



MEMORANDUM

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

Date: August 17, 2026
To: CLFLWD Board of Managers
From: Mike Kinney, District Administrator
Subject: Audubon Property Update



Background/Discussion:

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Board with an update on the Shallow Pond Audubon property acquisition and for the Board to review the property candidate forms. This property is within the proposed Greenbelt Phase 1 priority area that the District is developing using Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund (LSOHF) grant funds.

As discussed at the [August 13, 2026](#) regular board meeting, the Wild River Audubon Society would like to donate the ~66-acre parcel it holds in the Shallow Pond wetland to the District through a quit claim process. The Audubon Society has communicated its wish to transfer the property as soon as is practicable as to avoid continuing operation expenses (e.g., liability insurance). As such, staff are presenting several of the internal vetting documents (i.e., candidate forms) at this time to facilitate the acquisition in a timely manner.

As part of the District's land acquisition process outlined in the [Watershed Management Plan](#), all properties must be evaluated thoroughly before moving forward with an acquisition. EOR completed a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) in July, and the Board accepted the report at the August 13, 2026 regular board meeting. The assessment concluded that there are no current recognized environmental conditions, no historical recognized environmental conditions, nor any controlled recognized environmental conditions on the subject property.

Staff have been continuing property evaluation efforts by researching and completing the Candidate Site Evaluation and Review forms. Findings from these forms further validate the ESA findings in that no other potential environmental issues were identified. The next step in the land acquisition process is to complete a Candidate Acquisition form and evaluate the property title commitment. Staff worked with Land Title Inc. to investigate the title commitment. The commitment found one discrepancy that will need to be resolved prior to the deed transfer: the 8-foot strip of property allowing access from the City of Wyoming owned Hawk Meadows Park to the greater Audubon parcel was never officially conveyed from the Wyoming Township to the Audubon Society back in 1998.

The District will need to work with the City of Wyoming (as the township is now part of the City) to rectify this issue prior to closing on the property. Initial communications have been



MEMORANDUM

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

established, and staff are working with the City to resolve the issue. This may, however, stretch out the timeline for property acquisition.

Based on all the information provided above, staff recommends that the Board accept the Candidate Site Evaluation and Review forms and direct staff to continue efforts to complete the transaction. Staff will bring the Candidate Site Acquisition form back to the Board for approval once the deed issue described above is resolved.

Recommended Motion:

Manager ____ moves to approve the Candidate Site Evaluation and Review forms for the Shallow Pond Wild River Audubon Society parcel, PIN 21.11130.53, and directs the Administrator to work with legal counsel and/or a licensed title company to resolve the deed issues in the title commitment findings. Seconded by Manager ____.

Attached:

Candidate Site Evaluation form

Candidate Site Review form



COMFORT LAKE-FOREST LAKE WATERSHED DISTRICT CANDIDATE SITE EVALUATION FORM

Date: August 17, 2026

Prepared By: Blayne Eineichner, Emily Heinz

Site Name (Landowner Last Name): Wild River Audubon

Location: Shallow Pond/Sunrise River, City of Wyoming, Chisago County, MN

Property Description: The property is an ~66-acre parcel comprised of ~90% wetland. This wetland comprises ~40% of the greater Shallow Pond wetland complex and small sections of the Sunrise River. The property was originally an outlot associated with the adjacent Hawk Meadows subdivision and was donated to the Audubon Society in 1998, shortly after its dedication. The property is connected to Hawk Meadows Park (City of Wyoming) and offers a trail for wildlife viewing and non-motorized day-use recreation.

Improvements: A rustic trail system runs along the northern property boundary. Several excavated ponds are located along this trail – the ponds are indicated on the Hawk Meadows subdivision plat – likely constructed for this subdivision as stormwater features. No other improvements are present.

Property Context: The property encompasses ~40% of the Shallow Pond Wetland complex and small sections of the Sunrise River. The property is surrounded by medium density subdivisions with some remnant agriculture within a half mile radius. The property would be a key parcel in the CLFLWD's establishment of a greenbelt and open space corridor along the Sunrise River – spanning the lowland area between the outlet of Forest Lake and the inlet to Comfort Lake. The property is currently protected by the Wild River Audubon Society and would continue to be protected and restored upon acquisition by the CLFLWD.

Parcel Information

Tax Parcel	PIN	SIZE
211113053	21.11130.53	GIS acres 66.3

TOTAL: **66.3 acres**

Note that the acreage discrepancy between deed acres and GIS acres will be reviewed as part of the deed review.

