]

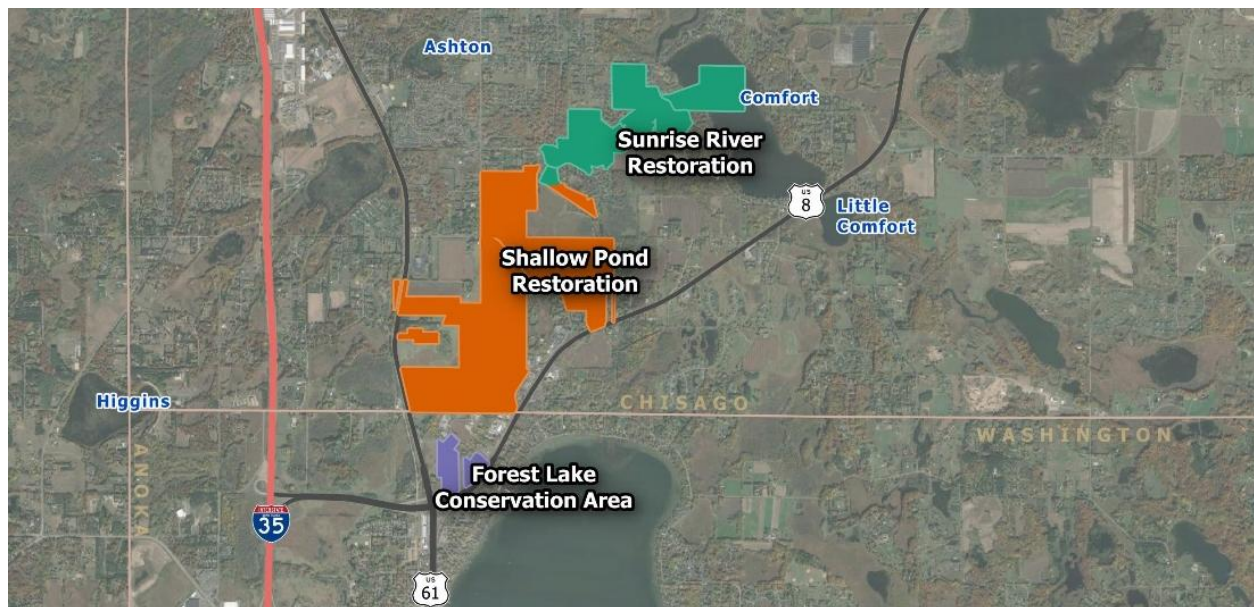


Figure 4 - Three distinct segments of the Sunrise River corridor

- A. Assemble, refine, and integrate primary water resource projects/opportunities. Further conceptualize the District capital projects acknowledged in the greenway planning thus far (e.g., Shallow Pond) and identify greenway configurations that permit these projects and maximize returns. Integrate other opportunities known to the District and stakeholders and identify other synergies with a greenway corridor.

- B. Prepare greenway typology analysis and as warranted, create subarea plan concepts depicting public use scenarios.
- C. Prepare written evaluation of the greenway concept against statements of intent, vision, goals, and objectives as well as conformance with existing guidelines and other plans and connectivity to adjacent infrastructure.
- D. Prepare graphic support illustrations including greenway and recreation typology diagrams to help communicate concepts. These visuals will be used for a variety of purposes (e.g., education, communication, and branding) and at numerous project phases.
- E. Review preliminary materials with CLFLWD staff
- F. Update preliminary concepts based on feedback

Deliverables:

- Documentation of water resource CIP opportunities and characterization of needs and returns via memo and informative graphics
- Subarea / typology concept(s)
- Written memo
 - Ecological and economic impact analysis
 - Alignment of concepts with vision, goals, and objectives
 - Graphic illustrations
- Illustrative diagrams to communicate complex and/or unique opportunities and constraints, which need to be addressed/understood by stakeholders (up to 4x)
- Illustrated plan for Sunrise River greenway
- Represented plan and cross-section of the primary typologies (up to 3x)

TASK 1 – PRIMARY INTENT

Further understanding of potential water quality and/or flood resiliency projects. Determine whether to advance projects within the greenway planning process or as a stand-alone project.

Estimated Hours / Fee + Expenses: 204 / \$35,182

Task 2 - Qualitative characterization of costs/benefits to the District and its constituents and comparison/contrast of the three greenway approaches

Articulate fundamental environmental, social and economic distinctions to aid District in determining forthcoming role/investment with this potential greenway value and benefit. At a minimum the following base variables will be compared and contrasted across the three greenway approaches:

- Investment
 - Timing/Sequencing
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Planning and design
 - Assembly
 - Implementation
 - Cost
 - Planning / Engineering
 - Land acquisition / easement
 - Infrastructure
 - O&M

TASK 2 – PRIMARY INTENT

Articulate fundamental environmental, social and economic distinctions to aid District in determining forthcoming role/investment with this potential greenway value and benefit.

- Necessary stakeholder involvement
 - LGU
 - County
 - State
 - Non-Profits
- Necessary District staff involvement
- Assemblage
- Returns and Opportunities
 - Public value and support
 - Elevated water quality
 - Flood reduction and resiliency
 - Habitat connection and enhancement
 - Enhanced cultural awareness & community identity
 - Created value & generated economic activity
 - Improved health through active living
 - Available funding/grants

Deliverables:

- Memo & presentation detailing & illustrating the qualitative characterization of costs/benefits to the District and its constituents

Estimated Hours / Fee + Expenses: 119 / \$20,690

Task 3 - Articulate & delineate probable District & stakeholder roles & responsibilities (advocacy, planning, assembly, implementation, O&M) and comparison/contrast of the three greenway approaches

Greenway development involves a variety of stakeholders with distinct roles and responsibilities to ensure the successful creation and maintenance of these important community assets. By involving diverse stakeholders and clearly defining their roles and responsibilities, greenway development projects can be more successful, creating vibrant and sustainable green spaces that benefit the entire community. This step is intended to inform the Board of necessary and beneficial partners and would be utilized in future stakeholder engagement/buy-in should the District pursue.

TASK 3 – PRIMARY INTENT

Inform CLFLWD Board of necessary & beneficial partners utilized in future stakeholder engagement/buy-in should the District pursue.

Stakeholders identified and vetted will include all of the following:

- Local Government and Agencies
- Community Organizations and Advocacy Groups
- Residents
- Businesses and Landowners
- Nonprofit Organizations and Philanthropic Foundations

At a minimum, each of the following primary roles will be delineated across potential stakeholders:

- Planning and Design: Developing a shared vision, conducting needs assessments, and creating design plans that incorporate stakeholder feedback.

- Funding and Resources: Securing funding, managing resources, and ensuring long-term financial sustainability.
- Construction and Maintenance: Building and maintaining the greenway infrastructure, ensuring safety and accessibility.
- Engagement and Communication: Establishing clear communication channels, providing opportunities for stakeholder input, and fostering a sense of ownership.
- Stewardship: Promoting the responsible use and care of the greenway and its surrounding natural resources.

Deliverables:

- Memo identifying potential co-benefits from the three greenway approaches in context to local government and agency public use priorities and plans.
- Memo with supporting figures/graphics.

Estimated Hours / Fee + Expenses: 69 / \$12,090

Task 4 - Conduct Up to 2 Board Workshops

Provide greenway refresher, present the work completed herein, and garner direction on:

- Continue greenway planning or divert attention/resources to 'stand-alone' capital improvement projects
- If continuing greenway initiative, what is the District's future role with public use planning

Deliverables:

- Presentation product(s)
- Written documentation of Board direction and implications for next steps

Estimated Hours / Fee + Expenses: 55 / \$10,450

Task 5 – Create Greenway Visioning Booklet

Create informative, concise, and inspirational document for stakeholder audiences. Booklet will communicate intent, opportunities, and ultimately be used to garner stakeholder interest/position on such a greenway. An example local product is [The Greenway Guidebook](#) authored by Dakota County.

Deliverables:

- Digital (.pdf) booklet and component files

Estimated Hours / Fee + Expenses: 64 / \$11,026

ASSUMED DISTRICT (STAFF) ROLE

- Assist with deliverable production, providing content and storyboarding concepts and approach
- Review draft products & provide unified direction
- Ensure products/deliverables are in line with Board vision and readily understandable
- Schedule workshops and assist with facilitation

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

Primary Tasks		2025						2026			
		JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN			
Notice to Proceed (7/10/2025)		X									
Tasks 1 thru 3	Production										
	District Staff Review										
	Refinement per District Direction										
Task 4 - Board Engagment											
Task 5 - Visioning Booklet											

ENCLOSURES

- 2022.2.1 Board Workshop Presentation

Location	Virtual	Date + Time	1/18/2022 3:00PM
Project Name	CLFLWD Greenway Visioning	Regarding	Prep for 2/1/2022 Workshop
Attendee(s)	Al Singer Al.Singer@CO.DAKOTA.MN.US Emily Heinz emily.heinz@clflwd.org Mike Kinney michael.kinney@clflwd.org Kevin Biehn kbiehn@eorinc.com	Present (y/n)	

1. THANKS TO ALAN FOR PARTICIPATING!

2. INTRODUCTIONS

- a. *Al Singer* – Land conservation extraordinaire currently with Dakota County and formerly leadership at MnDNR Metro Greenways, MPRB and others
- b. CLFLWD
 - i. *Emily Heinz* – Planning Coordinator
 - ii. *Mike Kinney* – Administrator
- c. Lead from EOR – *Kevin Biehn*

