



# **CROW WING COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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Effective: September 4, 2024

*Prepared by Bolton & Menk, Inc*

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## Overview

The Crow Wing County Comprehensive Plan is a roadmap guiding the county's growth and development for the next decade. Rooted in principles of sustainable development, it recognizes the interconnectedness of a healthy environment, a thriving economy, and a high quality of life. The plan addresses critical aspects of county development, including agriculture, economic growth, parks, housing, forests, water resources, transportation, utilities, and county governance.

This plan aligns with Crow Wing County's Vision, Mission, and Values:

- Vision: "Being Minnesota's Favorite Place."
- Mission: "Serve Well. Deliver Value. Drive Results."
- Values: "Be Responsible. Treat People Right. Build A Better Future."

A key goal of the plan is to effectively manage the challenges posed by population growth and increased demand for land with natural amenities. It aims to set the stage for diverse job, housing, education, and recreational options while preserving the county's natural beauty and resources. What sets this plan apart is its usability and adaptability, which are designed for the county to review and update to stay relevant.

Crucial components of the plan encompass a wide range of policies and strategies touching on land use, transportation, utilities and infrastructure, parks, trails and open space, housing, economic development, water resources, sustainability, and land use. These policies are guiding principles for making development decisions, addressing key issues, and providing implementation strategies.

The plan underscores the importance of local official controls, serving as the foundation for county-wide land use regulations. Two-way collaboration is necessary so that county plans align with the local vision and plans of municipalities within the county and vice versa.

Acknowledging historical context, the plan highlights the lasting impact of forestry, mining, and transportation investments on Crow Wing County's development and land use patterns. The introduction of automobiles and roads in the 1920s increased accessibility to the area, and highway investments over the past 30 years have led to more urbanization, altering the county's natural landscapes.

The county in North Central Minnesota boasts abundant lakes, forests, wetlands, and natural beauty, drawing residents and tourists alike. Forestry and tourism are primary land uses, with outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, hiking, and skiing. The plan provides insights into the county's ecological classification, identifies critical areas and rare species, emphasizes the need to balance development with conservation, and places significant emphasis on wildlife and habitats. The plan addresses the county's watersheds and incorporates the One Watershed, One Plan program sponsored by the Board of Water and Soil Resources. It also addresses the water quality of the county's 400 lakes and thousands of miles of rivers, underscoring their importance for hydrology and wildlife conservation.

In summary, the Comprehensive Plan is a forward-looking document that addresses the county's challenges and opportunities. It prioritizes the preservation of natural resources and the county's unique character. With a strategic focus on ecological balance and sustainable growth, the county has integrated recreational trails and facilities into its scenic landscape. This underscores the county's commitment to outdoor enjoyment, conservation, and collaborative efforts, ensuring a vibrant present and a promising future.

## Purpose & Use

The Comprehensive Plan provides a vision and framework for development in Crow Wing County until 2040 and will be reviewed annually for changes and updates. The Comprehensive Plan is an official

document adopted by the County Board to guide decisions about the physical development of the county. Any ordinances or other regulations adopted by the County are expected to reflect, support, and otherwise be consistent with the policies outlined in this Comprehensive Plan. The plan sets broad policies to direct future growth and development in the following areas: land use, transportation, utilities, parks, housing, employment and economics, natural resources, and county government. For each topic, the plan identifies specific issues, assigns policies to each issue, establishes a framework to achieve the policies, and identifies implementation strategies for the policy to resolve the issue.

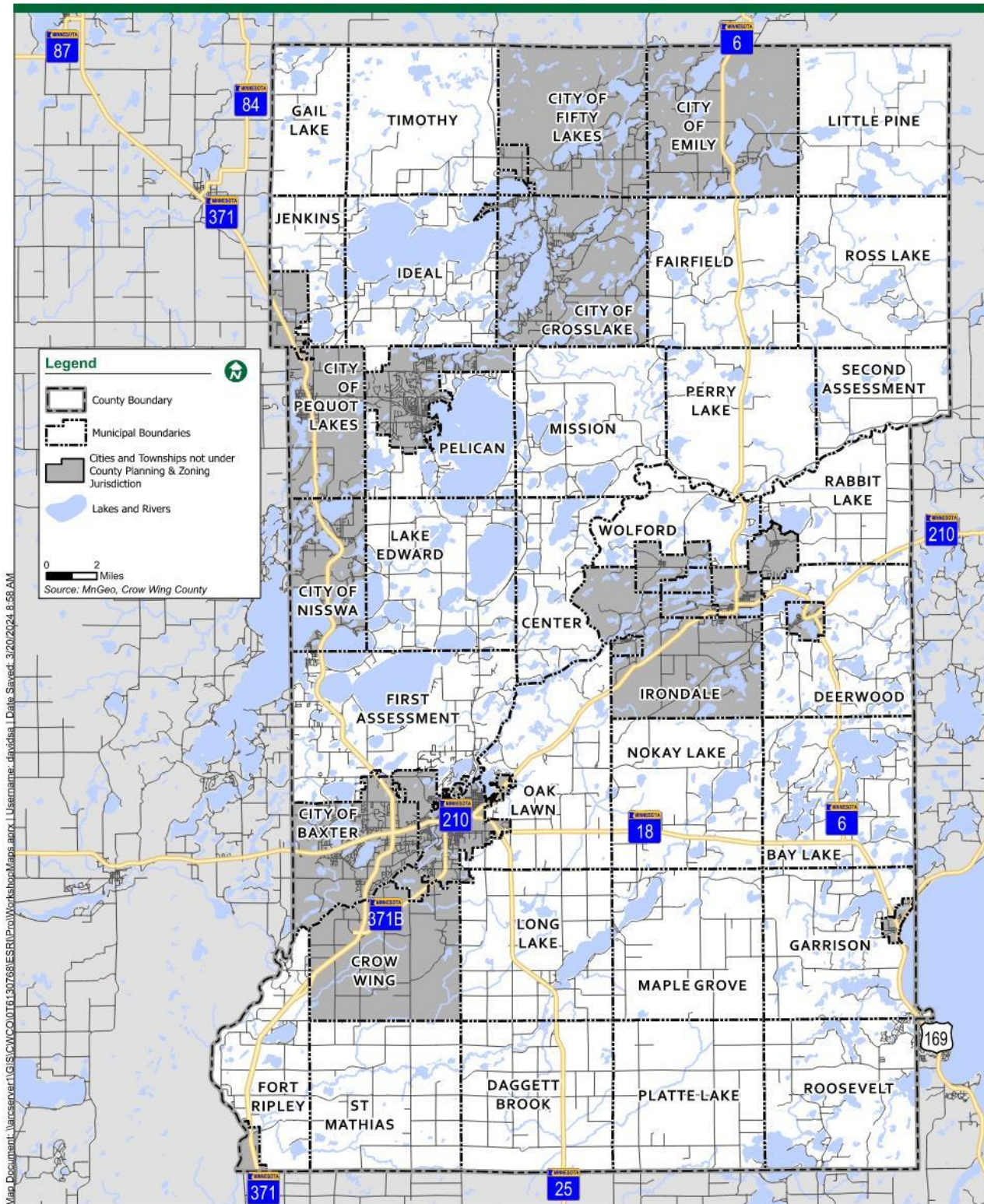
As noted in the map on the following page, the cities of Baxter, Brainerd, Breezy Point, Crosby, Crosslake, Cuyuna, Deerwood, Emily, Fifty Lakes, Fort Ripley, Garrison, Ironton, Jenkins, Manhattan Beach, Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Riverton, and Trommald, and the townships of Crow Wing and Irondale exercise their authority over land use and zoning for their municipality. Therefore, these communities are not under the county's planning and zoning jurisdiction.

This Comprehensive Plan was based on the following assumptions:

- Crow Wing County will continue to experience rapid population growth and high demand for land containing or abutting natural and scenic amenities.
- A strong economy and a healthy environment are not mutually exclusive but interdependent.
- Crow Wing County's rich natural resources and scenic beauty make it Minnesota's favorite place. Preserving those natural resources is essential to maintaining the County's identity, economy, and unique character.
- Disorderly development or unmanaged growth often results in undesirable land use patterns that impose unnecessary costs on residents and inefficient provision of infrastructure services.
- Planned development often pays for itself and benefits residents by providing orderly and efficient infrastructure, preserving valued resources and amenities, delivering a range of housing and jobs that meet the needs of people of all ages, education, and economic levels, and ensuring access to education, goods, and services.

## Planning

- Existing Land Use is the current way land is used in Crow Wing County, based on previous development patterns. It is the basis for all plans because it's simply what is already present. Decisions to drive new development or scale back a use come from understanding the impacts of Existing Land Use.
- Future Land Use is the desired outcome for what types of growth and development we want, where we want it, and how intense we want that to be. This comes from an understanding of the Existing Land Use and builds upon what we have currently as land uses a step further by asking common sense questions about what areas need to be preserved in their current state and where a change can improve the quality of life in our communities.
- Zoning is the classification of parcels of land based on how they are being used and the best potential uses for these parcels based on future land use planning. By dividing areas into zones, development becomes more organized as the types and intensity of uses become similar, creating a sense of place.





## **Official Controls**

The Comprehensive Plan is the foundation and legal basis of land use controls within Crow Wing County. Derived from the policies and actions outlined in this plan, the future land use plan ensures the development of logical patterns that preserve and enhance natural resources, direct growth to suitable areas, and prioritize the well-being of residents.

Minnesota Statutes, Section 394.22(9), defines a comprehensive plan comprising policies, statements, goals, and interconnected plans spanning public and private land and water, transportation, and community infrastructure. This plan also offers recommendations for implementation, documented through various means such as texts, ordinances, and maps. It collectively shapes the guiding framework for the County's future development.

Municipalities, including cities and townships, can shape their future development through comprehensive planning activities. They can formulate, adopt, and adjust comprehensive municipal plans, executing them through ordinances or official actions, aligning with the provisions of Minnesota Statutes, Sections 462.351 to 462.365.

The difference between city and township planning is that township official controls must align with and conform to the County's standards, ensuring consistency and adherence to the county's broader regional planning framework.

The Crow Wing County Comprehensive Plan directly influences land use controls within its 28 unincorporated townships, encompassing ordinances, subdivision regulations, zoning maps, and official maps.

This plan extends its influence indirectly, impacting land use controls and planning decisions within its 18 incorporated cities and townships and neighboring counties, communities, public agencies, and various private, public, and non-profit stakeholders.

Crow Wing County operates within a larger regional economy, where no single municipality or county operates in isolation. Planning decisions made by neighboring entities affect one another positively or negatively.

Crow Wing County's original Comprehensive Plan was prepared in 1970 and was updated in 1994 and 2003. The current Comprehensive Plan, in effect since 2003, provides policies and strategies through 2023, covering 20 years. To ensure the effectiveness of the Comprehensive Plan, policies must be actively implemented, monitored, and reviewed annually.

## **Planning and Public Engagement Process**

This planning process engaged the public and community stakeholders through a three-phase public engagement plan to build this comprehensive plan. Our goals were to ensure that the process was inclusive and transparent and that all issues, concerns, and aspirations were consistently collected, understood, and considered.

Throughout the planning process, we used the following means to educate the public about the Comprehensive Plan:

## Website

We created a project website the county added to its home page for cities, townships, and other stakeholders to link to and promote through their communications. The website included general project information, an interactive comment map, a survey, and public meeting details. It was updated on key points, such as posting meeting materials after the public meetings.

## Social Media

Social media promoted the project, engagement opportunities, and public meetings. Cities and townships were encouraged to repost or share with their communities. See Appendix B for samples.

## Video

A short informational video was created and posted with general information about the comprehensive planning process, timeline, and how people could get involved. Nearly 200 people watched the video throughout the planning process. Watch the video: [Crow Wing County Comprehensive Plan - YouTube](#)

## Articles and e-newsletter

Several articles were written and shared with the counties' communication staff to share with local papers and include in county newsletters to keep the community informed of the project. The articles were sent out to those who had signed up for updates and shared with the cities and townships in case they wanted to include them in their newsletters and encourage their residents to provide public input. The articles were also shared with groups like the area chambers, lake associations, and recreational groups. See Appendix B for samples.

## Print materials

A project fact sheet was created with general information about the project, the process, and how to get involved. The fact sheet was turned into a poster with a QR code linked to the project website, which was put up in county offices. A comment card was created and made available for people to handwrite comments for public meetings. All materials included the project URL and a QR code to direct people to the website for more information. See Appendix B for samples.

## Stakeholder Engagement

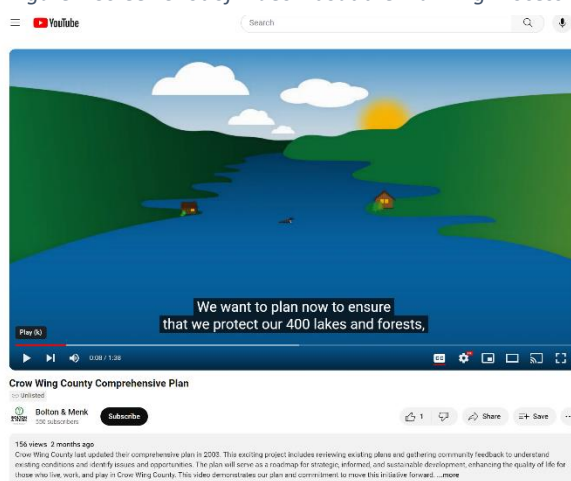
As key stakeholders in the planning process, the County was intentional about engaging the municipalities in Crow Wing County as well as other government entities through communications and meetings:

- Worksheet sent to municipalities for initial input on issues and opportunities to address
- Presentation at two semi-annual township meetings on October 25, 2023, and April 24, 2024
- Emails updates to other jurisdictions

Figure 1: Comprehensive Plan Update Website



Figure 2 Screen Shot of Video About the Planning Process





- Attendance at city or township meetings such as the Pine River Watershed Alliance meeting on Feb. 20, 2024 and Crosslake EDA/HRA on June 5, 2024.

## Public Engagement

The following describes the strategies that were used to engage stakeholders and the public:

### Radio Interview

The county's project manager and planning consultant were interviewed by the WJYY Community Focus radio host about the comp plan update in November 2023. Additional project updates were aired in April and June 2024. The interviews were posted as podcasts that people could listen to later if they missed the initial broadcast. The County shared links to the podcasts via social media.

### Web-Based Mapping Tool

A web-based comment mapping tool was set up. It allowed people to drop a pin on a map and add a comment describing an issue. During Phase One, 70 people commented on the map. Public comments focused on transportation issues, recreational trails, and water quality.

### Survey

An online survey was set up to gather public input on issues, opportunities, and priorities. The survey was promoted through social media, community newsletters, and QR codes on posters or print materials. During this first phase of engagement, 223 people took the survey.

### Public Meetings

On September 18, we held a pop-up meeting in the County's Environmental Services building lobby, followed by a town hall meeting. Attendance at the meeting was low, but all the County Board members and one of the planning commissioners attended, so we used it as a time to have an informal conversation with the few members of the public who attended.

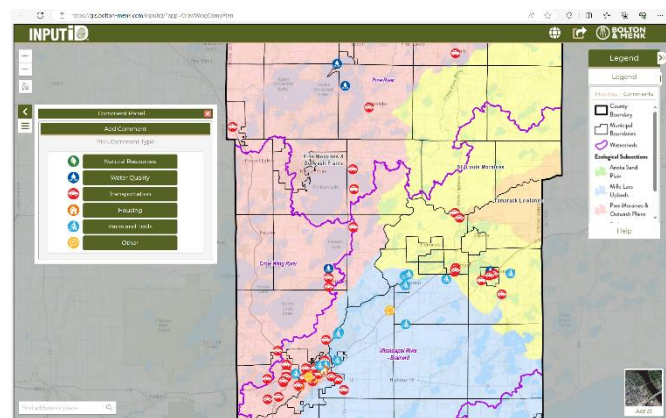
In early 2024, draft goals, policies, and maps were presented to the County Board and discussed in monthly public workshops. The public was encouraged to attend the meetings in person, livestream them, or watch them on YouTube to follow along. The videos were posted on the project website, and an open comment form was available for people to submit comments.

From our public engagement efforts, we learned the following about the Crow Wing County public's priorities for the future of the region:

Figure 3 Post Promoting WJYY Interview



Figure 4 Online Comment Map

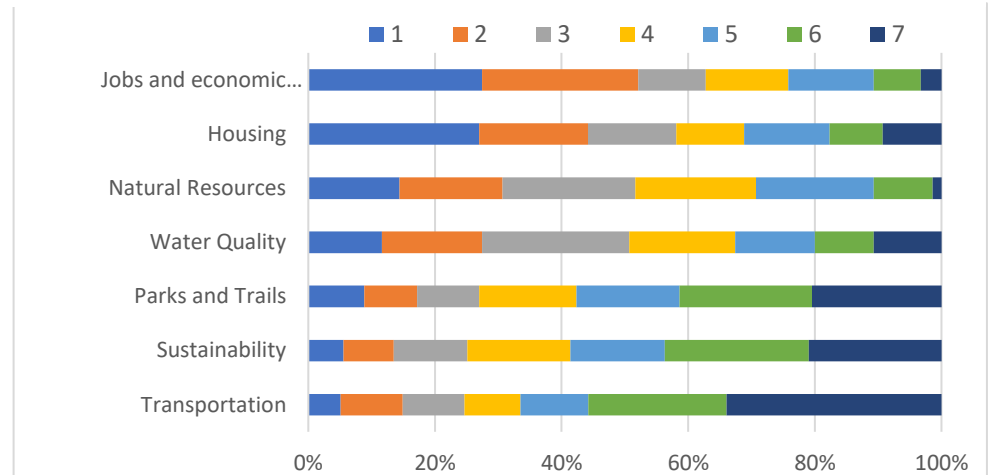


## Priorities

The issues that people ranked as their top three priorities include:

- Jobs and economic development (63 Percent)
- Housing (58 Percent)
- Natural Resources (52 Percent) and Water Quality (51 Percent) were a close third.

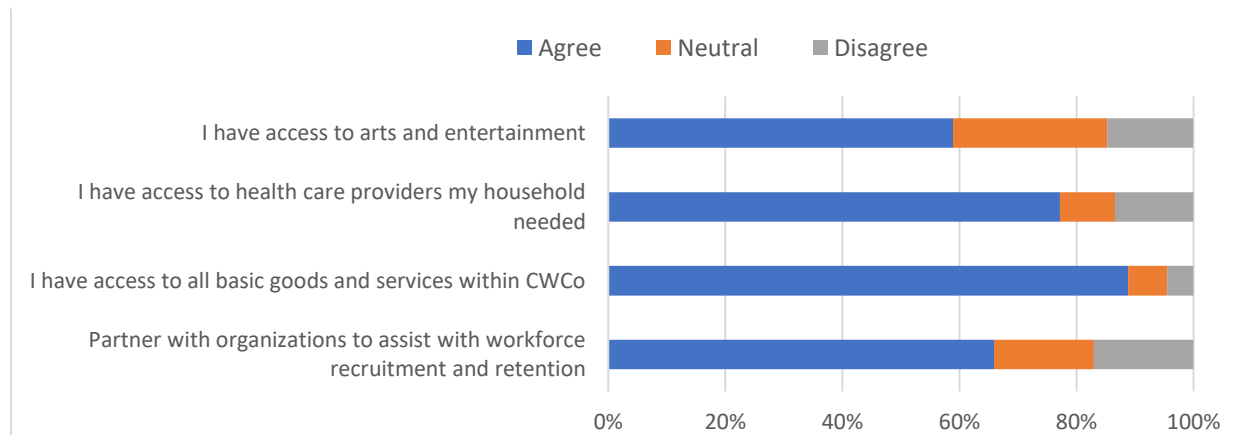
Figure 5 Chart Showing Issue Priorities (1 highest, 7 lowest priority)



## Economic Development

Economic development and jobs were ranked within the top three priorities of 63 percent of the survey respondents. The chart below shows that people overwhelmingly agree they can access the goods, services, health care, entertainment, arts, and culture they need. At the same time, 2/3 of respondents also think that more needs to be done to assist with workforce recruitment and retention.

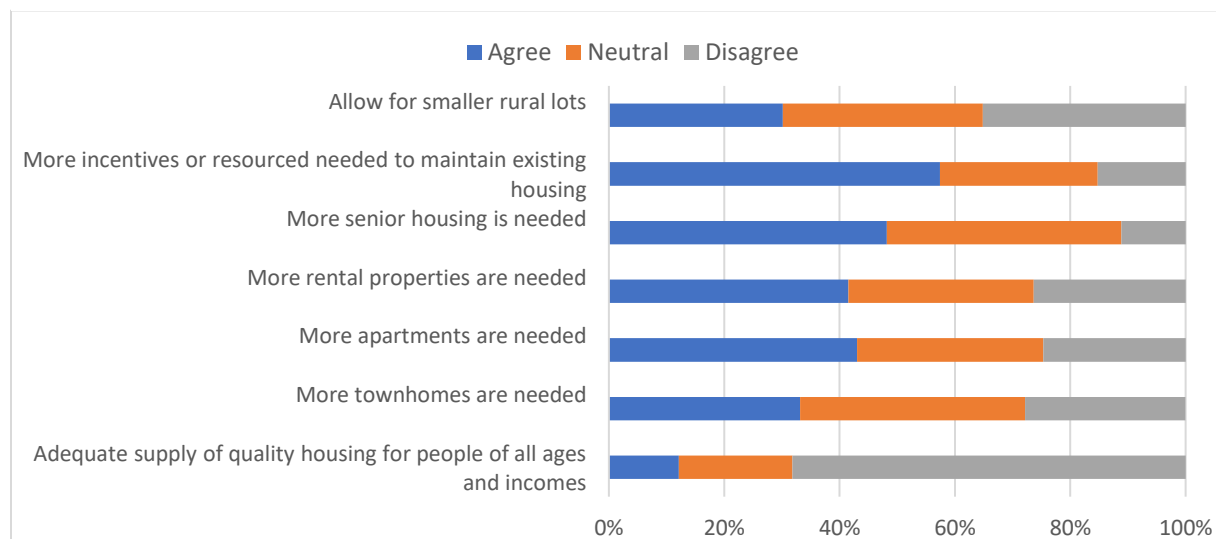
Figure 6 Public Input on Business Related Issues



## Housing

The survey responses indicate that housing is a significant issue and priority in Crow Wing County. Over 2/3 of the respondents think there is an inadequate housing supply for people of all ages and incomes. The other survey questions provide insight into what people think is needed, as shown in the graphic below.

Figure 7 Public Input on Housing Related Issues



## Public Comment Period

The public comment period was from June 4 to July 5, 2024. To give the public and stakeholders an opportunity to review and update the plan, the county:

- Posted the draft plan on the project website
- Issued a press release that was covered by The Brainerd Dispatch, Pine and Lakes Echo Journal, and Lakeland Television.
- Talked about the comprehensive plan update on the WJJY radio show
- Sent out an email update to people who signed up for the newsletter
- Posted how to comment on the county's social media pages
- Sent updates to contacts at municipalities in the county as well as stakeholder agencies and had follow up meetings with those that requested one
- Hosted an online comment form on the project website
- Held a workshop and public hearing at the July 18 Planning Commission/Board of Adjustment meeting

As a result of this outreach, the county received comments from 63 individuals and organizations with changes made to reflect this public input; these key comments were related to the following topics:

- Mississippi Headwaters (1)
- Aquatic Invasive species (33)
- Storage facilities (5)
- Coordination with municipalities (3)
- Other comments related to the environment (21)

The changes made following the received comments were reviewed at the County Board's Committee of the Whole meeting and during the Planning Commission's Public Hearing on the draft Comprehensive Plan in mid-July.

### **Existing Studies and Plans**

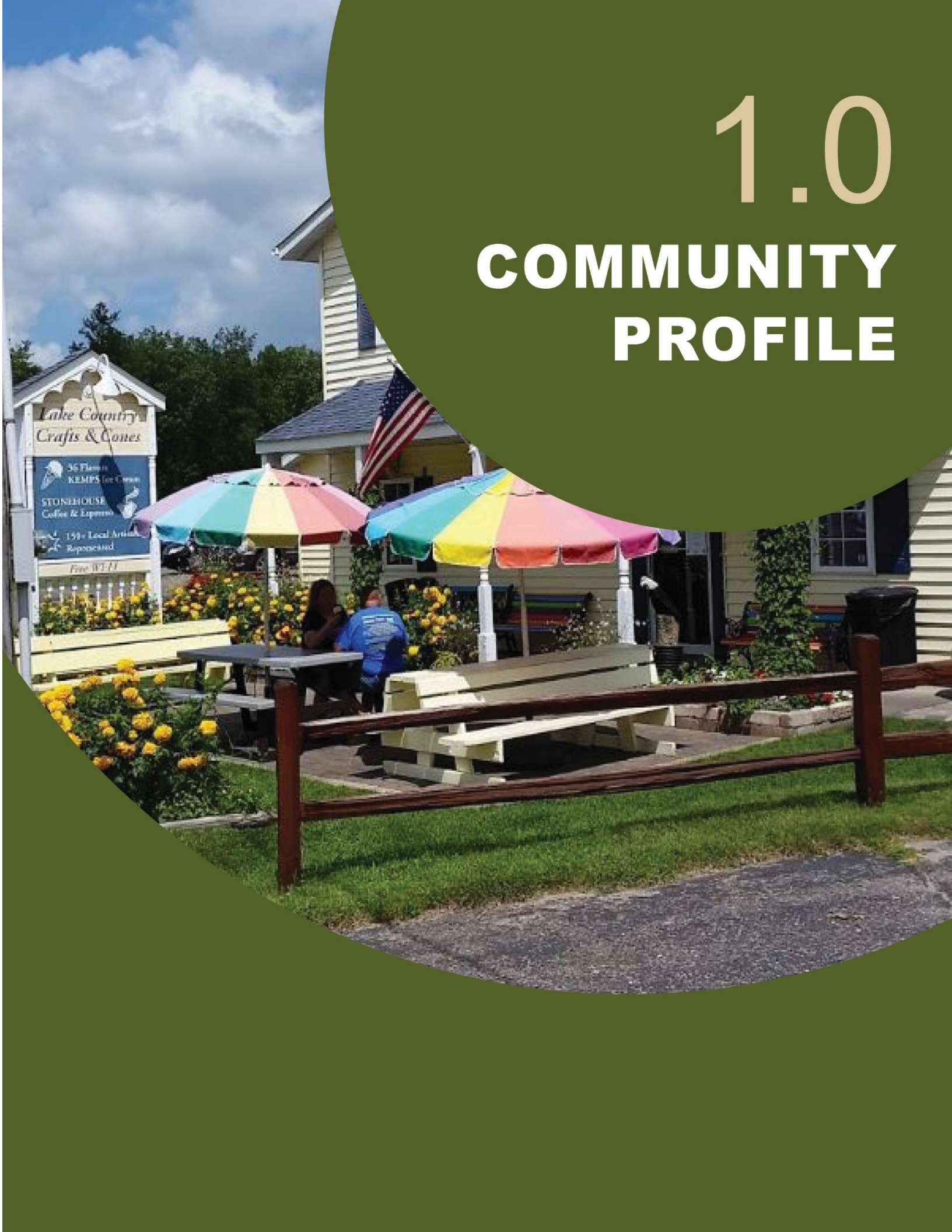
This Comprehensive Plan draws upon relevant findings from previous studies to inform its goals and policies. This ensures that past work is integrated and contextual to past and existing conditions while it aims to define a vision for the future. A summary of past studies can be found in Appendix A and includes:

- Crow Wing County Comprehensive Plan 2003
- Crow Wing County Land Use Plan 2021
- Pine River One Watershed – One Plan 2021
- Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan 2015
- CWC Comp Rec Trails Plan-2012
- CWC Workforce Housing Study
- Mississippi Brainerd Watershed One Watershed – One Plan
- 2013 Water Protection Report
- 2023-2027 Highway Improvement Plan
- 2015 Forest Resources Plan
- 2020 Housing Trust Fund Ordinance
- 2022 CWC Recreational Use Plan
- 2013 - 2023 Local Comprehensive Water Plan
- Rum River One Watershed – One Plan
- 1987 (amended 2007) Airport Zoning Ordinance



# 1.0

## COMMUNITY PROFILE





## 1.0 County Profile

Crow Wing County is in North Central Minnesota, approximately 100 miles northwest of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area. The County covers 999 square miles, with a length of 45 miles from north to south and a width of 27 miles stretching east to west. It lies in the heart of the Central Lakes Region, well known for its wealth of lakes, forests, wetlands, and natural beauty. It has provided the cornerstone for the County's economy since its inception in 1890 and continues to draw people today.

### Land features:

- Total area: 999 square miles
- Water: 14 percent, or 223,760 acres of water

Sources: US Census, Wikipedia and ESRI

The county's mix of lakes, forests, steep hills, and rolling topography is highly sought by residents, tourists, and retirees looking for outdoor recreation and amenities. The Brainerd/Baxter area has emerged as a regional job and shopping center, which has allowed more people to live and work in the area year-round. Highway expansions, improvements, and advances in telecommunications technology and high-speed internet service have aided this transition.

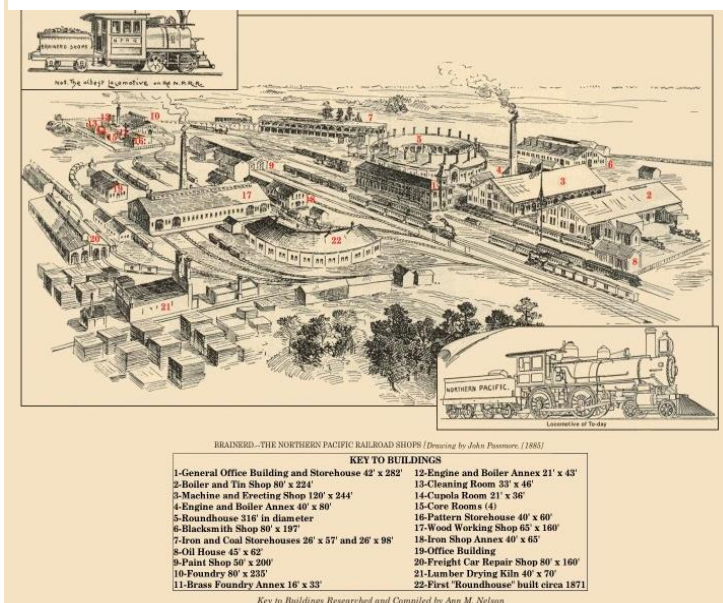
Crow Wing County has vast forests, beautiful lakes and wetlands, large public land and open space areas, interconnected trail systems, and diverse rural and urban areas. The county is growing rapidly, particularly in high amenity areas rich with natural resources. Since the last Comprehensive Plan update in 2003, the county's population has grown by over 21 percent. In 2000, the population was 55,099; currently, the population is 66,474. As it grows, Crow Wing County must develop strategically to provide its residents with high-quality jobs, housing, education, and recreation without degrading the natural and scenic amenities that draw people to it. This plan has been developed to meet those needs based on current trends and future projections.

## History

Natural resources play a pivotal role in the growth and development of Crow Wing County. Today's tourism industry began with trapping and fur trading along the Leech Lake Trail, a significant corridor used by Native Americans and trappers during the early to mid-1800s. Railroads opened Crow Wing County to logging white and red pine trees from 1890-1920. During this same period, iron mining occurred along the Cuyuna Range, and small-scale agricultural operations started in the southern portion of Crow Wing County. The railroads brought settlers looking for logging, mining, and farming jobs to the area. Transportation infrastructure to support business and industry also brought vacationers and tourists to lakeside resorts and cabins close to train stations.

Beginning in the 1920s, Crow Wing County experienced intense growth and development spurred by the introduction of the automobile and the construction of roads and highways. The Leech Lake Trail was converted to Trunk Highway 371. Interstate 94, US Highway 10, and US Highways 169 and 210 were also

Figure 1- 1 1888 Northern Pacific Shops



Source: Crow Wing County Historical Society

built, dramatically shortening travel time from St. Cloud and the Twin Cities. Not only were more people coming to Crow Wing County, but they were able to access increasingly remote areas, which started the development and use of the county's natural areas, especially along the highway. From 1924 to 1965, the number of seasonal and permanent lake homes along the Highway 371 corridor increased by 88 percent (Source: Process of Lakeshore Development in Crow Wing County by George Orning).

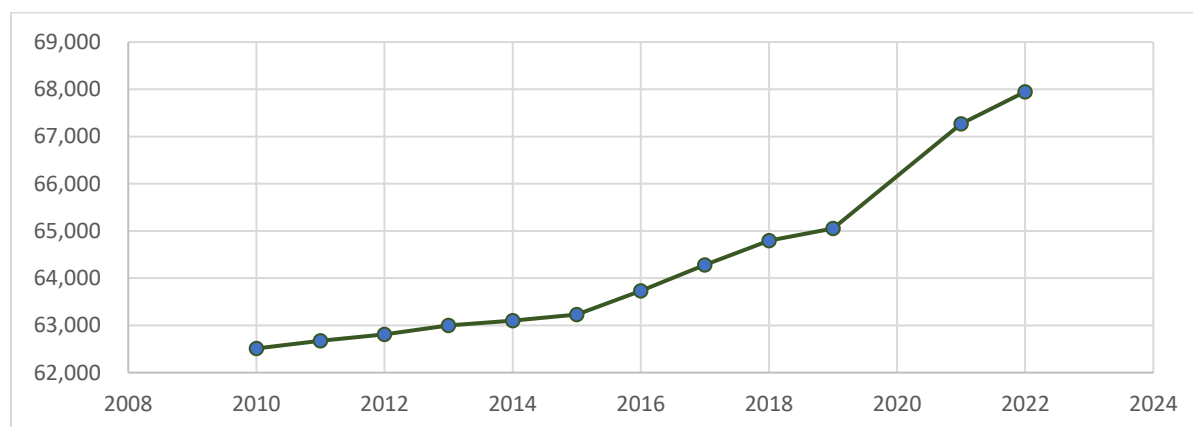
## Demographics

In 2022, the U.S. Census estimates that Crow Wing County has 23,925 households, a population of 67,948 people, and a median age of 45.6. The median family size is 2.84 people. Crow Wing County has seasonal residents who aren't counted in the residential population, which is demonstrated by the fact that the County has 41,568 housing units.

### Population and Age Distribution

Crow Wing Co. is the 14th largest of the 87 counties in the state by population. Its population increased over the past decade, ranking as the 17th fastest-growing state from 2010 to 2022. Crow Wing County's population grew 8.5 percent from the 62,608 people who lived there in 2010. For comparison, the population in the US rose 7.7 percent, and the population in Minnesota grew 7.6 percent during that period. Crow Wing County's population increased 12 out of the 12 years between 2010 and 2022.

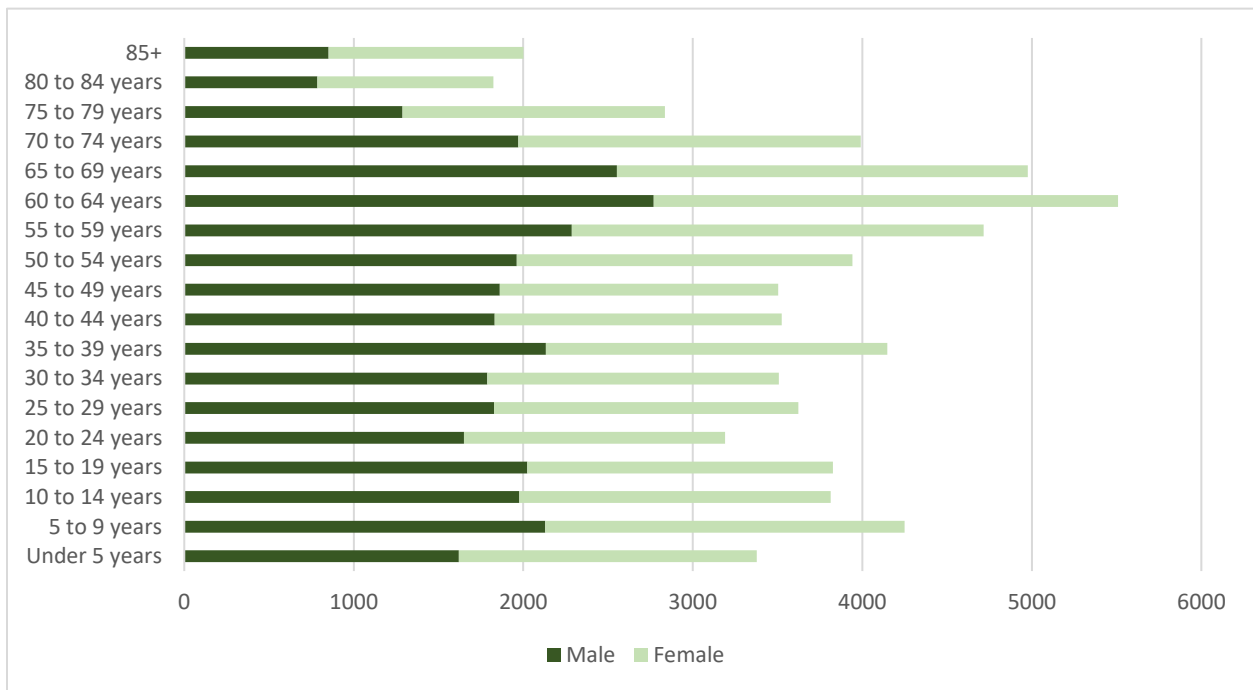
Figure 1- 2 Population Growth 2010-2022



The county's largest annual population increase was 1.7 percent between 2019 and 2020. Between 2010 and 2022, the county grew by an average of 0.7 percent per year. Overall, Crow Wing County has become more densely populated. The population per square mile in 2010 was 62.6 and increased to 66.2 in 2020. Approximately 31.3 percent of the population is located within an urban area of the county, while roughly 68.7 percent is in a rural area.