Evaluation Checklist

[Watershed Management Plan, 3012 Land Acquisition & Management](#)

District spending under the Land Acquisition & Management Program encompasses both spending to evaluate a potential acquisition (e.g., appraisal, resource evaluation, environmental assessment) and the costs associated with the acquisition.

Before committing funds to acquire a fee or easement interest, the Board of Managers will consider the criteria in the following checklist.



CLFLWD
WATERSHED DISTRICT

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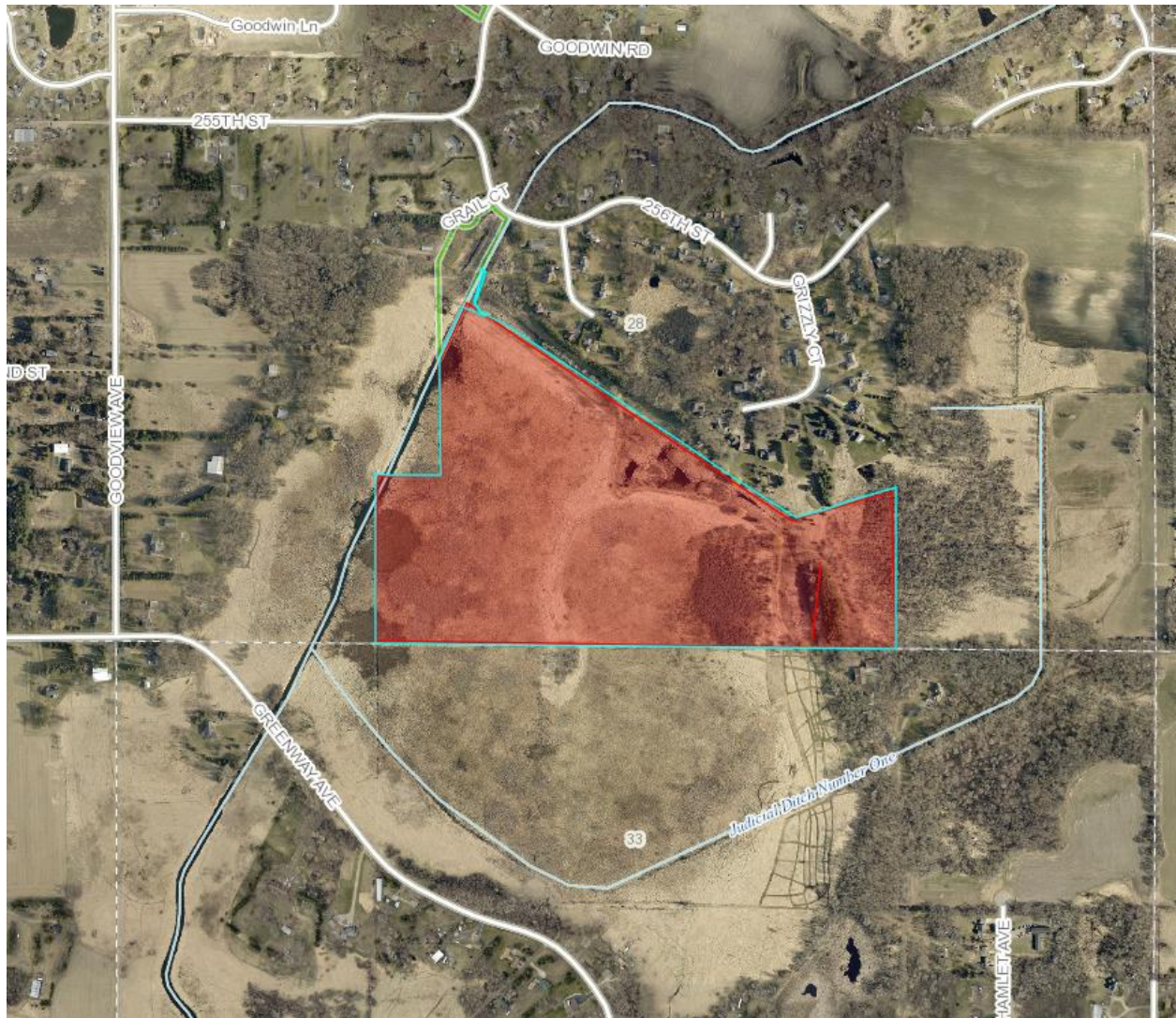
CANDIDATE SITE EVALUATION CRITERIA