3. INTEREST - WHY/HOW THIS CAME ABOUT

- a. Much accomplished already, moving on from lower hanging fruit
- b. Expectations to achieve more (results and precedent)
- c. Regional approach a necessity
 - i. Many solutions require undoing artificial drainage, which in this landscape has impacts well ‘upstream’
 - ii. Interest in climate resiliency

4. COALESCENCE NEEDED

- a. Turnover
- b. Board Clarity
 - i. Wants this but aren’t sure what it is
 - ii. Not on the same page about the goals of a greenway – somewhat boils down to whether recreation is included or not
- c. LGUs are supportive but not leading at this early stage
- d. Area of focus may be unclear
- e. Desired scale may be impractical

5. CHARACTERIZATION OF LIMITED PLANNING TO DATE

6. REACTIONS / Q&A

7. DETERMINING WORKSHOP APPROACH AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2/1/2022 CLFLWD BOARD WORKSHOP

GREENWAY DISCUSSION MOCK AGENDA

1. *Group Introduction [Emily]*
2. *What is a Greenway [Kevin]*
3. *Benefits and potential applicability to CLFLWD [Kinney]*
 - a. *Drainage impacts/necessities*
 - b. *Resiliency*
4. *AI Singer Perspective [AI]*
 - a. *Interest in WD's considering more comprehensive land protection measures, as a means to positively impact water resources*
 - b. *MnDNR & Dakota County Examples*
 - c. *Owner & operator perspective*
 - d. *Lessons learned*
5. *Opportunities and Limitations [Kevin]*
 - a. *Recreation.....*
 - b. *Wetlands....*
 - c. *Water trail.....*
6. *Work complete to date [Kevin]*
7. *Board Q&A [Emily]*
8. *Goal Setting Exercise – Prioritize Outcomes [Emily]*
9. *Additional Question for the Board [Kevin]*
 - a. *Area(s) of focus – Sunrise and/or JD-6*
 - b. *Watershed District Planning*
 - c. *Means and cost to garnering LGU buying*

Potential Additional work prior to Workshop

- *Cost estimating (perspective)*
- *Defining potential roles*
- *Graphics*
 - *<https://www.minneapolisarks.org/news/2020/06/19/check-out-draft-master-plan-for-minnehaha-creek-and-surrounding-parkland-and-trails-in-minneapolis/>*

2.1.2022 CLFLWD Board Workshop - Greenway Visioning

GREENWAY INTRO

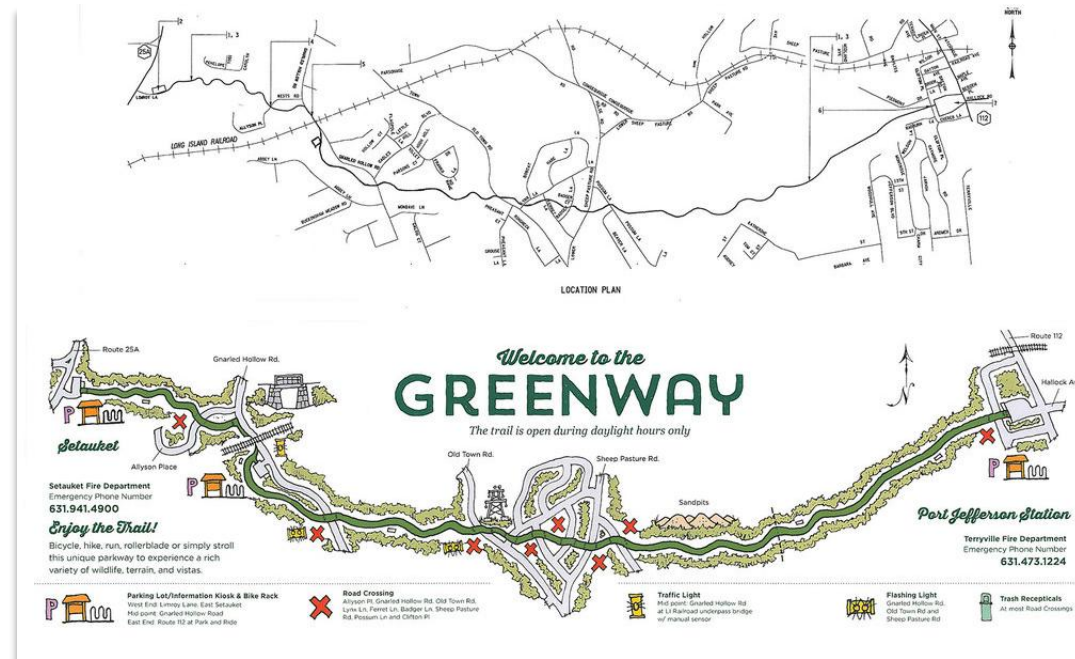


greenway intro



WHAT IS A GREENWAY?

- Corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and/or recreation purposes.
- Often follow natural land or water features & link parks, nature preserves, cultural features and historic sites with each other & with populated areas.
- Publicly or privately owned & some are the result of public/private partnership.



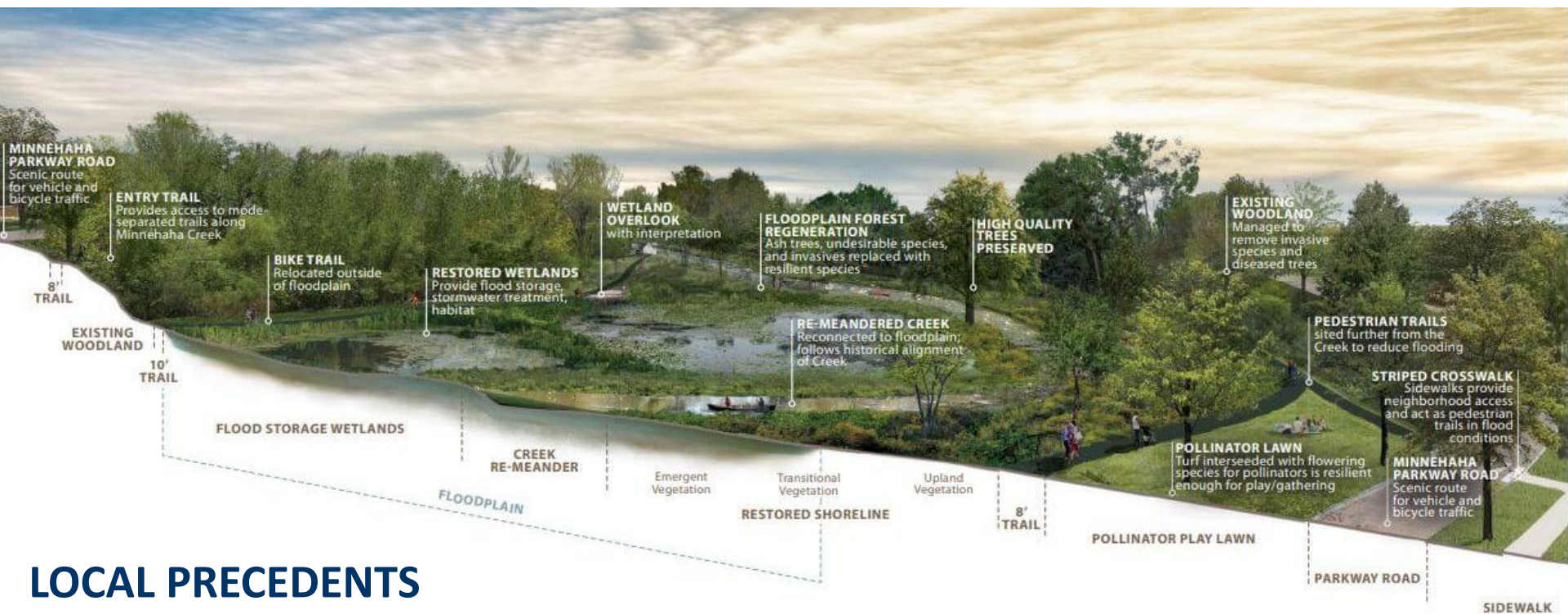
greenway intro



TYPES (one or more emphasis):

1. River
 - A. Urban
 - B. Natural
2. Parks & Trails
3. Cultural & Historic
4. Wildlife

greenway intro

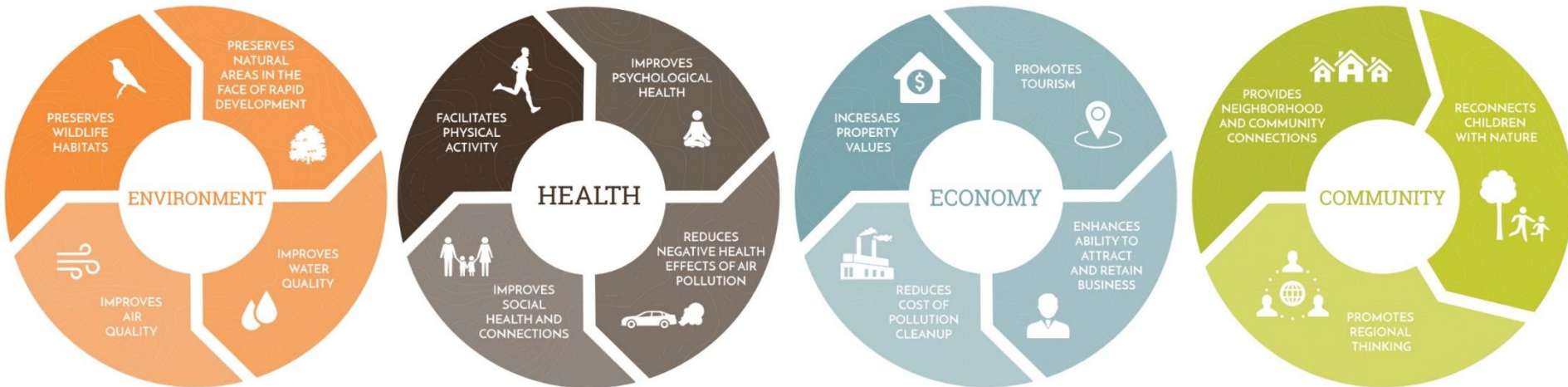


LOCAL PRECEDENTS

1. Dakota County (multiple, including Vermillion River)
2. Grand Rounds
3. Midtown Greenway
4. Plymouth's Northwest Greenway
5. Minnehaha Creek