Crow Wing County's population has a median age of 45.6 years, higher than Minnesota's at 39.0. The age distribution chart shows that it is an aging community with a higher proportion of residents over 60 and a comparatively small number of 20–24-year-olds. The population is aging, especially as the Baby Boom generation moves through the population pyramid.

Figure 1- 3 Population by Age and Gender



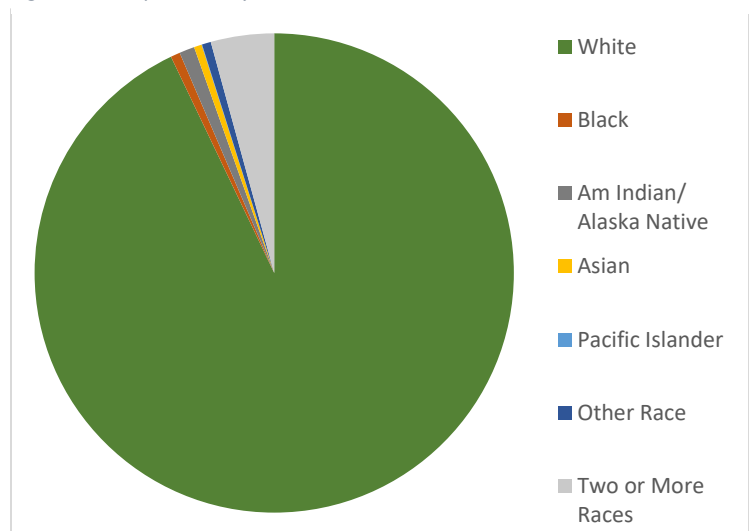
### Household Income

Crow Wing County's median household income is \$66,568, the 57th highest out of 87 counties in Minnesota. The state-wide median household income is \$82,338. The county has 11.3 percent of households living in poverty, higher than the state average of 9.6 percent.

### Racial and Ethnic Composition

Crow Wing County has a predominantly White population of 93.1 percent. The presence of other racial and ethnic groups is relatively small.

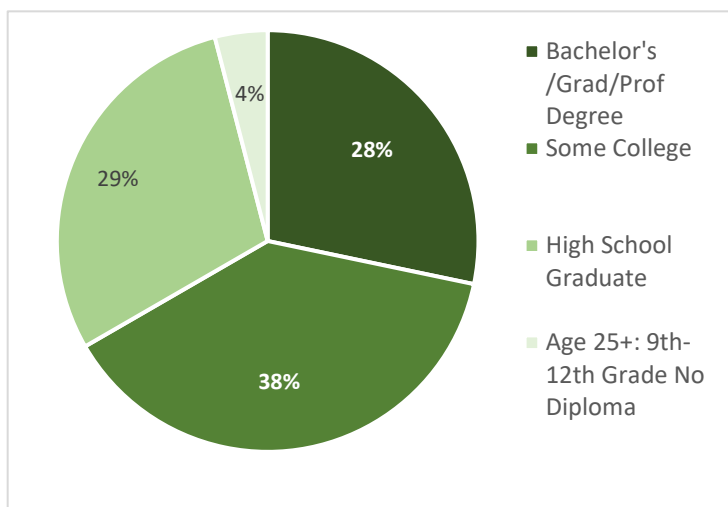
Figure 1- 4 Population by Race



## Education

Crow Wing County has a well-educated workforce, with 65 percent of the population having a college degree or some college experience and only 4 percent without a high school diploma. The county has a higher percentage of adults with a high school diploma than the state but a lower percentage of people with at least some college experience. Additionally, Crow Wing County has a higher percentage of people with an associate degree and a lower percentage of people with a bachelor's degree or higher.

Figure 1- 5 Educational Attainment



In 2021, Central Lakes College-Brainerd, the only university in Crow Wing County, awarded 876 degrees. The K-12 student population of Crow Wing County in 2021 is skewed towards women, with 3,638 male students and 5,258 female students. Most college graduates in Crow Wing County are White (799, 91.4 percent), followed by Two or More Races (21, 2.4 percent), Hispanic or Latino (19, 2.17 percent), and Black or African American (16, 1.83 percent). The most popular majors in Crow Wing County are Liberal Arts & Sciences (320 and 36.5 percent), Construction, Heavy, & Earth-Moving Equipment Operation (80 and 9.13 percent), and Registered Nursing (75 and 8.56 percent).

## Forecasts and Trends

Crow Wing County is known for its scenic beauty, vibrant communities, and rich tapestry of natural resources. As the county continues to evolve, it faces various challenges and opportunities that shape its future. From the allure of its pristine lakes to the complexities of economic development and healthcare access, Crow Wing County navigates a landscape where tradition meets innovation. Understanding key trends and dynamics in this ever-changing environment is crucial for informed decision-making and fostering a resilient and thriving community. The following discussion explores the trends and considerations that may influence the trajectory of Crow Wing County, offering a glimpse into its ongoing transformation and aspirations for the future.

## Population Growth and Aging

Rural areas in the United States, including counties like Crow Wing, have been experiencing an aging population as younger generations move to urban areas and birth rates decrease. This trend can have implications for healthcare, senior services, and housing. The share of the population that is 65 and older increased from 18.5 percent in 2010 to 24.6 percent in 2022.

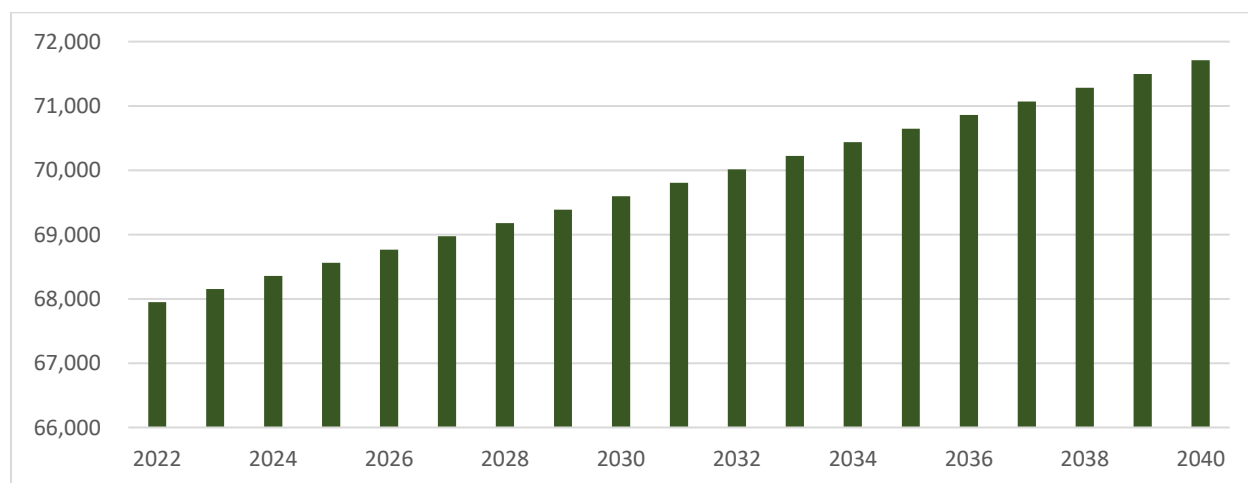
Figure 1- 6 Population of Crow Wing County by Age, Female = Purple, Male = Green



Among all age groups — 0 to 4, 5 to 19, 20 to 34, 35 to 49, 50 to 64, and 65 and older — the 65+ group was the fastest growing between 2010 and 2022, with its population increasing by 44.1 percent. The 0 to 4 age group declined the most, dropping 18.2 percent between 2010 and 2022 (from 6.4 percent to 4.8 percent of the total population).

Population growth to 2028 is anticipated to be 0.3 percent annually, matching national trends and 0.04 percent lower than the state. The population forecast for 2030 is 70,240, and for 2040, it is 73,590.

Figure 1- 7 2040 Population Projection



The Minnesota State Demographers 2028 forecast data indicate that Crow Wing County households will increase by 0.82 percent, higher than both state and national averages (0.66 percent). Meanwhile, median household incomes will be lower than state and national forecasts by almost 0.5 percent. This foreshadows lower local wages and lower-priced homes—the largest increase in ethnicity and race after



white is anticipated in people with more than two races. The median age will increase from 44.8 years old to 45.5. The largest age group will be those aged 65 to 74 years old.

Crow Wing County suffered a negative natural increase - more deaths than births from 2020 to 2022, but also experienced net in-migration - meaning more people moved in than moved out. In addition to domestic immigration, Crow Wing County welcomed net international immigration - gaining new Minnesotans from foreign countries.

*Figure 1- 8 Population Change Components 2010 -2022*

Total Population Change	Natural Increase	Vital Events		Net Migration		
		Birth	Death	Total	International	Domestic
1,826	-309	1,450	1,759	2,161	14	2,147

Crow Wing County has a smaller percentage of foreign-born residents than the state. From 2010 to 2021, however, the county saw an increase in foreign-born residents, though it was slower than the statewide increase.

### **Labor Force Trends**

At 3.2 percent, Crow Wing County had a higher unemployment rate than the state in 2022. After the pandemic recession, Crow Wing County's unemployment rate decreased compared to 7.4 percent in 2020 and declined compared to the 4.6 percent pre-pandemic rate posted in 2019.

Labor force growth has slowed in recent years. After experiencing a net gain of 813 workers each year from 1990 to 2000, Crow Wing County averaged an annual increase of 290.4 new workers from 2000 to 2010 and, most recently, a gain of 50.3 new workers since 2010. Crow Wing County is expected to add workers from 2025 to 2035. After the pandemic recession and gaining jobs over the past year, Crow Wing Co. had the 13th-largest economy of the 87 counties in the state. From 2019 to 2022, employment in Crow Wing County grew despite the pandemic recession.



2.0

**WATER AND  
NATURAL  
RESOURCES**



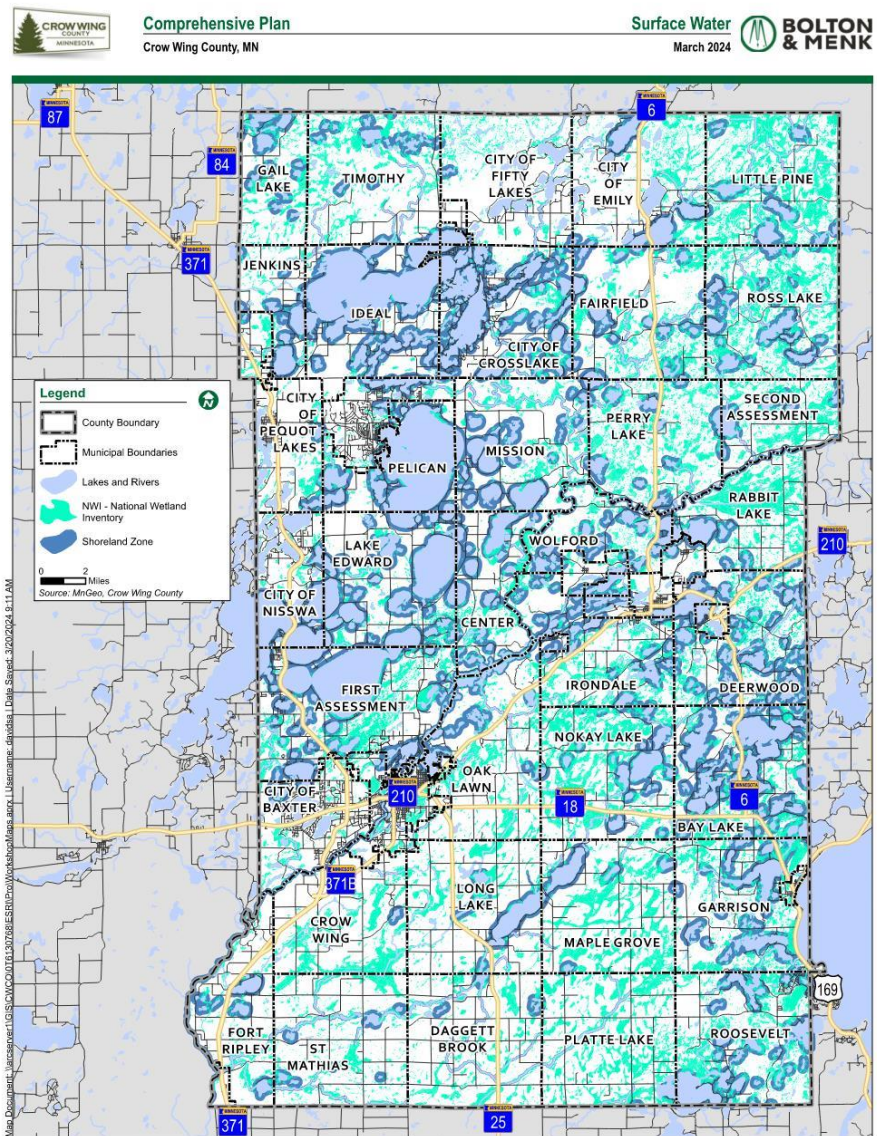
## 2.0 Water and Natural Resources

Crow Wing County has a variety of natural habitats, including forests, wetlands, grasslands, and shrublands, and a variety of plans already in place to manage these resources. The county has two state forests, the Crow Wing State Forest and the Emily State Forest, which provide recreation and wildlife viewing opportunities. The county owns and manages approximately 105,000 acres of tax-forfeited land. The county also has parks and trails, such as the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area, the Paul Bunyan State Trail, and the Crow Wing State Park.

### Water Resources

The county is home to over 400 lakes and thousands of miles of rivers, including the Mississippi River, which flows through the county and forms part of its eastern border, and the Pine River, which flows into the Mississippi. The county's smaller rivers and streams include the Crow Wing River, the Nokasippi River, and the Daggett Brook.

Crow Wing County is in the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Portions of five watersheds are located within Crow Wing County. The Mississippi River—Brainerd Watershed occupies most of the county's area. The Pine River Watershed, Crow Wing River Watershed, Rum River Watershed, and the Mississippi River—Sartell Watershed comprise the remainder of the County's area.



The Mississippi River – Brainerd Watershed has a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan spanning four counties: Aitkin, Crow Wing, Morrison, and Todd. The Mississippi River - Brainerd watershed extends over 1,079,950 acres (1,687 square miles) in the northern-central portion of the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Its boundaries originate in Aitkin County, extending through the municipalities of Aitkin, Brainerd/Baxter, and Little Falls. Approximately 42 percent of the watershed is covered by forests, with 38 percent grasslands and shrub wetlands, 10 percent dedicated to row crops, 6 percent featuring water bodies, and 4 percent designated as urban areas. This watershed mostly falls within the North Central Hardwood Forest region, with small sections in the Northern Lakes and Forests ecoregion. This expansive watershed features approximately 2,149 miles of total river length and accommodates 212 lakes exceeding 10 acres in size. Notably, there are impaired lakes and streams within the Mississippi River – Brainerd Watershed. While the lakes in Crow Wing County may not be impaired, the section of the Mississippi river running through the city of Brainerd is impaired. The Mississippi River is not designated as a "wild and scenic river," but segments within Crow Wing County are designated as state water trails. The Mississippi Headwaters Board, founded in 1980, is an eight-county collaborative organization that oversees the protection of this waterway and, by state statute, has the authority to impact the development of its periphery.

The Pine River Watershed spans approximately 502,400 acres (784.37 square miles) in size, with its drainage area encompassing segments of Aitkin, Cass, Crow Wing, and Hubbard counties. The primary cities situated within this watershed are Pine River and Crosslake. This watershed has a network of 586 miles of streams and rivers, varying in size, and includes 441 lakes exceeding 10 acres in size. Fifty-six percent of the land is privately owned, while more than 40 percent falls under state ownership. The landscape within the Pine River Watershed is 51 percent forested areas, 21 percent wetlands, and 13 percent open water. This watershed has numerous lakes with substantial development. The lakes are significant recreational assets and offer economic advantages to the entire watershed.

The Crow Wing River Watershed encompasses approximately 1,245,440 acres (1,946 square miles), spanning Becker, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Morrison, Otter Tail, Todd, and Wadena Counties. This watershed is characterized by two ecoregions: the Northern Lakes and Forests and North Central Hardwood Forests. The predominant land use in the watershed consists of forested and shrub lands, agricultural areas, wetlands, open water, and developed land. The watershed features a substantial number of pristine, valuable recreational lakes and cold-water streams that are conducive to trout habitat. There are over 627 lakes with areas exceeding 10 acres and an extensive network of 1,653 stream and river miles. The Crow Wing River eventually joins the Mississippi River at Crow Wing State Park. However, a handful of lakes and tributaries fail to meet water quality standards for various beneficial uses, including aquatic recreation, drinking water, and swimming. The primary pollutant in these lakes is phosphorus, which leads to algae blooms during the summer months.

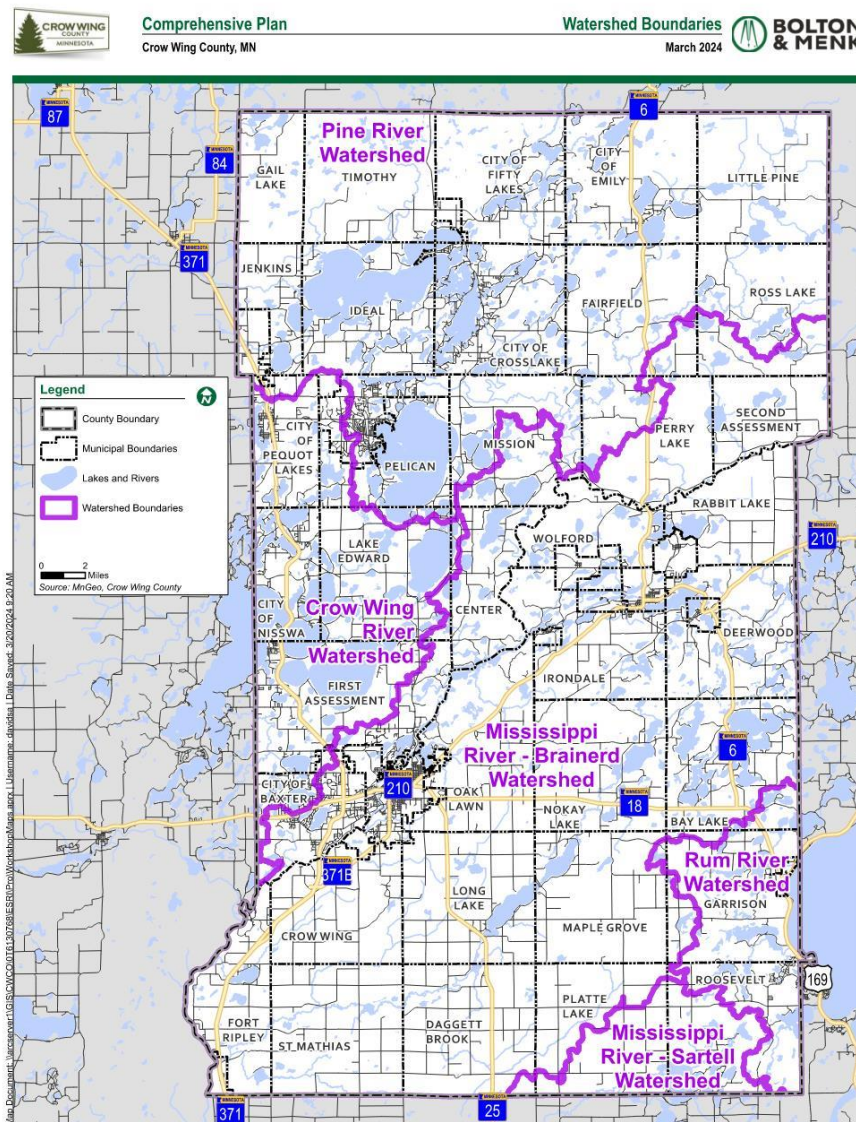
Encompassing 997,060 acres (1,557.9 square miles), the Rum River Watershed is positioned within the Northern Lakes and Forests and North Central Hardwoods Forest ecoregions. This watershed includes portions of Aitkin, Crow Wing, Morrison, Mille Lacs, Kanabec, Benton, Isanti, Chisago, Sherburne, and Anoka counties. The origins of the Rum River are traced back to Mille Lacs Lake, stretching over 145 miles until it merges with the Mississippi River in Anoka. The Rum River watershed is home to 212 lakes exceeding 10 acres in size. Regarding land usage, the area comprises 39 percent agricultural land, 24 percent forested regions, 18 percent grasslands, shrubbery, and wetlands, and 15 percent water. Due to phosphorous, a few lakes within the Rum River watershed fall short of meeting water quality standards for aquatic recreation, drinking water, and swimming. The Rum River is a "wild and scenic river."

The Mississippi River-Sartell Watershed covers an area of 652,800 acres, including parts of Benton, Crow Wing, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Stearns, and Todd counties. This region has 879 miles of rivers and 232



lakes, spanning 13,319 acres. The landscape is primarily agricultural, with the predominant ownership of 96 percent being private land. The watershed is marked by lakes in the northeast and southwest, with a network of tributaries in the central region. There are ongoing water quality challenges, including issues with some lakes and streams not meeting quality standards for conventional parameters. This underscores the need for collaborative efforts to preserve and restore these valuable resources.

Understanding the watersheds within Crow Wing County is essential for managing the region's water quality, land use, and environmental conservation efforts. The health of these watersheds directly impacts the quality of the lakes, rivers, and other water bodies within the county, making it crucial for sustainable development and natural resource management.



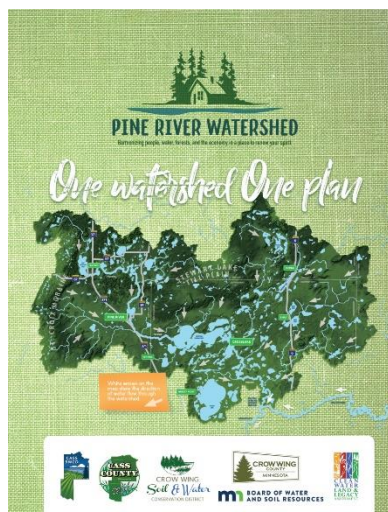


## Existing Plans

### 2021 Pine River One Watershed One Plan

The Pine River Watershed contains over 500 lakes (over 10 acres) and an abundance of wetlands covering 34 percent of the surface. Much of the agricultural land in the watershed on its western side contains a mixture of pasture and animal feedlots. The plan has several goals to achieve in the following categories:

- Achieve 75 percent land protection in select minor watersheds
- Phosphorous reduction through stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs)
- Pasture management BMPs
- Culvert management BMPs
- Fertilizer Management BMPs
- Seal unused wells



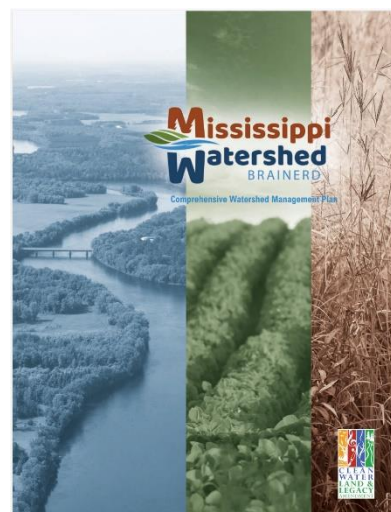
A copy of the Pine River Watershed Water One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) is available on the Crow Wing County website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov)

The plan cites land use changes such as agricultural practices, urban expansion, and shoreline development as main sources of phosphorus infiltrates in the hydrological system. Phosphorus is the main nutrient that feeds aquatic plants and algae, causes the lake's clarity to decline and impacts fish and wildlife habitats. In response, the Plan prioritizes key lakes, rotational pasture, and wetland management strategies and addresses localized climate impacts. A forecast of a 20 percent increase in expected precipitation could exacerbate the phosphorus and run-off issues, introduce invasive species, and harm native species. This plan also includes Aquatic Invasive Species as an emerging issue and identifies key county programs to curb this threat, including the Crow Wing County AIS Management Plan.

### 2023 Mississippi Brainerd Watershed One Watershed One Plan

The Mississippi Brainerd Watershed (MRBW) is covered by mostly wilderness areas, with over half the land in the watershed in forests, wetlands, and water, especially in the northern third of the watershed. The watershed contains 2,100 miles of river and over 300 lakes. The high water quality in these areas is due to limited development and forested land. The plan recognizes that converting this land for more intense development could jeopardize local water quality in the lakes, aquifers, and streams. The Mississippi River south of this watershed provides the drinking water for over one million Minnesotans, with Minneapolis alone using 21 billion gallons annually, emphasizing the invaluable nature of this resource.

A copy of the Mississippi Watershed – Brainerd Water One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) is available on the Crow Wing County website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).



The seven goals of this plan include:

1. Protection: Protect and enhance forest cover, focus lakes and streams, and groundwater through adding 14,765 acres of conservation easements, the Sustainable Forest Incentive Act (SFIA), and acquisitions in priority minor watersheds.
2. Agricultural Land Management: Implement 7,130 acres of agricultural best management practices (BMPs), including cover crops, nutrient management, pasture management, and conservation tillage.
3. Phosphorus Reduction: Reduce phosphorus loading in nearshore focus lakes by 5 percent and watershed focus lakes by 10 pounds/year.
4. Urban Stormwater Management: Develop a comprehensive stormwater information data set for eight cities that have drainage to a priority lake or stream.
5. Drinking Water Protection: Use BMPs to protect or manage 160 acres in highly vulnerable drinking water supply management areas (DWSMAs). Seal ten unused wells per year.
6. Shoreland Restoration: Enhance 2 miles of shoreline or streambank around focus lakes and streams.
7. Water Retention Build resiliency by adding 400 acre-ft of storage through cover crops and stormwater management.

Further, the plan aims to ensure that Watershed partners will explore ways to better integrate this watershed management plan into all the county's comprehensive land use plans. While the DNR administers Minnesota's shoreland management rules, local government units must have land use controls that protect shorelands along lakes/streams and have the authority to adopt stricter ordinances,, if desired. Crow Wing County is responsible for establishing and implementing land use regulation for those municipalities within the county that don't exercise their own authority.

This plan also includes an issue statement regarding Aquatic Invasive Species referencing the Crow Wing County AIS Management Plan as a key factor in preventing and managing this threat in the watershed.

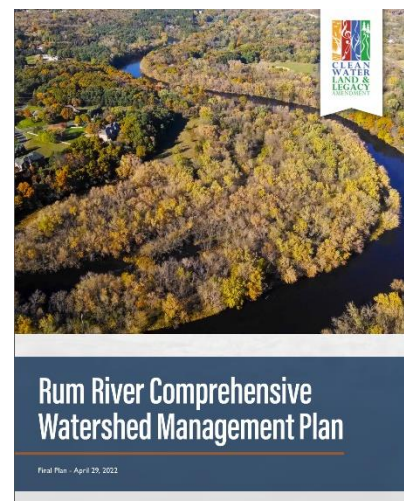
### **2022 Rum River One Watershed One Plan**

The Rum River Watershed has significant agricultural utilization, approximately 38 percent of the total watershed acres. Most of these agricultural lands are used for hay or pasture. The plan encourages the implementation of land use tools that improve protection in designated priority areas. The Level A goals of this plan include:

- Increased awareness of watershed issues, greater community support, and expanded technical resources will translate to more active resource stewardship.
- Improve water quality of impaired lakes and streams.
- Maintain or enhance watershed-based ecosystems to maintain water quality.
- Keep healthy lakes and streams healthy.

Level B and C goals include:

- The net discharge from each management zone net will not increase to prevent flooding, erosion, and water quality degradation.
- Decrease the risk of nitrate contamination in groundwater.
- Decrease the risk of groundwater contamination from septic systems.
- Define, identify, and rank high-value areas.
- Increase upland habitat acreage, quality, connectivity, and resilience to changing precipitation and climate patterns.
- Protect and restore critical aquatic and shoreland habitat areas.



- Increase connectivity for desirable aquatic species.
- Advance technical and scientific knowledge regarding groundwater availability and quality issues and implement programs that protect groundwater resources into the future.
- Reduction of acres and population size of current invasive species.
- Reduce new infestations of invasive species, which the county is delegated to do through the execution of its annual AIS management plan.

A copy of the Rum River Watershed Water One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) is available on the Mille Lacs Soil & Water Conservation District website at [www.millelacsswcd.org](http://www.millelacsswcd.org).

County and municipal comprehensive or land use management plans are essential guides to ensure future land management activities prevent harmful impacts on environmental and economic concerns. However, land use varies greatly throughout the watershed. Hardwood forests and large wetland complexes dominate the upper third of the watershed. This area is home to Mille Lacs Lake, a recreation and tourism area with high-density shoreland development around much of its perimeter. The middle third of the watershed is a transitional area, changing from hardwood forests and wetland complexes in the north to increasingly intensive agricultural use in the south. The lower third is the most densely populated, starting with small-acreage suburban development and trending towards more urbanized development patterns near the Rum River's confluence with the Mississippi in Anoka. The population growth in the southern third of the watershed is poised to impact ecological pressures on the watershed as development sprawls.

### **2019 Mississippi Headwaters Board – Comprehensive Management Plan**

The Mississippi Headwaters Board, initially formed in 1981, acts as a protective entity for the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River, was formed in 1981. It was established by statute to protect the area from harmful development and pollution and ensure its availability for future generations' recreation and survival. The plan goals are as follows:

- Organize agencies and organizations to promote the protection of the Mississippi River regarding water monitoring and scientific data accumulation and modeling.
- To preserve and protect the habitat and water quality of the Mississippi River and watersheds that drain into it by coordinating partnerships that meet the goals of the MHB.
- Create partnerships and strategies with organizations to develop, protect, promote, store, display, and increase awareness about the Mississippi River's valuable history and cultural areas.
- Facilitate and maintain new and existing partnerships with stakeholders to promote, develop, and protect the recreational opportunities that complement the Mississippi River.



A copy of the Mississippi Headwaters Board's 2019 Comprehensive Management Plan is available at the board's website: [www.mississippiheadwaters.org](http://www.mississippiheadwaters.org).

### **2024 Crow Wing River 1W1P**

The Crow Wing River Watershed One Watershed One Plan is being drafted and can be found at this address upon its completion on the Hubbard County Soil & Water Conservation District website at [www.hubbardswcd.org](http://www.hubbardswcd.org).

### **Mississippi River – Sartell Watershed 1W1P**

While not yet started, this document will be incorporated into managing water and natural resources when completed.

### **2013 Water Protection Report**

The groundwork for this water plan update was based on the 2011 changes to the County Land Use Ordinance, which sought to integrate the existing water plan priority concerns and action steps into the daily operations of the Land Services Department. In 2012, Crow Wing County implemented a model for determining the amount of phosphorous contributed by land use activities. It is based on the amount of impervious surface, which is tracked on every permit in the Shoreland Zone.

### **2013- 2023 Local Comprehensive Water Plan**

Crow Wing County revised its Land Use Ordinance & Map in 2010-2011 to incorporate the concerns and objectives of the Comprehensive Water Plan into the daily operations of the Land Services Department. Due to its abundance of surface water, Crow Wing County is a destination area. From 1990 to 2000, the population in Crow Wing County increased by 24.5 percent, the eleventh fastest-growing county of Minnesota's 87 counties. Its population increased over the past decade, ranking as the 17th fastest-growing state from 2010 to 2022. Growth has concentrated around the county's larger lakes and transportation corridors.

### **2024 Crow Wing County Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Plan**

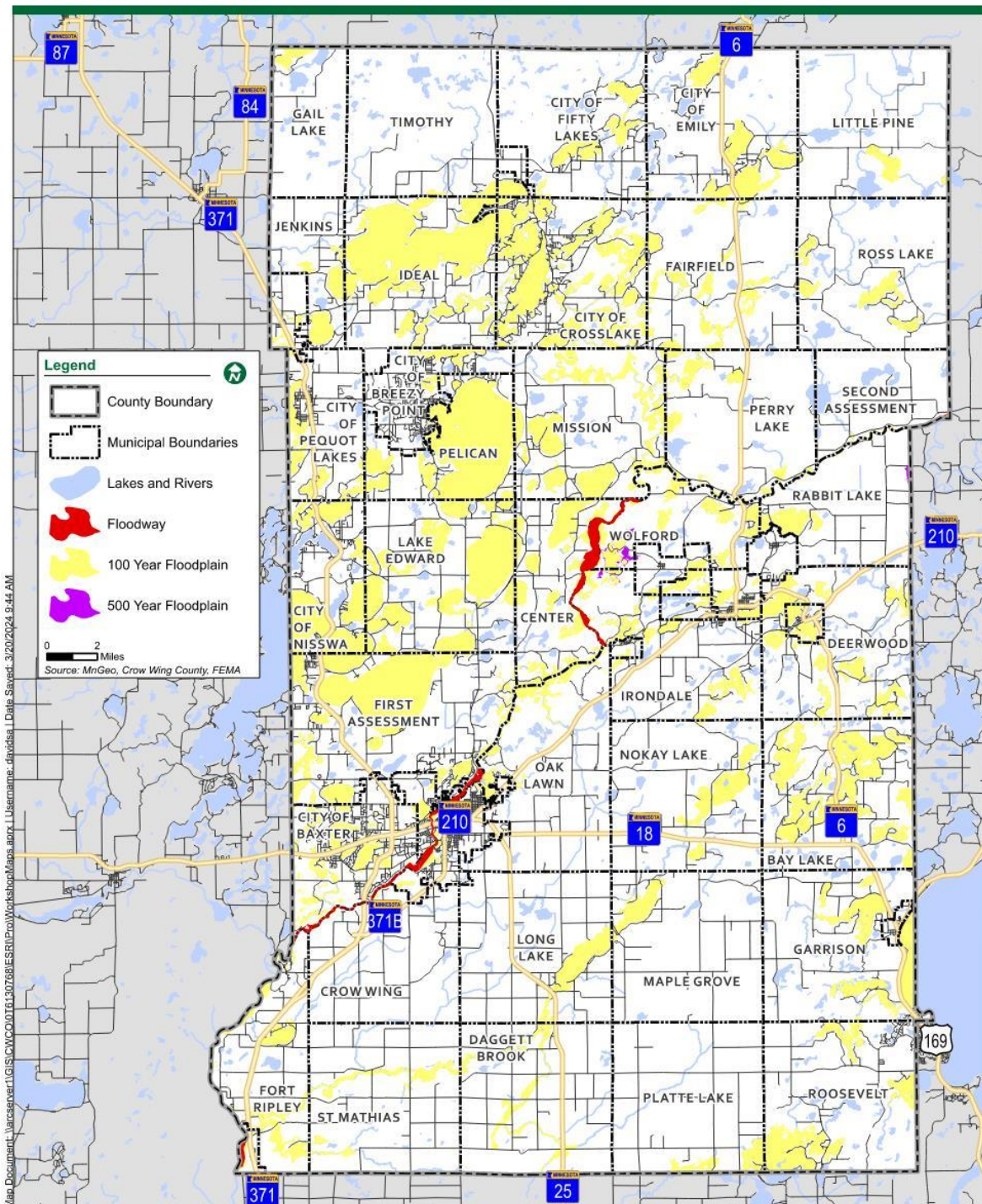
**Each year, Crow Wing County approves an AIS prevention plan based on funding the State of Minnesota allocated to combat aquatic invasive species in the state's waterways. The 2024 AIS plan focuses on inspecting watercraft on high-risk lakes, aiding decontamination of affected waterways, educating the public, and assessing threats to water bodies in the county. Floodplains**

The specific areas within the county in this overlay district can be found in the Land Use Map of Crow Wing County. Floodplains impact development through: **Flooding Risk:** High susceptibility to floods can damage property and infrastructure.

1. **Regulatory Constraints:** Strict regulations often dictate construction limitations, elevations, and flood control measures.
2. **Insurance Costs:** Floodplain Properties may incur higher insurance premiums due to increased flood risk.
3. **Environmental Impact:** If not managed correctly, it can disrupt ecosystems, alter habitats, and contribute to biodiversity loss.
4. **Infrastructure Vulnerability:** Roads, bridges, and utilities in floodplains are prone to damage during floods.
5. **Emergency Response Challenges:** Flooded areas can impede evacuation and emergency response efforts.
6. **Long-Term Resilience:** Variations in weather patterns and intensity over time amplify flooding risks, necessitating considerations for future resilience.

Any land development in a FEMA-designated floodplain must adhere to federal regulations and prioritize safety and environmental conservation. The Crow Wing County Land Use Ordinance's Floodplain Overlay District Standards provide further rules on floodplains.







## Natural Resources

### Forests

After water, forests are the next most significant natural resource in Crow Wing County. The most predominant land uses in Crow Wing County are forestry, recreation, and tourism. This area is heavily forested, and timber harvesting is extensive. Aspen is the primary species harvested as it is the most abundant species on tax-forfeited lands. Recreation is primarily associated with the subsection's lakes and surrounding areas. However, land-based recreation is also significant, with hunting occurring on county land while ATVs, snowmobiles, bikes, and hikers use the county's trail systems. Agriculture is common in the south, where corn and potato crops are common. Summertime swells the population of these areas significantly. Brainerd absorbs more than ten times that number within a 30-mile radius during summer weekends. Outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, and skiing are popular.

White pine-red pine forests cover portions of the county's steep ridges and pitted flats in the northeast. Aspen-birch forests also grow on the ridges but are more common on the plains with well-drained sandy soils. The mixed hardwood-pine forest is found along the large lakes. Conifer swamps and bogs are scattered throughout the county. Red pine is the most common species in the pine forests, preferring excessively drained soils. Northern pin oak, birch, and other hardwoods occasionally grow within these pine stands. Large areas of the county are dominated by aspen-birch and pine forests (mixed with red and white pine). Irregular topography, broad wetlands, and relatively large lakes offer fire protection for this forested land.