WMP CRITERIA, 2012, subsection 4.5.12	Criteria	Comments
	1. Suitability of the property for a capital project or other project identified in the Plan.	A capital improvement project (CIP) restoration project for the Shallow Pond wetland is included in the Watershed Management Plan (WMP).
	2. Potential for the land rights to facilitate the District's pursuit of water quality, flood management or other water resource goals identified in WMP, with respect to specific waterbodies or more generally.	High: This is a key parcel for any restoration efforts in Shallow Pond and could also be key property in the development of a greenbelt and open space corridor along the Sunrise River – from Forest to Comfort lakes.
	3. Market value of the rights to be acquired, by means of appraisal or other valuation as the Board of Managers determines appropriate.	The county property evaluation has the wetland property valued at \$18,400 for property taxation purposes.
	4. Water resource value of the acquisition	High: Wetlands, the Sunrise River, connectivity to Comfort Lake, and wildlife habitat.
	5. Consistency of acquisition with city/township land use classification/plans and potential for collaboration on use of the property.	The City of Wyoming supports the District acquiring the property and would like to see the public access continue and trails maintained for educational and recreational activities.
	6. Extent to which water resource purposes of acquisition can be achieved without District spending public funds, due to physical, regulatory, or similar constraints on property use.	The property would be donated to the District. Any restoration activities would be funded by grant dollars with minimal local match provided in the form of District staff time. State, local, and federal wetland regulations would protect the property – if not acquired- as the property is 90% wetland.
	7. Ongoing property management costs.	Low: Annual trail maintenance would be the minimum management need. This cost would be relatively small – \$500 to \$2,000 per year.
	8. Ability to dispose of District property interests if potential use for a capital or other project fails to materialize.	Low: The property is 90% wetland. It could be donated to another local government unit. Any property transfer would require approval from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, since the District proposes to use Lessard-Sams grant funds to pay for professional services related to the acquisition.
	9. Potential for facilitating District goals for the property but acquisition can be completed by another conservation entity	The City of Wyoming also entertained acceptance of the donation. This would have continued protection of the property but likely would not have resulted in any restoration actions on the property or in the greater wetland complex.

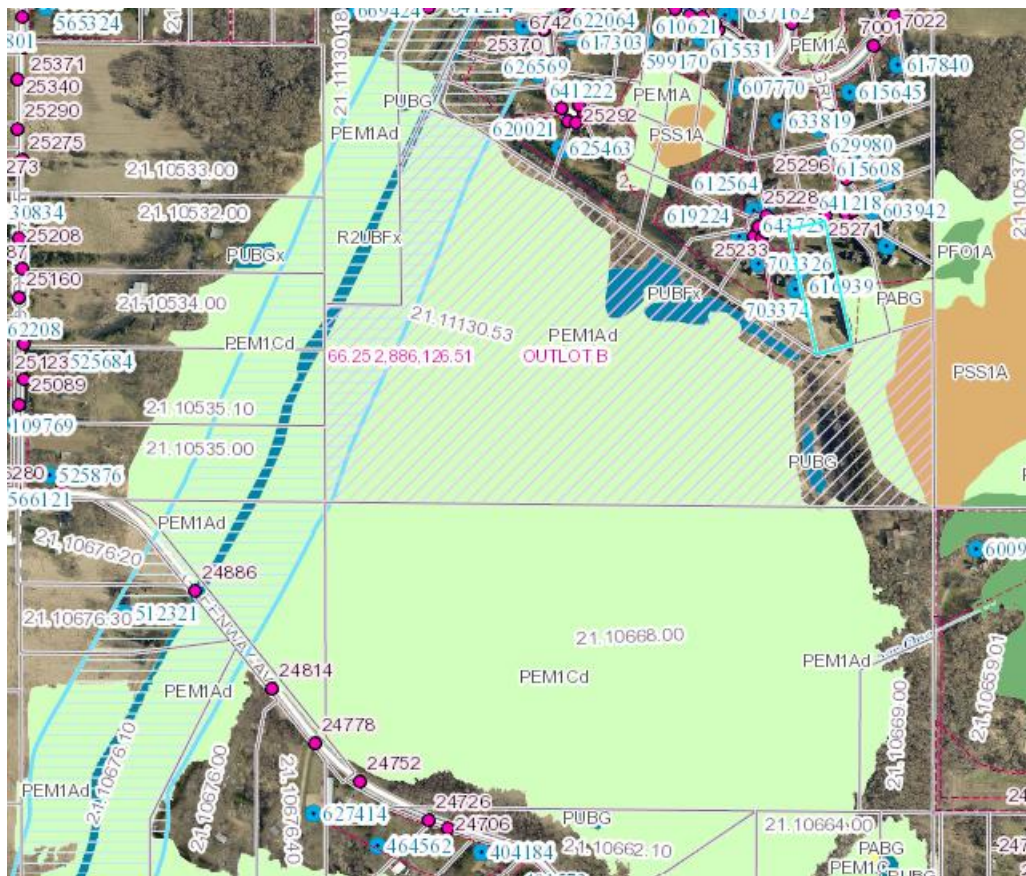
	10. Sources of additional funding, such as state or federal grants, which can be utilized in acquisition	N/A. The property will be a donation. The District will utilize a Lessard-Sams grant to fund professional services such as site surveys and legal assistance.
	11. Ability to leverage resources including financial (e.g. bargain purchase) and conservation resources (acquisition is a catalyst for other projects, or management is covered by another entity)	The property would be donated to the District and would be a catalyst for restoration efforts in Shallow Pond and the creation of a greenway corridor.
	12. Urgency, due to imminence of threat, property listing or pending offer, or resource degradation.	High. The Wild River Audubon Society would like to transfer this parcel as soon as is practicable as to avoid ongoing operation costs (liability insurance).
	13. Landowner readiness pertaining to sale of property interest, and expectations related to the value.	High: The Wild River Audubon Society is actively seeking to donate the property to the District as soon as possible.