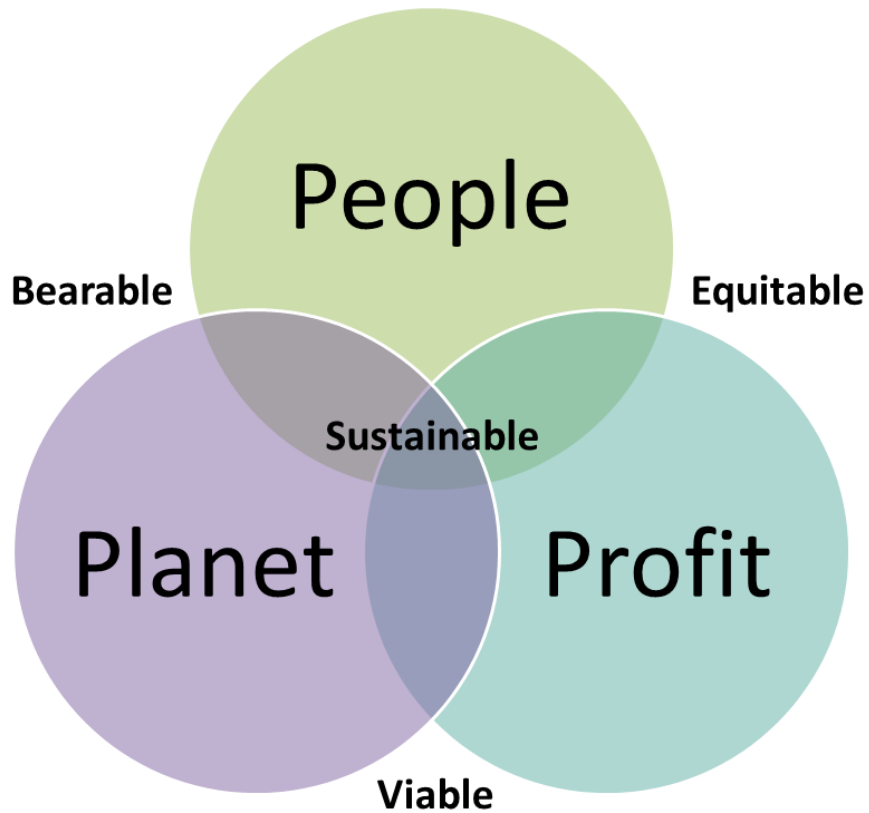
Image courtesy of Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

greenway intro



- 1) Flood protection
- 2) Improves water quality
- 3) Protect habitat & wildlife
- 4) Improving health through active living
- 5) Creating value and generating economic activity
- 6) Enhancing cultural awareness and community identity

greenway intro



2.1.2022 CLFLWD Board Workshop - Greenway Visioning

APPLICABILITY TO CLFLWD



CLFLWD applicability



**WATER RESOURCES & CLFLWD AS
A CATALYST.....**

**.....TO CONNECTING
COMMUNITIES + RESOURCES FOR
A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**



CLFLWD applicability



CLFLWD returns of regional or corridor approach

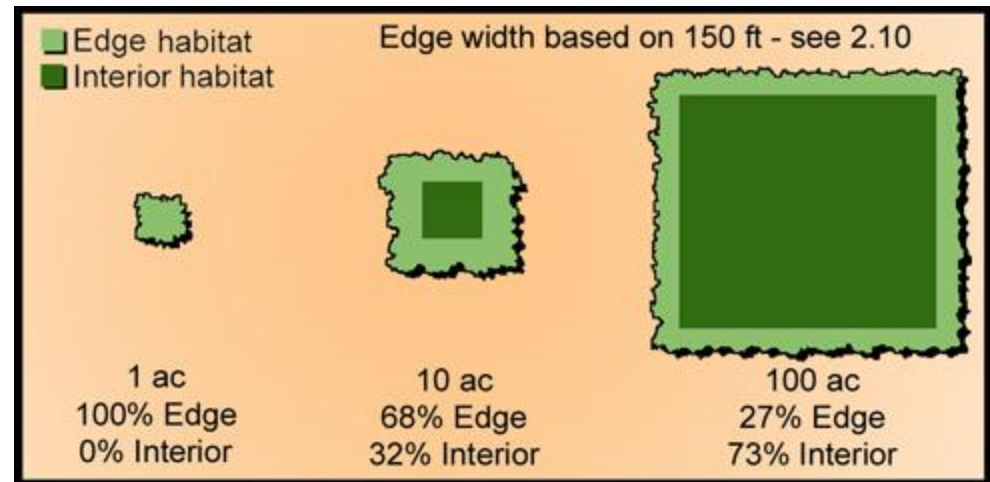
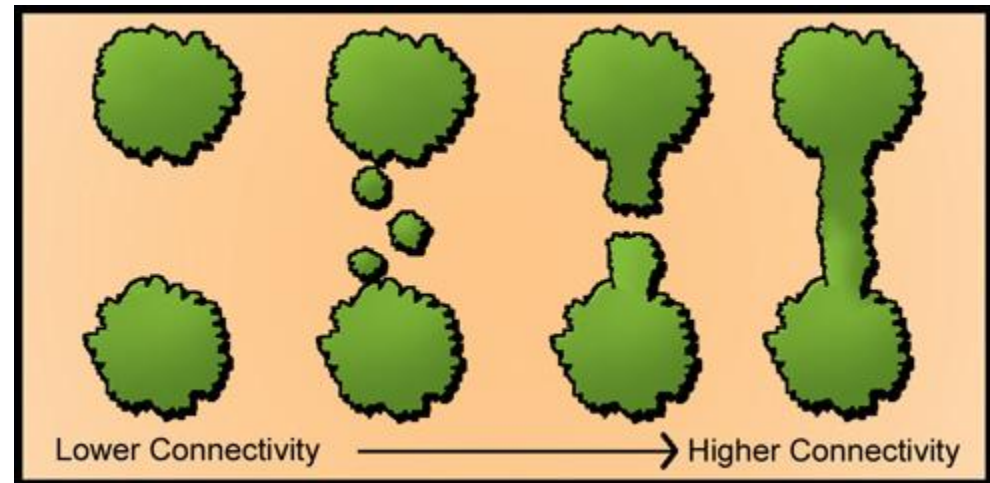
Elevate