### Soils and Agriculture

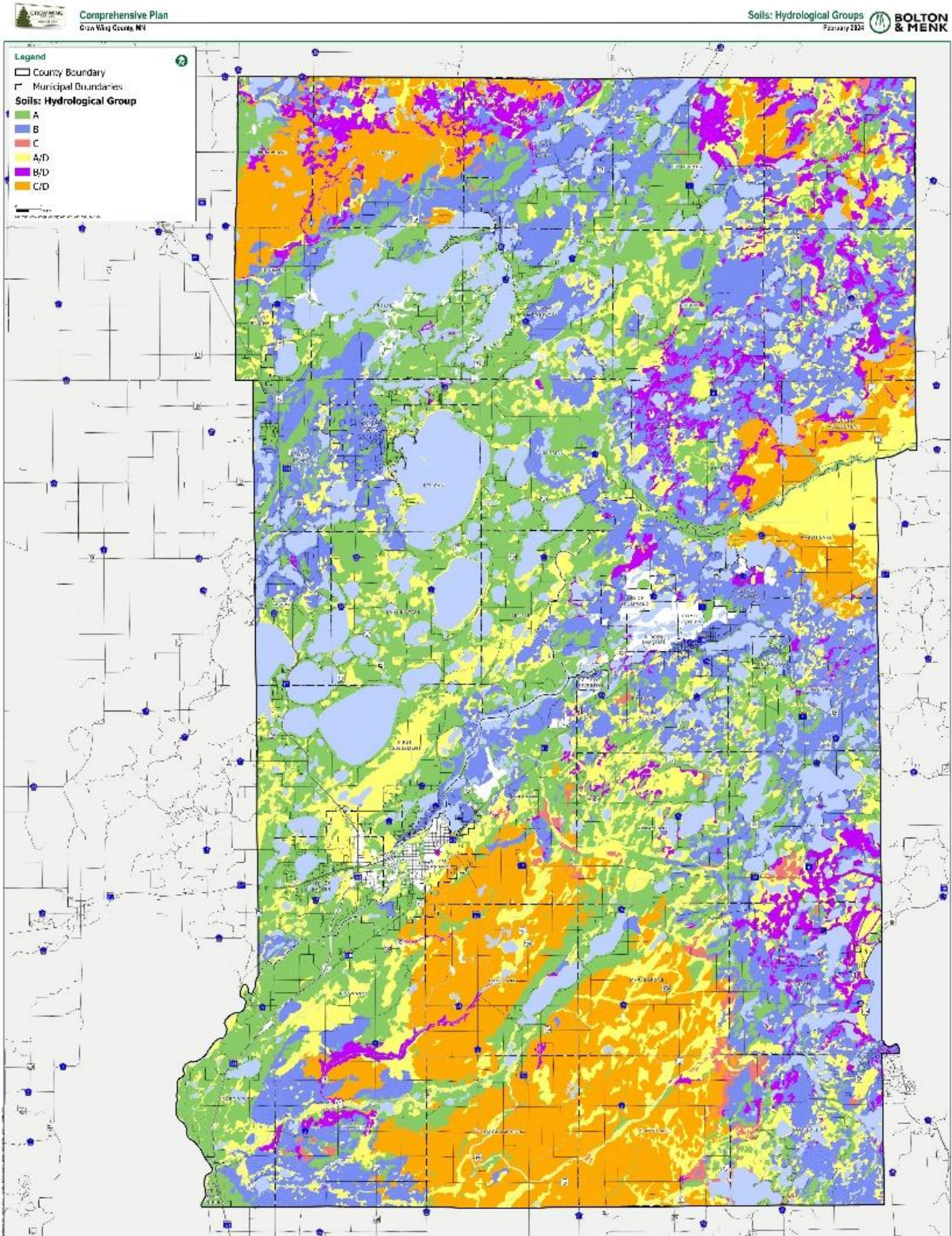
Evaluating soil quality is critical to identifying the optimal land use, and it becomes especially crucial when considering the conservation of natural features. Soil types play a pivotal role in determining water infiltration, retention, and absorption levels, which impact the water table. Consequently, these factors directly affect the identification of the location and type of development and, ultimately, the foundation design and construction costs.

The hydrologic (hydraulic) properties of soil, such as infiltration, water content, and water retention, are critical determinants affecting plant growth, pollutant transport, and subsurface water movement (e.g., groundwater recharge). Understanding these dynamics is one factor in determining whether or not to allow building on slopes steeper than 18 percent, which helps preserve the integrity of natural terrain and mitigate potential hazards such as erosion.

Understanding soil types and groundwater is essential to selecting appropriate land uses and planning for a resilient community with safe land development practices. Hydrologic soil groups (A, B, C, & D) include:

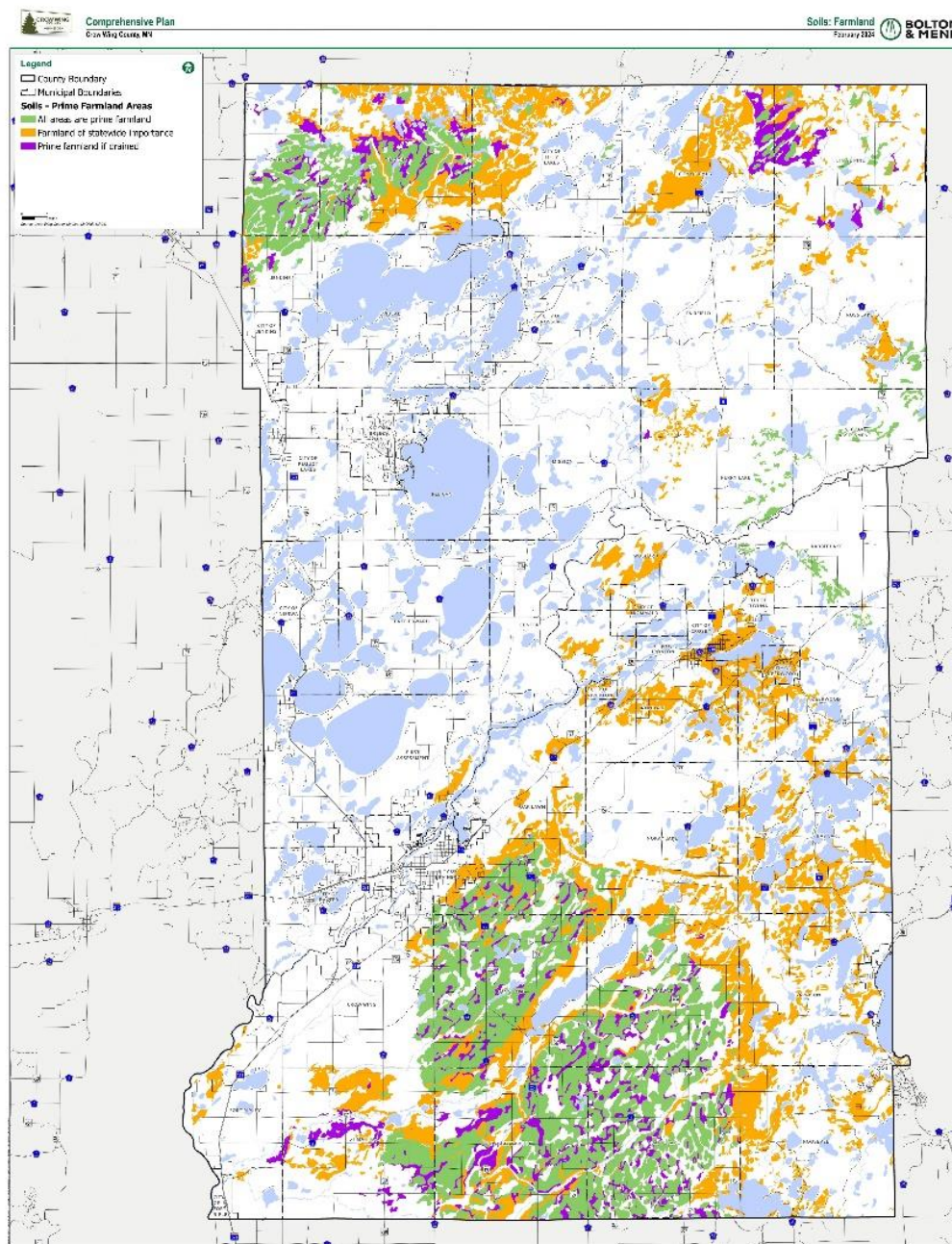
- Group A. Soils with a high infiltration rate (low runoff potential) when thoroughly wet. These soils consist mainly of deep, well-drained, excessively drained, or gravelly sands. They also have a high rate of water transmission.
- Group B. Soils have a moderate infiltration rate when thoroughly wet. They consist chiefly of moderately deep or deep, moderately well-drained, or well-drained soils with a moderately fine to moderately coarse texture. This soil also has a moderate rate of water transmission.
- Group C. Soils have a slow infiltration rate when thoroughly wet. They consist chiefly of soils with a layer that impedes the downward movement of water or soils of moderately fine or fine texture. These soils have a slow rate of water transmission.
- Group D. Soils have a prolonged infiltration rate (high runoff potential) when thoroughly wet. These consist chiefly of clays with a high shrink-swell potential, soils with a high-water table, soils with a

claypan or clay layer at or near the surface, and soils that are shallow over nearly impervious material. These soils have a prolonged rate of water transmission.





In Crow Wing County, the hydrologic soil groups are mainly classified A through C, with no areas entirely classified as Group D. Group A soil classification covers the western half of the county from Fort Ripley up to Emily except for the northwestern corner; these are some of the best draining areas in the county. The Eastern part of Crow Wing County is mainly Group B soils, with an area starting at Brainerd's eastern edge and running to the eastern county line. This area extends from the county's southern border to the southern edge of Ironton. These soils are slightly poorer at draining and have a coarser texture, reducing the risk of severe runoff. The remaining areas are predominantly Group C Soils found in the county's Northern corners and to the east of Crosby and Ironton. These soils infiltrate slowly due to fine soils, allowing for more standing water as water transmission from the surface to the ground is delayed. As shown in this map, these areas also align with the areas in the northwestern and south-central parts of the county with the best agricultural potential because the soils can better trap and retain nutrients from organic debris.



## Wildlife

The presence of the Mississippi River bisecting the county and nearby Mille Lacs Lake, combined with the geography and remaining forested areas, contribute to key habitats across Crow Wing County. At least 22 documented species of animals, insects, fungi, and plants range from vulnerable to critically imperiled within Crow Wing County, and another 19 non-game species are prevalent within Crow Wing County.

## Ecoregion

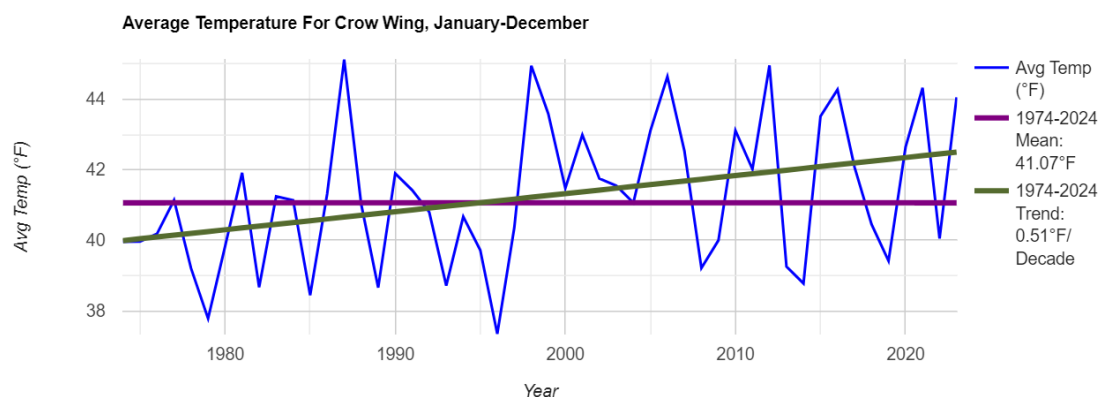
The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Forest Service developed an Ecological Classification System for Minnesota. These classifications describe areas of land with uniform ecological features. Crow Wing County lies mainly within the Laurentian Mixed Forest (LMF) province ecoregion and five ecological subsections, one of which lies within the Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province.

Pine Moraine and Outwash Plains (212Nc), Mille Lacs Uplands(212Kb), Anoka Sand Plain (222Mc and part of the Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province), St. Louis Moraine (212 Nb) and Tamarack Lowlands (212Nd).

## Climate

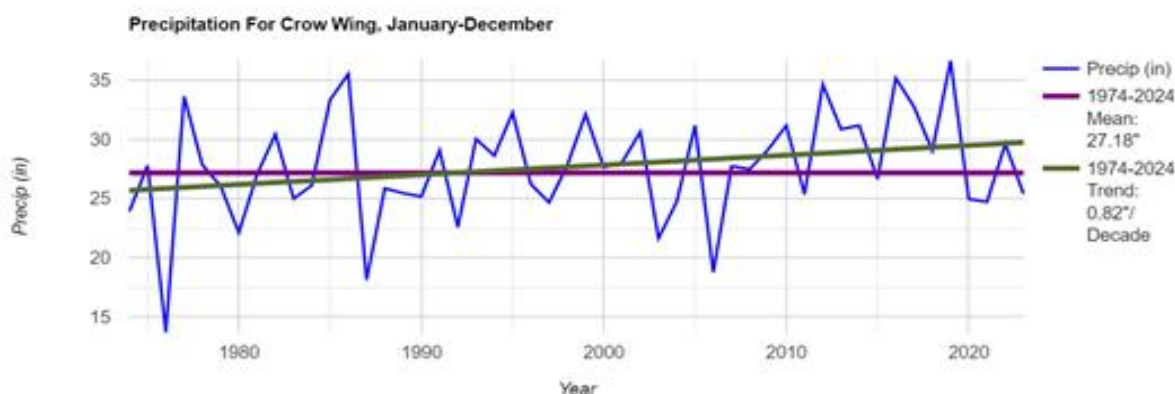
According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Climate Trends Website, Crow Wing County's climate has changed over the past 50 years. The 12-month average temperature in Crow Wing County is 41.07 °F, which has increased by 0.51°F per decade since 1974.

Figure 8: Graph of Average Temperature in Crow Wing County 1974-2024



The average total annual precipitation is 27.18 inches, which has increased at an average of 0.82 inches per decade since 1974. The growing season length varies from 111 to 131 days. More information can be found on the interactive DNR website [arcgis.dnr.state.mn.us/ewr/climatetrends/](https://arcgis.dnr.state.mn.us/ewr/climatetrends/).

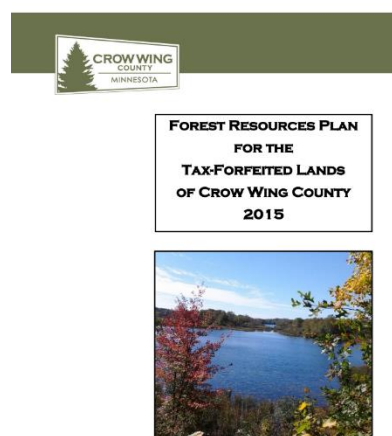
Figure 9: Graph of Annual Precipitation in Crow Wing County 1974 - 2024



## Existing Natural Resources Plans and Programs

### 2015 Forest Plan

The 2015 Forest Plan focused on managing tax-forfeited forest lands under the care of Crow Wing County. With no forest land under federal protection, Crow Wing County began a policy of retaining forested tracts in the 1970s to ensure these parcels were kept in existence. This has been bolstered by the state's efforts to preserve land in the county during the same period. Since then, they have maintained over 105,000 acres of tax-forfeited land. This forest plan defines the management strategies for land administration, recreational and trail facilities, forest roads, habitats, landscapes, and forest resources. The final piece is an implementation plan with a projection for the timber stock over the next century. The primary goal of this plan is to sustain a healthy and diverse forest while ensuring continued economic activities related to these lands within the context of their role as stewards of the forests.



The 2015 Forest Plan is available on the Crow Wing County website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).

### Clean Water Critical Habitat Program

The Clean Water Critical Habitat program, funded by the Outdoor Heritage Fund, is focused on protecting the watersheds of deep, cold-water Tullibee Refuge lakes in northern Minnesota. Tullibee fish, or Cisco, require cold, oxygenated waters and are sensitive to temperature and oxygen level changes. They are vital forage fish for various species, making them an important indicator of habitat health.

The program's primary goal is to preserve natural, undisturbed land cover and well-managed shorelines to protect tullibee and related fish populations. This is achieved through conservation easements or land acquisition. The program's funding comes from the Outdoor Heritage Fund as part of the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment.

The program aims to reach a 75 percent level of protection along the shorelines of select Tullibee refuge lakes. 38 out of 68 refuge lakes are found in Aitkin, Cass, Hubbard, and Crow Wing Counties, which offer natural amenities and recreation. Big Trout Lake, Borden Lake, Pelican Lake, Rush Lake, Crooked Lake, and Whitefish Lake are all current program priority lakes or watersheds within Crow Wing County.



Special consideration is also given to land that connects to existing protected land or along waterways in or out of the critical watersheds.

Landowners interested in participating in the program can apply, and properties are evaluated and ranked by a technical committee. Lake associations can contact the Crow Wing Soil and Water Conservation District about conservation easements.

### Habitat Preservation Projects

Crow Wing County has a history of successful preservation projects with partners such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Trust for Public Lands, Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment, and others. The most recent project is the Indian Jack Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), a 234-acre site that permanently preserves 2.5 miles of shoreline around Indian Jack Lake. The project was made possible with the help of the Clean Water Fund and Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund.

In 2020, Star Lake Camp, with funding from the Minnesota Land Trust and Northern Water Land Trust, placed 383 acres of woods, deep and cold-water fish habitat, and wetland into a permanent conservation easement. This easement protected 4.6 miles of shoreline in Ideal Township and the City of Crosslake.

Other projects include the Whitefish Lake Shoreline

Conservation Easement that covers nearly 108 acres within Crow Wing County. The piece of land is situated on Whitefish Lake, making it one of the last remaining sizable, undeveloped lakeshore parcels in an area with immense pressure for lakeshore development. In their untouched state, these 108 acres hold substantial value as a natural, scientific, and educational asset because they have not been impacted by development. With its high-quality woodlands and tranquil ponds, this property functions as a vital riparian habitat for a variety of wildlife species, including bald eagles, neotropical migrant songbirds, great blue herons, waterfowl, shorebirds, and various other non-game species. This property also features extensive old-growth pine and maple-basswood forests that remain predominantly undisturbed.

Uppgaard WMA spans 110 acres within Crow Wing County. The Uppgaard WMA holds the distinction of being Minnesota's first "Landscaping for Wildlife Demonstration Area." It is a practical example of landscaping practices geared towards wildlife conservation, emphasizing utilizing the 16 landscaping elements detailed in Carrol Henderson's "Landscaping for Wildlife" manual. These elements encompass the installation of nesting boxes and areas for leisure, the planting of trees and shrubs to cater to all seasons, the cultivation of plants to attract butterflies, bees, moths, and wildflowers, the establishment of sites for raptor nesting and perching, as well as the creation of a hibernation area for snakes and the assembly of brush piles. The primary focus of this section lies in the realm of demonstration and education, offering visitors access to trails, seating areas, and materials for interpretation.

In 2010, Crow Wing County designated five High-Value Conservation Forests (HCVF), specifically one old-growth forest, three future old-growth forests, and the Red-Shouldered Hawk Habitat Area. These designations provide special management procedures focused on preserving the habitat.

- Big Island: old forest, northern hardwood forest; 53 acres
- Norway (Red) Pine Future Old Growth: future old forest red pine ; 13 acres
- Birchdale WMA Northern Hardwoods Future Old Growth: mature northern hardwoods; 52 acres



- Ross Lake Northern Hardwoods Future Old Growth: mature northern hardwoods; 40 acres
- Red-Shouldered Hawk Habitat Area: ; 2,650 acres

## **Issues and Opportunities**

### **Trend 1 Public desire for the public protection of water resources from damaging impacts and excessive development.**

#### Opportunities

- More stringent shoreland management policies and development guidelines could protect water resources.
- Careful and reasonable development near shoreland can relieve the demand for housing
- Collaboration with other agencies can make it easier to implement higher quality standards.

#### Issues

- Enforcement of stricter standards will increase development costs and increase maintenance.
- Reducing shoreland development opportunities could slow growth and economic trends.
- Significant resource allocation to water resource protection could lead to neglect of other natural resource protections.

### **Trend 2 Commitment to the use of science-backed plans, government collaboration, and other organizations to execute natural resource protection policies.**

#### Opportunities

- Higher likelihood of achieving desired outcomes through a collaborative approach extending resources.
- Balanced interests and equitable policies are the result of the organizations and stakeholders' involvement in protecting natural resources
- Improved natural resource areas and waters will improve recreational and tourism industries.

#### Issues

- Changes to plans created by one agency can affect the whole collaborative group.
- Reliance on resource sharing and mutual enforcement can reduce the effectiveness of efforts.
- Difficulty in public comprehension of technical and environmental protections and support.

### **Trend 3 Desire for water quality improvement efforts.**

#### Opportunities

- This will open more lakes and river areas for recreational use due to public trust in water quality.
- Improvements in the ecological health of the whole natural environment.
- Reduced development pressure on lakes where improvements have not been made or needed.

#### Issues

- Failure to balance protection with reasonable use may damage the recreational industry.
- Difficult to balance with agricultural needs for discharge.
- May cause issues if mining becomes more of an industrial focus in the economy.

#### **Trend 4 Sustainable management of forests as an economic resource and public natural resource.**

##### Opportunities

- Increased area for natural ecological systems to thrive without intensive development.
- Ensures the rural and natural character of the region is retained.
- Allows for economical use of the resource without overuse and significant depletion.

##### Issues

- Balancing the community's economic needs with protection policies may hinder growth.
- May prevent potential growth in non-shoreland areas.
- It could prevent public and private investments in the region if a potential developable area is made unavailable if it is too large.

#### **Trend 5 Public awareness of the importance of protecting shoreland areas and planning for growth.**

##### Opportunities

- Transitional zones can be implemented around shoreland areas to decrease uses in the immediate shoreland zones.
- Educating the public about conservation measures and their benefits could increase public support and use to minimize the impact of development and even improved developed areas.
- Planning for lower intensity residential in the shoreland areas and directing commercial and higher intensity multi-use development nearby but outside of the shoreland would reduce impacts.

##### Issues

- Limiting development in shoreland areas may mean there insufficient consumer demand or local workers to support localized commercial development.
- Limiting density in shoreland areas may impact the ability to meet the demand for housing.
- Protecting natural resources and allowing people to use their property can be a challenging balance.

#### **Trend 6 Aquatic Invasive Species are a significant threat to water resources in the county.**

##### Opportunities

- Public and private partnerships are needed to effectively combat aquatic invasive species (AIS).
- Awareness and public education of the impact of AIS on water quality, natural resources and economy is critical.
- Combining private resources and public efforts and resources can increase the effectiveness of AIS management programs.

##### Issues

- The spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) poses a threat to the water quality and biodiversity of the county's lakes and rivers, which is part of the area's attraction to residents and visitors.
- Popular recreational activities contribute to the spread of AIS.
- Residents, visitors, property owners, local organizations and all levels of government have a role to play in a minimizing the spread of AIS.
- There are not enough resources to implement AIS prevention programs on every waterbody in the county at once.

## Goals and Policies

**Goal 1:** To respect, not duplicate, or create conflict with the valuable work completed in the watershed plans, this plan recommends that property owners and developers reference the following specific section to gain insight into regulatory authority, requirements, best practices, and tools, programs, and incentives available for developments aligned with watershed recommendations.

- **Mississippi River-Brainerd One Watershed, One Plan** is available on the Crow Wing County website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov). The county will apply the information, incentives, programs, development best practices, and construction standards in this 1W1P.
- **Pine River One Watershed One Plan** is available on the Crow Wing County website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov). The county will use implementation strategies and programs to support development that is in harmony with water and natural resources
- **Rum River One Watershed One Plan** is available on the Mille Lacs Soil & Water Conservation District website at [www.millelacsswcd.org](http://www.millelacsswcd.org). The county will apply implementation strategies and best practices to maintain the health and beauty of its natural resources and waters.
- **Crow Wing River One Watershed One Plan** is being drafted and will be available on the Hubbard County Soil & Water Conservation District website at [www.hubbardswcd.org](http://www.hubbardswcd.org).
- **Mississippi River-Sartell One Watershed One Plan** The completion date will be determined.
- **Mississippi Headwaters Board's 2019 Comprehensive Management Plan** is available at the board's website: [www.mississippiheadwaters.org](http://www.mississippiheadwaters.org). As a member of this organization, the county will apply the regulatory strategies laid out within the plan.

**Goal 2:** Maintain and enhance the overall health of water resources by implementing the 2021 Pine River, 2023 Mississippi-Brainerd, 2022 Rum River, 2024 Crow Wing, Mississippi Headwaters Board's 2019 Comprehensive Management Plan, and Mississippi-Sartell Watershed One Watershed One Plans. This requires property owners, businesses, farmers, local governments, and state agencies to work together and take steps to protect the quality and quantity of our lakes, wetlands, rivers and streams, and groundwater.

- **Policy 1:** Recognize the value of all water resources, protect and enjoy their use without negative impacts, and draft options for mitigating impacts.
- **Policy 2:** Actively collaborate with other government agencies to support water protection efforts through plans such as the One Watershed One Plans.
- **Policy 3:** Balance the need for environmental protection with the economic benefits of developing natural resources.
- **Policy 4:** Use information on the floodplain, shoreland, soil type, and property slopes to inform common sense development practices and growth priorities.

**Resiliency Goal:** Implement environmental resiliency initiatives to safeguard the natural resources of Crow Wing County.

- **Policy 1:** Apply low salt design principles in designing new roads and reconstructing existing roads.
- **Policy 2:** Develop public educational materials about conservation measures they can take to minimize environmental impacts, reduce impervious surfaces, and address stormwater runoff.

- **Policy 3:** Monitor emergent environmental threats and develop strategies to respond to those threats.



An aerial photograph of a winding asphalt road that curves through a landscape. To the left of the road is a grassy field and a small body of water. To the right is a dense forest with trees in various shades of green, yellow, and orange, indicating autumn. In the background, more trees and some buildings are visible. A large, semi-transparent green circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text '3.0 LAND USE'.

# 3.0

## LAND USE

### 3.0 Land Use

A thoughtful land use plan and regulations foster effective, compatible, and efficient development that serves the public interest. This plan chapter describes the existing land use as the starting point of the planning process. It establishes the future land use map for geographic areas under Crow Wing County's planning authority. It provides a blueprint for orderly growth within the county's jurisdiction and the desired development character.

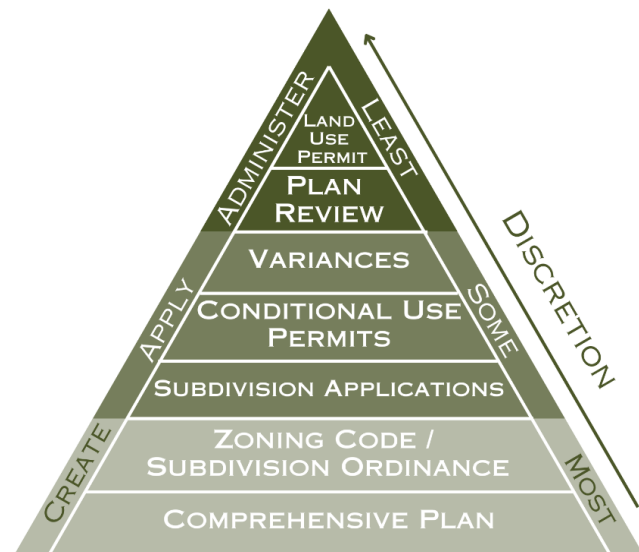
#### Land Use Designations

Land can be described using current and future land use, zoning, and tax classifications.

#### Land Use

"Land Use" describes how land is used in broad categories such as agriculture, industrial, residential, commercial, public, or conservation. It involves how land is used from a human perspective, such as in terms of types of buildings, development, infrastructure, and activities such as agriculture or preservation. "Existing Land Use" is a snapshot in time to describe the current use or broader function of the land within a jurisdiction.

"Future Land Use" refers to the planned or designated use of land for future development and growth. The Future Land Use Map, see map below, serves as a blueprint for growth, reflecting existing patterns of land use and the desired land use to achieve the County's vision.



#### Zoning

Zoning is a regulatory tool for controlling and directing property development. It involves dividing land into zones where specific land uses are permitted or prohibited. Zoning regulations govern aspects like the types of buildings allowed, heights, densities, and how they are arranged. Zoning is a method for implementing land-use planning and managing urban growth and development. It is the more specific of the two concepts and supports the goals that land use designates.

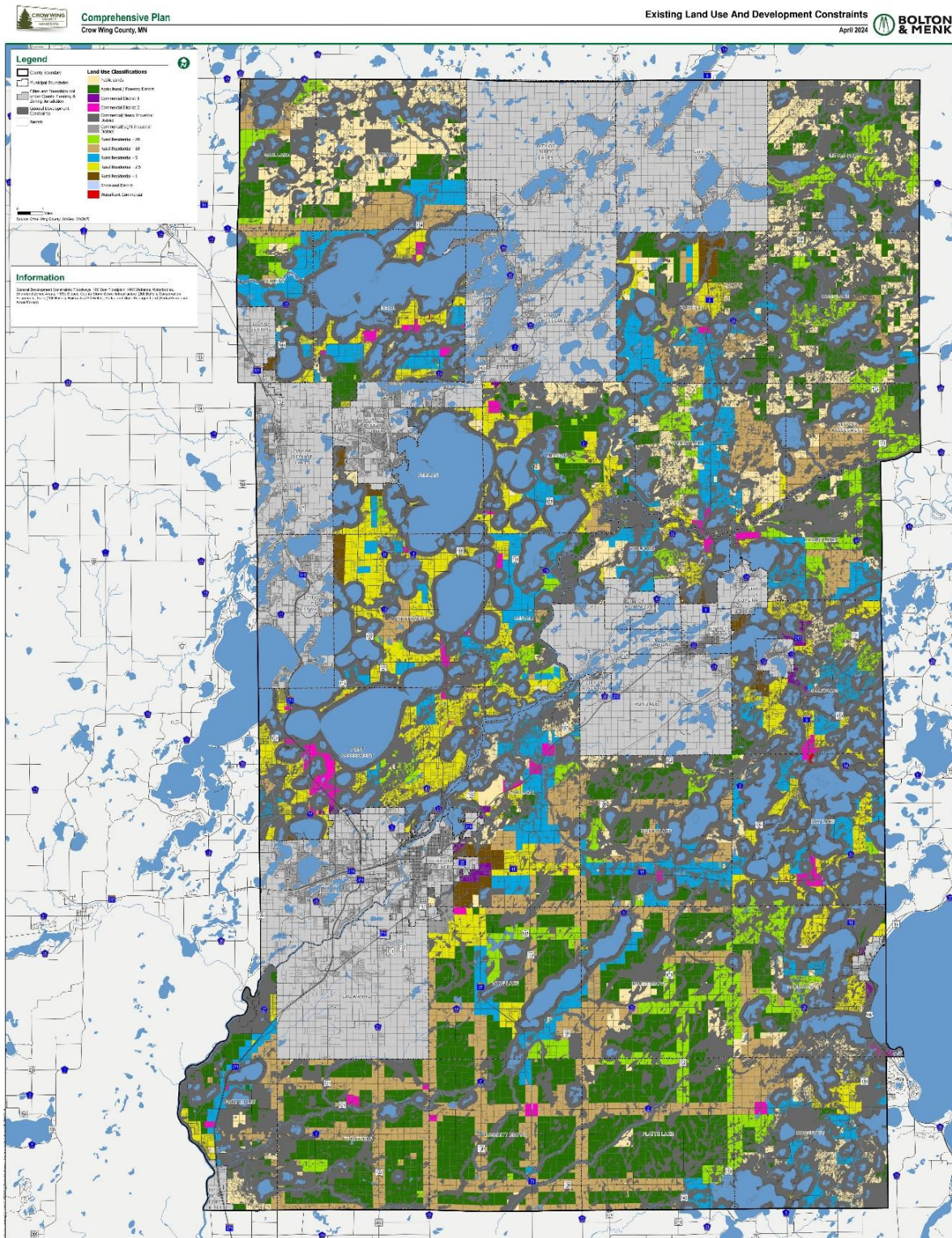
#### Tax Classification

Property owners often confuse their property's land use or zoning designation because of the classification on their tax statement. Tax classification differs from a property's land use designation or zoning districts, which regulate how a parcel is developed and used. Tax classification is a system the County Assessor's Office uses to calculate property taxes. Tax classifications have different nomenclatures than land use districts. The four main tax classifications are Homestead, Agricultural, Commercial/Industrial/Public Utility, and Other residential, although each has subclassifications. Tax classifications are essentially based on how the property is used.



## Existing Land Use

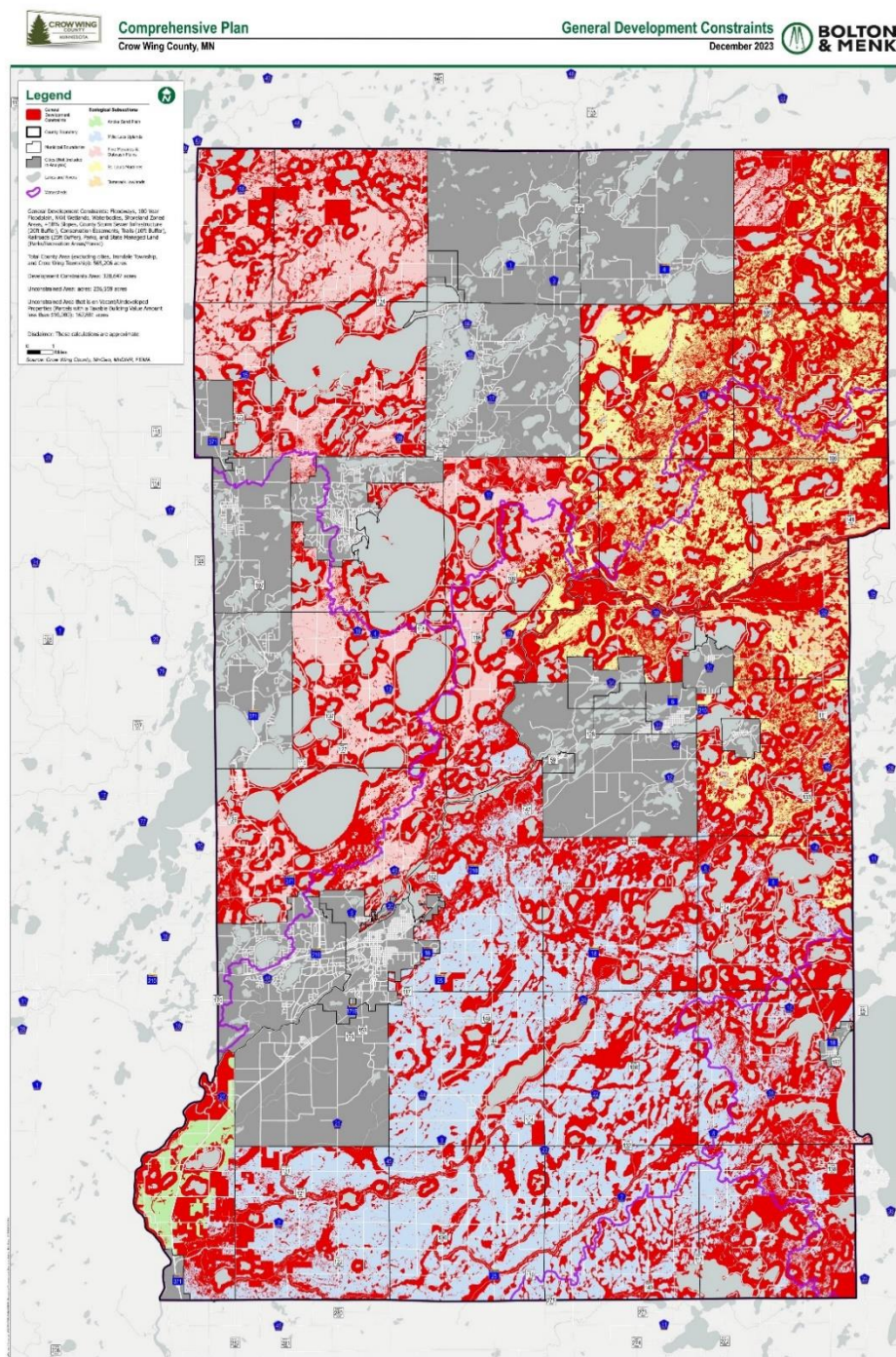
The Existing Land Use Map describes the current conditions within the county. It is the starting point for looking at development patterns and identifying areas to preserve or protect.





Protecting the natural resources of Crow Wing County is a top priority. Chapter 2, Water and Natural Resources, identifies the resources and establishes goals and policies to guide the county in making land use, development, and infrastructure decisions based on this priority. The first step in this effort is to identify and map areas with challenges to development due to physical constraints, high-quality natural resources, environmental regulations, or compatibility. The map below illustrates areas as “constrained,” including surface water bodies (rivers, lakes, ponds), wetlands, shorelands, state parks, steep slopes (18 percent or more slope), and the railroad corridor. The total constrained area under Crow Wing County planning authority is 328,647 acres of 565,265 acres.

Table 3- 1 Current Land Use in Acres





	Current Land Use in Acres	Percent
Agricultural / Forestry District	97,476	17%
Public Lands	72,821	13%
Commercial-1	1,306	0%
Commercial-2	4,445	1%
Commercial/Heavy Industrial	82	0%
Commercial/Light Industrial	777	0%
Rural Residential - 20	33,938	6%
Rural Residential - 10	58,850	10%
Rural Residential - 5	42,222	7%
Rural Residential - 2.5	38,451	7%
Rural Residential - 1	3,764	1%
Shoreland District	122,519	22%
Waterfront Commercial	75	0%
Waterbodies	88,539	16%
<b>Total</b>	<b>565,265</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Issues and Opportunities

### Trend 1: Balance between the growth pressure and the rural character of Crow Wing County.

#### Opportunities

- Allowing limited residential development on non-high-quality agricultural lands to accommodate growth.
- Managing growth and strategically increasing density where services and infrastructure capacities are present preserves the rural character in areas.
- Simplifying land use categories and promoting sustainable development balances the public interest in protecting the environment while providing more housing options.