ATTACHMENTS:

Property Aerial Map

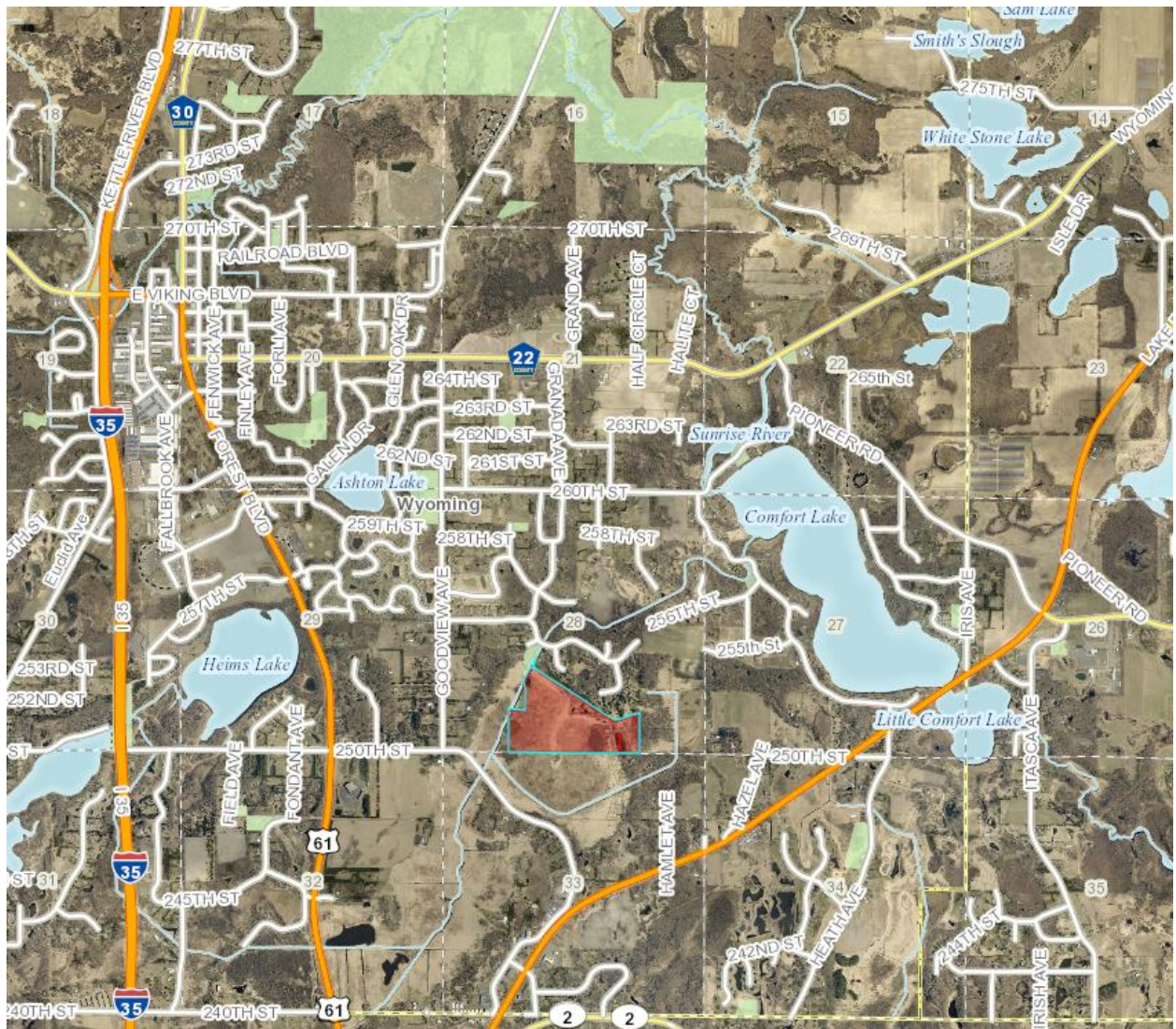


[illegible]



Shoreland overlay zoning buffer along the sunrise river (blue lines along stream with horizontal hatching). Wetland types indicated by color and abbreviation (PEM1Ad, PUBFx, etc). The subject parcel is labeled at Outlot B and has diagonal hatching.

Landscape Context Map





COMFORT LAKE-FOREST LAKE WATERSHED DISTRICT ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FORM

Date: August 17, 2026

Prepared By: Blayne Eineichner, Emily Heinz

Site Name (Landowner Last Name): Wild River Audubon

Location: Shallow Pond/Sunrise River, City of Wyoming, Chisago County, MN

1. SITE DESCRIPTION: Provide a brief description of the property and surrounding area.

SETTING: ☐ Rural ☐ Urban ☒ Suburban

Describe (include any information from site visit):

The ~ 66-acre parcel is an outlot from the Hawk Meadows development within the Wyoming City boundary, Chisago County Minnesota. It is located in and encompasses ~40% of the Shallow Pond wetland and includes several small sections of the Sunrise River. The property is surrounded by medium and low-density housing developments with mixed agricultural land within close proximity.

2. LAND USE HISTORY, FEATURES & DEVELOPMENT: Check and comment as appropriate.

CURRENT LAND USES AND FEATURES

☐ Residential	☐ Commercial	☐ Industrial
☐ Agricultural	☐ Dump/Landfill	☒ Wetland