1. Habitat quality + connectivity
2. Education + stewardship

More Essential

3. Water quality + flood reduction
4. Resiliency

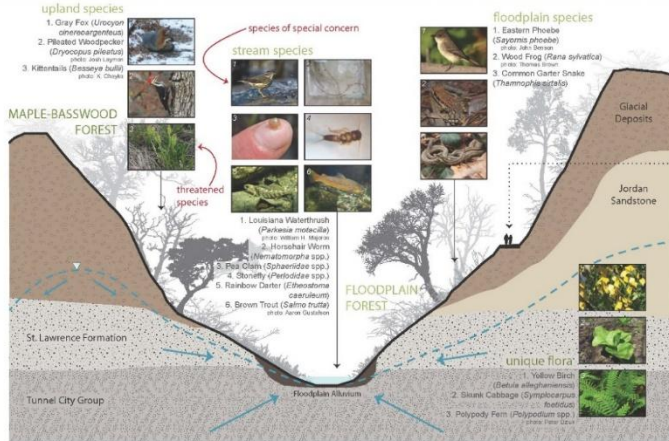
CLFLWD applicability



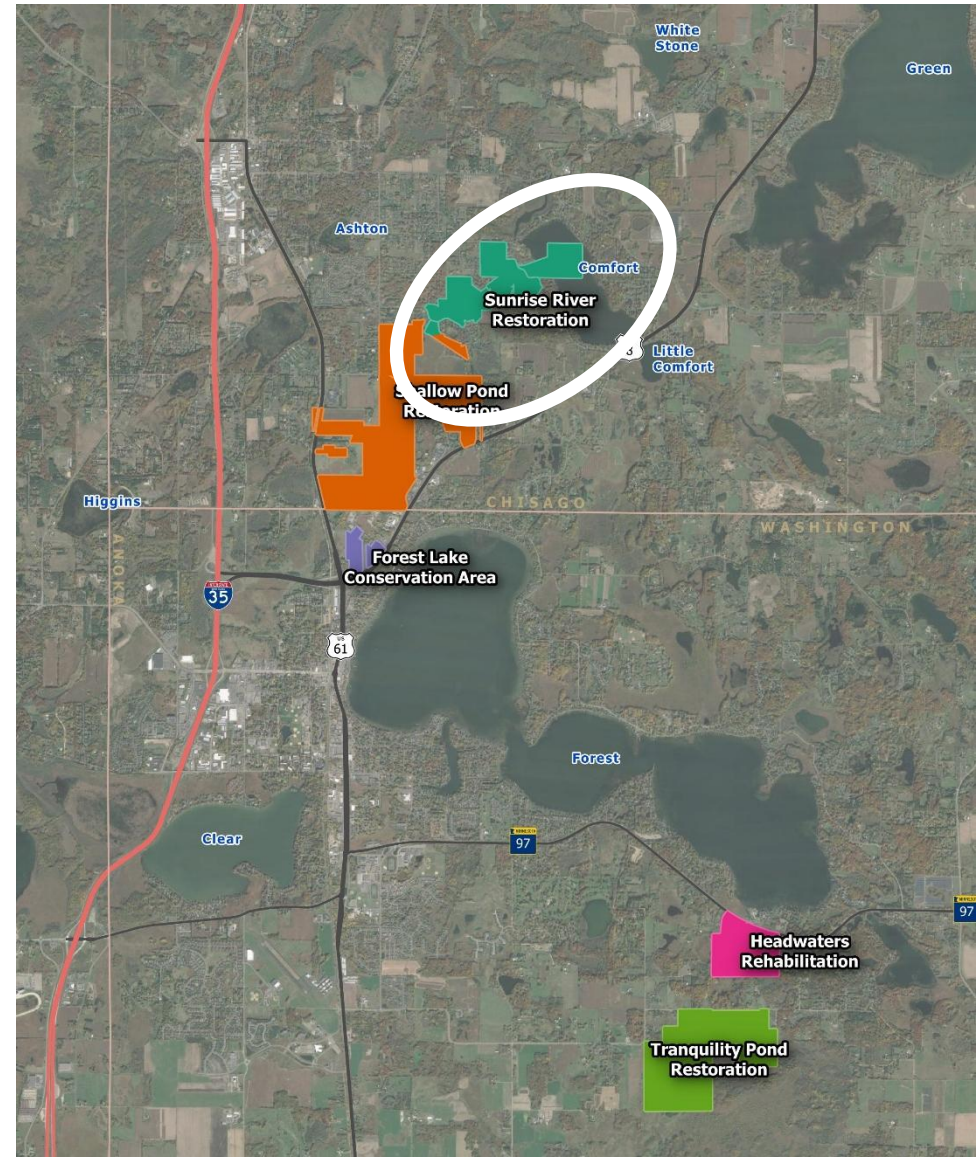
CLFLWD applicability



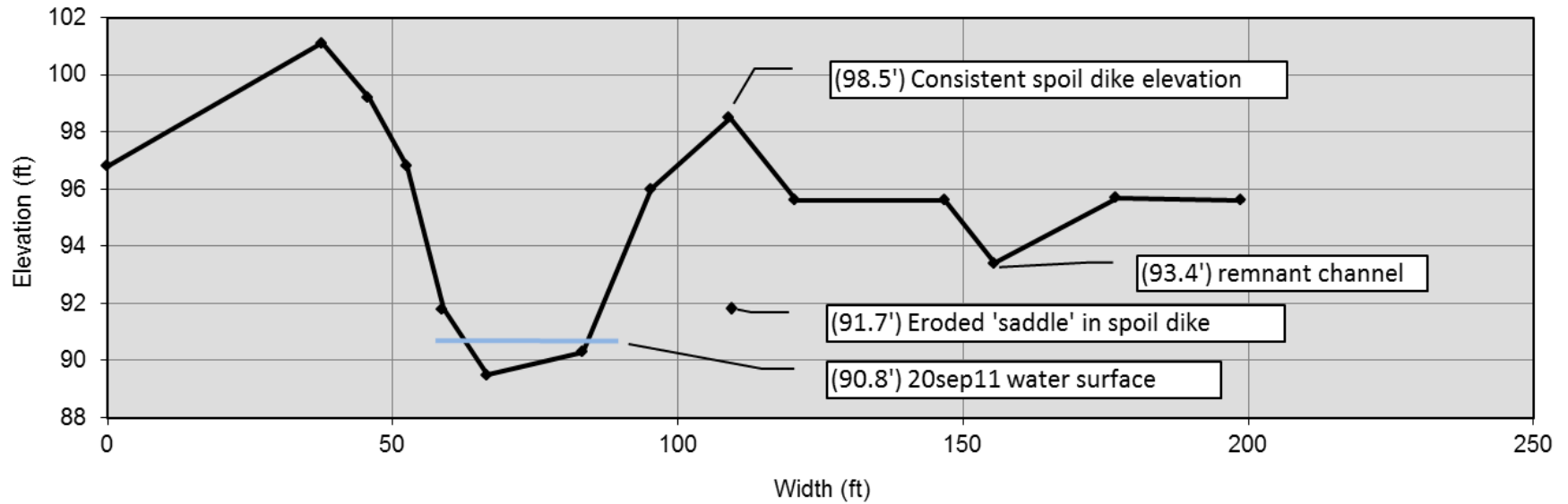
Brown's Creek GORGE : natural & cultural resources