#### Issues

- Some survey respondents do not think the county should grow, which could challenge future development if they oppose projects.
- People challenging proposed development projects may increase risk, inflate costs, and potentially price locals out of their projects.

### Trend 2: Survey respondents indicated that protecting the environment was one of the key priorities.

#### Opportunities

- Protecting the environment through additional regulations, programs, and best practices to offset concerns about impacts due to increased population and commercial uses.
- Support existing environmental partnerships between agencies and continue the dialogue and collaboration as population and commercial/industrial development increases.

- Seeing redevelopment as an opportunity to improve or mitigate past land use or development decisions, such as addressing stormwater management, decreasing impervious surfaces, or restoring native vegetation as a condition of development approvals.

#### Issues

- Enforcing regulations and policies is challenging, given the number of agencies involved, budget constraints, and staffing limitations.
- Implementing too many restrictions and regulations increases costs and could reduce the potential for new development.
- Implementing too many environmental protections could reduce interest in businesses or activities that rely on natural resources, such as agriculture or forestry.

### **Trend 3 Public nuisance complaints may increase as growth occurs in more remote areas and residential density increases.**

#### Opportunities

- Reducing nuisances could improve aesthetics and public perception of the area and encourage growth.
- Enforcing a nuisance ordinance could help set property owners' expectations, and consequently, more people comply with the standards.
- Addressing nuisances may help reduce water quality impacts, such as oil or gas leaking from abandoned vehicles, and environmental mitigation.

#### Issues

- Given budget constraints and staffing levels, effective enforcement is difficult; it currently relies on people filing a complaint to bring it to the County's attention.
- Increasing density of development and more people living in remote or agricultural areas will likely result in more complaints.

### **Trend 4 Updating and refining zoning standards in critical areas to protect the county's natural resources, support orderly development, and maintain rural character.**

#### Opportunities

- Standards aid in establishing the rural character and creating a uniform vision.
- Zoning policies on major corridors help to harmonize the appearance of development and its connections within the area and to adjoining neighborhoods.
- Influence over the aesthetic of each project as these emerging development zones take shape.
- Protecting the county's rich agricultural history where the soils and drainage are best suited to farming is key to maintaining the area's rural character.

#### Issues

- Given budget constraints and staffing levels, effective enforcement is difficult; it currently relies on people filing a complaint to bring it to the County's attention.
- Effectiveness of enforcement defines the degree of successful implementation of standards.
- Increasing regulations could increase the cost of development.
- Explaining new or changing regulations to the public, property owners, or developers can be complex and contentious.

- Aesthetic standards are often subjective and frequently result in projects that don't reflect the desired local character.

**Trend 5 A common concern raised during the public engagement process was the placement, design, and visual impacts of storage unit development.**

Opportunities

- Storage units meet the community's needs and provide a necessary service to area residents and businesses.
- Residents storing equipment, recreational vehicles, additional cars, and other personal items means they aren't being stored outdoors and creating visual nuisances in residential areas.
- Storage units economically use land that has not been otherwise developed; thus, they generate taxes and provide a service for the community.
- Focus on on-site design and placement in more appropriate locations away from natural resources, which may make them less objectionable.
- Allowing storage in agricultural land uses may mitigate the visual and environmental impacts compared to parcels closer to the cities and lakes.

Issues

- Shoreland restrictions to minimize impervious surfaces and development within a prescribed setback from the water means that people can't have as much development on a site as they may want. Storage units provide options supporting less intense development near sensitive natural resources.
- Storage units consume commercial and industrial land intended for economic development but do not create many jobs.
- Storage units create large areas of impervious surfaces; addressing stormwater on site is critical, especially in areas near surface water bodies and where run-off is a concern.
- Storage structures are often large, unarticulated, and may detract from the local aesthetic.

**Trend 6 Short-term rental industry growth impacts long-term housing economy and conditions.**

Opportunities

- Short-term rentals allow property owners to generate supplemental income, making homeownership or seasonal property more attainable.
- Local owner-operators frequently inject earned revenue back into the local economy, and visitors contribute to the local economy.
- Short-term rentals offer different accommodation types and support the tourism industry in Crow Wing County.

Issues

- Housing stock utilized as a short-term rental is unavailable for residents, reducing the housing supply. This, in turn, increases the cost of housing due to demand and creates challenges with recruiting and retaining workers.
- If not locally owned or owned by corporations, short-term rental housing profits leave the community.
- Short-term rentals are often concentrated in high-demand areas with exacerbated density concerns.

- Given budget constraints and staffing levels, effective enforcement is difficult; it currently relies on people filing a complaint to bring it to the County's attention.

**Trend 7: Planning focuses on emerging land use trends and allows the County to address them proactively.**

Opportunities

- Places the county ahead of issues and public complaints instead of being responsive only when issues emerge.
- Provides leadership to other communities and sets standards for policy in the municipalities, not just the county.
- Allows for more significant public discussion before new uses become a concern in the community.
- Mixed-use developments are becoming more common, and projects throughout Minnesota have demonstrated that commercial and residential uses are compatible; the County may want to consider allowing this in the future.

Issues

- Planning requires continuous issue monitoring to identify trends and develop solutions as they emerge.
- Change is complex, and handling issues through future updates or amendments to the land use plan or zoning may be negatively perceived by the public, especially if the changes are not fully understood.
- The county needs to be diligent about not overreacting to trends; it may take time to realize the results or benefits, so the County Board may need to be patient and not come to a quick conclusion about the effectiveness of a plan, project, or ordinance.

**Changes in Land Use**

Comprehensive planning, which includes creating and adopting a land use plan and zoning ordinances, is a legislative process in which a governing body makes plans to advance a community's health, safety, and welfare. The 2024 update to the Comprehensive Plan reflects the County's current aspirations. It establishes the desired growth and development pattern that meets that vision and addresses current trends and issues. Following is a summary of the critical land use issues that resulted in changes to the previous land use categories and assignments implemented with this plan to enhance consistency and plan for orderly growth and development.

**Commercial and Industrial**

Previous plans included three commercial land use categories, two based on intensity and one on proximity to a lake. Waterfront Commercial District is a unique classification necessary for current lakefront commercial development and the tourism industry. The other two commercial land use categories, Commercial 1, located adjacent to cities, and Commercial 2, reserved for rural commercial areas, are similar. The 2024 Future Land Use Map consolidates Commercial 1 and 2 into one commercial land use category to clarify expectations for the public, businesses, and developers. Economic development was one of the top three priorities identified in the community survey. As a result, the County identified key transportation corridors ideal for commercial development, employment centers, and goods and services. One such corridor is the extension of commercial activities along TH 18, east of the City of Brainerd. Commercial development in this area will improve business accessibility for residents in the southeastern part of the county. The County Road 3 corridor towards Merrifield from Brainerd will extend business access to the central part of the county. These corridor extensions directly



respond to citizens' requests for the county to prioritize development along routes that offer more significant commercial benefits than storage unit facilities.

The previously existing industrial land use categories were also similar. Therefore, this plan combines them into one Industrial land use category, simplifying economic development by clearly identifying where industrial development fits within the county.

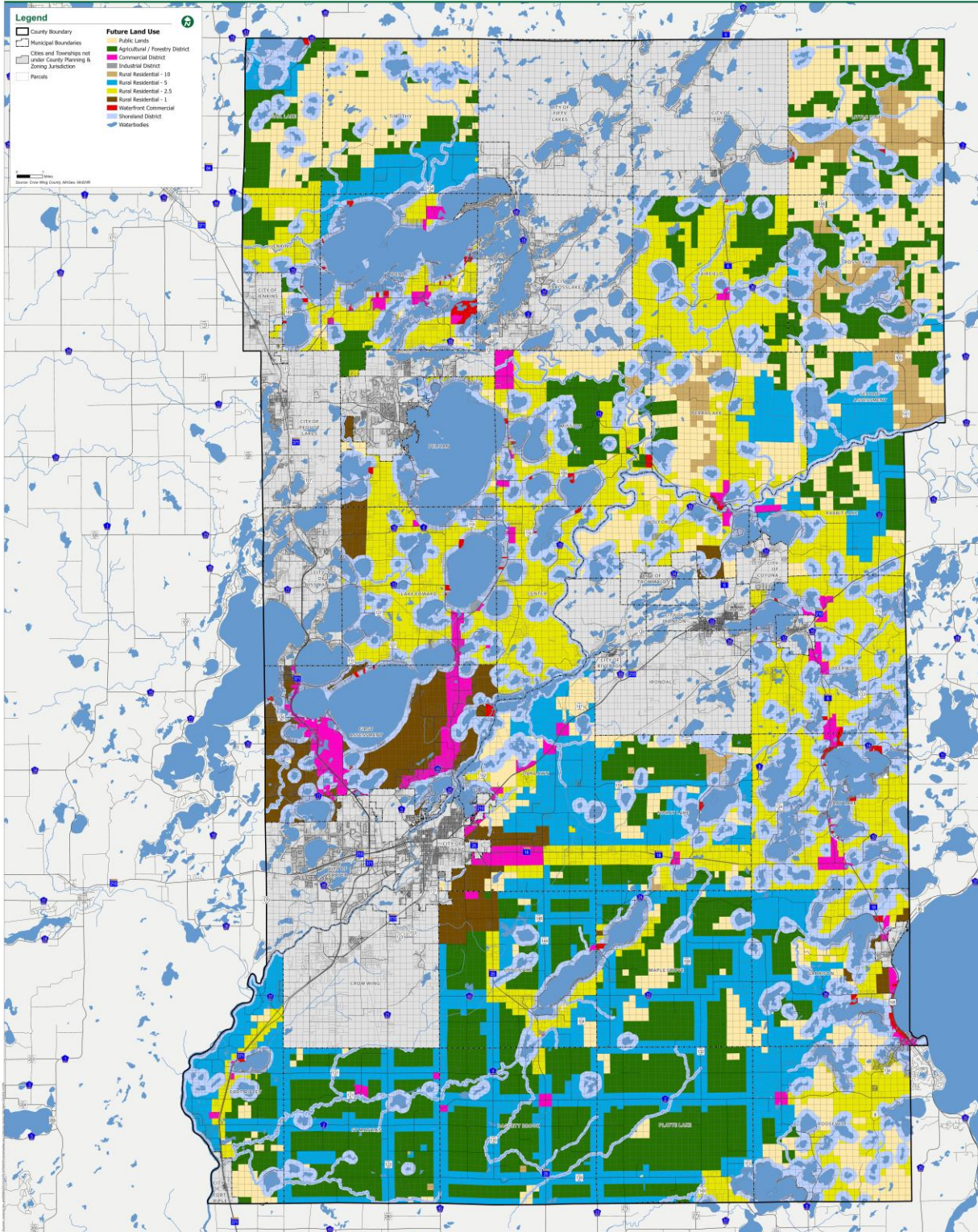
### **Rural Residential - 20**

Previous land use plans and zoning codes included a Rural Residential - 20 classification. It is removed from this plan due to the county's balanced goals of retaining agriculture on high-quality soils and allowing for more housing. The Agriculture/Forestry classification retains large tracts of land for forestry, natural resource, and agricultural purposes. The Rural Residential - 10 designation allows residents to have the land and space that comes with rural living on a 10-acre parcel instead of a 20-acre parcel. This will enable the county to meet the rising demand for rural living space as work becomes less restricted by location.

### **Residential**

Brainerd and Baxter's public wastewater and water supply infrastructure allows them to extend development into county jurisdiction on the periphery of their city limits. Under the previous land use plan, if many of those parcels adjacent to the cities had been developed at the county's smallest rural residential lot sizes, annexing, and extending public utilities through those large lot areas would have made it prohibitive. By anticipating this future development and addressing the demand for more moderate-price housing, this land use plan changes the land use classification in the areas surrounding cities and properties in the First Assessment District to allow 1-acre lots.

In rural areas, the county sees the demand and desire for more housing but also wants to retain the rural character and protect natural resources. This plan allows for smaller lots of 1, 2.5, 5, or 10 acres based on surrounding land use, access to the country road network, or natural resources such as forests, surface water, and steep slopes to achieve this balance. The public's emphasis on sustainable development guided this decision to avoid increases in areas where geographic constraints exist, and environmental impacts could be avoided.



## Future Land Use

This plan showcases community input and research by proposing future land uses to meet the community's vision. These future land uses show where the community wants to grow and develop. Since growth is imminent, the county has a roadmap for its development.

## **Public**

These are lands owned by the county or state government. Much of the County's property is forestland acquired through tax forfeiture or other means and managed for economic and recreational uses. Other public land includes state parks or recreation areas occupied by infrastructure. The vision for this land is to continue operating for financial and recreational purposes.

### **Agricultural/Forestry**

#### **Maximum Density 1 Dwelling Unit / 35 Acres**

The purpose of agricultural/forestry land use is to promote and protect those portions of the county from development with high-quality agricultural lands and forestry activities that are present and are expected to continue. These activities and the large tracts of land without buildings assist in maintaining the rural character and open space. Agriculture and forestry are vital elements of the county's economy and are essential to maintaining a diverse economy. The primary activities in this land use classification are farming, raising livestock, and managing and harvesting trees sustainably. Complimentary uses include single-family residential, especially for those working or operating the farm. Buildings and development in this land use include facilities needed for agricultural operations. Compatible commercial uses may be allowed as permitted or conditional uses.

### **Rural Residential - 10**

#### **Maximum Density: 1 Dwelling Unit/10 Acres**

The Rural Residential - 10 land use designation is designed to allow for very low-density residential development with single-family homes on private septic systems and wells and small-scale agricultural activities. Their size allows these tracts of land to function as agricultural or environmental protection areas that retain the area's rural character. Most of the land designated at Rural Residential-10 is in the northeastern quadrant of the county in forested areas, which allows for residential growth but retains much of the existing vegetation, which helps maintain the rural character and protect natural resources. Compatible commercial uses and small-scale multifamily homes may be permitted as conditional uses.

### **Rural Residential - 5**

#### **Maximum Density: 1 Dwelling Unit/5 Acres**

The Rural Residential - 5 land use designation is designed to allow for low-density development with single-family homes on private septic systems and wells. Their size allows these tracts of land to act as very small-scale agricultural activities or environmental protection areas that retain the area's rural character. They are predominately located along county roads to allow for more residential growth in rural areas, but at a level that does not require significant infrastructure investments and minimizes environmental impacts. Compatible commercial uses and small-scale multifamily homes may be permitted as conditional uses.

### **Rural Residential - 2.5**

#### **Maximum Density: 1 Dwelling Unit/2.5 Acres**

The Rural Residential - 2.5 land use designation aims to promote moderate-density residential development in those portions of the county outside the Shoreland and beyond areas of anticipated urban growth extending out from cities with public wastewater and water supply service. It is a rural development tool that allows for lower density living while retaining the rural character. The spacing is such that communal infrastructure is feasible. Compatible commercial uses and small-scale multifamily homes may be permitted as conditional uses.

### **Rural Residential - 1**

#### **Maximum Density: 1 Dwelling Unit/1 Acre**

The purpose of the Rural Residential-1 is to allow for a minimum lot size of one acre. It is intended for higher-density residential with single-family homes on private septic systems and wells. The vision is to make more land available on smaller lots to promote more moderately priced homes. They are often located at the periphery of the incorporated municipalities. Parcels have one-acre minimum size requirements for one-family residences and are the densest residential land use category within the



county's land use planning jurisdiction. However, they are still not generally a reasonable option for multifamily housing development. Compatible commercial uses may be allowed as conditional uses.

### **Shoreland**

The Shoreland land use designation aims to preserve and enhance the quality of surface waters, conserve the economic and natural environmental values of shorelands, protect drinking water sources, and provide for the wise use of water and related land resources. This district is designated for land within 1,000 feet of a lake, 500 feet from the Mississippi River, and 300 feet from all other rivers or streams. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources sets its base standards. The primary use within this land use classification is seasonal and year-round single-family residential. Compatible commercial or water-oriented commercial uses may be allowed as permitted or conditional uses.

### **Waterfront Commercial**

The purpose of the Waterfront Commercial land use is to accommodate commercial uses in the shoreland district where access to and use of a surface water feature is an integral part of the business. The primary uses in this district are marinas, resorts, and restaurants with transient docking facilities. This zone balances commercial use impacts with the ecosystems' sensitivity in a shoreland environment.

### **Commercial**

This land use provides adequate areas for general retail, wholesale, office, and service activities throughout the county. Commercial land uses focus on areas with good access, primarily along federal, state, or county highways. Smaller Commercial regions may be on local roads to provide essential services in more remote areas.

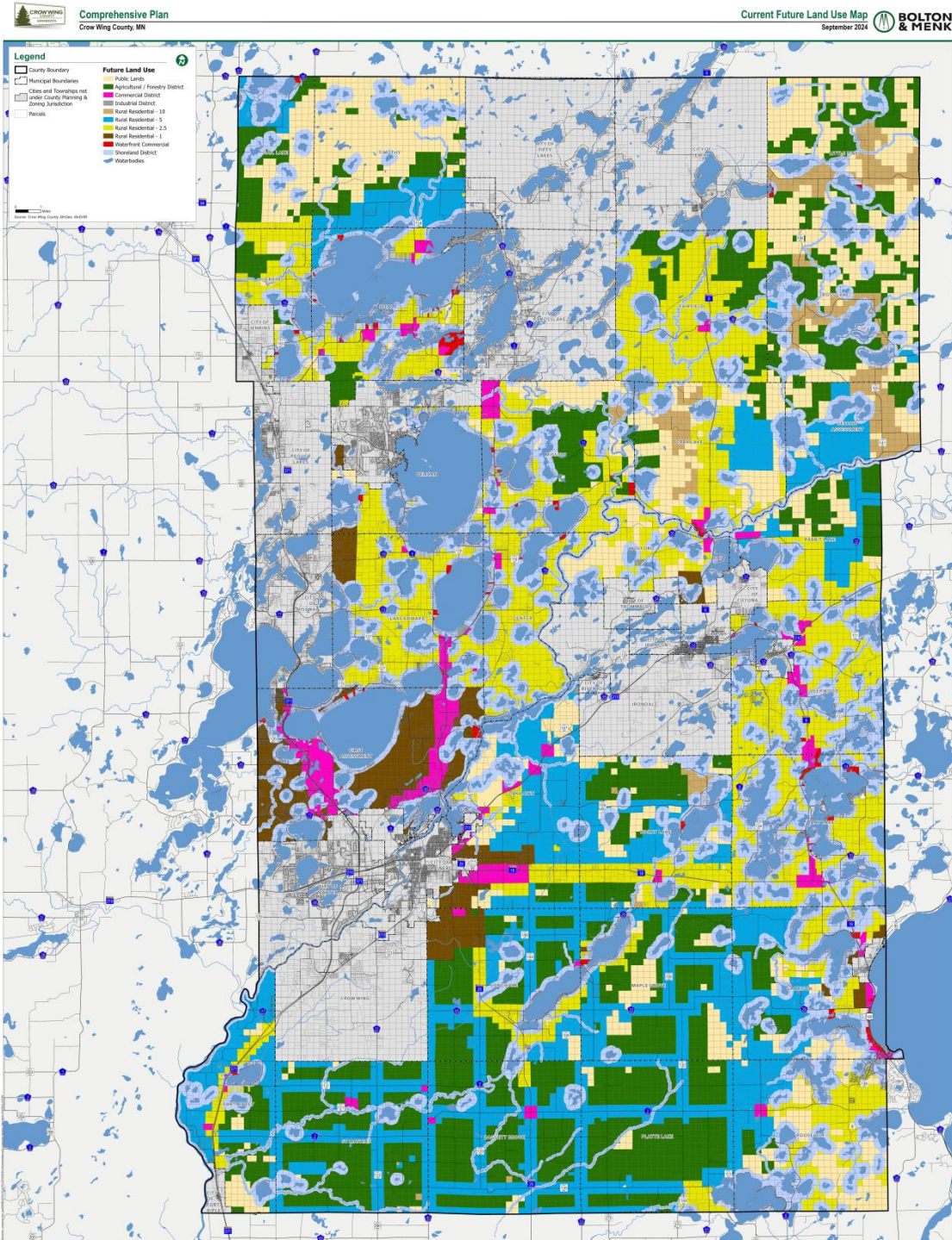
### **Industrial**

The purpose of Industrial land use is to accommodate industrial uses that generate jobs and produce few off-site impacts such as noise, odor, or vibration. Heavier industrial uses or uses with impacts may require mitigation, such as setbacks, air or water quality monitoring, landscaping, screening, or sound barriers. Placements are generally restricted by the availability of infrastructure that can support the intensity of these uses. Industry development should be focused in or near cities with infrastructure supporting water, wastewater, transportation, and other utility needs. Care should be taken to minimize noise, odors, fumes, dust, and other impacts on residential areas. Industrial land uses should mitigate impacts to high-quality natural resources and have good access, primarily along federal, state, or county highways.



## Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map guides growth and development planning. The Future Plan Use Map aids property owners, developers, and the County make well-informed decisions and orderly growth. It shows where the County anticipates development to realize its vision for protecting natural resources, accommodating a variety of housing, and increasing economic development.



## Future Land Use Table

The following table summarizes the future land use categories and planned acres and compares them to existing acres.

Table 3- 2 Comparison of Current Land Uses and Future Planned Land Uses

Land Use Classification	Current Acres	Percent	Future Acres	Percent	Change
<b>Agricultural/Forestry</b>	97,476	17%	92,722	16%	-4,754
<b>Commercial</b>	5,752	1%	11,203	2%	5,451
<b>Industrial</b>	859	0%	217	0%	-642
<b>Public Lands</b>	72,821	13%	65,161	12%	-7,660
<b>Rural Residential - 20</b>	33,938	6%	0	0%	-33,938
<b>Rural Residential - 10</b>	58,850	10%	10,367	2%	-48,483
<b>Rural Residential - 5</b>	42,222	7%	79,941	14%	37,719
<b>Rural Residential - 2.5</b>	38,451	7%	81,420	14%	42,969
<b>Rural Residential - 1</b>	3,764	1%	15,421	3%	11,657
<b>Shoreland</b>	122,519	22%	118,850	21%	-3,669
<b>Waterbodies</b>	88,539	16%	88,539	16%	0
<b>Waterfront Commercial</b>	75	0%	1,975	0.3%	1,900
<b>Total</b>	<b>565,265</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>565,817</b>	<b>100%</b>	

This comprehensive plan does not anticipate a significant change in agricultural, forestry, commercial, industrial, public, or shoreland land uses. This supports the County's intent to retain agricultural uses as an essential component of the economy as well as retain the rural character and natural resources. The most significant changes are the reduction of Rural Residential - 20 and - 10 and a substantial increase in acres guided for Rural Residential - 5, - 2.5, and - 1. These supports making more land available for residential development to accommodate growth and promote moderate housing construction for area families and workers.

## Goals and Policies

**Goal 1:** Plan a balanced approach to meet housing needs by increasing densities.

**Policy 1:** Support high-density and multifamily development in cities with infrastructure and service capacities.

**Policy 2:** Plan for Rural Residential - 1 surrounding urban area to enable future annexations and not make infrastructure extensions cost-prohibitive.

**Policy 3:** Plan for smaller rural residential lots in areas served by existing roads but unlikely to be served by public sewer and water to support more affordable rural development.

**Goal 2:** Plan a balanced approach to growth that supports economic growth and focuses on commercial and industrial development along existing infrastructure.

**Policy 1:** Drive development towards existing infrastructural and service capacities.

**Policy 2:** Encourage commercial development along arterial transportation corridors.

**Goal 3:** Maintain farming on higher-quality agricultural lands while allowing marginal agricultural land development that harmonizes with local character and existing uses.

**Policy 1:** Foster the use of quality agricultural land for agricultural uses where it is most suitable based on natural conditions and location.

**Resiliency Goal:** Protect water quality, minimize environmental impacts, and pursue land use opportunities that aid the county in achieving existing and strategic needs such as erosion control and other hazard mitigations.

**Policy 1:** Customize development intensity standards based on natural and water resources and community goals.

**Policy 2:** Encourage land uses that are likely to mitigate effects on the environmental impacts of surrounding properties.





# 4.0

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



## 4.0 Economic Development

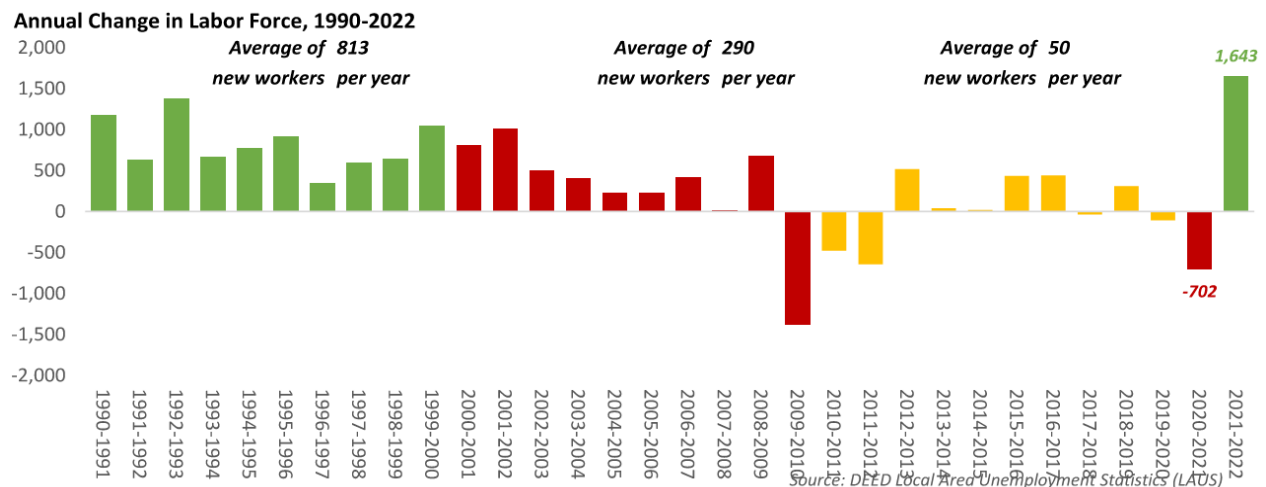
Understanding the community is critical to planning for future business requirements, barriers to economic development, and avenues for expansion. The following is a snapshot of Crow Wing County's current economic condition, shedding light on various businesses, amenities, structures, characteristics, and facets of the economy.

### Employment Demographics

In 2022, over half of the country's population is working age between 18 and 64. Crow Wing County had a lower labor force participation rate than the state average, and the labor force is less racially diverse than the state (where 82.6 percent of workers are white alone) but is becoming more diverse.

Labor force growth has slowed in recent years. From 2020 to 2021, employment in Crow Wing County grew from 30,800 to 30,900 employees (a growth rate of 0.08 percent). In 2022, the county had 33,477 available workers, of which 1,071, or 3.2 percent, were unemployed. Projections expect Crow Wing County to add workers from 2025 to 2035. Before the pandemic, the labor market had grown extremely tight in recent years, with less than one jobseeker per vacancy in early 2020. As a result of the pandemic, job vacancies in northwest Minnesota reached new highs in the 4th quarter of 2021, quickly bringing back challenges in finding new workers, and 2022 showed the lowest jobseeker-per-vacancy ratio on record.

Figure 3- 1 Annual Changes to Labor Force 1990-2022 (Source: DEED Local Area Unemployment Statistics)



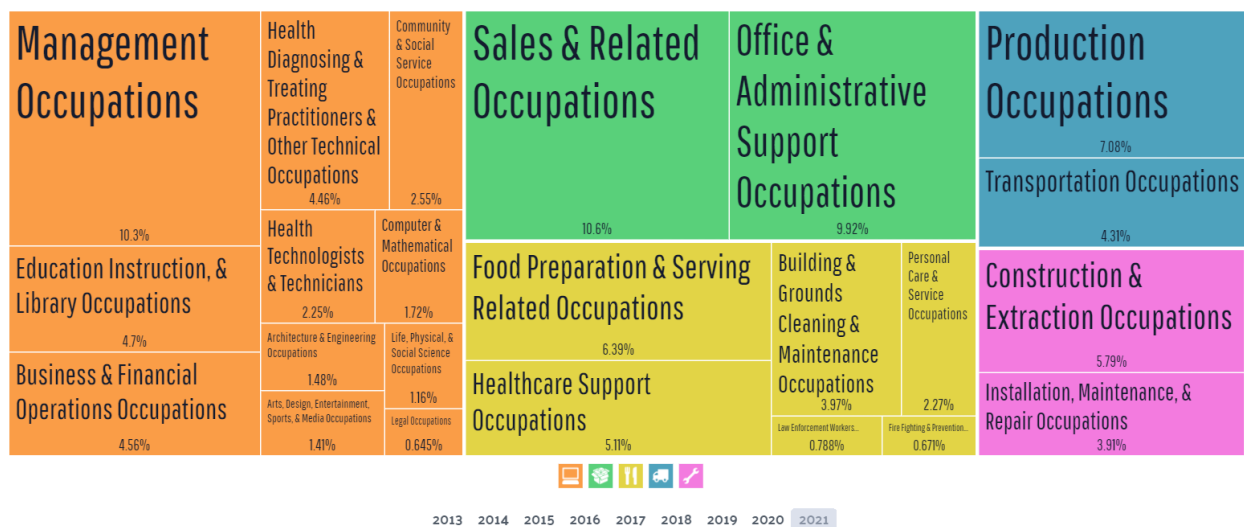
In 2020, most people in the county work somewhere within the county, with 16,900 people living and working in Crow Wing County and 11,100 Crow Wing Residents working outside the county. A larger percentage of workers in Crow Wing County worked in the same county where they live compared to the state. As a result, Crow Wing County residents had a shorter average commute time than the state, with around 50 percent commuting 5 to 20 minutes to work.

## Key Industries

Over half of the county's workforce are considered white-collar or professional workers. The most common job groups, by number of people living in Crow Wing County, are Sales & Related Occupations (3,272 people), Management Occupations (3,191 people), and Office & Administrative Support Occupations (3,060 people). The graphic below illustrates the breakdown of the primary jobs.

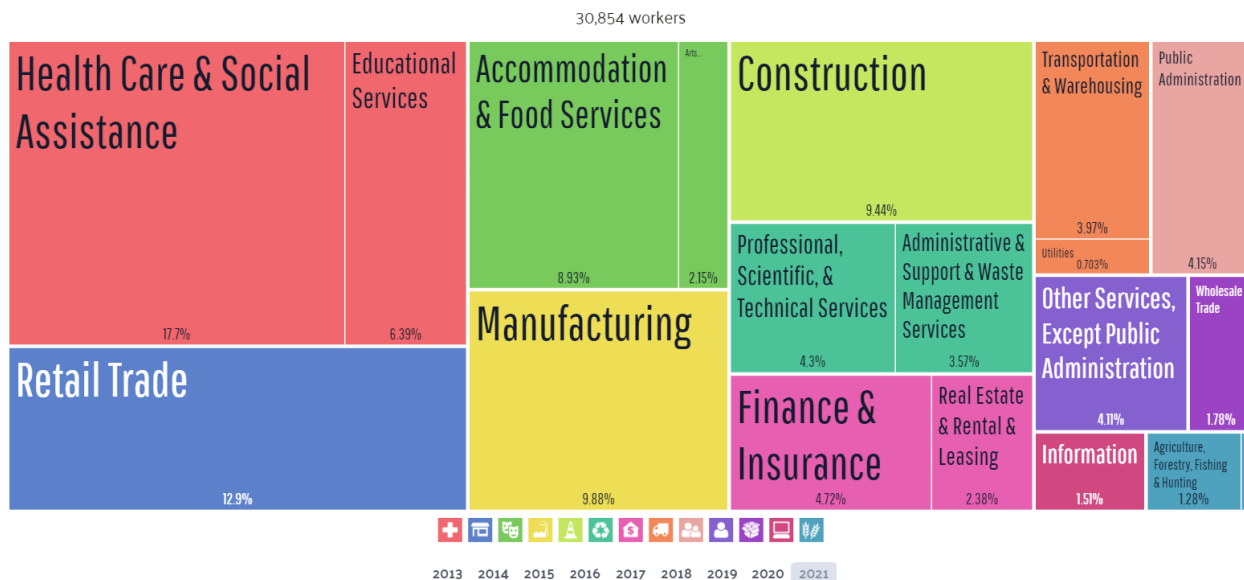


Figure 3- 2 Percentage of Jobs by Primary Categories (Source: Employment sectors: Data from the Census Bureau ACS 5-year Estimate.



The most common sectors for those who live in Crow Wing County are Health Care & Social Assistance (5,448 people), Retail Trade (3,983 people), and Manufacturing (3,049 people). The graphic below shows the primary industries in which Crow Wing County residents work, noting that residents may work outside of Crow Wing County. Census data corresponds to a residential address, not a work address.

Figure 3- 3 Key Employers and Percentage of Employees (Source: Employment sectors: Data from the Census Bureau ACS 5-year Estimate)

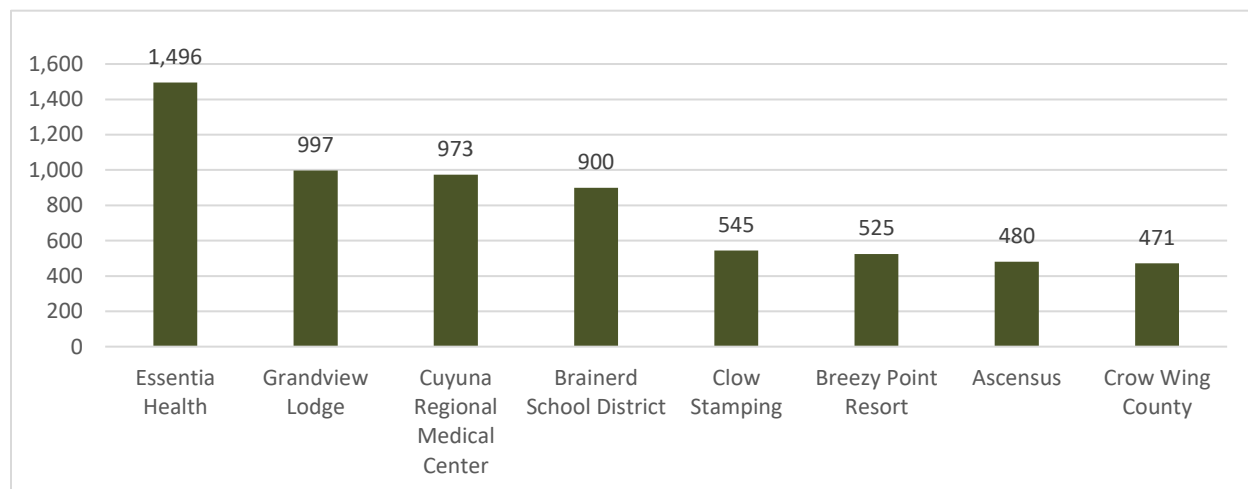


Based on the Census Bureau data, the following industries are key employers and economic drivers in Crow Wing County:

- **Healthcare and Social Assistance:** Healthcare services play a significant role in Crow Wing County's economy. Essential medical facilities and services are available for residents, workers, and visitors.
- **Tourism and Recreation:** Tourism is a major driver of the country's economy due to its picturesque lakes, forests, and recreational opportunities. The area's lakes, including Pelican Lake and Whitefish Lake, attract visitors year-round for boating, fishing, and winter sports. The Brainerd Lakes Area is a hub for resorts, restaurants, and outdoor adventure companies, contributing significantly to the local economy.
- **Manufacturing:** Crow Wing County has a diverse manufacturing sector that produces a range of goods, including machinery, electronics, and fabricated metal products. The industry provides stable employment opportunities for the local workforce.
- **Education and Healthcare:** Educational institutions, including Central Lakes College, provide employment opportunities and support workforce development. The healthcare sector also includes hospitals and clinics, contributing to the local economy and workforce development.
- **Retail and Hospitality:** The retail and hospitality sectors are linked to tourism, with shops, restaurants, and accommodations catering to visitors. These industries employ a sizable portion of the local workforce, especially during peak tourism seasons.

The following chart shows the number of employees for the top eight employers in Crow Wing County.

Table 3- 3 Top Employers in Crow Wing County



- **Essentia Health—Central Region:** This healthcare organization provides medical services to the residents of central Minnesota.
- **Cuyuna Regional Medical Center:** This healthcare organization provides medical services to the residents of the Cuyuna Range area.
- **Brainerd School District:** This public school serves the students of Brainerd and Baxter.
- **Grandview Lodge:** This resort offers lodging, dining, golf, a spa, and other recreational activities to visitors to the Brainerd Lakes area.
- **Breezy Point Resort:** This resort offers lodging, dining, golf, entertainment, and other recreational activities to visitors to the Brainerd Lakes area.
- **Ascensus:** This technology company provides retirement plan administration, recordkeeping, and compliance services to financial institutions and employers.
- **Clow Stamping:** This is a manufacturing company that produces metal stampings, fabrications, and assemblies for various industries, such as automotive, aerospace, and medical.
- **Crow Wing County:** This is the county government that provides public services to the residents of Crow Wing County, such as sheriff, attorney, community services, land services, public health, social services, and highway departments.

The tourism and recreation industries continue to thrive in Crow Wing County. Local businesses and organizations collaborate to promote the area's natural beauty and recreational opportunities, attracting tourists from across the state and beyond. Efforts to improve infrastructure, maintain the environment, and enhance visitor experiences are ongoing to sustain this vital economic sector.

In partnership with educational institutions like Central Lakes College, Crow Wing County has been actively engaged in workforce development efforts by implementing programs that provide skill development, vocational training, and apprenticeships, which meet the workforce needs of various industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, and tourism.