☐ Gravel/Mining	☒ Woods	☒ Park/Nature Trails

Comments:

The property is ~90% wetland with some wooded uplands. It includes a trail system for day use recreation (hiking, bird watching) that connects to the Hawk Meadows Park that is operated by the City of Wyoming. The property acts as an extension of this park.

STRUCTURES AND IMPROVEMENTS

☐ Wells ☐ Transformers ☒ Ponds

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ☐ Septic | ☐ Sumps | ☐ Basins |
| ☐ Underground Tanks | ☐ Drums | ☐ Pipelines |
| ☐ Surface tanks | ☐ Other: | |

Comments:

Review of historic aerial imagery indicates no remnant structures on the property and indicates agricultural uses upon the landscape.

PREVIOUS LAND USES

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| ☐ Residential | ☐ Commercial | ☐ Industrial |
| ☒ Agricultural | ☐ Dump/Landfill | ☐ Other |
| ☐ Gravel/Mining | ☐ Timbering | |

Comments:

Review of historic aerial imagery indicates agricultural uses upon the landscape – primary hay production and grazing.

ADJACENT LAND USES (ONE MILE RADIUS)

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| ☒ Residential | ☐ Commercial | ☐ Industrial |
| ☒ Agricultural | ☐ Dump/Landfill | ☐ Other |
| ☐ Gravel/Mining | ☐ Timbering | |

Comments:

3. RECORDS AND INVESTIGATIONS:

Prior environmental assessment or tests: ☒ yes ☐ no

Phase 1 ESA completed for property. No findings.