CLFLWD applicability



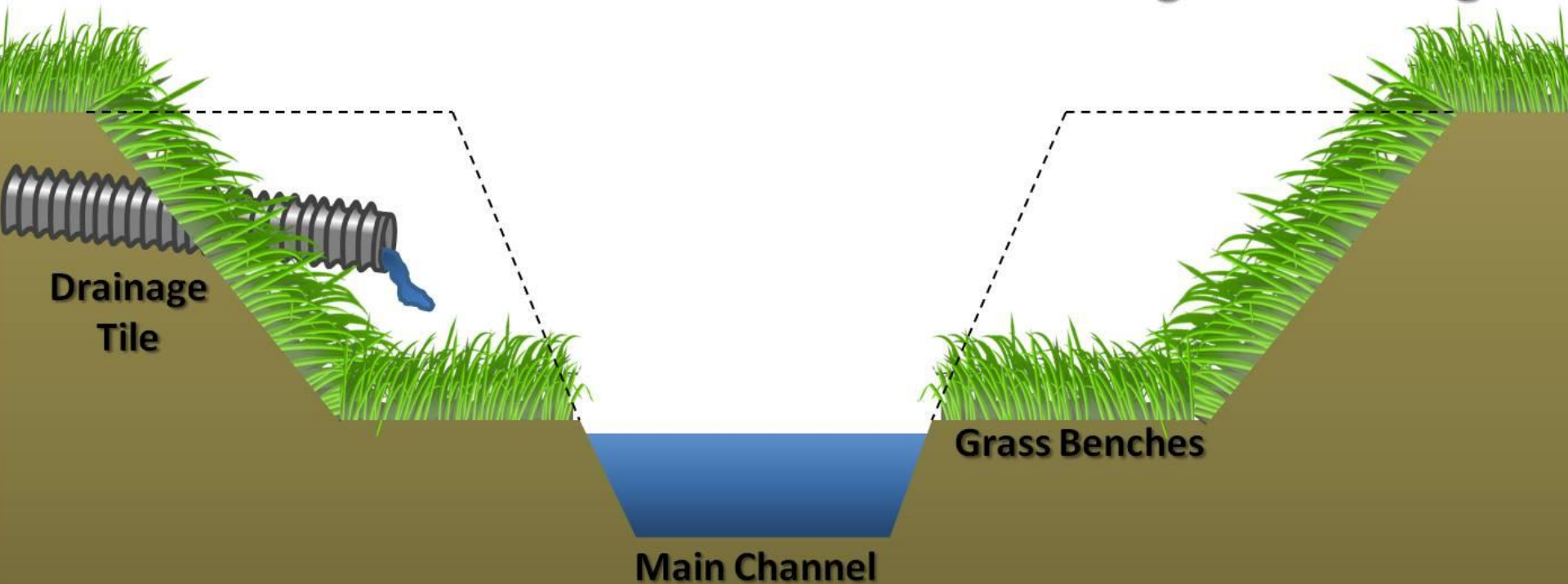
CLFLWD applicability



CLFLWD applicability



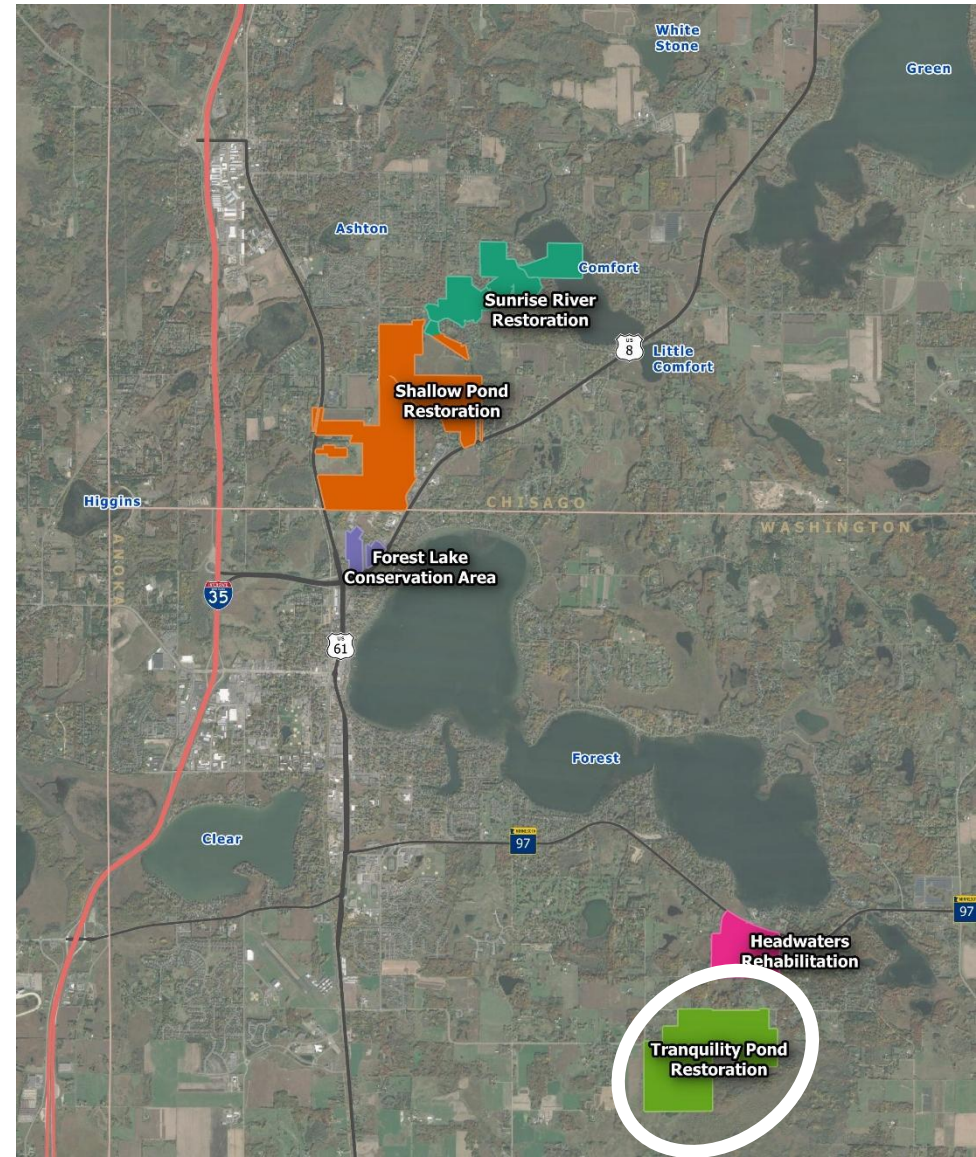
Two-Stage Ditch Design



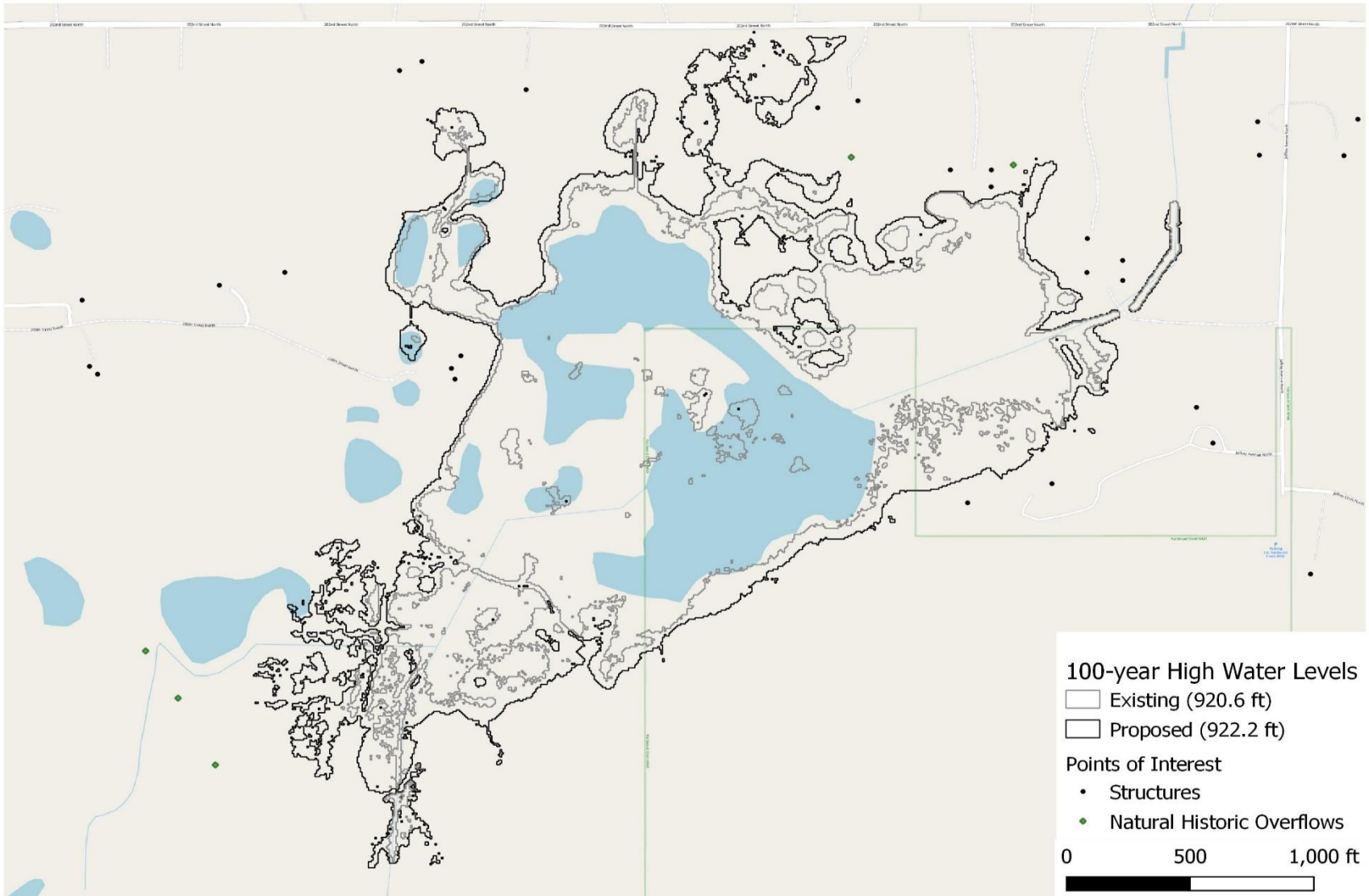
CLFLWD applicability



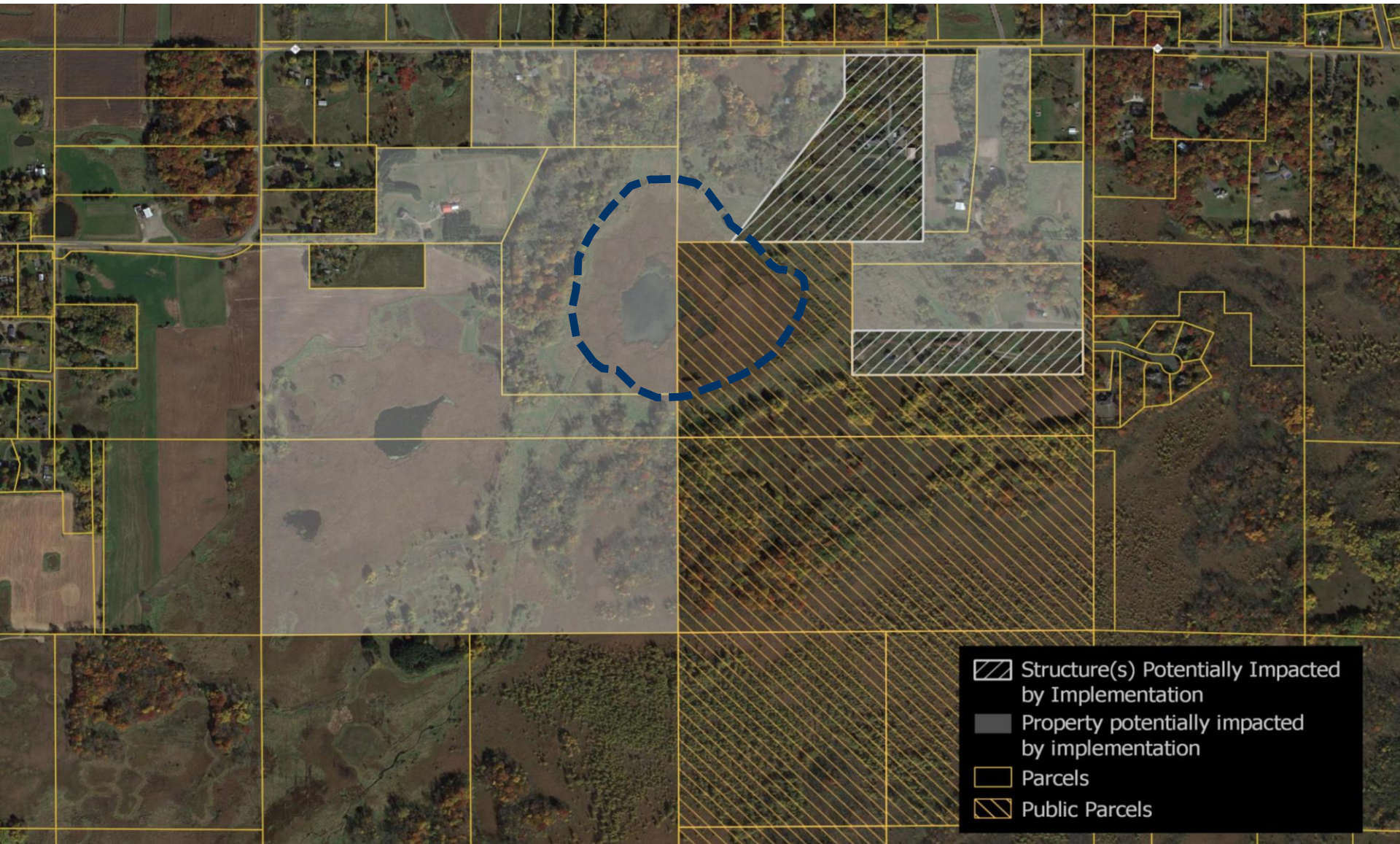
CLFLWD applicability



CLFLWD applicability