## **Economic Development and Land Use**

Crow Wing County's largest employment centers are the cities of Brainerd, Baxter, and Crosby-Ironton, but smaller cities such as Pequot Lakes, Breezy Point, Nisswa, and Deerwood also provide jobs. These cities share standard features such as downtown and industrial parks with existing infrastructure for commercial and industrial uses. Encouraging commercial and industrial growth and redevelopment in existing cities' downtowns and industrial parks presents a challenge to the county since cities have their planning and zoning outside the county's authority. The county only has land use authority over the townships that do not exercise their land use and zoning authority and do not have the infrastructure to support intensive commercial and industrial development. Consequently, commercial, and business-related land uses in these townships are small.

Crow Wing County derives revenue from commercial and industrial land use, regardless of whether they are situated within cities or rural townships. However, there is a notable disparity in costs associated with these two areas. Concentrating industries within cities equipped with existing infrastructure and local planning regulations and enforcement results in lower costs for the county. In contrast, when businesses are scattered throughout rural areas, industries place a higher financial burden on the county through infrastructure maintenance costs such as road repairs due to heavy truck traffic, curbs, and gutters to capture and direct runoff. Additionally, managing decentralized industries poses challenges for the county's planning office, particularly in providing adequate infrastructure, services, and enforcement. Further, industry and businesses are visually impacted by clearing forestland for development and parking lots.

The dispersion of industries in rural areas misses the advantages of clustering similar industries and the availability of industry-related services and infrastructure typically found in cities and urban industrial parks. Therefore, it is advisable to encourage centralization and grouping of industries to maximize economic and environmental benefits.

Trunk Highway 371, which bisects the Brainerd/Baxter regional job center and extends north to Pequot Lakes and Nisswa, has good business accessibility within the highway corridor. The same is true along Highway 169, Highway 210, and Highway 18. Increased accessibility raises the value of commercial and industrial development nodes, leading to greater investment in those areas. Strip development adds to the number of access points, which lowers travel speeds, reduces overall accessibility, increases accidents, and has a long-term stifling effect on economic development.

## **Real Estate**

Local commerce's resilience will depend on diversifying and reducing its reliance on a single industry. According to LandWatch, in early 2024, the county ranked fourth in Minnesota based on its combined acres of land for sale. In Crow Wing County, there were around \$163 million worth of farms, rural land, hunting land, and other land for sale, totaling 2,340 acres.

## **Cost of Living and Wages**

According to the State Demographer, Crow Wing County boasted a lower cost of living in 2021 than the State of Minnesota. A single person living independently can have a modest standard of living with an hourly wage of \$13.97. In contrast, a typical family consisting of two adults and one child required an hourly wage of \$16.15 to cover basic living expenses.

In 2023, wages in Region 5, which contains Crow Wing County, were lower than the state average, with an hourly wage of \$19.98. Region 5 recorded the lowest median hourly wage level among the state's thirteen economic development regions. Regarding specific occupations, management roles

commanded the highest wages at \$37.69 per hour, while jobs in food preparation and serving-related fields had the lowest wages at \$13.94 per hour.

ESRI income forecasts show that the largest income bracket will remain between \$100,000 and \$149,999, at 21.8 percent in 2028.

### **Spending Habits**

Based on the ESRI market analysis of 2023 data, the largest household expense will remain the cost of housing for both ownership and rental. Spending habits indicate business development, entrepreneurship, and job creation centered on vacation-related spending and homemaking (remodeling and decorating). Many Crow Wing County consumers prefer buying American and shopping based on pricing, not brands. More specifically:

- Convenience Stores: 67 percent of adults will shop at convenience stores.
- Restaurants: 53.5 percent will dine out
- Banking: 58.8 percent will conduct banking online
- Groceries:
  - 94.4 percent of households will buy bread.
  - 70.2 percent will buy chicken.
  - 88.2 percent of households will buy fresh fruit or vegetables.
  - 84.6 percent of households will buy milk.
  - 59.1 percent of households will buy fish or seafood.
- Home Improvement:
  - 43.4 percent of households will do home remodeling.
  - 30.1 percent of households will use professional cleaning and repair services.
- Pets: 71 percent of households own pets
- Consumer Behavior:
  - 16.2 percent of households will be interested in helping the environment.
  - 39.6 percent of households will prefer to buy American.
  - 27.7 percent of households will shop based on price, not brands.
  - 10.4 percent of households will spend more on environmentally safe products.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Environmental sustainability will continue to be a focus of the county. Initiatives related to clean water, conservation, and waste reduction will remain relevant. As tourism increases, it will be important to implement responsible and sustainable recreation with eco-friendly practices among tourists and local businesses to preserve the county's water quality and natural beauty. The future of Crow Wing County's deep-rooted tourism industry relies on maintaining the beautiful features that attract people. The plentiful game and fish stock, abundant clean lakes, and thick, lush forests make Crow Wing County an eco-tourist destination. Maintaining these features increases the region's value as an Up North destination for generations.

## Technology and Connectivity

Access to high-speed internet and digital infrastructure is increasingly important for rural areas. This will support the trend for remote work and the emerging trend towards non-traditional work hours and office settings. It will be important to continue to invest in increasing broadband speeds and capacity with fiber optic to support the *Internet of Things* emerging economy.

## Healthcare Access

Healthcare access and services can be a concern, especially for rural areas. Trends in healthcare delivery, telehealth, and the availability of medical facilities may need support. At the same time, the local market is undoubtedly health conscious, with 82.1 percent of households visiting a doctor and 66.9 percent using vitamins/supplements.

## Education

Trends in education, such as school enrollment, remote learning, and the availability of educational resources, can impact families and the community. The county has a higher nursery and preschool enrollment than the state, indicating the need for family-oriented goods and services. High School (grades 9-12) enrollment and attainment are also higher than the state average, indicating a young workforce and potential need for first jobs and early career jobs that ensure this cohort does not emigrate from the county.

## Tourism and Recreation

With its lakes and natural beauty, Crow Wing County will continue to be a popular destination for tourism and outdoor recreation. Embracing the emerging trends in experience-based recreation and shared-economy offerings can bring diverse benefits to the local community. Diversifying accommodation options and offering shared ownership of amenities like boat docks, fishing piers, or hiking trails can attract locals and tourists. The vast forests, lakes, and the Mississippi River sections in Crow Wing County make this region ideally suited to eco-tourism. By securing these large tracts of land for the public, Crow Wing County's investment will continue to pay off as tourists specifically hike, mountain bike, and camp in the area's pristine environments.

## Issues and Opportunities

**Trend 1: According to a survey in the fall of 2023, jobs and economic development are Crow Wing County residents' priorities.**

### Opportunities

- Assisting local businesses to expand, create jobs, and keep money cycling in the local economy.
- Fostering business retention in Crow Wing County by coordinating public and private sector programs and keeping jobs from leaving.
- Collaborating with other public agencies, employers, and other stakeholders to increase the impact and diversify strategies for economic development.

### Issues

- The imbalance between the cost of living and income impacts people's ability to find housing that meets their needs.
- Economic development efforts require coordination with housing development because, due to the housing shortage, the area cannot attract employees without housing to support job growth.
- Prioritizing new business growth risks weakening existing businesses, especially if too many of the same types of businesses enter the county's market.



**Trend 2: Collaborative efforts to support business growth through workforce retention and recruitment have broad support.**

Opportunities

- Streamlining development approvals and economic development programs for businesses increases the likelihood of success by making it more convenient and less risky for investors.
- Identifying and planning for business-related land uses in good infrastructure and road network areas.
- Focusing on retaining employees and area residents is a key business need due to the investment and costs of hiring and training new employees.
- Collaborating between stakeholders allows more creative ideas and resources for developing and implementing programs.
- A Fall 2023 public survey indicated that most people felt they had access to the goods and services they needed.

Issues

- Low employee retention may indicate issues in other areas, such as housing and childcare access.
- Recruiting new employees to the area must be paired with retaining those new residents and ensuring housing and other needs are met.
- Support of a program does not always translate into public utilization.

**Trend 3: Protection of quality agricultural land.**

Opportunities

- Balancing the county's economy includes maintaining existing businesses such as farms and agribusinesses.
- Maintaining the county's agricultural employment opportunities.
- Looking into agritourism opportunities to tie together the agricultural and tourism sectors, such as wineries, distilleries, or creameries.
- Developing low-quality agricultural land into housing developments.

Issues

- Unideal agricultural land is unused or does not produce profitable yields, and it could serve other purposes, such as solar farms, stormwater management, or other land uses.
- The cost of mitigating agricultural effects on the environment, such as erosion, and other sectors of the economy, such as tourism, needs to be balanced.

**Trend 4: Balance the seasonal tourism industry and other industries in the greater local economy.**

Opportunities

- Tourism injects a significant amount of cash into the local economy, and seasonal businesses have the potential to transition to year-round operations if they can sustain profitability from local demand.
- Catering to seasonal tourism traffic could bolster a reputation as a year-round destination rather than just a seasonal one by encouraging more winter recreation and programming.

### Issues

- Seasonal industries provide seasonal employment, which can contribute to economic hardship if it's the sole source of annual income or if migratory workers are only residents for part of the year.
- Service positions common to the tourist industry tend to be lower-paying jobs. These employees may have difficulty finding affordable housing and may not have opportunities for upward mobility.

### **Trend 5 Redevelopment can increase economic activity and address community character concerns.**

#### Opportunities

- Revitalizing properties serves as a land use and economic development strategy, generating business activity through construction services and providing opportunities for new establishments to enter the local economy once spaces are renovated.
- By aligning with the community's character and economic development goals, the county can embrace its up-north aesthetic and steer development and redevelopment efforts accordingly.
- Planning for land uses, design, and infrastructure that reflects the natural and outdoor environment.
- Enhancing blighted properties not only boosts customer traffic for surrounding businesses but also unlocks opportunities for increased commercial activity within these properties.

#### Issues

- Property owners may not choose to improve their property no matter what incentives are implemented.
- Economic development efforts may increase economic activity but not coincide with desired community character.

### **Goals and Policies**

**Goal 1:** Foster a diverse business environment focusing on growth in designated infrastructure-supported areas. Support business development that creates livable-wage jobs, enhances tourism, and improves residents' quality of life. Address blight to enhance community character and preserve quality of life.

**Policy 1:** Cultivate business development along strategically recognized commercial corridors and where supporting infrastructure currently exists.

**Policy 2:** Increase the support of local tourism, vacation-oriented business, and non-seasonal base economy.

**Policy 3:** Promote redevelopment of sites that detract from the community's character.

**Resiliency Goal:** Prepare and anticipate economic challenges and changes in local consumer behavior to position the county to seize current and future opportunities.

**Policy 1:** Attract and retain a range of employers who provide a diversified local economy and jobs with a livable wage.

# 5.0

## HOUSING



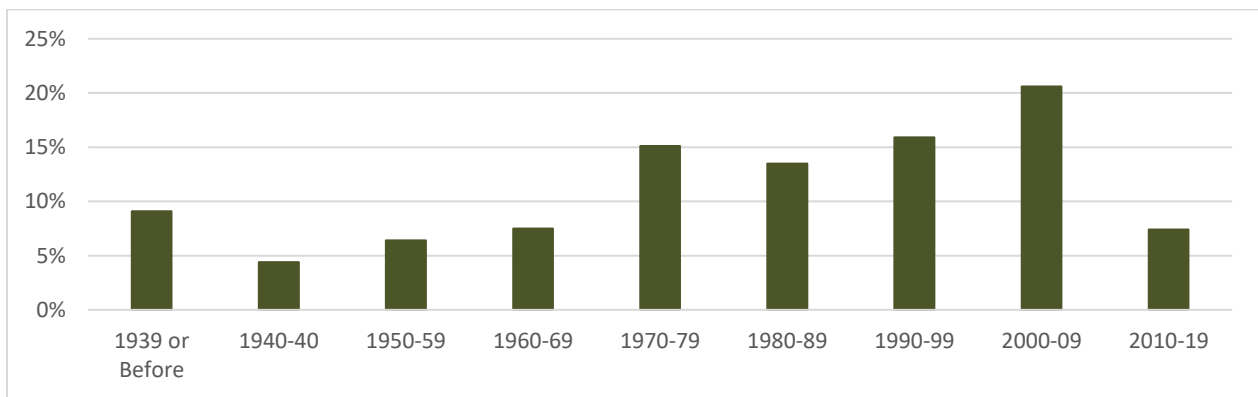
## 5.0 Housing

This chapter examines the existing residential housing inventory and forecasts housing requirements for the future. Crow Wing County has 41,568 housing units accommodating 27,539 households, with an average household size of 2.3 individuals. Crow Wing County has a diverse housing stock newer than the State of Minnesota's average. The seasonal nature of some residents increases the total number of homes and explains the noticeable difference between housing units and households with permanent residents of the county. The number of seasonal and vacation homes impacts non-seasonal residents in finding housing that meets their needs at their income level.

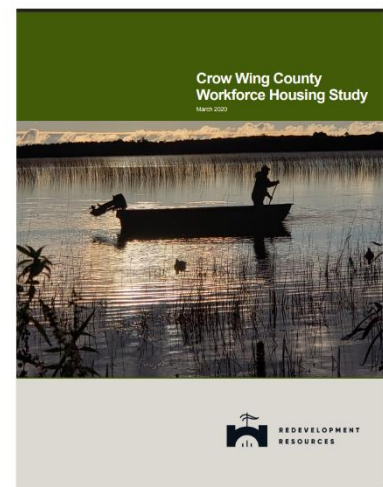
### Existing Conditions

Crow Wing County's housing stock is newer than the state average, but some are showing signs of aging. The median construction year is 1983.

Table 3- 4 Age of Housing Stock (Source: Esri, ACS. Esri forecasts for 2022, 2017-2021, 2027)



In 2022, 514 new residential building permits were issued county-wide, according to the US Census QuickFacts, which gathers data from local permitting offices. According to the 2020 Crow Wing County Housing Study, single-family homes dominate, making up 83 percent of the total residential units. The study also showed that about 35 percent of all homes in the county included three bedrooms, 30 percent had two bedrooms, and 16 percent had four-bedroom options, aligning with the median household size. The Crow Wing County 2020 Workforce Housing Study is available on the Brainerd Housing and Redevelopment Authority website at [www.brainerdhra.org](http://www.brainerdhra.org).

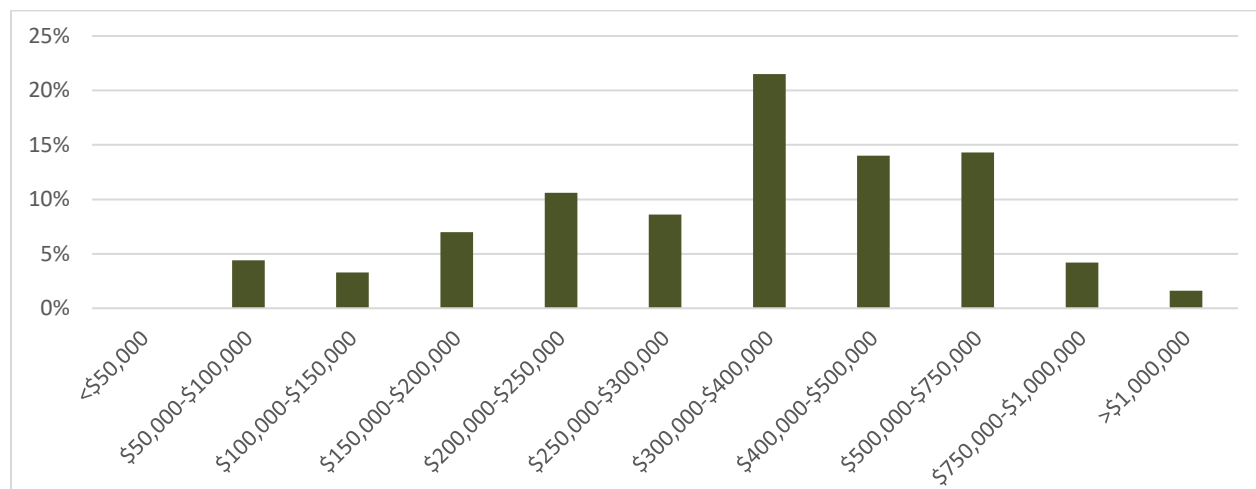




In contrast to single-family homes, the supply of multi-family homes is relatively modest. Most residents own their home, 77.9 percent, while 22.1 percent rent.

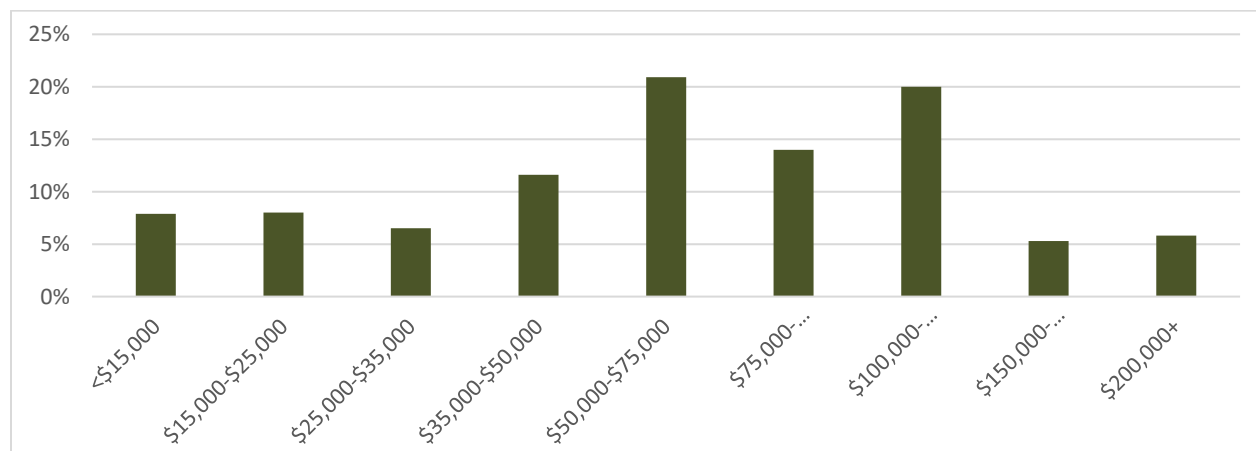
Data analysis indicates that 54 percent of renter households and 30 percent of homeowners in Crow Wing County experience housing cost burdens. Within middle-income households, 36 percent of renters and 50 percent of owners experience housing cost burdens. Detailed analysis reveals that 20 percent of rental households allocate 30 percent to 35 percent of their income to rent, 18 percent spend between 35 and 40 percent, and 12 percent allocate 40.0 percent or more to housing costs.

Table 3- 5 Home Value (Source: Esri, ACS. Esri forecasts for 2022, 2017-2021, 2027)



Crow Wing County has a lower median home value than the statewide average, ranking 22nd out of the 87 counties in 2021. The median home value is \$330,789, and the median gross rent is \$836. The median household income is \$66,568. The average household can afford a home price of up to \$247,000, assuming a 20 percent down payment and a 30-year fixed mortgage at a 7 percent interest rate. This assumes that monthly debts, taxes, insurance, and association fees are no more than 36 percent of the household's gross income. Given that the median home value is priced at \$330,789, there is an affordability gap; median household incomes would need to rise to at least \$98,000 to afford the median home values in Crow Wing County. In other words, the average household cannot afford to purchase the average home in Crow Wing County.

Table 3- 6 Household Income (Source: Esri, ACS. Esri forecasts for 2022, 2017-2021, 2027)



Median monthly expenses for owner-occupied dwellings in the county were lower than the state's average, amounting to \$1,383 versus \$1,682. However, nearly one-quarter of households in owner-

occupied housing are cost-burdened, defined as housing expenses consuming 30 percent or more of their income. This cost-burdening situation also applied to renters, who enjoyed comparatively lower rental costs in the county compared to the state—nevertheless, nearly 44.2 percent of households in rented housing experienced cost burdens. The areas with the highest number of cost-burdened renters are Brainerd (1,403) and Baxter (586), while the highest number of cost-burdened homeowners are found in south/southeast townships (945), northeast townships (579), Brainerd (528), and Baxter (300).

In early 2024, there were 415 homes on the market in Crow Wing County, according to Rocket Mortgages market report. The median home sale price is \$349,460 for a 1,793-square-foot home, equivalent to \$195 per square foot. The average home on the market is a 3.23-bedroom home. The cost of median sold homes has increased by 5 percent annually. For comparison, in early 2019, the average sales price was \$249,353 for a 1,898-square-foot home, equivalent to \$131 per square foot. These homes had an average of 2.7 bedrooms.

### **Housing Market Trends and Projections**

An increase in older demographics and an influx of younger visitors impact the housing types in demand. In 2022, 38 percent of the Crow Wing County population was aged 55 and over. For housing to be age-friendly and allow for aging in place, some features are commonly required:

- Zero-Step Entrances: Currently, only 53.8 percent of housing units in the county have entrances without steps.
- Multifamily and Assisted Living Options: These allow for privacy and community living, allowing these residents to live with dignity and still access the help they need.
- Single-level Dwellings: As people age, stairs between floors become a challenge and safety risk; single-level living is desired to maintain home mobility and usable space.

In 2023, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), in their livability index website, [www.livabilityindex.aarp.org](http://www.livabilityindex.aarp.org), gave Crow Wing County a 55/100 score for livability and a 57/100 score for housing. By 2035, those over age 55 will comprise 40 percent of the population. Access to medical care and support services near the home is key to age-friendliness because reliance on driving decreases. To meet the changing housing needs of an aging population, the county should consider land use policies that allow:

- Accessory Dwelling Units are secondary attached or detached living spaces on a property that allow for separate, independent living on one lot.
- Assisted Living Facilities are multifamily living spaces with services and care.
- Senior Apartments: These are Multifamily dwellings that are age-limited and may be financially supported by non-profit or government programs.
- Age-limited communities: These include condominiums and homeowners' associations but are limited to a specific age group.
- House Sharing: Becoming a landlord by renting out a portion of one's residence to offset the cost and upkeep of the property.

A third of Crow Wing County residents are between the ages of 15 and 44 and have their own housing needs. While this age cohort often does not require physical adaptation of their home, there are key needs for this demographic, such as:

- Starter homes and fixer-uppers meet the needs of this age group as they enter the housing market. They are looking for a lower price point and the ability to generate equity through home improvements.

- Larger homes are the move-up housing for this group as they start families, and their need for additional bedrooms and space increases. Their need for additional bedrooms and space will decrease as they age.
- Easy access to jobs and services is desirable for this age group; they want to live close to the workplace as this demographic does not want to spend considerable time and resources commuting to and from work.
- Access to high-speed broadband internet is key for this demographic as they spend a significant amount of their daily lives online, whether working from home, taking online courses, socializing, shopping, or other daily tasks.

Households are expected to increase in 2028 by 2.3 percent, from 28,623 to 29,308, while household size will decrease slightly from 2.31 to 2.29 persons. Given population and household growth, new housing is needed to meet future projections. The rate of new home construction is 82 percent of pre-pandemic activity, indicating that the county is slowly recovering from pre-pandemic permit activity and on an upward trend. When the local economy recovers to 100 percent of pre-pandemic conditions, it will need at least 5 percent more housing units than its current supply to meet needs in the immediate future (5 years)

In 2028, the median annual income for a Crow Wing County Household is projected to be \$74,063. This would allow the household to afford a home costing \$274,693, assuming a 20 percent down payment and a 30-year fixed mortgage at a 7 percent interest rate. This assumes that the household's monthly debts, taxes, insurance, and HOA fees are no more than 36 percent of their gross income.

The projected median home value for Crow Wing County in 2028 will be \$372,435, based on an average five-year inflation rate of 2.4 percent per year. A \$372,435 home is affordable to a household with an annual income of \$111,750, \$37,687 more than the forecasted median income. In 2028, 65 percent of the households in Crow Wing County are expected to have a household income below \$100,000. This means there is a disconnect between the average household income and home price. Without action to create more workforce housing options at a price affordable at the median income for Crow Wing County residents, this gap will get wider, which means it will be hard for workers and families to find housing that meets their needs at a price they can afford.

### **Recommendations**

To alter the course of current trends and projections in the Crow Wing County housing market, the county should consider the following options:

- Work with cities to encourage the construction of various housing types, sizes, and prices throughout the county, especially in areas served by urban infrastructure.
- Increase the density of existing residential land uses to facilitate growth.
- Allow alternative housing arrangements outside of shoreland areas, such as multiple homes per parcel, tiny homes, and other living spaces, to increase density in line with the community's character.
- Seek state and federal grants for housing development, especially to support veterans, seniors, and the workforce.
- Create land use and zoning districts that could support housing development at a density of one dwelling unit per acre.

### **Existing Plans**

#### **CWC Workforce Housing Study**

In March of 2020, Crow Wing County published its workforce housing study. This document highlighted the current housing market and its deficits based on projections for the next 15 years. The most

troubling current conditions were that 37 percent of households in Brainerd and Baxter are cost-burdened, and the problem is more significant for renters and owners in the middle-income group. When businesses were asked about the distance between their employee's homes and the workplace, most respondents indicated that less than 50 percent of their employees live within 10 minutes of their workplace, and 21 out of 48 indicated they have trouble attracting or retaining employees due to a lack of housing options. Some went as far as to note that there is no rental housing in our part of the county, no housing for the middle class, and insufficient low-income housing for lower-wage employees.

The inherent problem in these realities of the Crow Wing County housing market is how severe they will become in the next 15 years. Crow Wing County is expected to grow by 2,976 new households and 7,484 new residents. Based on recent employment growth and residential construction trends, the team estimates that Crow Wing County will need 4,800 new housing units over the next 15 years. This number does not include future demand for additional seasonal vacation homes. When the study was completed, Crow Wing County had a slight oversupply of housing units relative to employment but a clear undersupply of housing in the workforce affordability range. To meet long-range needs, Crow Wing County needs 3,510 housing units to relieve cost-burdened residents, with 1,493, or 43 percent, being affordable on average incomes in the workforce.

### **Issues and Opportunities**

#### **Trend 1 The public perceives that there is an overall housing shortage.**

##### Opportunities

- Planning for land uses and policies that support middle-income housing may free up the supply of workforce housing.
- Working with the municipalities to contribute more housing options, especially in areas served by infrastructure.
- Pooling resources and coordinating efforts with the cities and townships to promote housing growth.

##### Issues

- Helping the public understand the housing market economics and that more housing will not solve the shortage if workers can't afford it.

Planning for and developing senior and multi-family housing requires urban infrastructure to get to the necessary density and services to make them affordable and effective.

#### **Trend 2 Housing accessible to all ages and incomes is lacking.**

##### Opportunities

- Encouraging the development of senior housing options will allow seniors to move out of their single-family homes, freeing up housing for families and workers.
- According to the public survey, there is support for more senior housing development and public support for providing incentives.
- Increasing the housing stock to an affordable amount for the average household (\$274,693) will spur greater economic gains if the household's cost burdens are reduced.

##### Issues

- Senior and starter homes require denser development and efficient infrastructure to be profitable to private investors and developers.
- Proposed locations for these projects must be close to commercial nodes and workplaces; otherwise, this housing will require transportation.



•

**Trend 3 Homes used for short-term vacation rentals are not reducing the workforce housing stock but have a community-wide economic benefit due to tourism.**

Opportunities

- Short-term vacation rental homes may be seasonally used by the property owners and also rented to others to offset the ownership and maintenance costs.
- Local ownership of short-term rentals as a business, not as a subsidy for owning a recreational property, injects cash into the local economy as profits stay local and service jobs are created.
- Workforce housing and the typical short-term rental exist at different price points in the market and do not conflict or affect each other's prices.

Issues

- Non-workforce housing costs can be affected and increased by properties bought solely for short-term rental purposes.
- Corporate ownership and investment in short-term rentals drain the economic benefit of these facets of the tourism industry from the county.
- Non-local ownership and management reduces integration with surrounding neighborhoods and can lead to problematic occupants.

**Trend 4 Housing that is economically attainable for the average Crow Wing County worker is missing, hindering economic development and workforce growth.**

Opportunities

- Improving housing options for people of all incomes and abilities makes the county more likely to grow as people move closer to employment.
- Seeking work in an area becomes more desirable when people can afford to live where they work, attracting higher-quality employees.
- Collaborating with local employers to raise local wages would make owning a home more attainable.

Issues

- Increasing the supply of workforce housing may make it more attainable, but the cost of land and construction and demand may still result in pricing that results in a shortage of housing that is not cost-burdening.
- Monitoring workforce and housing growth is key to avoiding an imbalance that results in a surplus of either and could negatively impact the local economy.
- Getting workers housing closer to areas of commercial activity may require density that is not consistent with rural character or feasible in areas not served by infrastructure.

**Trend 5 Maintain the existing housing stock.**

Opportunities

- Consider collaborating with partners to develop programs that can aid homeowners in maintaining or renovating existing housing stock to address housing needs.
- Conversion projects and redevelopment are more cost-effective, stretching investments further than new developments.
- Promoting private investment that addresses the housing needs by providing development benefits.

## Issues

- Existing housing stock supporting the workforce needs relies on county residents who can afford higher quality housing moving up and out.
- Limited public support for government incentives and programs for housing projects.

## **Goals and Policies**

**Goal 1:** Plan for residential development that meets the needs of residents of all ages and income levels, focusing on an aging population and moderately priced housing for area workers. Balance interests between short-term rentals and long-term housing needs. Support the development of housing that balances natural resources, creates a sense of community, and connects to recreational amenities and open space.

**Policy 1:** Promote policies and development that make housing more attainable for all income levels and abilities, especially workers, seniors, and first-time homebuyers.

**Policy 2:** Pursue development opportunities that provide for all stages of life and are accessible to all residents.

**Policy 3:** Encourage mixed-use development to create neighborhoods and communities around existing and new housing.

**Policy 4:** Prioritize housing development in harmony with the natural and recreational resources in Crow Wing County.

**Policy 5:** Balance the development of short-term rentals with the community's long-term need for permanent housing options.

**Resiliency Goal:** Prepare for projected changes in the county population, workforce, and housing market by seeking opportunities to develop adaptable housing that meets changing needs.

**Policy 1:** Encourage developments that meet the housing needs of a range of age groups, such as the number of bedrooms, stories, or levels, to avoid having one housing type that is not easily adapted to different needs.



# 6.0

## RECREATION

## 6.0 Recreation

Crow Wing County has a robust park, trails, and public lands network that form a significant asset for the county's residents, businesses, and visitors. Each of these resources provides the opportunity for people to connect with nature. This diverse selection of parks, trails, and public land attracts tourists from all over the state and region to Crow Wing County for recreational needs.

### Existing Conditions

#### Recreational Resources

The Land Services Department of Crow Wing County manages approximately 105,000 acres of tax-forfeited lands distributed across the region. These lands reflect the county's location in Minnesota's ecological transition zone. Crow Wing County's forested land has good agricultural qualities and thus receives consistent demand for private land ownership.

Crow Wing County has some federal or state-owned forestland. However, tax-forfeited land is the main form of public ownership. Some involve shared ownership with private parties, posing management and development challenges.

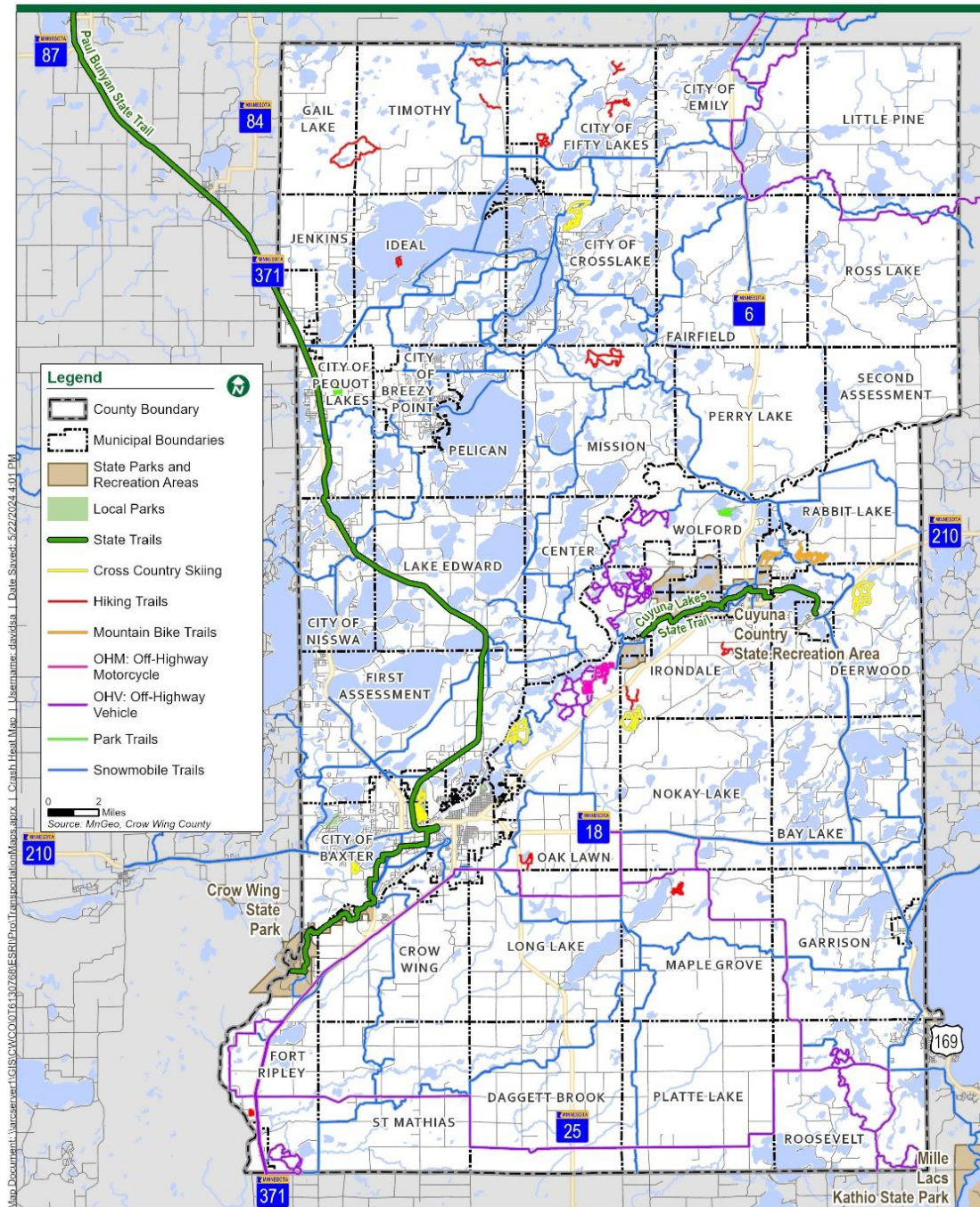
#### Parks

In addition to six county parks, Crow Wing County hosts 46 various city, township, and state-operated parks. Though not managed by the county, cooperation can aid in potential county park expansion and highlight additional recreational options. Below are descriptions of Crow Wing County-operated parks, including specific amenities, infrastructure, and maintenance plans:

- **Paul M. Thiede Fire Tower Park:** This park features a historic fire tower open to the public for climbing, along with more than three miles of walking trails with interpretive signage. The property, including the tower, was acquired by Crow Wing County in 2018 from the MN DNR to preserve and protect the tower while allowing public use. The tower, built in 1935, is in excellent condition. The park offers a vaulted restroom and picnic shelter at 5230 County Road 11, Pequot Lakes, MN. Maintenance is conducted by county staff every week, and the park's infrastructure has a 10-year replacement plan.
- **South Long Lake Park:** Situated along the southwest Nokasippi outlet of South Long Lake, this park provides a peaceful area for relaxation, shore fishing, a canoe and kayak launch, and a covered picnic pavilion. Donated to Crow Wing County by various individuals, the park features picnic tables, BBQ grills, a fishing pier, and a vaulted restroom. The park, located in Brainerd at 13694 County Road 22, is maintained by county staff weekly. Infrastructure is outlined with a 10-year replacement plan.
- **Milford Mine Memorial Park:** This park commemorates the tragic 1924 mining disaster in which 41 miners lost their lives due to a mine shaft collapse. The park is located at the disaster site on Milford Lake Dr., Crosby. It is maintained by county staff, and the infrastructure is outlined with a 10-year replacement plan. An expansion plan in place for this park is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2024. It includes the addition of new trails and other amenities.
- **Rollie Johnson Natural & Recreational Area (Big Island Park):** Managed by a Joint Powers Board, this area includes Big Island, Steamboat Island, and Little Island in Upper Whitefish Lake. Twelve camping sites are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and volunteers monitor and maintain the area. Firewood is provided, and camping is limited to designated sites. Crow Wing County manages the signage, and no significant improvements are planned.
- **Rush Lake Island Park:** Accessible only by watercraft, Rush Lake Island offers tranquility, a hiking trail, and scenic beauty. There is minimal infrastructure, and currently, Crow Wing County manages the signage.



- Little Emily Lake Park:** This park is an addition to the county's park system and is scheduled to be completed by spring 2025. It will feature over 3 miles of non-motorized walking trails and scenic overlooks. Additionally, the lakefront will feature a fishing pier, swimming beach, and canoe/kayak launch. A vaulted toilet, playground, and picnic pavilion will make this project a park with amenities for people of all ages and abilities.



## State Parks

- **Crow Wing State Park:** This state park is located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Crow Wing Rivers. It interprets the site of Old Crow Wing, one of the most populous towns in Minnesota in the 1850s and 1860s. The park features a variety of habitats, such as pine forests, hardwood forests, wetlands, and prairies. It also offers hiking, camping, fishing, boating, and wildlife viewing opportunities. An extensive expansion is happening, and completion is scheduled for the summer of 2024.

## Public Water Access Sites and Water Trails

Crow Wing County manages 14 public water access points. These locations differ in purpose, structure, parking, and type. Presently, six public water accesses feature docks and concrete planks, five of which have concrete planks only, and the remaining three are basic entries for small watercraft. All access points adhere to the County Park/Access Maintenance Policy, with regular upkeep, including weekly garbage collection, weed trimming, and dock leveling during the peak season.