Any governmental or regulatory investigation or inquiry: ☐ yes ☒ no

OBSERVATIONS OR EVIDENCE OF CONTAMINATION FROM SITE VISIT

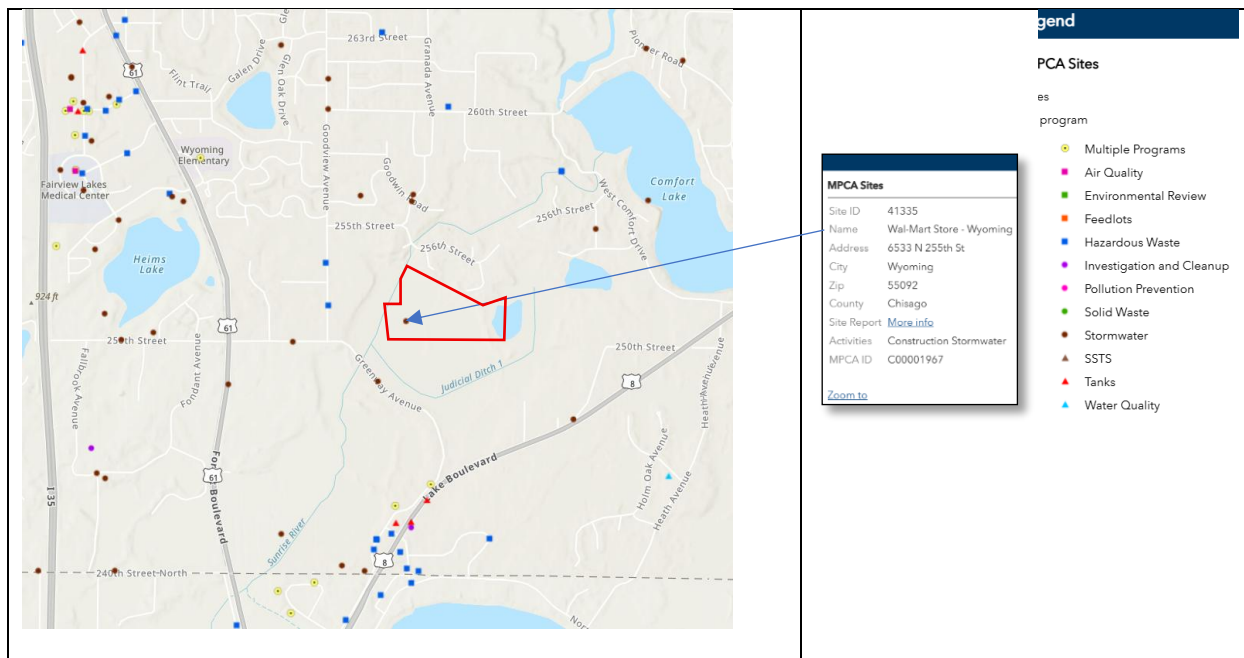
- | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| ☐ Surface Staining | ☐ Oil Sheen | ☐ Odors |
| ☐ Vegetation Damage | ☐ Prior spills/leaks | ☐ Other: |

Comments: Nothing noted during site visit.

REVIEW OF REGULATORY AGENCY RECORDS

Check MPCA records on web-based application [What's in My Neighborhood](#).

Review additional agency records if there is an indication of any potential release of a contaminant at or near the project location. Identify any records checked and results. Attach materials if appropriate.



MPCA "what's in my neighborhood" map search. The Red Polygon indicated the approximate boundary of the subject property.

Notes:

The online search indicates a construction stormwater (BMP) by the Walmart Company on the property. This is likely temporary erosion and sediment control BMPs installed during construction of the Forest Lake Walmart that had noted erosion issues impacting the Sunrise River. Records show these BMPs only active from 1995-1999.

There is some evidence of excavated ponds on the north side of the property (as seen on the 2002 google earth aerial imagery - below). These ponds are likely stormwater features from the Hawk Meadows subdivision and are delineated on the Hawk Meadows plat (attached below).

The online search indicates no hazards directly on the property, but several hazard waste commercial industries and stormwater BMPs within a mile radius of the project – associated with local businesses.

REVIEW OF OUTSIDE RECORDS WHICH MAY INDICATE PAST LAND USES

Review additional materials (title information, business licenses, insurance records, fire hazard maps, tank permits, etc.) if items checked above indicate a potential for contamination. Identify any records checked and results. Attach materials if appropriate.

After conducting a field inspection and/or record search of the subject property:

☒ There is no apparent contamination potential.

OR

☐ Contamination potential exists and additional investigation is needed.

COMMENTS:

Conclusion based on aerial imagery review (indicating only past agricultural practices on the parcel), title information (encumbrance report and plat), parcel site visit, and the online "what's in my neighborhood" database search.



Excavated Ponds circa 2002 likely associated with the Hawk Meadows subdivision.