CLFLWD applicability



CLFLWD applicability

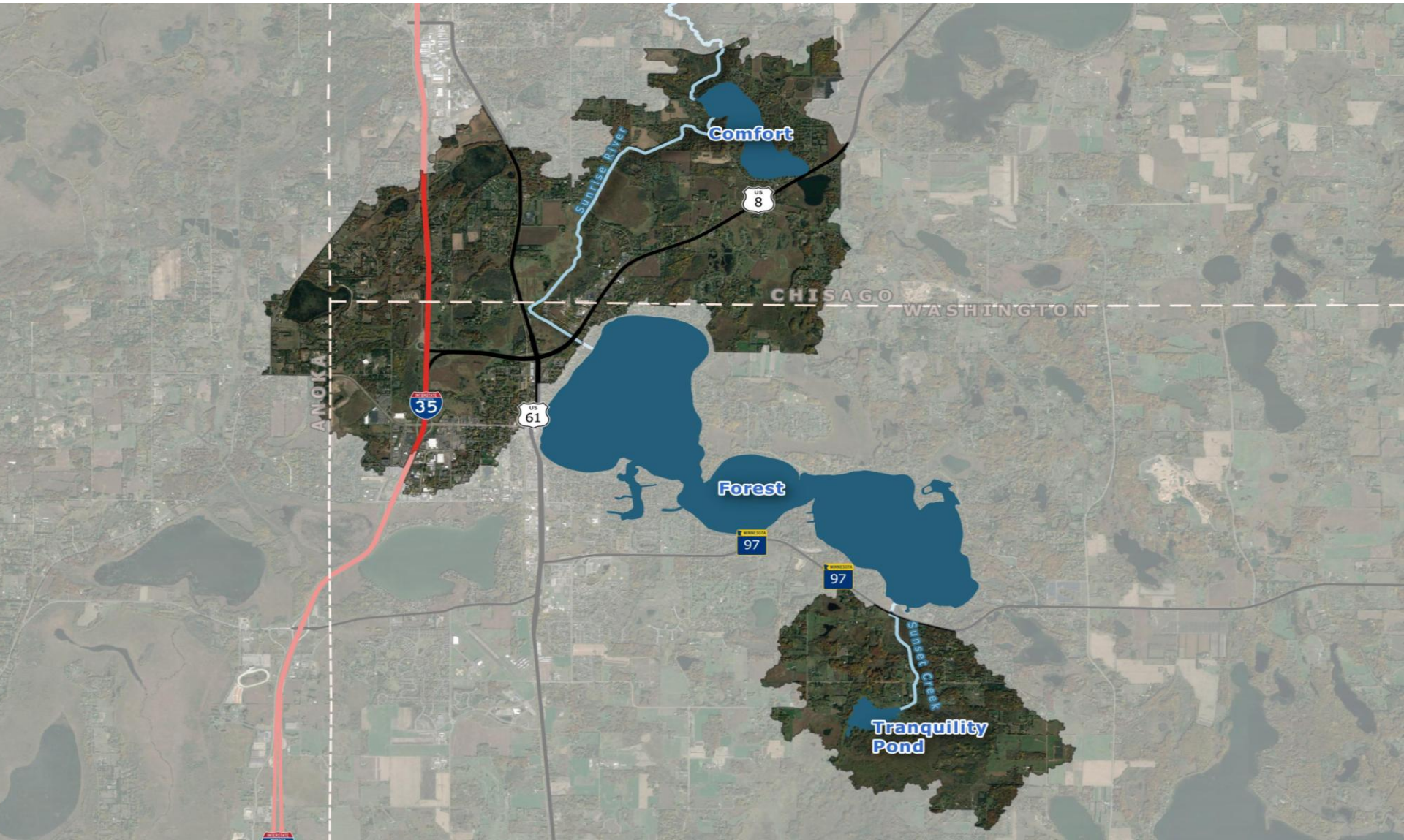


2.1.2022 CLFLWD Board Workshop - Greenway Visioning

SUMMARY OF WORK TO DATE



work to date



work to date



CONSERVATION

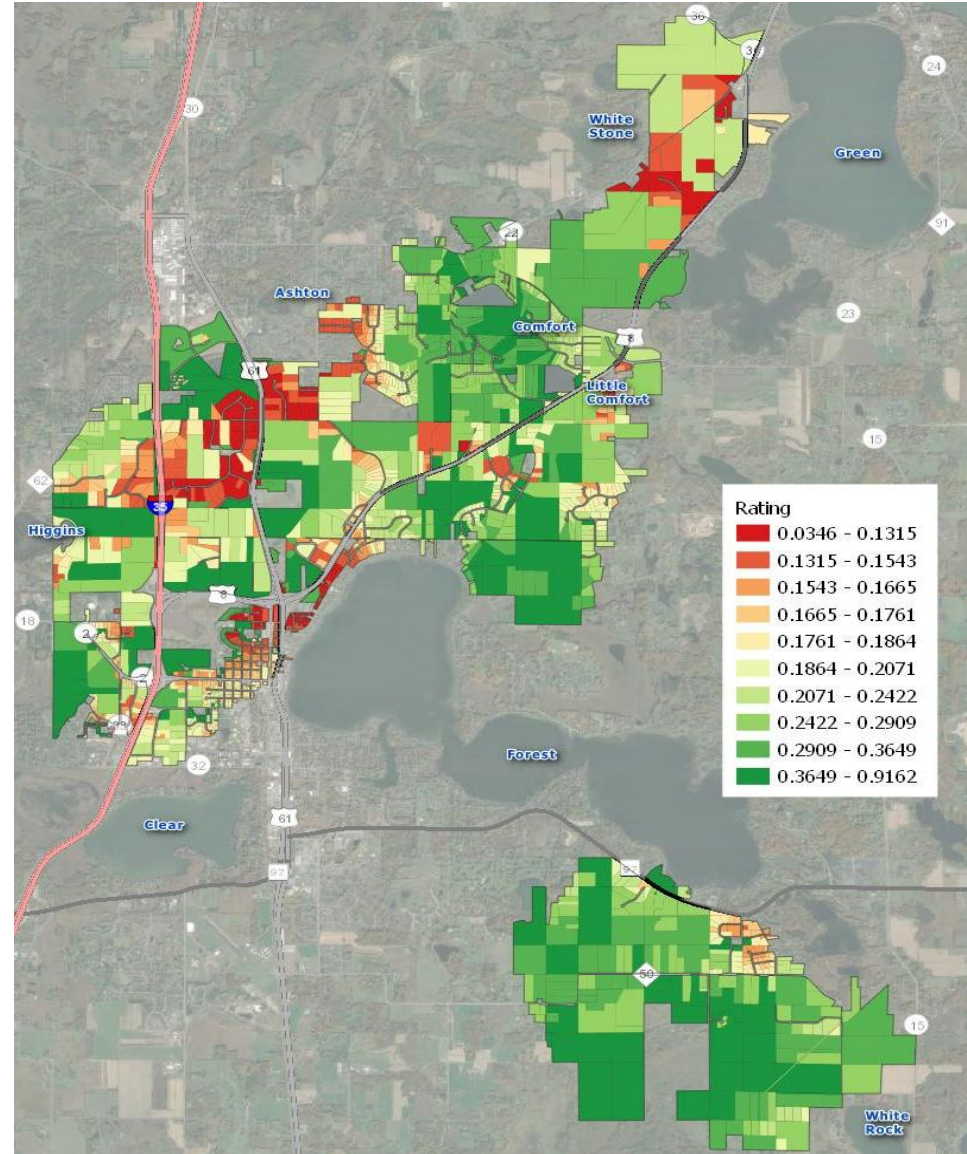
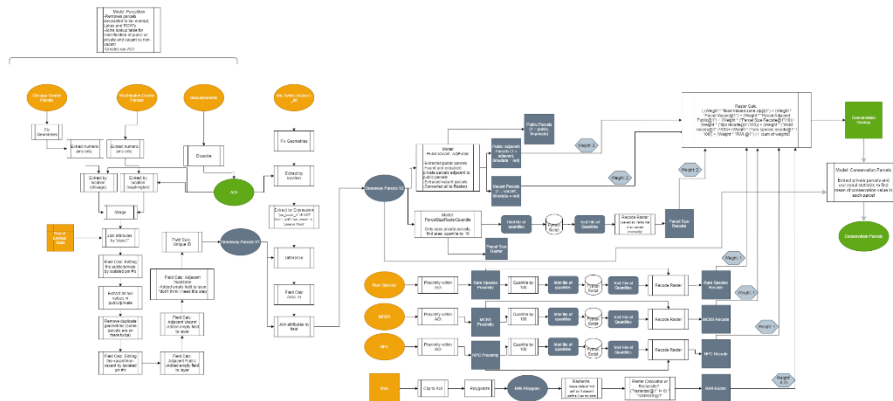
Biological Preservation & Enhancement