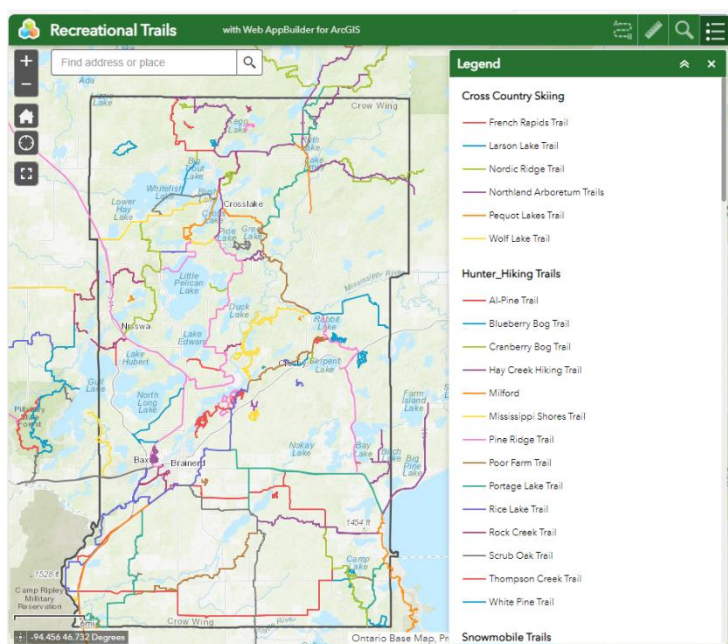
- Access sites with docks and planks include Jones Bay, Gilbert Lake, Red Sand Lake, Sebie Lake, Little Rabbit, and Black Lake.
- Access sites with planks only include Fawn Lake, Mississippi River, French Rapids, and Rowe Mine Lake.
- Small craft primitive access sites include Butternut, Loon, and Wolf lakes.

The entire length of the Mississippi River within Crow Wing County is designated as a water trail; there are access points located throughout the county. The Mississippi Headwaters Board is actively promoting this aspect of the river to increase recreational use and appreciation of this natural water body in the county.

## Recreation Trails

Tax-forfeited lands within and managed by the county offer a range of recreational trails. These trails include hiking, biking, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, off-highway motorcycles (OHMs), all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), equestrian trails, and canoe routes. The table below shows the total combined length of the trail for each type and identifies examples of those trails managed/sponsored by the county.

Check out Crow Wing County's [cwccm.maps.arcgis.com](http://cwccm.maps.arcgis.com).



**Table 1. Recreation Trails managed by Crow Wing County**

Trail Type	Examples	Combined Trail Length (miles)
<b>Non-Motorized Trails – Summer</b>	Rice Lake Trail Mississippi Shores Trail Portage Lake Trail	<b>31.7</b>
<b>Non-Motorized Trails – Winter</b>	French Rapids Trail Area Nordic Ridge Trail	<b>42.8</b>
<b>Motorized Trails – Summer</b>	Fort Ripley Trail Miller Hills Trail Mississippi River Northwoods Trail	<b>227.0</b>
<b>Motorized Trails – Winter</b>	Brainerd Snodeos Snowmobile Club Merrifield Marathons Snowmobile Club Fort Ripley North Country Trail Busters	<b>833.7</b>
<b>Water Trails</b>	Pine River Canoe Route (Crosslake to Mississippi River) Mississippi River East (Cass Co. – Pine River) Mississippi River Brainerd (French Rapids-SW Baxter)	<b>82.0</b>

In 2022, Crow Wing County underwent extensive planning and prepared the Crow Wing County Recreational Use Plan. This plan reflects a dynamic blend of natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and community health. The county's commitment to maintaining and enhancing its public spaces has resulted in diverse parks offering unique amenities and experiences. With a strategic focus on preserving ecological balance and promoting sustainable growth, Crow Wing County has attempted to integrate recreational trails and facilities into its scenic terrain. As the county continues to evolve, its dedication to fostering outdoor enjoyment, conservation, and collaboration is a testament to its vibrant present and promising future.

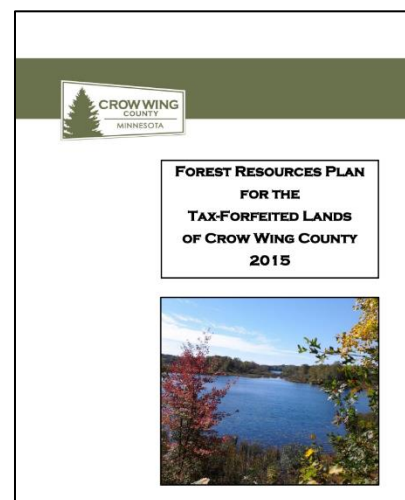
### Existing plans

#### 2015 Forest Resources Plan

The 2015 Forest Resources Plan established policies and priorities for how Crow Wing County will manage its forests. Among these policies was a statement of how the management of lands in the Mississippi Headwaters corridor would be conducted. The Forest Resources Plan outlines how the county manages tax-forfeited lands, which impacts public roads, land uses, shoreland alterations, forestry, extractive uses, and public land ownership. The county capped the quantity of harvestable forestland and timberland and prioritized creating “natural resource emphasis areas” to minimize future land use conflicts.

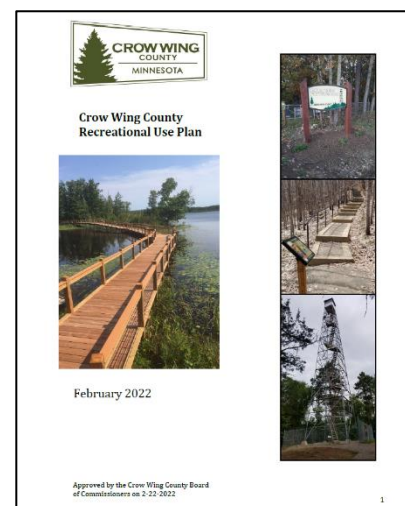


This plan also recognized a need to balance the pressures of growth in these areas with scenic amenities with the protection of the amenities themselves. The county has categorized the forests on its lands into 18 different Native Plant Communities. These classifications were used to assess the forests adopting management strategies based on a High-Value Conservation Forests (HCVF's) designation, of which five sites were designated, specifically one old-growth forest, three future old-growth forests, and the Red-Shouldered Hawk Habitat Area. Additionally, the county focuses on habitat management through its forestry plan, which includes cooperative agreements with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to aid in administering these objectives. The overarching goal of this plan is to balance the welfare of the environment as a public resource with economic use that avoids damaging key locations. The Crow Wing County Forest Resources Plan 2015 is available on the County's website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).



## 2022 Recreational Use Plan

The 2022 Recreational Use Plan is Crow Wing County's effort to guide the strategic development of its public recreation facilities. During the planning process, the decision was made to steer away from new land acquisitions for recreational purposes and focus on a ten-year maintenance schedule for the existing recreational infrastructure. This also functioned as an inventory of the county's recreational infrastructure. Based on the public appetite for greater quantity and quality parks, trails, and public lands, Crow Wing County will undergo a strategic planning process for its parks and trails system in 2024. The full Crow Wing County Recreational Use Plan 2022 is available on the county's website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).



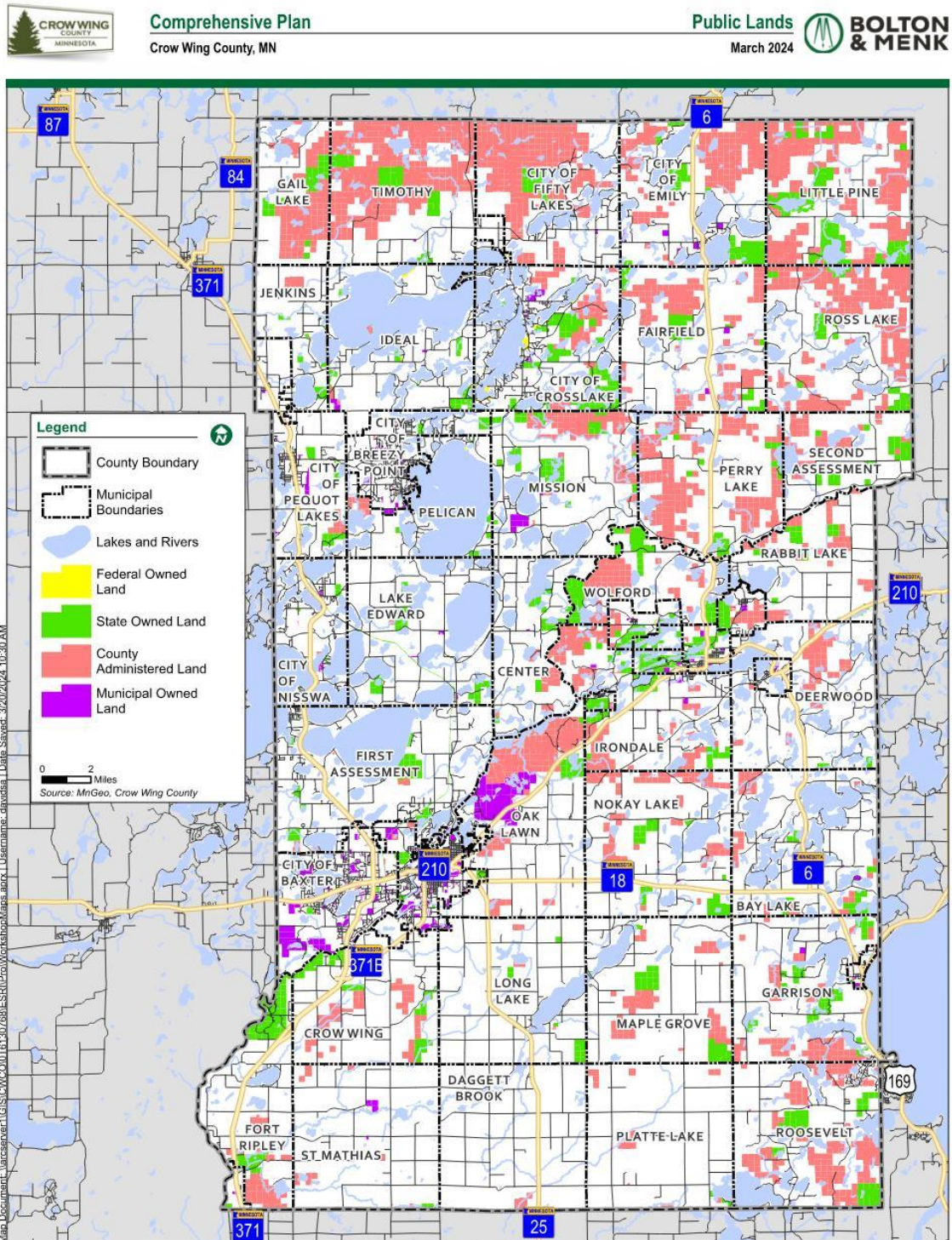
## Future Trails

The Crow Wing County Recreational Use Plan identifies potential trails that would increase connections in the existing trail network or provide trails in areas currently not served. The list below was identified in the 2022 Recreational Use Plan and reflected on the following map.

1. Linkage between the Pine Center Trail County lands and Soo Line Trail in Morrison
2. County to connect to regional ATV trail system
3. Linkage between the Fort Ripley Trail and Camp Ripley Veterans Trail
4. Snowmobile Bridge spanning the Mississippi River completing the Half Moon Landing Spur
5. Bike Trails in the City of Crosslake near the Nordic Ridge Trail
6. Development of a snowmobile use only trail in Section 31 & 32 City of Cuyuna
7. Connection from the City of Fifty Lakes to the Emily/Outing System
8. Connection from Miller Black Bear to the Mississippi River Northwoods
9. Connection from Miller Black Bear to the Emily/Outing System
10. Connection of the Miller Black Bear to the southern loop of the Blind Lake Connector in Aitkin County
11. Connection of the Miller Black Bear to the City of Crosby, Ironton, Cuyuna and area DNR ATV Trails
12. Connection from the Mississippi River Northwoods to the City of Brainerd



13. Connection for the Mississippi River Northwoods to the Southern Loop
14. Connection between Emily/Outing ATV Trails and Spider Lake ATV Trails including ATV Trail loops in Northern Crow Wing County
15. Connection between Emily/Outing ATV Trails, future trail loops



## Issues and Opportunities

### **Trend 1: Increased need and demand for existing facility improvements and maintenance.**

#### Opportunities

- Increased satisfaction with facilities will generate a return on investment through recreational and tourism gains.
- Investments in facility improvement support more diverse programming implementations.
- Improvements and maintenance increases can create greater public engagement in supporting these assets.

#### Issues

- Facility improvements require increased capital for construction and maintenance.
- Ensuring equitable allocation of resources and public access to in-demand amenities.
- Balancing opportunity cost between allocating capital for improvements that may shortchange improvements or acquisition of new recreational areas, open spaces, or parks.

### **Trend 2: There is an increased need for recreational vehicles, such as ATVs and snowmobiles, as well as trail connectivity and safety.**

#### Opportunities

- Investment in the county trail system will increase usage and tourism revenue.
- Address existing safety concerns with junctions between trails and roadways.
- Tie trail and sidewalk improvement projects to planned roadway improvement projects to increase connectivity throughout the community.

#### Issues

- Working with stakeholders to secure right-of-way to accommodate necessary trail connections.
- Maintenance practices and construction costs associated with an increased trail system.
- Reducing conflict points between recreational and non-recreational vehicles at major roadway crossings.

### **Trend 3: Enhancing connectivity between park and trail exits and their surrounding community.**

#### Opportunities

- More integration of communities and recreational resources benefits local economies through increased customer access.
- Improves the tourist experience by opening access to non-park amenities from the recreational infrastructure.
- Allows for easier access for local users to access the resources.

#### Issues

- Increases the intensity of maintenance needed at entry and exit points.
- Does not account for the capacity of communities where users request access from trails.
- Poses safety concerns at access points.

#### **Trend 4: Public awareness that Crow Wing County's recreational assets attract tourists and visitors.**

##### Opportunities

- Allows for a greater client base and higher quality areas than the capacity solely based on local utilization.
- Increases the diversity of clientele that are accessing parks and trails as well as their programming needs.
- Utilization fees offset the tax burden for local communities.

##### Issues

- People who do not have a connection to the resource may abuse, overuse, or damage the facilities.
- Maintenance standard expectations will be greater than those of local users.
- Diverse program, desires may be greater in scope than can be provided locally.

##### **Goals and Policies**

**Goal 1:** Maintain and enhance parks, recreation, and natural resources in Crow Wing County to enhance community well-being by providing diverse park amenities, improving trail connections and safety, and preserving the environment. Ensure accessible and high-quality recreational opportunities for residents while preserving the county's natural areas and open spaces.

**Policy 1:** Provide public access to recreational opportunities that meet the diverse needs of the growing community.

**Policy 2:** Balance the need for recreational amenities with environmental concerns for the county's natural areas.

**Policy 3:** Seek opportunities to increase the connectivity and safety of trail systems in the county.

**Policy 4:** Direct resources to key parks and public lands where the opportunity for strategically placed amenities enhances community wellbeing.

##### **Resiliency Goal:**

Balance the development of new recreational opportunities with the county's current maintenance capacity and manage to avoid overuse.

**Policy 1:** Anticipate challenges and be prepared to adapt recreational systems as trends change and issues arise.

**Policy 2:** Use the county's CIP and capital planning process to budget first for maintenance and second for expansion in new recreational facilities.





# 7.0

## **TRANSPORTATION**



## 7.0 Transportation

Crow Wing County's transportation network facilitates mobility by connecting residents, employees, and visitors with places to live, work, recreate, and play. Transportation networks have traditionally been designed and understood through the lens of origins and destinations; however, the *quality* and *experience* of using a transportation network means as much as the destination. Ease and safety of travel, regardless of mode, plays a significant role in the overall success of county mobility. As such, Crow Wing County is committed to working with local stakeholders and the Minnesota Department of Transportation to ensure the continued pursuit of an exceptional, multi-modal transportation system. The transportation chapter of the plan examines the future transportation needs for all modes of travel and people of all ages and abilities within Crow Wing County.

Crow Wing County is served by several key highways, such as Trunk Highways (TH) 371, 210, 6, 25, 18, and 169, and various county and township roads. Traffic has steadily increased over the past few decades, especially around Baxter and Brainerd, as the area continues to be a vacation and resort area. Cooperation among cities and townships is crucial for regional transportation planning that aligns with land use. While population and tourism are growing, protecting the county's natural setting, and improving the transportation network must be carefully balanced for sustainable development. The fluctuations with seasonal residents and tourists unfamiliar with the area result in challenges with safety and congestion.

### Functional Classification

The functional classification system describes each road's role in the community. A road's role and functions guide design features such as street widths, speed limits, and intersection control. Crow Wing County has several roadway functional classifications in and around its communities that carry cars, commercial traffic, and freight (trucks and semis). These classifications are summarized as follows:

#### Arterials

Arterials are designated as Principal or Minor; they are roads that provide mobility across regional communities. The County's Highway Department works closely with MnDOT to plan and design improvements associated with these arterials. For example, Crow Wing County staff are participating in the TH 371 Nisswa to Baxter Corridor Study, TH 210 study, and design of a proposed grade-separated intersection of TH 371 over the freight rail tracks and TH 210.

Several Principal Arterials in Crow Wing County are owned and maintained by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, including principal arterials TH 371 and TH 210 and minor arterials TH 25, TH 18, and TH 6. There are five Minor Arterials that Crow Wing County owns and maintains, including:

- CSAH 48 between Brainerd and Baxter. This road transitions into a collector near the city limit between the two municipalities
- CSAH 3 from the Intersection of Highway 210 in Brainerd, north to Crosslake, where it connects to CSAH 66
- CSAH 12 runs east and west from the intersection with Highway 210 in Crosby to Deerwood
- CSAH 66 runs north and south from Crosslake to Fifty Lakes
- CSAH 1 running east and west from Emily to Fifty Lakes

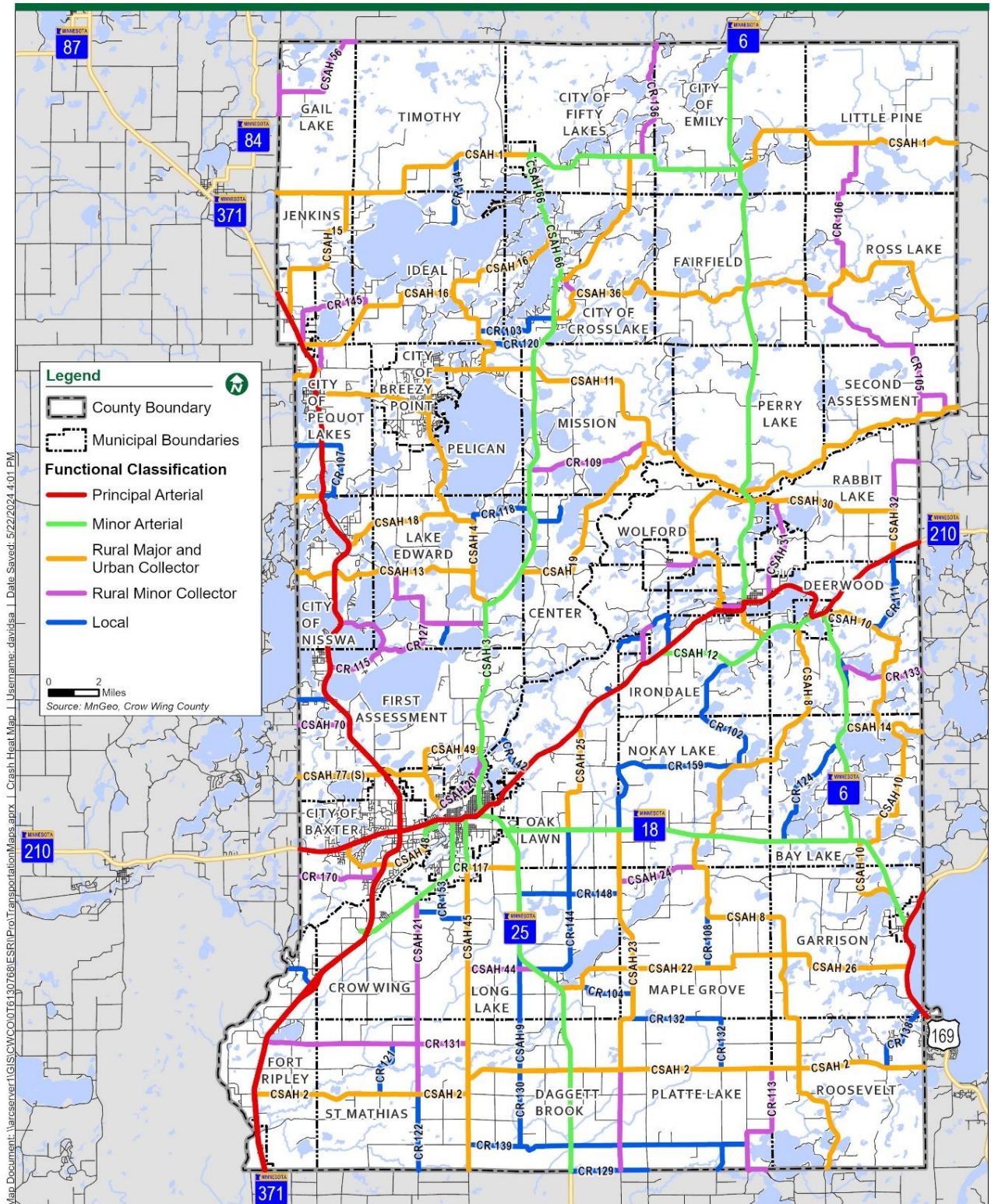


## Comprehensive Plan

Crow Wing County, MN

## Functional Classification

May 2024



## **Collectors**

Collectors are designated as either Major or Minor and balance the mobility across a community. They generally serve trips through a community and connect neighborhoods and business districts. Collector roadways that Crow Wing County owns and maintains include the following:

- Rural and Urban Major Collector Examples: CSAH 2, CSAH 45, and CSAH 23
- Rural Minor Collector Examples: CR 170, CR 115, and 127

## **Local Roads**

All other remaining roadways are classified as Local Roads. Their primary function is to serve local and residential traffic and convey it to collectors and arterials. Residential neighborhoods are most often served via the Local Road classification. Generally, these roadways are under the local municipalities' jurisdiction since they have low traffic volumes and mainly serve local traffic. However, Crow Wing County has jurisdiction over several examples of Local Roads, such as CR 159 and CR 102.

## **Bridges**

Crow Wing County is responsible for inspecting 85 bridges. The state requires the county to adopt a resolution identifying bridges eligible for state bridge bonding or other bridge funding and those considered a priority to replace, rehabilitate, or remove within the next five years. The county board approved the latest bridge priority list in April 2024. It includes four township bridges and eight on the County Highway Road System. The list is not in order of priority and is updated every year.

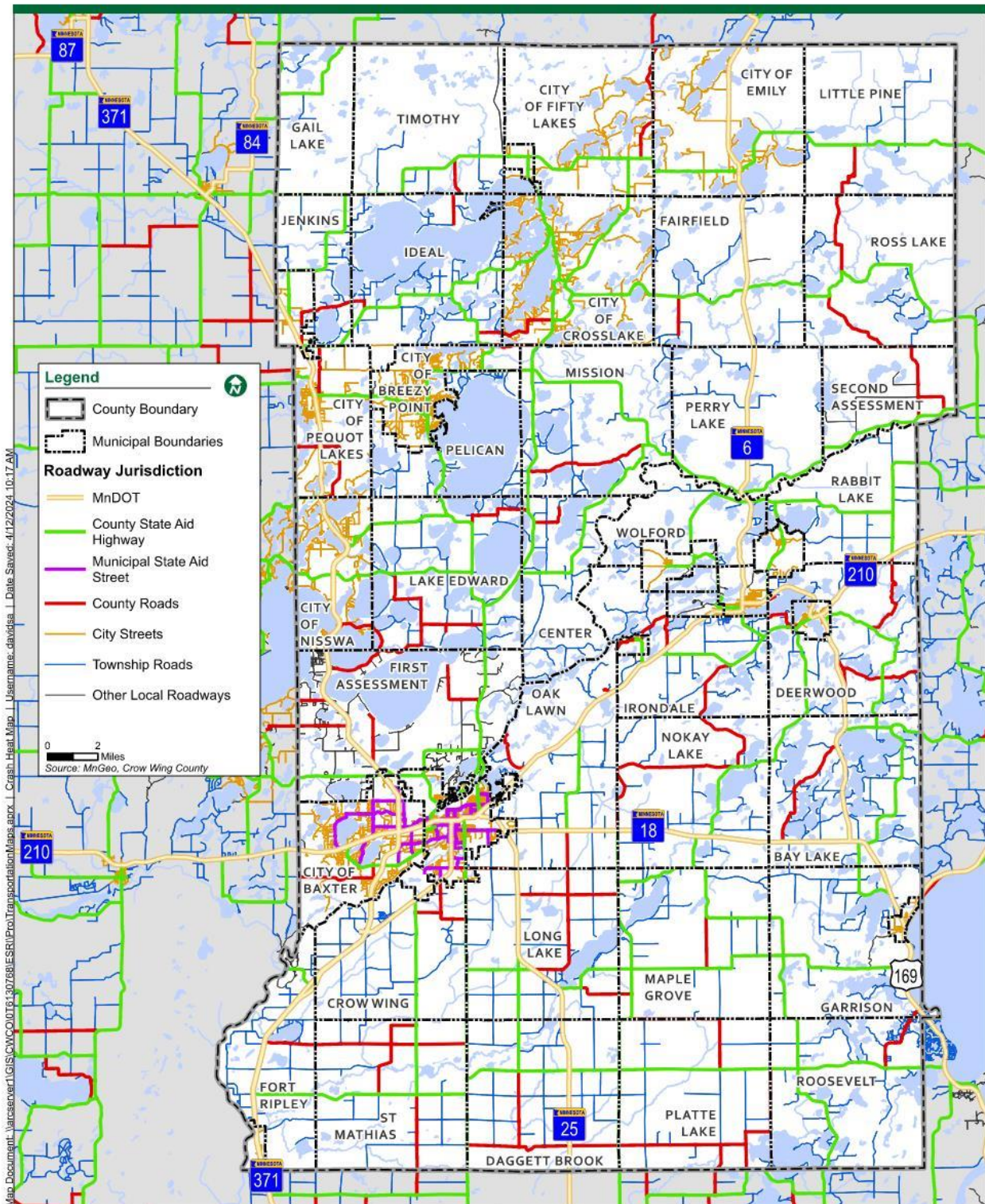
## **Jurisdiction**

The Minnesota Department of Transportation owns and maintains State Highways such as 371, 210, 25, 18, and 6. Crow Wing County owns and maintains over 640 miles of roads, including most of the Collector Roads and a few Local Roads, which the Local Option Sales Tax and tax levy fund. The county-owned road network consists of two main categories:

- County State Aid Highways (CSAH), covering around 380 miles.
- County Roads (CR) totaling approximately 180 miles.

CSAHs are designated with one- or two-digit numbers, such as CSAH 1 connecting Pine River and Emily. At the same time, CRs are identified by three-digit numbers, like CR 142 near the County Highway Department complex.







## Local Option Sales Tax

In 2015, Crow Wing County adopted a half-cent Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) to fund transportation improvements to CR or CSAH in the county. At the same time, they passed a property tax reduction to be phased in during 2017 to offset the Local Option Sales Tax (LOST implementation). The LOST is optional, up to 0.5% of all eligible sales within the county, and is used to fund capital outlay projects proposed by the county government and participating qualified municipal governments. In 2021, this sales tax was extended through 2040 to continue funding transportation-related projects in the county. The estimated revenue from the LOST was projected to generate \$25 million over five years. However, it produced \$40 million. The LOST was intended to help address the county's transportation needs, such as maintaining and improving county roads and bridges, without relying solely on property taxes or state aid. The LOST was supported by a study by the University of Minnesota Extension, which estimated that about 51 percent of the sales tax proceeds would be paid by non-residents, such as seasonal residents, visitors, and travelers. The county board approved the LOST after a public hearing and a resolution identifying the eligible transportation projects and their costs. The list of projects included improvements to County State Aid Highways (CSAH) and County Roads (CR) in various locations. State Statute 297A.993 stipulates that revenue generated from this tax is to be dedicated to funding specific transportation-related projects and that the tax must terminate at sunset or when all the identified projects are funded, whichever occurs first.

In addition to LOST, the county uses other revenue sources, such as state gas tax and, on average, \$1.5 million in federal grants, to fund County Road and State-Aid Highway improvements.

## Assessment Districts

The Crow Wing County Highway Department is also responsible for constructing and maintaining approximately 60 miles of township-level roads, primarily in unorganized territories within the First and Second Assessment Districts, where the county serves as the road authority when there is no organized Township Board. The County Highway Improvement Plan includes planned road enhancements in these areas. These areas in Crow Wing County have different road standards and maintenance levels than the rest. The funding source for FAD (First Assessment District) and SAD (Second Assessment District) road improvement is only for township-level roads funded by the Township Level Road & Bridge Levy. These are separate from those that fund CR and CSAH improvements. More information about the FAD and SAD is available on the county's website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).

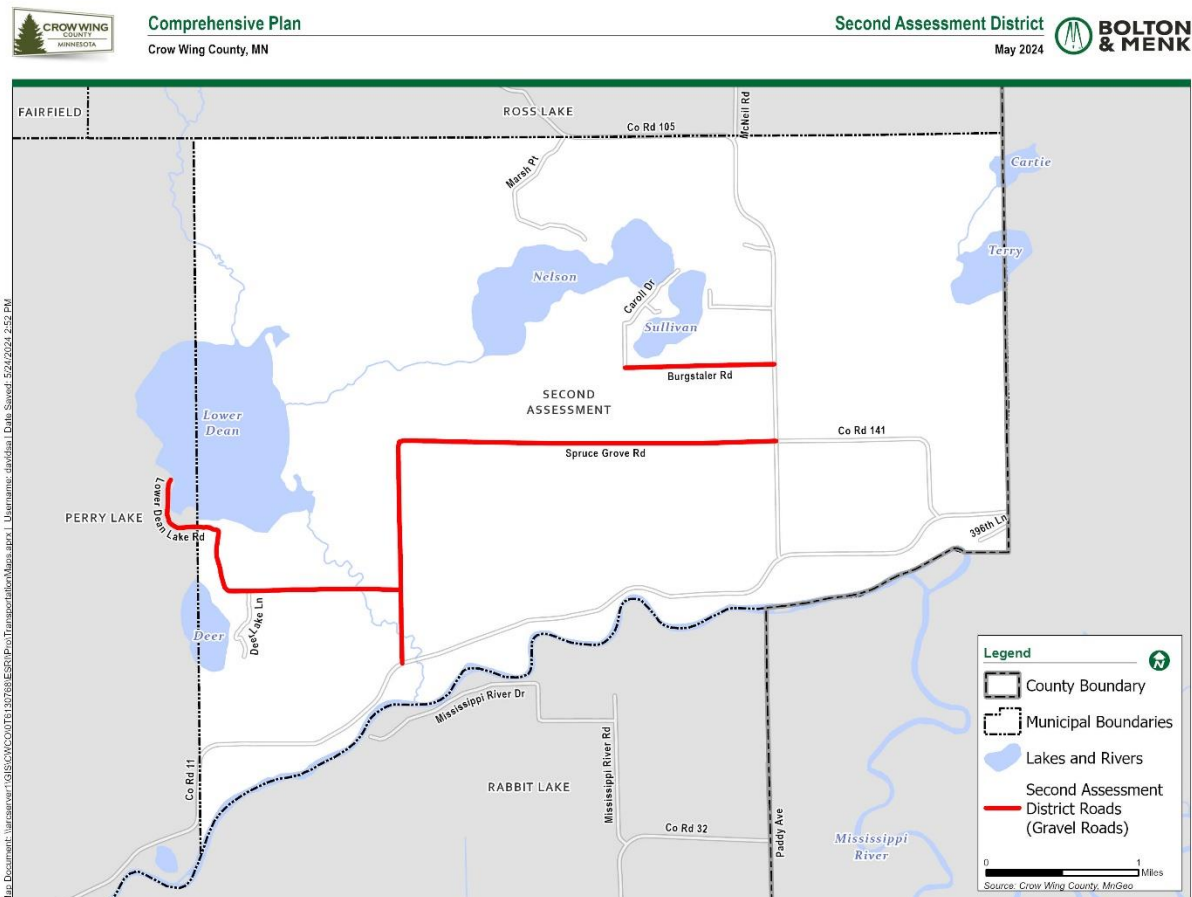
- Only the township-level road and bridge property tax levy, a separate line item on the property tax statement, funds FAD/SAD road improvement.
- The county government improves and maintains the CR and CSAH roads, with some state aid funding for the CSAH roads. The funding source for CR and CSAH improvements is mainly the county-level road and bridge property tax levy, another separate line item on the property tax statement.

The First Assessment District (FAD) is an unorganized territory which has over 60 miles of public road ways. The County Board of Commissioners acts as the elected policy makers in the absence of an organized form of local government. The Highway Department coordinates construction and maintenance of FAD roads. In April 2022, the county adopted minimum road construction specifications for proposed roads within the FAD is to allow for the creation of a consistent set of expectations, provide sufficient transportation services for future residents and protect FAD residents from unexpected future costs due to inadequate roadway construction. The design guidelines and standards can be found on the county's website [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov) and using search term "FAD."



## Second Assessment District (SAD)

The Second Assessment District (SAD) is an unorganized territory along the Eastern boundary of Crow Wing County and contains just over 6 miles of Second Assessment Roads. These roads are all gravel and can be seen outlined in red in the map below. Much like the First Assessment District (FAD), The County Board of Commissioners acts as the elected policy makers in the absence of an organized form of local government. The Highway Department coordinates construction and maintenance of SAD roads.





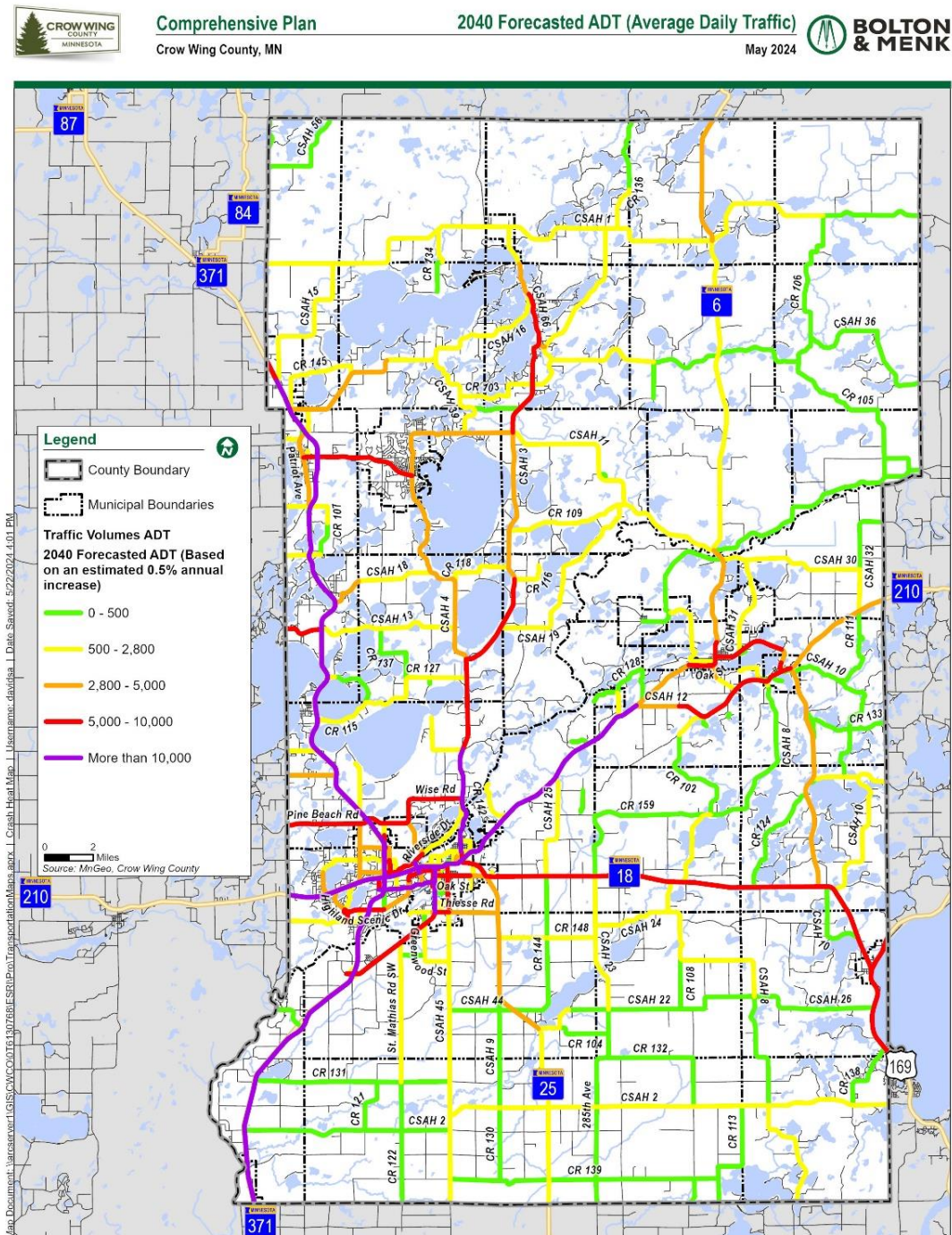
Trunk Highways 371, 210, 25, 18 and 6; County State Aid Highways 3, 12, 45, 48, 49, and 66, and County Road 117 carry the highest traffic volumes in Crow Wing County. These roadways are classified as Minor Arterials or Collectors. At 5,000 to 12,000 cars per day on these routes, the total traffic is well below the capacity the system is meant to accommodate. However, given that nearly 40 percent of the homes are seasonal or vacation residences, traffic volumes vary greatly by season. In the summer months, on holiday weekends and during major events such as races at Brainerd International Raceway, traffic volumes can increase significantly over the average daily volumes. Additional traffic analysis should be completed as part of a detailed Long Range Transportation Plan to identify roads where safety and capacity improvements are needed. Crow Wing County Highway Department works closely with MnDOT and the municipalities to identify issues and coordinate solutions.





## 2040 Traffic Volumes

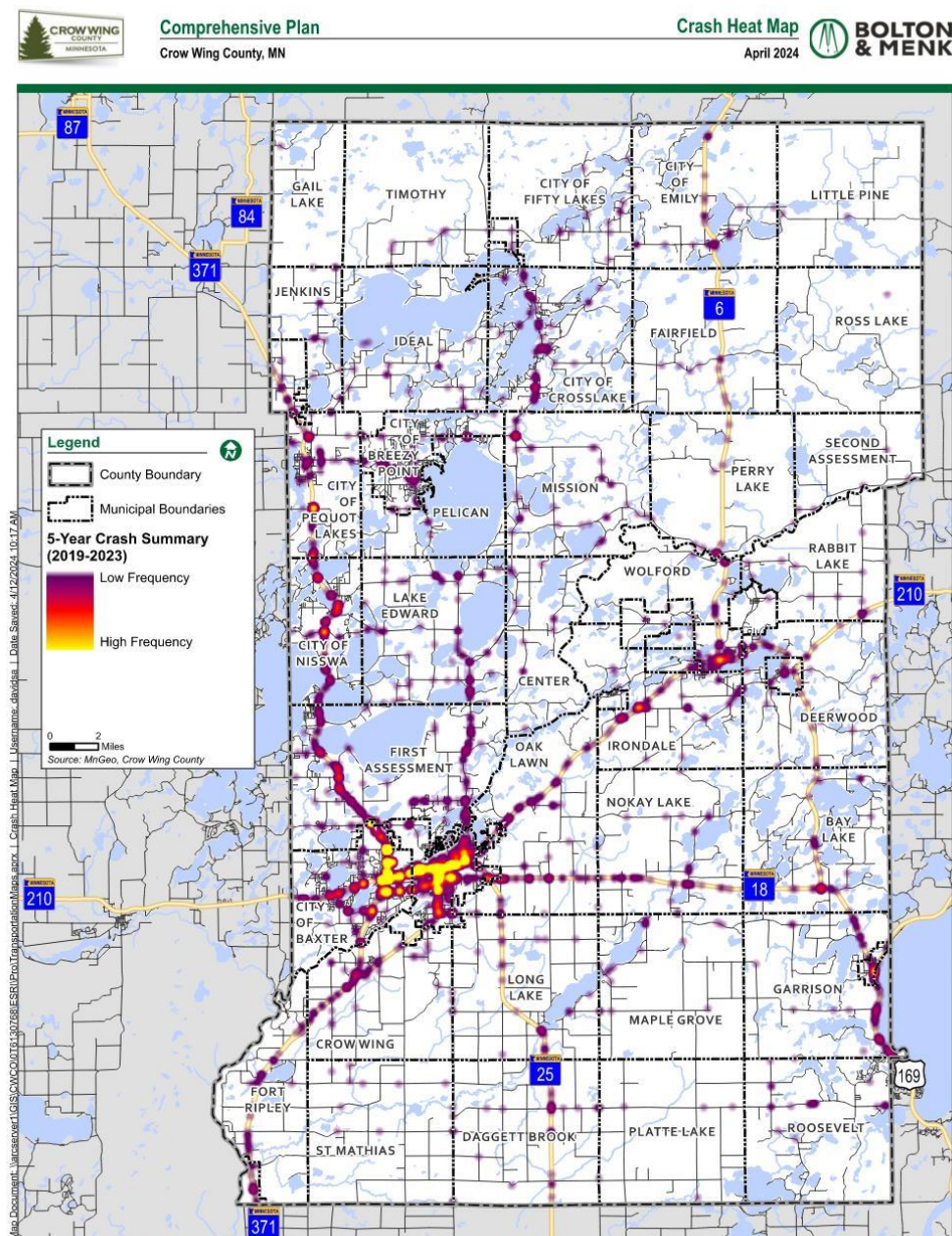
As shown in the map below, which assumes a traffic volume growth rate of 0.5 percent compounded annually through 2040, there would be no meaningful change in traffic levels on the county's roads, indicating that the existing road network can accommodate the projected traffic levels. As the community grows, specifically with the First Assessment District densification prescribed in this comprehensive plan, it is possible this growth rate could be exceeded. If the densification increases the traffic volumes on collectors north of Baxter, the collectors may need to change functional



classifications. The minor arterials will remain largely unaffected by population growth with their current capacity.

### Traffic Safety

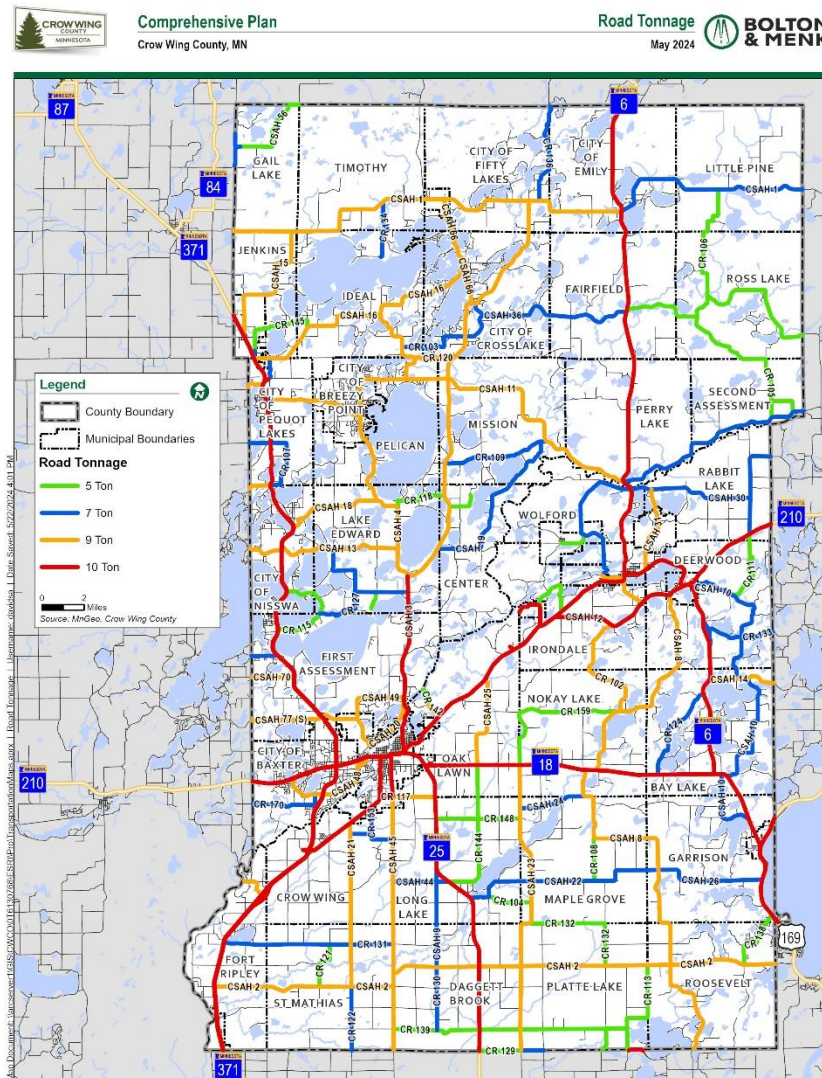
Safety is an integral component of planning for transportation improvements and expansions. The crash map shows where crashes occurred between 2019 and 2023. This map shows that many traffic accidents happen where traffic volumes are highest near cities and along Arterial or Collector roadways such as Highways 371, 210, and 25 and CSAH 3. Crow Wing County is working with MnDOT and other project partners on corridor studies that will be used to plan and implement improvements to many of these corridors. Safety analysis and improvements are a significant component of these studies. A safety analysis should be included in the County's Long Range Transportation Planning process to identify safety improvements to address the corridors and intersections with the highest rate of crashes.





## Tonnage

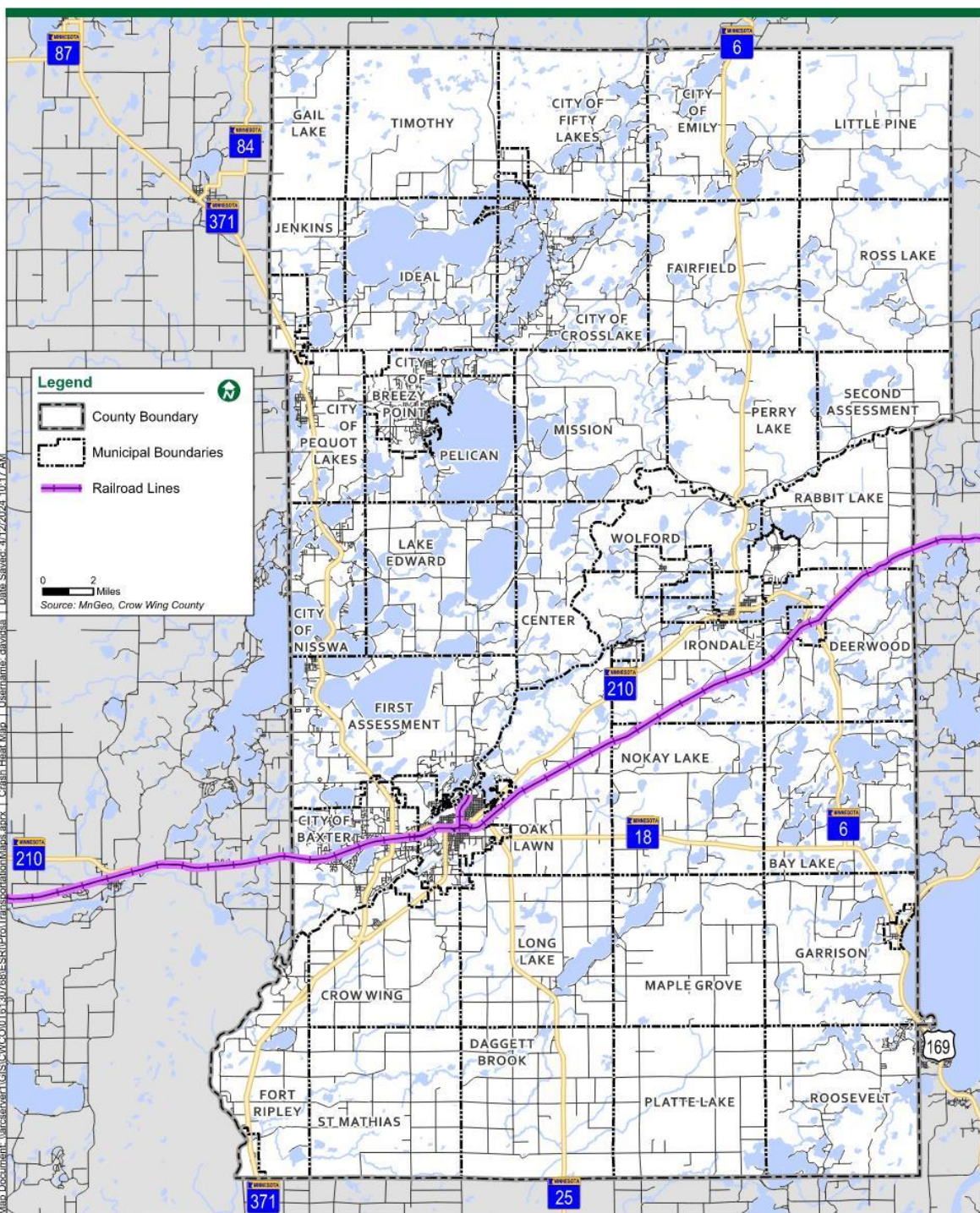
MnDOT Trunk Highways 371, 210, 25, 18 and 6 are designed to accommodate freight over 10 tons. However, Crow Wing County's network primarily consists of 9-ton roads with relatively few 10-ton corridors near Brainerd and Crosby. To close the gaps and create a continuous network that would improve freight hauling throughout the county, the county aspires to create a 10-ton network of county roads, especially east-west corridors connecting north-south State Highways 371, 6, and 25.



## Freight

Crow Wing County has been served by freight rail since 1870, when the Northern Pacific Railroad built its railyard in Brainerd. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway now serves the area, a merger of the original company and the Santa Fe Railway in the 1970s. The track runs east to west across the county as part of a 150-mile section of the Brainerd Subdivision. BNSF Railway operates up to seven trains a day and has a railyard near the original site of the Northern Pacific yard.

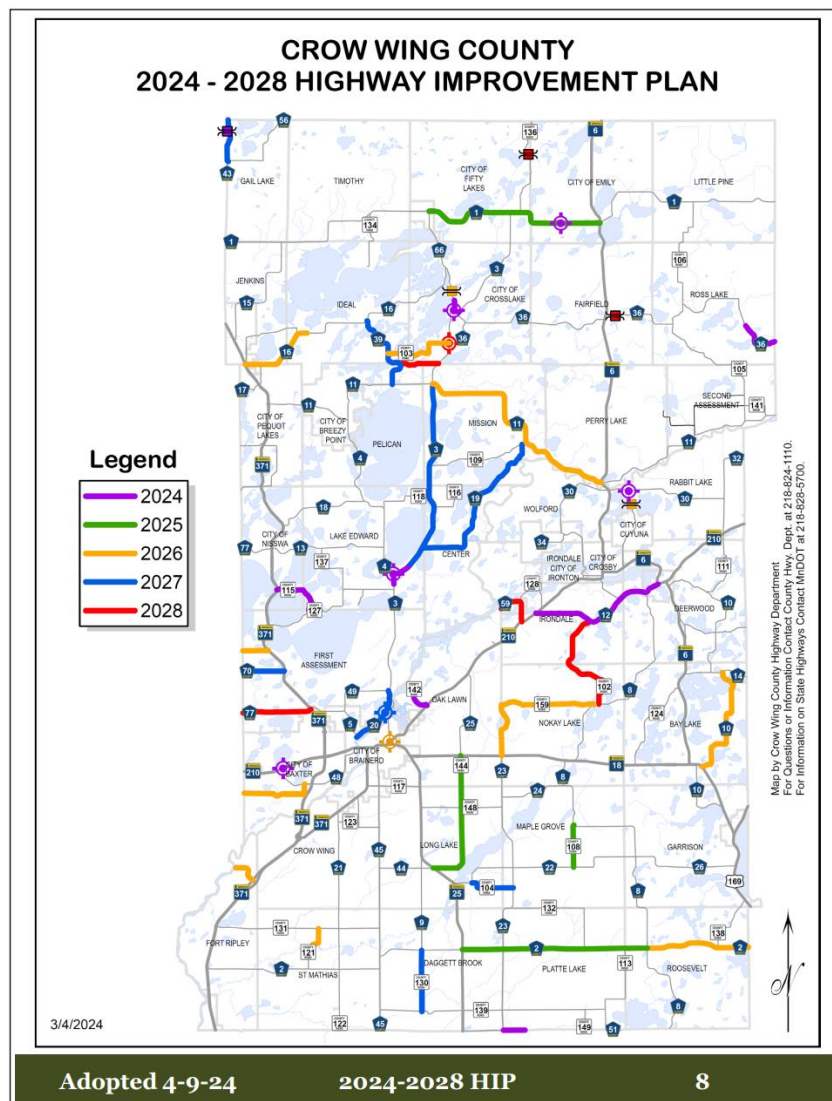
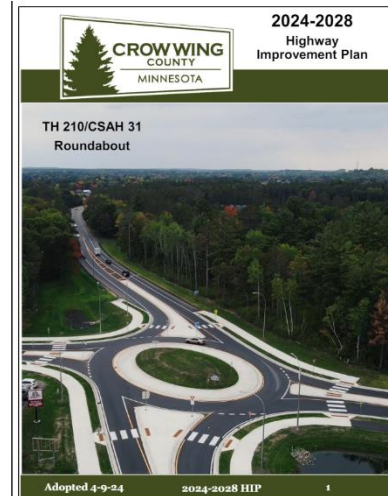
The county works with local jurisdictions and supports efforts to improve rail crossings for both vehicle and pedestrians. This includes quiet zones in Brainerd and Baxter. The county recently worked with Baxter to successfully complete the CSAH 48 crossing and is looking to work with Brainerd on improvements to the CSAH 45 crossing.





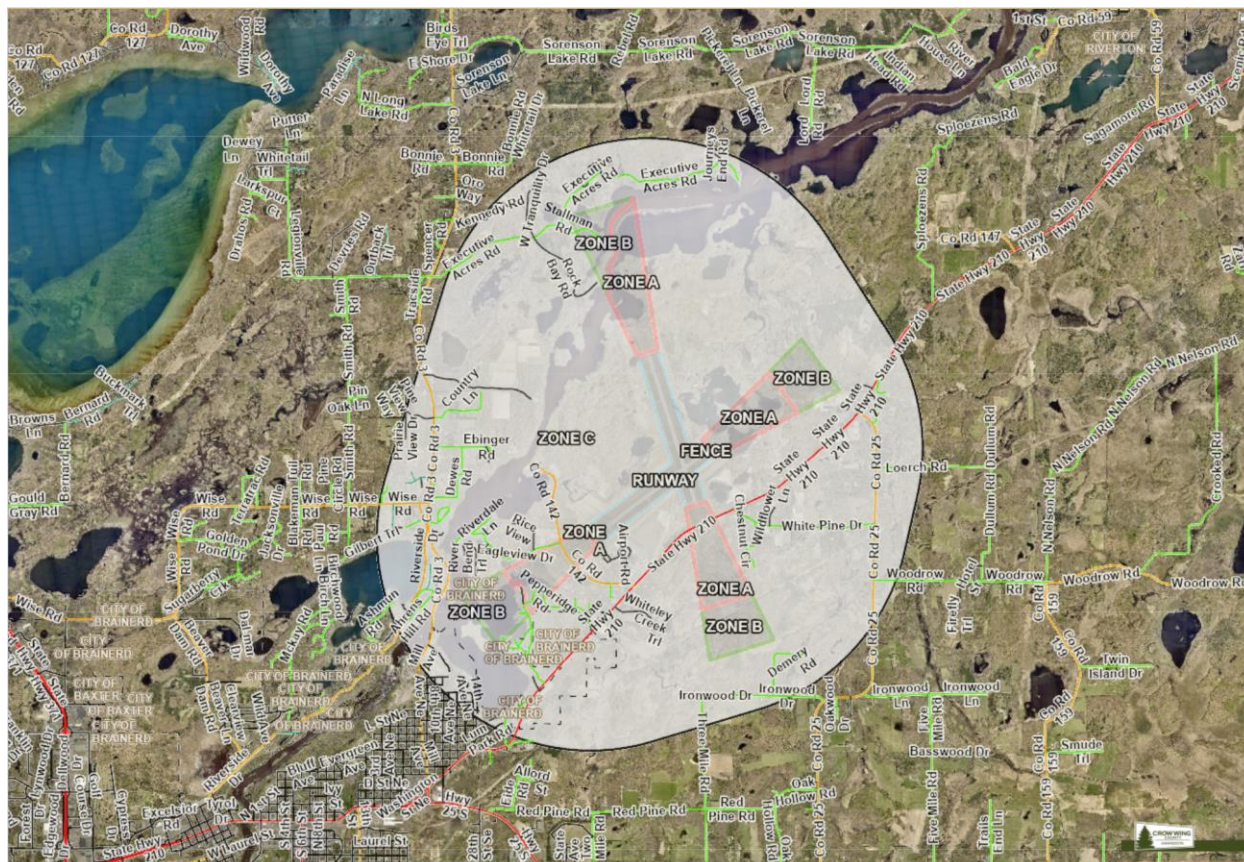
## Highway Improvement Plan

The Highway Improvement Plan (HIP) is the County Highway Department's execution plan that identifies and prioritizes roadway improvement and how limited roadway funding is utilized. The HIP includes a yearly report on the condition of the county roadway system, and it compares existing metrics to established performance targets related to the ride quality of the pavement. Each HIP also contains a priority listing of county, township, and municipal bridges that need rehabilitation or replacement. The latest Highway Improvement Plan is posted on the Crow Wing County Highway Department website [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).



## Airport

Crow Wing County partners in the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport, a passenger and cargo facility three miles east of Brainerd. Serving over 22,000 passengers a year, the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems lists the airport as a primary commercial service airport. The 2,597-acre facility hosts approximately 80 mostly small aircraft. There are two runways and a helipad. The runways measure 150 feet wide, 7,100 feet, and 6,512 feet long. The area supports tourism with one commercial airline service from the facility, Delta Connection, which provides twice-daily service to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. Sun Country Airlines also runs a shuttle coach from the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport to MSP. The airport also supports the local economy with three cargo lines flying out: UPS, FedEx Feeder, and Bemidji Airlines. As online orders and shopping continue to be one of the ways people purchase goods and materials, supporting the airport is vital to the local economy. The airport is located east of Brainerd, north of 210, and east of County Road 3, as shown below.



The Federal Aviation Administration designates safety zones around airports as described below. More information is available on the FAA's website at [www.faa.gov](http://www.faa.gov). The county will work with the airport and local jurisdictions to plan land use in this area.

- Runway Protection Zone (RPZ) (Zone A) - The area off the runway end is designed to provide a clear area free of above-ground obstructions and structures to enhance the protection of people and property. Zone A is intended to provide a clear area free of above-ground obstructions and structures.
- Runway Approach Surface (Zone B) - A critical overlay surface that reflects the approach and departure areas for each runway at an airport. The approach surface is longitudinally centered



on the extended runway centerline, extending outward and upward from the end of the runway. The approach slope for visual runways is 20:1 for a distance of 5,000 feet.

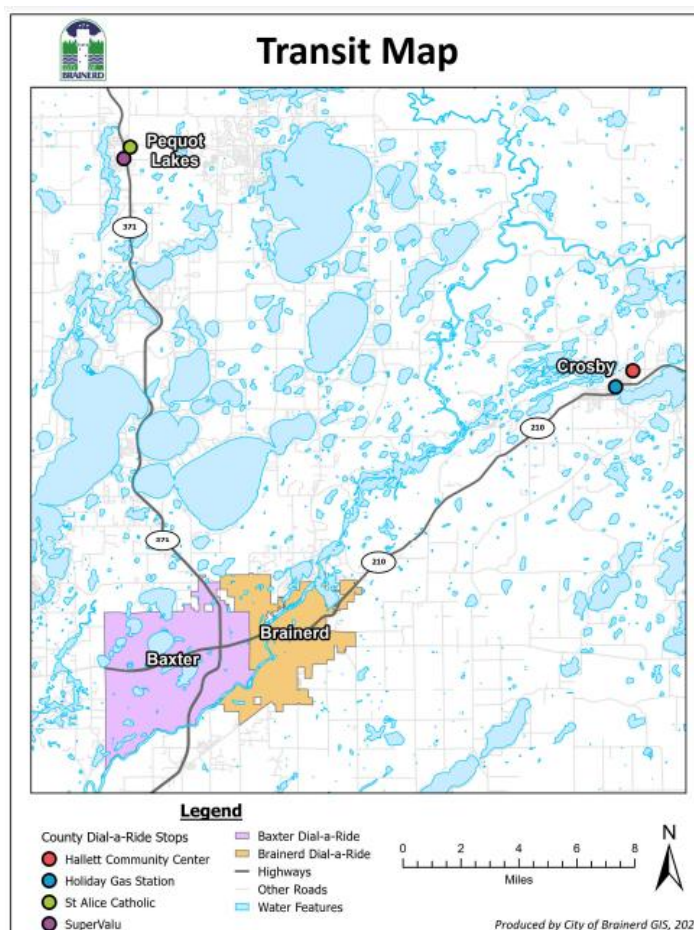
- Transitional Surface (Zone C)—The transitional surface extends outward and upward at right angles to the runway centerline and slopes seven feet horizontally for each one-foot vertically (7:1) from the sides of the primary and approach surfaces. The transitional surfaces extend to the point at which they intercept the horizontal surface 150 feet above the established airport elevation.

## Public Transportation

Brainerd & Crow Wing Public Transit is a partnership between Crow Wing County and the City of Brainerd. It provides service in Brainerd and Baxter and morning and afternoon service to Pequot Lakes and Crosby. Morning transit services include stops in the Brainerd and Baxter areas between 6:30 A.M. and 6:45 A.M. and stops in Pequot Lakes at St. Alice Church and Pequot Lakes Supervalu and in Crosby at the Holiday Gas Station Store and the Hallet Community Center. The service returns to Brainerd and Baxter to accommodate passenger drop-offs at their requested destinations. Transit service information is available on the City of Brainerd's website:

[www.ci.brainerd.mn.us](http://www.ci.brainerd.mn.us).

Afternoon services start with pickups in Brainerd and Baxter around 2:00 PM and continue with trips to the Pequot Lakes and Crosby stops. Service concludes with transit vehicles returning to Brainerd/Baxter by 4:30 P.M.



In addition to dial-a-ride service, taxicab services are available in Brainerd and Baxter. Grey Hound and Jefferson bus lines serve several cities in Crow Wing County, including Brainerd, Nisswa, and Pequot Lakes.

## Trails

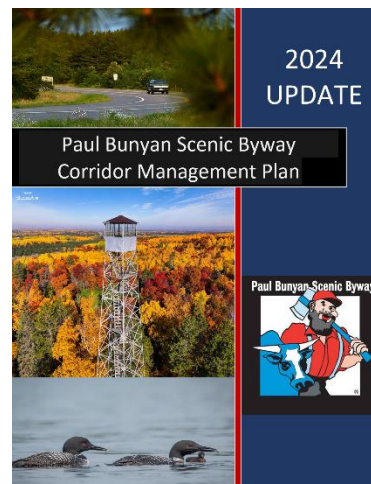
In addition to recreational opportunities, trails can provide a route for people to walk or bike to their destination or use smaller motorized vehicles such as motorbikes, ATVs, snowmobiles, and golf carts. Crow Wing County works with local jurisdictions to provide more trails within their road rights-of-way to increase connectivity. The Recreation Chapter offers more details about these facilities.



## Scenic Byways

Crow Wing County has two designated scenic byways that follow county-owned roads. While the primary purpose of these roadways is to serve the communities they connect, they also promote tourism by offering a scenic drive and destinations such as overlooks, parks and trails, and lake access. Four state agencies, including the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Historical Society, and Explore Minnesota Tourism, partner with grassroots organizations and local governments on byway projects.

The Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway is a 54-mile driving route comprised of county roads. It takes travelers through 14 jurisdictions and two counties (Crow Wing and Cass), with hiking and walking trails, recreational parks and lakes, wildlife management areas, and historical artifacts. The route has a nonprofit organization, the Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway Association, which manages the projects, programs, and events. More details about the plan are available on their website at [www.paulbunyan scenicbyway.org](http://www.paulbunyan scenicbyway.org).



The spine of the route is County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 16, which runs northeast of TH 371, two miles north of Pequot Lakes. The nearly 13 miles along CSAH 16 passes sites of scenic, recreational, historical, and natural interest, such as the Gateway Gazebo Information kiosk, Veterans Memorial Walking Trail, Island Lake Woods, Uppgaard Wildlife Management Area, Rush Lake Floating Island, and the site of a battle between the Dakota Sioux and Ojibwe in the early 1800's. CSAH 16 connects with CSAH 66 at the north end of Crosslake. At that point, byway travelers can select either the 12-mile north loop around the Whitefish Chain of Lakes or turn south and travel south and west through 23 miles of beautifully wooded countryside and lakes on CSAH 3 and 11.

Paul's Footprints at Barclay Town Hall, Timothy Town Hall, Timothy Township interpretive kiosk, and the old Swanburg Store are highlighted along the north loop. The US Army Corps of Engineers Crosslake Recreation Area Park with the Crosslake Area Historical Society and Village, historic Pine River Dam, Linda Ulland Memorial Gardens, and the National Loon Center (groundbreaking in 2024), well-known Breezy Point Resort and its famous Fawcett House, Lowell Wildlife Management Area, and the Paul M. Thiede Fire Tower Park are among the points of interest along the southern loop. The Scenic Byway connects with the Paul Bunyan State Trail, a paved hiking, biking, inline skating, and snowmobiling trail at four locations, offering opportunities to drive the byway, park and bike or hike the trail. Numerous trails on publicly owned land along the 54-mile scenic byway provide opportunities to stop and hike through the woods. Public access to Whitefish Lakes, Ossawinnamakee Chains, and Pelican Lake are also located along the byway.

The Lake Mille Lacs Scenic Byway (LMLSB) is a 68-mile loop that passes through the eastern part of Crow Wing County near Garrison. The byway follows highways 169, 27, 18, and 47 and Shakopee Lake Road, a county-owned road. The 68-mile driving route known for its natural and scenic attractions circles Lake Mille Lacs—one of Minnesota's largest lakes at 132,000 acres. Located at the southern edge of Aitkin County, it also straddles the northernmost reaches of Mille Lacs County and the southeast corner of Crow Wing County in central Minnesota.

The LMLSB ring of roadways takes in the natural body of water with sandy beaches, open horizons, islands, and scenic surrounding forests. Small communities, resorts, camping and lodging, two state parks, several public water access points, a casino/resort, a tribal history museum, and unique waysides take residence along the lake's shore in Mille Lacs, Crow Wing, and Aitkin Counties.

Located within 100 miles from three metropolitan areas of Duluth, Saint Cloud, and the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul—the large lake historically draws from those populations, where anglers come in all seasons to catch walleye, Minnesota’s State Fish, prized for its white, flaky filets. Many of the area’s tourism-related businesses focus their facilities on serving traditional anglers—basic lodging, boat marinas, bars, restaurants, and ice fishing house rentals. As an effort to diversify the tourism infrastructure mounts, fishing promotions and services focusing on smallmouth bass and muskies continue the shift beyond the walleye. The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe diversified the area’s offerings by operating a casino/hotel/movie theatre within their community on the lake’s southwest shore. The area currently offers a variety of baseline tourist-related infrastructure such as golf courses, coffee shops, gift shops, fuel/convenience stores, and sporting goods retail and rental.

The LMLSB offers a unique blend of explorations and stories for visitors, as it is the place where the region’s recreational opportunities and scenic beauty merge.

In addition to these scenic byways, The Great River Road, a collection of State and local roads tracing the course of the Mississippi River, is also a prominent feature running from Crosby through Brainerd and out of the county along Highway 371. The route is a nationally designated scenic byway. While the National Parks Service does not own it like a national parkway, it is expected to be maintained to a high standard of care as it is as much for recreational purposes as it is a functional roadway.

### **Issues and Opportunities**

#### **Trend 1: Increasing demand for use of county highway right-of-way corridors.**

##### Opportunities

- Expanding right-of-way corridor width to accommodate the increasing demand for wider roadway shoulders, public utilities, stormwater runoff, and construction of separated motorized and non-motorized trails.
- Creation of a continuous network of roadside facilities able to safely accommodate motorized and non-motorized users and connect communities, recreational opportunities, and other points of interest.
- Creation of a county-wide plan to coordinate the individual efforts of several motorized and non-motorized user groups.

##### Issues

- The existing width of many right-of-way corridors often limits the scope of roadway improvement projects and perpetuates existing challenges.
- Expansion of existing right-of-way corridors requires the acquisition of private property and an impact on existing development.
- The existing encroachment of prescribed right-of-way setbacks inhibits expanding some right-of-way corridors.
- Currently, no comprehensive county-wide plan synchronizes the efforts of several individual motorized and non-motorized user groups.
- Introducing additional facilities for motorized and non-motorized users within the roadway corridors increases the cost of maintenance and the risk of conflict between user groups.

#### **Trend 2 `Sustained occurrences of fatal and serious crashes on the State Highway system within Crow Wing County.**

##### Opportunities

- Continue to foster planning and funding partnerships with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), which will result in the advancement of safety improvement projects that align with the priorities important to Crow Wing County and its local partners.
- Actively participate in developing formal state highway corridor management studies and develop future land regulations to implement the identified safety strategies.
- Actively seek grant applications for state, federal, or other specialty transportation funding to supplement existing funding sources and assist with achieving priorities important to Crow Wing County and its local partners.
- Continue proactive planning and engineering efforts required to increase the competitiveness of grant applications for state, federal, or other specialty transportation funding.

#### Issues

- The availability of funding and staff resources allocated to MnDOT impacts the ability to deliver state highway safety improvements aligned with the priorities established by Crow Wing County.
- Utilizing County funding and staff resources to advance MnDOT projects impacts the County's ability to deliver improvement projects for the remainder of the County transportation system.
- The selection process for state, federal, or other specialty transportation funding awards is extremely competitive.

### **Trend 3 Declining occurrences of fatal and serious crashes on the Crow Wing County highway system.**

#### Opportunities

- Continue supporting and implementing transportation improvement strategies prioritizing pedestrian and vehicle safety over reduced vehicle travel times.
- Initiate a formal process to study and document the safety performance and risk factors associated with the regional transportation system to establish and communicate priorities important to Crow Wing County and its local partners.
- Invest in new technology that allows the County to better evaluate and deliver transportation projects that continue to reduce fatal and serious crashes.
- Continue to promote and educate the public about the benefits of alternative intersection configurations designed to reduce the occurrence of fatal and serious crashes on the regional transportation system.

#### Issues

- Most of the strategies identified by previous additions to the County Road Safety Plan (CRSP) have been implemented, are no longer viable, or are unsupported.
- Engineering and planning technology is rapidly advancing, and it is important to stay current with these changes to maintain the county engineering department's capabilities.
- Despite the decline in fatalities and serious crashes on the county highway system, there continues to be moderate resistance to using alternative intersection configurations designed to reduce the occurrence and severity of crashes.



**Trend 4 High seasonal traffic volumes, increased population/economic growth, and new vehicle technology increase demand for the regional transportation system.**

Opportunities

- Continue to take proactive measures to appropriately address the impact of seasonal peak traffic on the regional transportation system.
- Evaluate the magnitude and impact of seasonal traffic volumes on differing portions of the regional transportation system and seek to balance infrastructure investments throughout the county.
- Evaluate the impact of increased commercial development on land use and the associated transportation system.
- Evaluate the impact of the residential broadband network expansion and other services and amenities on land use and the associated transportation system.
- Recognize the increasing presence of autonomous vehicles and vehicles powered by alternate fuel sources and seek opportunities to advance the infrastructure needed to support these emerging technologies.
- Invest in creating a county-wide network of 10-ton roadways that closes existing gaps and complements the state highway system currently able to accommodate heavier vehicles.

Issues

- High season traffic volumes combined with the increased heavy commercial traffic to support these visitors impact the regional transportation system's safety and longevity.
- Increased potential for pedestrian and vehicle crashes related to users unfamiliar with the regional transportation system.
- Focusing solely on improvements to accommodate the high seasonal peak traffic volumes may lead to unbalanced transportation investments throughout the county.
- Economic development and provision of more services and amenities within the county may increase permanent residency among seasonal residents.
- There is a lack of public infrastructure to support the growing trend of vehicles powered by alternate fuel sources.
- Gaps in the 10-ton roadway network restrict the movement of freight and other heavy vehicles during certain times of the year and may restrict the potential for economic development.

**Trend 5 The Local Option Sales Tax (LOST) continues to be the County's largest and most impactful transportation revenue source**

Opportunities

- Maintain the collection of the LOST and continue to leverage the large portion of the revenue generated by Crow Wing County's visitors.
- Continue to utilize the LOST to offset the County property tax needed to operate and maintain the County transportation system.
- Periodically take the steps necessary to adapt the LOST eligibility resolution to maximize its use for the operation and maintenance of the County transportation system.
- Develop and maintain a long-range transportation planning document that identifies specific improvement priorities, projects the ongoing utilization of the LOST, and communicates them to the public.
- Ensure the time horizon for collecting LOST is adequately long enough to plan appropriately for utilizing these important funds.

## Issues

- Over 50% of the LOST revenue generated is derived from visitors to Crow Wing County.
- Decommissioning the LOST would create a large transportation funding gap and necessitate considering a very large County property tax levy increase to act as an offset.
- Predicting the amount and availability of LOST revenue is necessary to make and deliver on the promises made to the public in the 5-year Highway Improvement Plan.

## **Goals and Policies**

**Goal 1:** Maintain a safe, cost-effective, and efficient transportation system.

**Policy 1:** Ensure all land use and related decisions are balanced with local efforts to implement the County Roadway Safety Plan and Highway Improvement Plan (HIP).

**Policy 2:** Align local and state highway system planning with goals for highway-adjacent land uses.

**Policy 3:** Work with partners to identify and coordinate transportation system improvements to accommodate growth and development.

**Policy 4:** Plan, build, and maintain roadways to accommodate existing and future traffic growth.

**Policy 5:** Support area airports responsibly and sustainably to enhance the capacity of passenger and freight movement options.

**Goal 2:** Develop a transportation system that serves the accessibility and mobility needs of all users.

**Policy 1:** Plan for trails and other facilities that connect destinations and create a network across the county, providing recreational opportunities and multi-modal options for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorized recreational vehicles.

**Policy 2:** Support regional planning activities to enhance interagency collaboration and coordination.

**Policy 3:** Support creating a continuous network of non-motorized trails connecting population centers with recreation and providing opportunities for daily commuting.

**Policy 4:** Support transit service that provides transportation alternatives responsibly and sustainably.

**Policy 5:** Pursue opportunities to create a continuous network of 10-ton roads throughout the county to accommodate freight mobility.

**Policy 6:** Acknowledge the importance of the existing railway network for freight movement throughout the region while supporting initiatives that enhance its safety at locations in conflict with the existing transportation system.

**Policy 7:** Plan for complimentary land uses adjacent to the airport that take advantage of air travel and restrict land use that would conflict with air traffic.