work to date



CONSERVATION PRIORITIZATION



work to date



WATER RESOURCE PROJECTS

Water Quality & Flood Reduction CIP

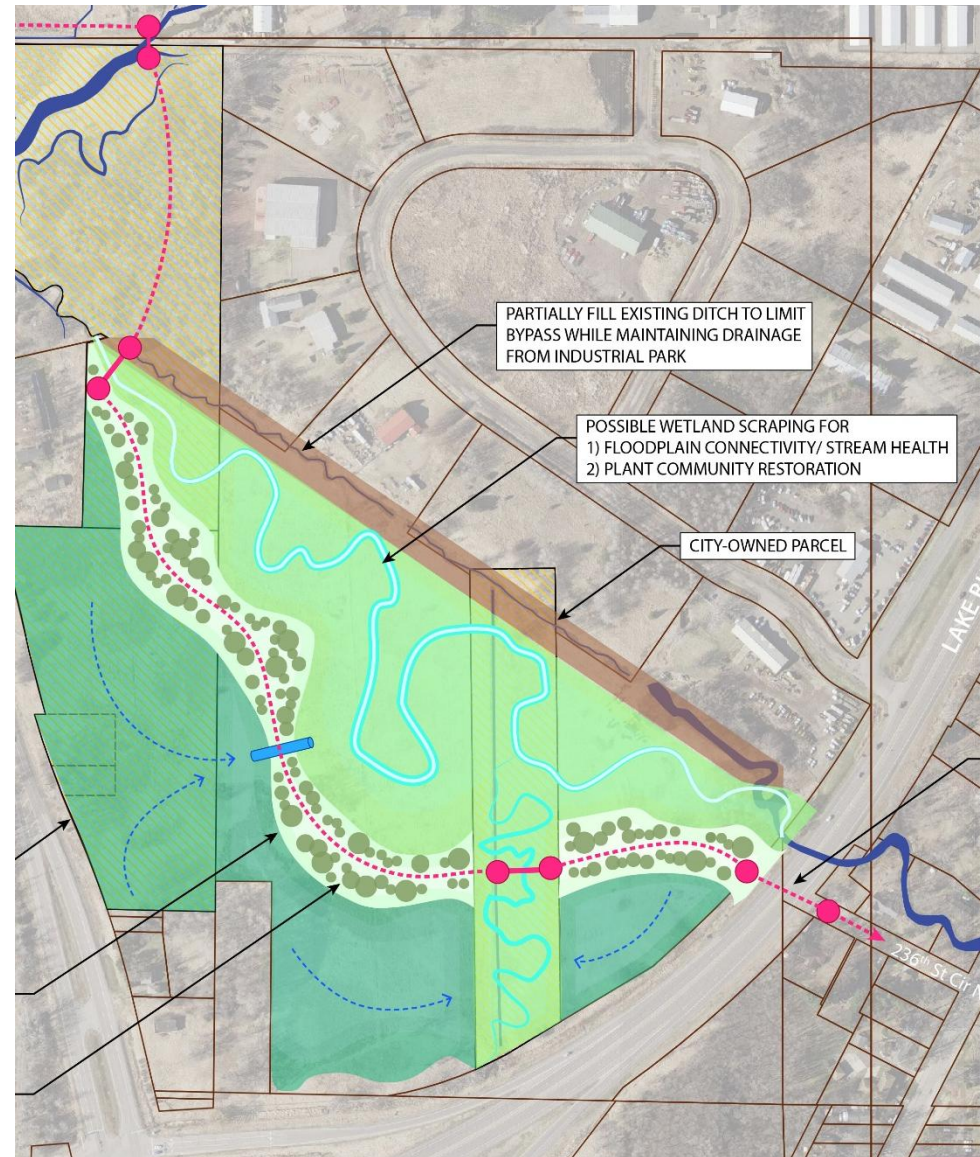


work to date



WATER QUALITY & FLOOD RESILIENCY PROJECTS

- Identified and vetted 5 projects
- More opportunities within corridors
- Developed and modeled concepts
- Estimated parcels needed (flood stage + constructability) to completed
- Layered in other benefits and greenway assemblage



work to date



RECREATION

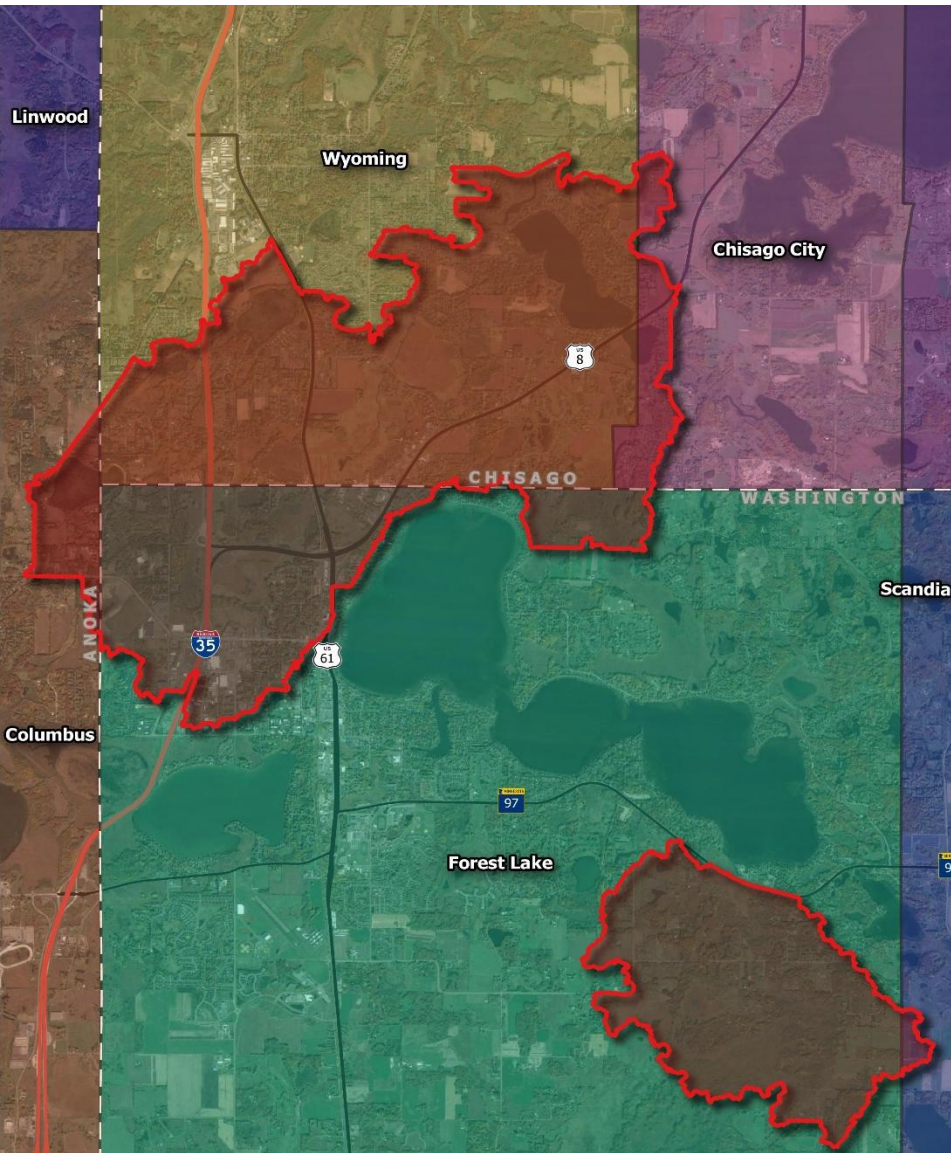
ACCESS AND INTERCONNECTIVITY



work to date



work to date



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



DISCUSSION POINTS

- CLFLWD interest & opportunity
- Characterization of 'pilot' area
- Probable roles and responsibilities
- Gauging interest

work to date



FUTURE DISCUSSIONS



THE
CONSERVATION FUND

work to date



City of Forest Lake 2040 Comprehensive Plan

Approved by Metropolitan Council March 25, 2020
Approved by City of Forest Lake April 13, 2020



WHAT WE'VE HEARD

- More specificity on roles & responsibilities
- Generally supportive, but lack the resources to lead now
- Alignment with LGU (comp plans)
- Interest in recreation (trails)
- Weak survey response

work to date



REACTION TO INPUT

- Next steps and further leadership will have to fall on the Watershed District
- Tangible details necessary for buy-in

work to date



Timelines, synergies & duplication.....

.....with related District Efforts:

- ✓ **NRI**
- ✓ **FLOOD VULNERABILITY**
- ✓ **H&H**

GREAT TO HAVE IN-HAND NOW, BUT THE FORTHCOMING DETAIL NOT AS ESSENTIAL FOR PLANNING STAGE

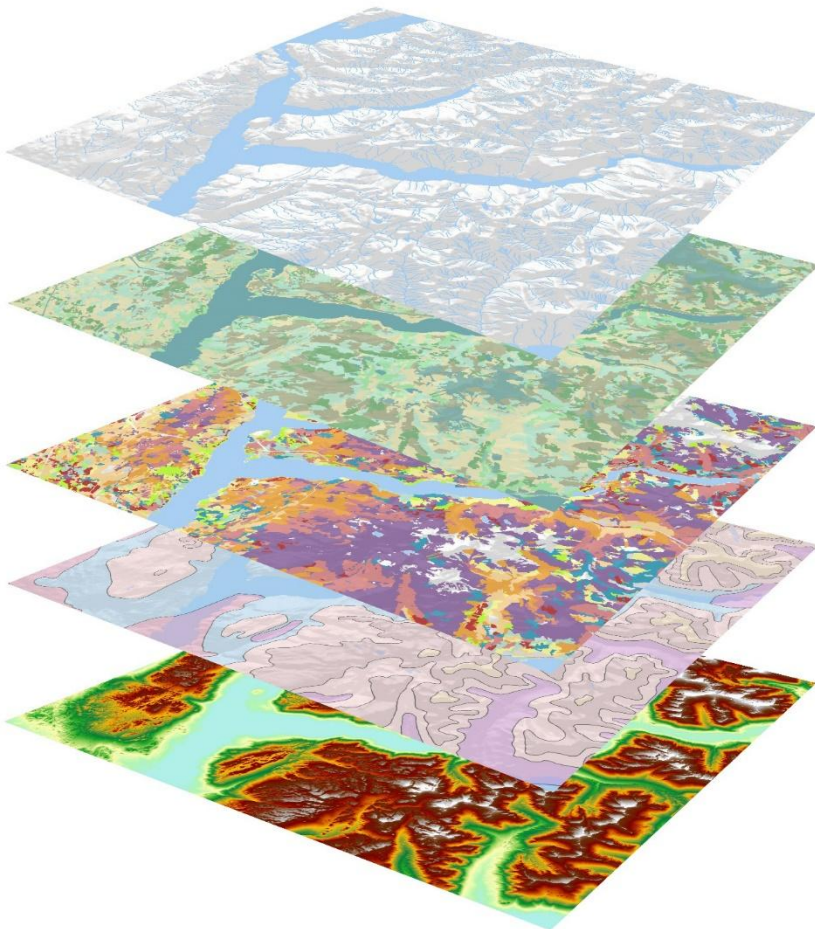
- Further prioritize individual parcels
- Quantify & justify regional approach
- Document importance of landscape conservation above 100-year flood elevation
- Design and implementation

work to date



WAIT OR MOVE FORWARD?

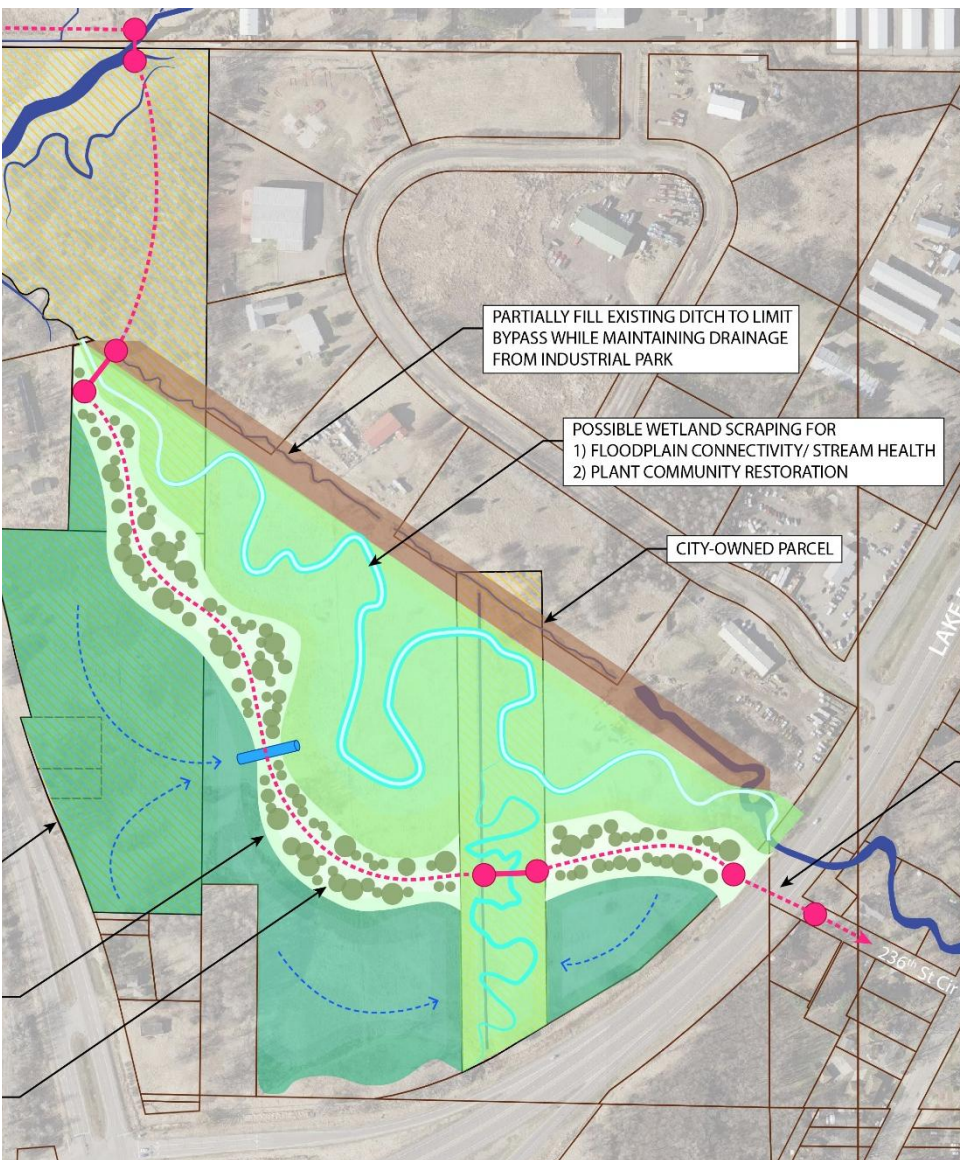
- Know enough to make progress
- Fold in future data to refine & further justify product



2.1.2022 CLFLWD Board Workshop - Greenway Visioning

BOARD DIRECTION





Q1. Are literal greenway corridor(s) that connect A to B desired or just the means to tackle larger capital improvement projects that require a regional approach (e.g., Tranquility Pond)?

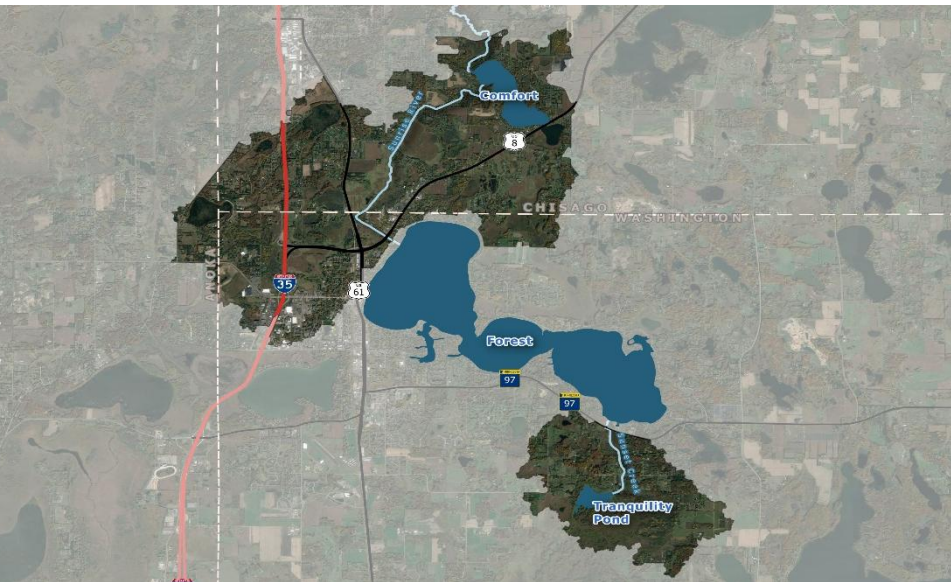
Board direction



Q2. Knowing that public use considerations of a greenway would likely be the responsibility of Cities and/or Counties and that such considerations could be dropped at a future development stage.....

Should public use of the greenway(s) be considered at this early planning stage?

Board direction

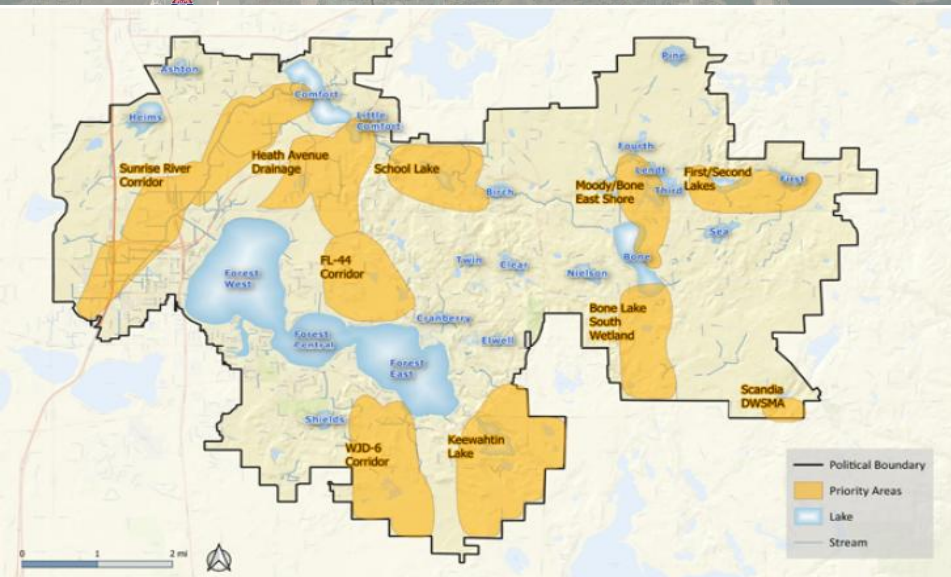


Q3. Should the immediate focus of resources be allocated to:

Advancing Master Plan(s) for the Sunrise River and Washington Judicial Ditch 6 (WJD-6) corridors

and/or

District-wide identification and prioritization of regional land conservation measures?



Board direction



RECREATION

- Diversifies and maximizes returns
- Increases complexity which likely necessitates more time to implement
- Increases planning & implementation cost
- May be the catalyst



Board direction



PRIORITIZE OUTCOME(S)

Primary



Secondary



Ancillary

Elevate **water quality**

Lessen **flooding** and
foster **resiliency**

Habitat Protection &
Enhancement

Improving **health**
through active Living

Creating **value** & generating
economic activity

Enhancing **cultural** awareness &
community **identity**

Board direction



PRIORITIZE OUTCOME(S)

Primary

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Lessen **flooding** and
foster **resiliency**

Habitat Protection &
Enhancement

Improving **health**
through active Living

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Secondary

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Board direction



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