**Goal 3:** Promote positive environmental and health outcomes by minimizing the negative impacts on sensitive ecosystems, historically and culturally significant sites, and adjacent land uses.

**Policy 1:** Select the best routes and realignments for new highway links and local roadways to ensure that environmental factors are sufficiently weighted.

**Policy 2:** Balance environmental strategies and best management practices when planning, building, and maintaining the motorized and non-motorized transportation network.

**Policy 3:** Seek opportunities to create new wetlands or wildlife habitat credits, which would function as required mitigation for future transportation system improvements.

**Resiliency Goal:** Preserve and modernize the existing transportation system.

**Policy 1:** Explore and support emerging technology related to vehicles and information systems to improve planning, building, and maintenance of the transportation network.

**Policy 2:** Pursue federal, state, regional, and local funding opportunities to preserve, maintain, expand, and modernize the transportation network.

**Policy 3:** Coordinate with partners and local jurisdictions to adequately address land use regulatory impacts of road realignments, right-of-way acquisition, and access modifications.



An aerial photograph of a multi-lane highway interchange with a grassy median and surrounding trees. A large green circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text '8.0 INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES'.

# 8.0

## **INFRASTRUCTURE & SERVICES**

## 8.0 Infrastructure and Services

While a county does not directly provide utilities, it is the host, regulator, and stakeholder for many agencies and businesses operating within its jurisdiction. Utilities and facilities are the foundational services municipalities provide to ensure health, safety, and welfare and support the growth of their community. Utilities include water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer systems, electricity, natural gas, and solid waste disposal. Community facilities include all municipal, county, and state parks, schools, health and safety services, and libraries. The geographic size, current population, anticipated residential growth, and economic development drive the demand and capacity for these services.

As Crow Wing County continues to grow and attract new development, its cities' utilities and facilities must be equipped to support this change with the capacity to deliver services to their residents with county oversight and support.

Crow Wing County's residents have most of the public services, utilities, and infrastructure that other public entities provide. To achieve its goals, the county recognizes that it must coordinate and collaborate closely with different levels of government to provide public infrastructure and services, plan for growth, align land use goals, and protect natural resources. By preparing for development, the county can promote efficiencies that allow for lower costs and more effective public services, especially around cities where more dense growth and development are expected to occur.

### Utility Infrastructure

Crow Wing County does not own or operate any utilities; however, it does have a role in regulating them. The municipalities provide water and sanitary sewer services in Brainerd, Baxter, Crosby, and Garrison. Outside these cities' jurisdictions, the landowner is responsible for installing and maintaining a well and septic system, as these utilities are not provided in rural areas. There are a few areas in the county where local utility providers operate municipal water, sanitary sewer, and stormwater systems. Each provider does this through access or other service fees and in compliance with applicable state and federal standards.

### Water Systems

*Table 8- 1 Water Providers in Crow Wing County*

Crow Wing County municipalities other than Brainerd, Baxter, Crosby, and parts of Cuyuna and Pequot Lakes do not provide water service. The population outside these jurisdictions depends on wells to meet their water needs. The table below describes these water systems.

Water Provider	Description
Brainerd Public Utilities	Three water towers; filtration rate of 1.35 million gallons per day
City of Crosby	None are available at this time
City of Cuyuna	One water tower serves 16 platted original blocks of the city.
City of Pequot Lakes	Multiple water towers

The State of Minnesota regulates these systems and mandates that they incorporate wellhead protection measures based on system size. At a minimum, a 200-foot buffer around public wells is analyzed and managed to prevent contamination. A comprehensive wellhead protection plan is created for larger systems, delineating the protection area, and drinking water management zones. This typically

covers recharged areas within a 10-year water travel time to the well. The plan evaluates vulnerability and establishes safeguard strategies, including contingencies.

The Minnesota Department of Health produces "Source Water Assessments," summarizing system water sources. Crow Wing County municipalities, including Baxter, Brainerd, and others, collaborated with the Department of Health to prepare wellhead protection plans. Crow Wing County's staff were involved in wellhead protection teams that prepared these plans. The 2013 to 2023 Water Plan Revision integrates these local Wellhead Protection Plans through reference.

Crow Wing County aims to enhance and safeguard water resources through planning. The Land Services Department, responsible for this Comprehensive Plan and the Local Comprehensive Water Management Plan, prioritizes proactive, efficient, and customer-centric practices. With innovation and resource stewardship, the department ensures excellent service, aiding landowners in preserving the county's unique natural resources.

### Sanitary Sewer Service

Crow Wing County does not operate or maintain a sanitary sewer system. However, seven municipal systems serve eleven municipalities, as described in the following table. Residents and businesses in municipalities not listed in the table use septic systems to treat and store wastewater.

*Table 8- 2 Sanitary Sewer Providers in Crow Wing County*

Sanitary Sewer Provider	Cities Served
<b>Brainerd Public Utilities</b>	Brainerd, Baxter
<b>The City of Breezy Point</b>	Breezy Point
<b>Serpent Lake Sanitary Sewer District</b>	Crosby, Cuyuna, Deerwood, Ironton
<b>The City of Emily</b>	Emily
<b>Garrison, Kathio, West Mille Lacs Lake Sanitary Sewer District</b>	Garrison
<b>The City of Nisswa</b>	Nisswa
<b>The City of Pequot Lakes</b>	Pequot Lakes

### Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS)

Crow Wing County has the second-largest number of septic tanks of any county in the state. Crow Wing County Land Use Ordinance Article 37 and Minnesota Rules Chapter 7080 outline the land use requirements related to septic systems. The jurisdiction of the ordinance is all county lands except for incorporated areas that administer a Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) program by Ordinance within their incorporated jurisdiction, which is at least as strict as the County Ordinance.

### Storm Water

Crow Wing County Land Services Department oversees a stormwater permitting system to promote prompt implementation of mandated stormwater plans within the initial year of permit approval. The department also established policies and procedures to effectively monitor executed plans, focusing on plan quantity, adherence, and compliance.

Crow Wing County partners with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Cities in the county to regulate and manage stormwater runoff. However, the county does not involve itself in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPP) process. In unorganized territories and some townships, the county is the enforcement agency for stormwater policies. These regulations include the requirement of permits on any project affecting more than one acre of the area and a stormwater management plan



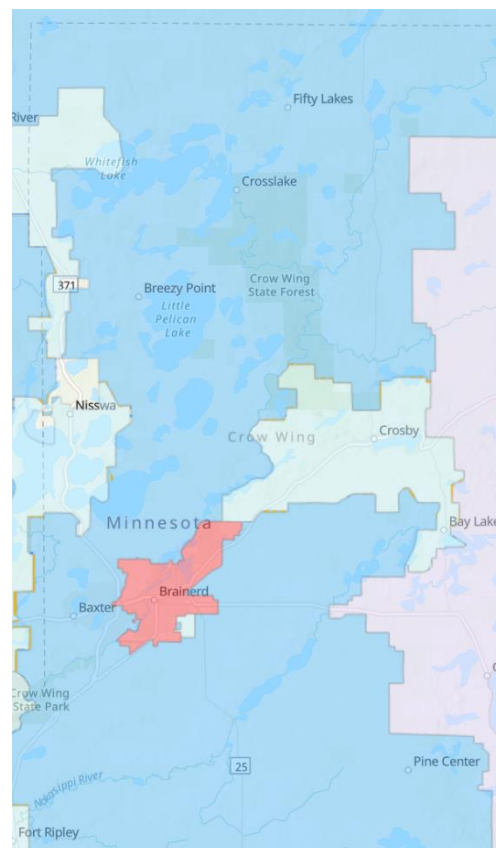
submittal for any proposed development that provides for 15-25 percent impervious surface. The County's Land Services Department manages these items. Further information can be obtained at reference: [Stormwater | Crow Wing County, MN - Official Website](#)

## Electricity

There are four electricity providers in Crow Wing County, with residents of each municipality having at least a binary choice of options in their community.

*Table 8- 3 Electricity Providers in Crow Wing County*

Provider	Cities Served	Description
<b>Brainerd Public Utilities</b>	Brainerd, Baxter	Headquartered in Brainerd, this is the county's only company with a power plant. 100 percent of its fuel is hydroelectric power.
<b>Crow Wing Power</b>	Baxter, Breezy Point, Crosslake, Cuyuna, Emily, Fifty Lakes, Jenkins, Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, and townships in Crow Wing County	These cooperative purchases power in bulk on the market. It serves 40,000 members in three Minnesota counties: Cass, Crow Wing, and Morrison.
<b>Mille Lacs Electric</b>	Garrison	Headquartered in Aitkin, this entity serves the fewest of Crow Wing County's residents. This cooperative sources all its electricity wholesale on the markets.
<b>Minnesota Power</b>	Crosby, Cuyuna, Deerwood, Fort Ripley, Ironton, Jenkins, Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Riverton, Trommald	Headquartered in Duluth, it provides power to over 125,000 residential customers. Power is fueled by 65 percent Coal, 24 percent Wind, 8 percent Hydroelectric, and 3 percent from other sources.



## Natural Gas

CenterPoint Energy, Minnesota Energy Resources, and Xcel Energy are the three natural gas providers that serve Crow Wing County. Xcel is the only one with a local service office. Residents in rural areas not served by a natural gas line may use propane tanks to fuel appliances.

## Broadband

Crow Wing County is committed to achieving the goal of border-to-border broadband access and since 2020 has invested over \$8.8 million dollars in funding and partnerships for broadband expansion resulting in over 85% of the county being served by wireless broadband with speeds of at least 100M. As of 2024, only 13% of the county is underserved with download speeds slower than 100M.

As of 2024, all of Crow Wing County is served by broadband speed of at least 100/20, which is sufficient for most residential uses. Over half of the area is served for business uses at 250/25 Mbps as shown in the second map below. More information is available on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) website at [www.broadbandmap.fcc.gov](http://www.broadbandmap.fcc.gov).

Figure 8- 1 Residential Broadband Availability 100/20 Mbps (Source FCC.gov)

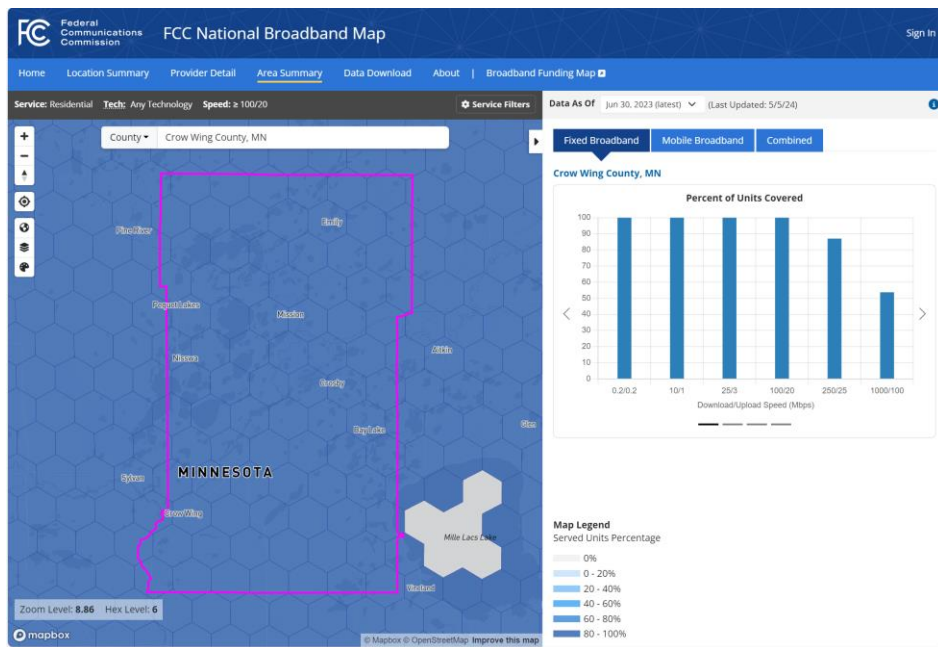
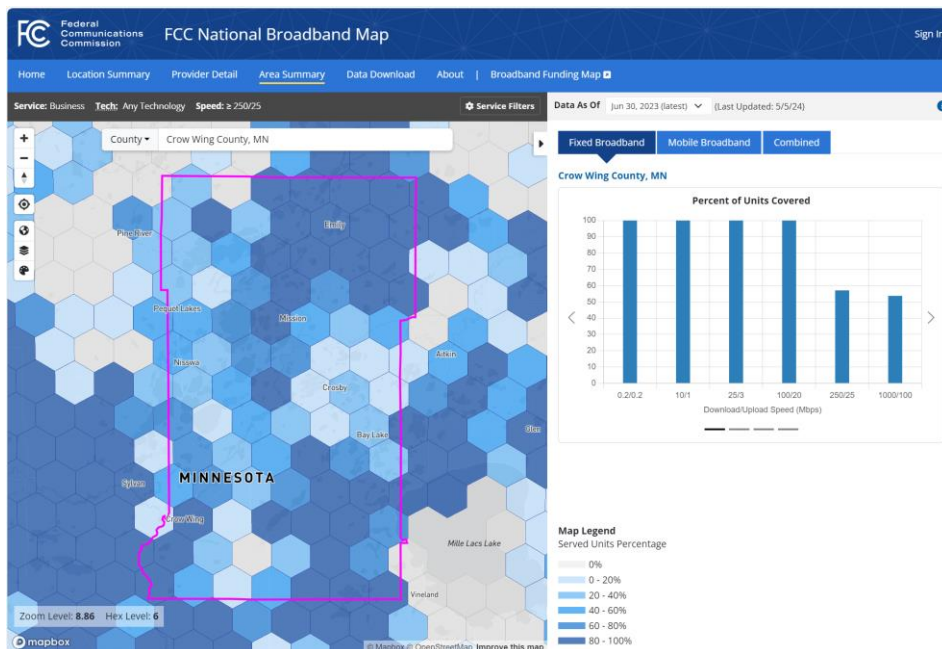


Figure 8- 2 Business Broadband Availability 250/25 Mbps (Source FCC.gov)



## Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling

Crow Wing County operates a landfill for solid waste disposal that accommodates various disposal needs. The site is located within the county east of the City of Brainerd. Residents and businesses can access private waste collection companies that provide garbage and recycling curbside pick-up.

### Recycling

Since 1991, recycling has been the county's core resource recovery initiative<sup>1</sup>. In 2021, this extensive program collected over 48,000 tons of recyclables from county residents, institutions, and businesses. The county's recovered materials met the state's recycling goal of 35 percent. There are two drop-off sites in Crow Wing County: The County Landfill and the Ideal Transfer Station that Ideal Township manages. The County boasts a robust residential recycling program, and many businesses have established effective recycling and waste reduction initiatives. However, the sustainability of these efforts is jeopardized by recent low recyclable prices. Recycling's crucial environmental advantages align with the County's advanced landfill, offering secure and essential disposal solutions for the community. More information about the county's recycling and waste management program is available on the county's website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov), search using keyword landfill.

Table 8- 4 Recycling Program Overview

Item	Quantity
Total MSW Tons Generated	96,578
Total MSW Tons Into Landfill	46,095
Tons Collected for Recycling	48,783

### Compost

The county operates a yard waste composting program. Yard waste is prohibited from disposal in the solid waste landfill, instead promoting on-site management via educational resources. Furthermore, a county yard waste composting facility is available at the county landfill.

### Solid Waste

Private entities predominantly manage solid waste collection services in the county. Collection isn't obligatory, operating through an open system where individual generators contract with their preferred hauler. Weekly curbside collection is accessible in select cities and rural regions. The refuse collection market is competitive, with numerous haulers serving the entire county. The county doesn't offer subsidies for collection. The County's Land Services Department licenses haulers within the county. Presently, 16 haulers are licensed for solid waste collection and transportation.

### Community Facilities

The community facilities throughout Crow Wing County provide places for people to receive government services, education, and recreational opportunities. These facilities create community identity, provide opportunities for social interaction, and provide essential services. The county recognizes that, as it grows, these community facilities serve crucial roles in area residents' and businesses' quality of life.





## Community Centers

Crow Wing County does not operate a community center; however, several communities have privately or publicly funded community centers. The following table lists the community centers' locations and essential amenities.

*Table 8- 5 Community Centers in Crow Wing County*

Community Center	Location	Description
<b>Brainerd Family YMCA</b>	Brainerd	The nonprofit-run center provides access to a pool, gym fitness center, and multi-purpose meeting rooms and offers programs and classes, including swimming lessons, aerobics, children's programs, and exercise incentives.
<b>Hallett Center</b>	Crosby	The nonprofit foundation-funded facility houses an ice arena, aquatic center, and pickleball courts. It also offers a variety of activities and fitness programs for members of all ages.
<b>Crosslake Community Center</b>	Crosslake	The weight room and gymnasium are for members to use.

## Public Library

Crow Wing County is one of five counties in the Kitchigami Regional Library System which supports the Brainerd Public Library. The following table lists other community or public libraries in the county.

*Table 8- 6 Libraries in Crow Wing County*

Library	Location	Description
<b>Jessie F. Hallett Memorial Library</b>	Crosby	The community public library is funded by its foundation and the cities of Crosby, Deerwood, Ironton, Cuyuna, and Riverton.
<b>Pequot Lakes Community Library</b>	Pequot Lakes	City-run library with a catalog of resources and seasonal programming of activities.
<b>Nisswa Elementary School</b>	Nisswa	Part-time public library hours and a collection of resources for all ages.

## County Government and Administration

Crow Wing County has numerous services to support its operation, including administrative, attorney services, community services, court administration, highway services, human resources, land services, the sheriff's office, and University of Minnesota Extension Crow Wing County.

The County Board consists of five members and is the governing body of Crow Wing County. The County Board serves as the legislative branch of the county and is responsible for setting policies and enacting ordinances. The County Administrator manages all county departments, overseeing the implementation of the board's policies and decisions. The County Administrator serves as the Clerk of the County Board. The current commissioner districts can be located using the county's website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov). The county's meeting date, time, location, and agenda are posted and communicated to the public. To be transparent and accessible to the public, the County Board and its committee's live broadcasts are available on the Crow Wing County YouTube Channel or the Crow Wing County Meeting Portal, which can both be located on the county's website at [www.crowwing.gov](http://www.crowwing.gov).

### Planning Commission/Board of Adjustment

## Natural Resources Advisory Committee

## Transportation Advisory Committee

Highway Department

The County Highway Department is the primary public works agency in the county tasked with engineering, creating, and maintaining transportation infrastructure. This includes implementing the annual Highway Improvement Plan. The department's mission is to provide and maintain a high-quality and safe transportation system while upholding high levels of transparency and accountability to the constituents of Crow Wing County. It is a county leader in designing and maintaining a safe, efficient, and sustainable transportation system.

**2022 Commissioner Districts**

**Commissioner District 1**

**Commissioner District 2**

**Commissioner District 3**

**Commissioner District 4**

**Commissioner District 5**

## **Land Services**

Land Services provides excellent customer service focused on protecting the county's natural resources, valuing property as part of the property tax process, and managing public lands for recreation and forestry. Staff are devoted to professional, efficient, and effective programs and services. Land Services is comprised of 3 programs and services:

- Environmental: Addressing land subdivisions, land use permits, septic systems, solid waste management, stormwater management, surveying, water planning, forest management, and recreation.
- Assessing: Valuation and classification process, homestead classification, property tax reduction programs, and your right to be heard.
- Customer Services: We accept real estate documents for recording, property searches, property transfers, parcel consolidation, land sales, and vital records.

## **Community Services**

Crow Wing County Community Services is the governmental department administering social programs throughout the county. The county works with approximately a dozen privately owned healthcare providers to facilitate timely and complete mental healthcare management strategies. The county further offers substance abuse disorders services, which provide direct access to providers if the applicant qualifies for eligibility with the county. Beyond these critical needs, Crow Wing County focuses on child welfare by connecting families to social workers who can locate the least restrictive services for youth through community partners or direct provision. Crow Wing County fights homelessness by administering the state's housing assistance program for elderly and disabled adults—furthermore, the county partners with numerous organizations to provide housing opportunities for residents.



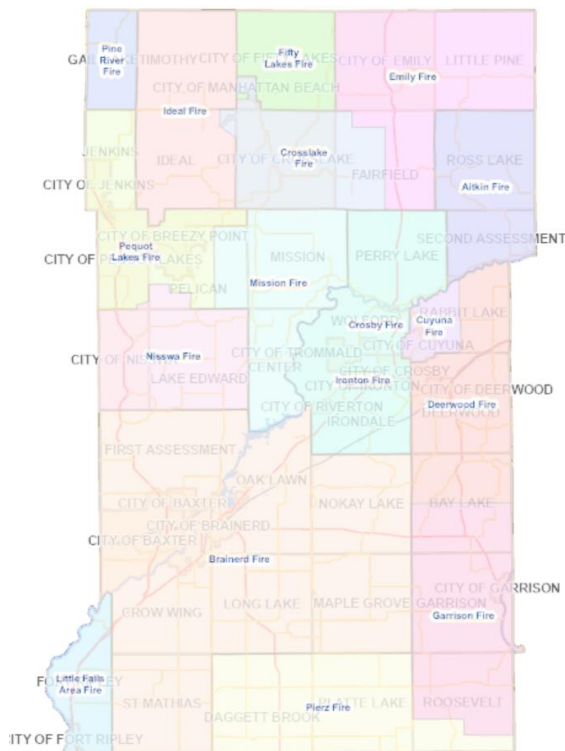
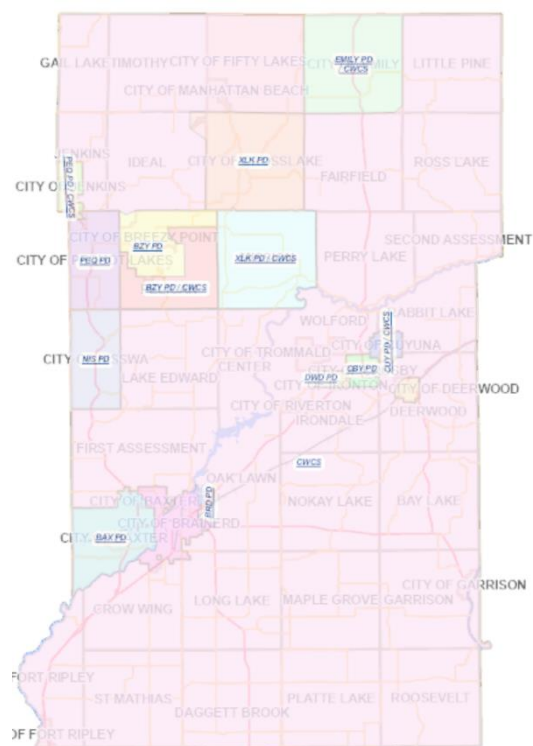
## Law Enforcement and Local Fire Departments

The Crow Wing County Sheriff's Department consists of approximately 130 employees, providing 24-hour service, seven days a week. Crow Wing County provides dispatch services to the fire and police agencies within the county. The following local departments provide police services in Crow Wing County:

- Baxter Police Department
- Brainerd Police Department
- Breezy Point Police Department
- Crosby Police Department
- Crosslake Police Department
- Cuyuna Police Department
- Deerwood Police Department
- Emily First Response Unit
- Nisswa Police Department
- Pequot Lakes Police Department
- Crow Wing County Sheriff

The following local departments provide fire services in Crow Wing County:

- Aitkin Fire
- Brainerd Fire
- Crosby Fire
- Crosslake Volunteer Fire
- Cuyuna Fire
- Deerwood
- Emily Volunteer Fire
- Fifty Lakes Fire & Rescue
- Garrison Fire
- Ideal Volunteer Fire
- Ironton Fire
- Little Falls Area Fire
- Mission Fire
- Nisswa Fire and Rescue
- Pequot Lakes Fire
- Pierz Fire
- Pine River Fire



## Courts

Crow Wing County District Court is the jurisdiction of origination for all family, probate, juvenile, criminal, and traffic cases filed in Crow Wing County. This Court is housed in the 9<sup>th</sup> Judicial Administrative District of Minnesota, a 17-county area covering most of Northwest Minnesota and is presided over by five judges. In addition, the County Attorney's Office coordinates a Drug Court and DUI Court to divert these offenders into treatment and rehabilitation.

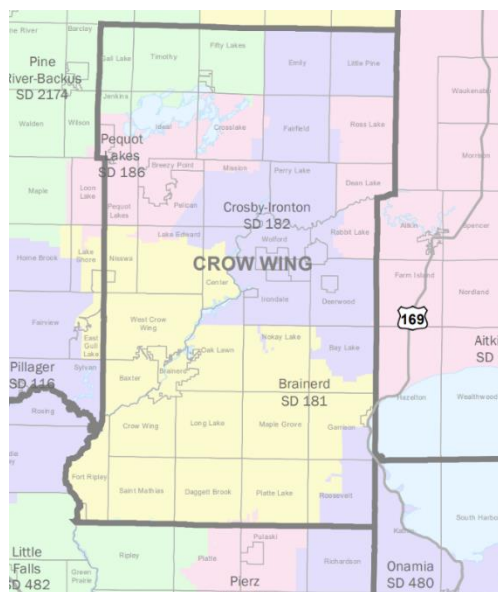
programs. The courts are conducted outside the judicial complex on the Crow Wing County Government Campus in Brainerd.

## Education

Crow Wing County has educational resources for students of all ages. The six public school districts that serve Crow Wing County residents are listed below and shown in the map:

- ISD 181 Brainerd-Baxter
- ISD 182 Crosby-Ironton
- ISD 186 Pequot Lakes
- ISD 480 Onamia
- ISD 1 Aitkin
- ISD 2174 Pine River Backus

The county is home to the Brainerd campus of Central Lakes College. Central Lakes College is part of Minnesota State, the third-most extensive system of state colleges and universities in the United States and the largest in the state, with 26 colleges, seven universities, and 54 campuses. It is a technical college serving about 5,500 students per year.



## Issues and Opportunities

**Trend 1: Cities provide utilities via municipal services. The county encourages growth adjacent to existing infrastructure or where infrastructure is planned.**

### Opportunities

- The county bears no maintenance responsibility for infrastructure annexed into another jurisdiction after the annexation.
- Inspection and regulatory enforcement burdens shift to the city's jurisdiction by supporting city growth, reducing staff resources needed in these annexable areas.
- Supporting growth will improve the taxable value of properties adjacent to cities, reaping economic benefits for the county revenue stream.

### Issues

- The county has no control over utilities or influence on decision-making as they are private or public providers outside their authority.
- Preparing for the growth of cities into their adjacent area of the county's jurisdiction provides infrastructural improvements and expenses from the county that will be annexed by cities that do not bear their cost.
- Municipalities that fail to enact planned expansions cost the county resources when the county installs infrastructure in preparation for planned expansions.

**Trend 2: An increase in county-wide service demands may require prioritizing services with budget levels of service and may require efficiency.**

Opportunities

- Support policies that develop renewable energy, water efficiency, and stormwater.
- Foster growth priorities to align with the concurrency of infrastructure and services.
- Create public-private partnerships to expand the service capacity of the county while not investing in the infrastructure that does not align with county priorities.

Issues

- The sprawl of development and lack of density makes service provision costly to providers and consumers, reducing service quality at increased costs.
- A lack of control over where development is built first and where service extensions are needed creates significant inefficiencies in utility or service provision systems.
- Budgeted service provision levels may not meet public needs, and private supplements could create monopolies in areas where they are the sole providers.

**Trend 3: Public-private and public-nonprofit partnerships for community and social services broaden the impact of Crow Wing County's public safety nets.**

Opportunities

- Services with a holistic approach to social and community issues are offered due to the number of active partners involved in providing the care or service.
- Opportunities to expand services such as specialized court dockets through the capacity of additional partners that can improve results.
- Increased opportunity for grants to implement programs based around service partnerships on specific issues in the community.

Issues

- The county trades off quality control and direct management of societal concerns, reducing its ability to direct change.
- The continuity of services at their current capacity levels is based on Crow Wing County's and supporting partners' ability to maintain partnerships.

**Trend 4: Broadband services are provided to the Crow Wing County public as a utility developed through grants.**

Opportunities

- Grants extend the reach of programs by supplementing county revenue expenditure, allowing the county to reallocate funding.
- Widespread development of broadband infrastructure will increase connectivity and transparency in government.
- Broadband accessibility development can increase economic competitiveness, quality of life, and access to health care through telehealth.

Issues

- The financial cost burden of developing infrastructure across a broad, rural geographic area is high, limiting the progress that can be planned at any given time.
- If unable to secure grants to support the project, the effort is an opportunity that is unlikely to be acted on.



## Goals and Policies

**Goal 1:** Create a county-wide inventory of infrastructure and utility plans that identifies areas where infrastructure capacities are available or expandable to serve growth. To support efficient growth, plan for coordinated and connected high-quality infrastructure systems, including roads, trails, and utilities.

**Policy 1:** Set service levels based on budget, strategic goals, and priorities.

**Policy 2:** Be fiscally accountable and allocate resources to support infrastructure based on budget, goals, and priorities.

**Policy 3:** Provide infrastructure for a growing region to meet projected demands, including clean water, waste management, amenities, roads, broadband connectivity, and services.

**Goal 2:** Manage centralized and individual wastewater systems throughout the county to minimize environmental impacts and protect ground and surface water quality.

**Policy 1:** Drive development to areas where existing infrastructure supports the intensity of utilization.

**Policy 2:** Seek opportunities for centralizing septic systems in areas of concentrated land use while managing individual systems.

**Goal 3:** Maintain a comprehensive waste management system that is self-sustaining and supports robust recycling programs, maximizes resources, reduces solid waste, and increases efficiency.

**Policy 1:** Increase municipal solid waste disposal at the Crow Wing County Landfill to 100 percent of produced output and increase construction debris disposal to 25 percent of all production in the county.

**Goal 4:** Embrace innovative technologies that offer alternative options, including appropriate locations for renewable energy sources.

**Resiliency Goal:** Create and maintain a resilient infrastructure and utility system, ensuring safe drinking water and access to high-speed internet.

**Policy 1:** Prepare for disasters, increase resilience, and foster innovative technological solutions.

# 9.0

## IMPLEMENTATION



## **9.0 Implementation**

The Comprehensive Plan creates a vision for Crow Wing County and guides land use and infrastructure improvements so the county can meet the community's future needs. However, the vision can only be realized if the plan is used. Tools to implement the plan will vary. Some will be reactive, such as zoning and subdivision ordinances that guide private developments, and others will be proactive, such as the county's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for undertaking public improvement projects.

### **Official Controls**

#### **Zoning**

County zoning codes regulate land use to promote all citizens' health, safety, order, convenience, and general welfare. They regulate the location, size, use, and height of buildings, the arrangement of buildings on lots, and the population density within the county. The county's zoning districts effectively guide development in Crow Wing County. Crow Wing County also allows Planned Unit Developments to allow unified site design, conserving land and open space by clustering buildings and activities.

#### **Subdivision of Land**

The Subdivision Ordinance regulates the subdivision and platting of land within the county, providing for the orderly, economical, and safe development of land and facilitating the adequate provision for transportation, water, sewage, storm drainage, electric utilities, streets, parks, and other public services and facilities essential to any development. County controls to regulate land subdivisions include an application and approval process, including the Planning Commission and County Board review. The subdivision of land promotes public health, safety, and general welfare. It helps achieve the vision of this comprehensive plan by providing standards for land development.

#### **Ordinance Amendments**

The county will evaluate land use controls and consider amendments to eliminate inconsistencies with the Comprehensive Plan, conform to state and federal regulations, and support the overarching community goals identified through this plan update.

The county may also want to review the current Zoning Map and Zoning District requirements for compliance with the Comprehensive Plan. If discrepancies or changes are needed to meet the county's goals and objectives, an amendment to the official controls (Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances) may be appropriate.

### **Funding Mechanisms**

Construction of public improvements and implementation of these plans require funding. The Capital Improvement Program (CIP), grants and local taxing authority can be used to plan for and fund these improvements.

#### **Capital Improvements Program**

Capital improvement projects are significant projects that benefit the County. They include constructing or reconstructing roads, sewers, water and electric utilities, trails, parks, and recreation facilities and purchasing new or replacement equipment and buildings. A Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is a budgeting plan that lists five years of needed capital improvements, their order of priority, and the means of financing. Projects included in a CIP are intended to meet the County's goals.

## **Grants**

Grants are an essential tool for local governments to fund projects that contribute to the community. A government grant is a financial award given by the federal, state, or local government to an eligible grantee. Government grants are not expected to be repaid but are usually allocated for specific needs and may go through a competitive application process. The County can pursue grant application opportunities to help Crow Wing County implement its vision.

## **Amending the Plan**

Amendments will occasionally be necessary to keep the Comprehensive Plan current. However, as the foundational document guiding development, most amendments should occur through a comprehensive effort to address changes in the community over time. The Action Plan, described below, is a tool that can and should be amended more frequently.

## **Implementation Plan**

Implementing the vision and goals of the Comprehensive Plan requires an action plan and the coordination and investments of many stakeholders. The Implementation Plan presents a concise summary of the goals and specific action steps, organized by chapter. The Implementation Plan includes:

- **Goal:** A restatement of the goal.
- **Policy:** Specific action items intended to help meet the goals.
- **County Lead:** Department within the county that is most responsible for implementing each policy.
- **Other Partners:** Other agencies with an interest or resource to support the policy implementation.
- **Resources:** Funding and programs that could be used to implement the policy.
- **Priority:** Indication of timeline or order for implementing policies using short, mid, and long term.

The Implementation Plan will be updated regularly as part of other County processes, such as annual budgeting or project prioritization sessions. The worksheets' action steps and timeline sections are intended to be flexible and adaptable over short periods, so changes to these sections do not require a formal amendment to the Comprehensive Plan. The goals, however, are high-level, long-term goals. Changes to the specific goals will require an amendment to the plan.



## Water and Natural Resources

<p>Goal 1: Maintain and enhance the overall health of water resources by implementing the 2021 Pine River, 2023 Mississippi-Brainerd, 2022 Rum River, 2024 Crow Wing, and Sartell Watershed One Watershed One Plans. This requires property owners, businesses, farmers, local governments, and state agencies to work together and take steps to protect the quality and quantity of our lakes, wetlands, rivers and streams, and groundwater.</p>				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
1) Recognize the value of all water resources, protect them, and enjoy their use without negative impacts. Draft options for mitigating impacts.	Land Services – Environmental Services	Watershed Districts	Staff time, Interagency cooperation, grant funding	Short-term
2) Collaborate actively with other government agencies to support water protection efforts through plans such as the One Watershed One Plans.	Land Services – Environmental Services	MNDNR, Local Cities, MPCA, and Watershed Districts	Staff time	Short-term
3) Balance the need for environmental protection with the economic benefits of developing natural resources.	Land Services	MNDNR, County Administrator	Staff time	Mid-term
4) Use information on the floodplain, shoreland, soil type, and property slopes to inform common-sense development practices and growth priorities.	Land Services – Environmental Services	MNDNR, County GIS	Data, Staff time	Short-term
<p>Resiliency Goal: Implement environmental resiliency initiatives to safeguard Crow Wing County's natural qualities through low salt design principles and mitigating eutrophic runoff.</p>				
Focus on policy options that promote preparedness for emergent threats to these resources.	Land Services – Environmental Services	Crow Wing County Highway Department	Data, Staff time, Continuing education	Short-term

## Land Use

Goal 1: Plan a balanced approach to increase housing by increasing densities.				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Support high-density and multifamily development in cities with infrastructure and service capacities.	Land Services – Environmental Services	Brainerd HRA, Cities, County Administrator, Developers	Grants, Staff time, Interagency cooperation, Infrastructure data	Short-term
Plan for Rural Residential – 1 surrounding urban area to enable future annexations and not make infrastructure extensions cost-prohibitive.	Land Services – Environmental Services	County Administrator / Board, County Engineer, Cities	Staff time	Short-term
Plan for smaller rural residential lots in areas served by existing roads but unlikely to be served by public sewer and water to support more affordable rural development.	Land Services – Environmental Services	County Administrator / Board, County Engineer, Townships	Staff time	Mid-term
Goal 2: Plan a balanced approach to growth that supports economic growth and focuses on commercial and industrial development along existing infrastructure.				
Drive development towards existing infrastructural and service capacities.	Land Services/ County Administrator	County Board, BLADEC, County Engineer	Staff time	Mid-term
Encourage commercial development along arterial transportation corridors.	Land Services	County Administrator / Board, BLADEC, County Engineer, Cities	Staff Time, Tax abatements, financing instruments	Mid-term
Goal 3: Maintain farming on higher-quality agricultural lands while allowing marginal agricultural land development that harmonizes with local character and existing uses.				
Foster the use of quality agricultural land for agricultural uses where it is most suitable based on natural conditions and location.	Land Services - Environmental Services	County Board, County Administrator, MN Dept of AG,	Grants, Staff time, Interagency cooperation	Short-term

Resiliency Goal: Protect water quality, minimize environmental impacts, and pursue land use opportunities that aid the county in achieving existing and strategic needs such as erosion control and other hazard mitigations.

Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Customize development intensity standards based on natural and water resources and community goals.	Land Services - Environmental Services	County Board, County Administrator, MNDNR, MPCA	Staff Time	Short-term
Encourage land uses that are likely to mitigate effects on the environmental impacts of surrounding properties.	Land Services - Environmental Services	MNDNR, MPCA, Watershed Districts	Staff Time	Mid-term

## Economic Development

Goal: Foster a diverse business environment focusing on growth in designated infrastructure-supported areas. Support business development that creates livable-wage jobs enhances tourism and improves residents' quality of life. Enhance community character and preserve quality of life by addressing blighted properties, light pollution, and other impacts.				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Cultivate business development along strategically recognized commercial corridors and where supporting infrastructure currently exists.	County Administrator/ Land Services	BLADEC, County Board	Grants, Staff time	Short-term
Pursue attracting and retaining employers that provide a diversified local economy and jobs with a livable wage.	County Administrator/ Land Services	BLADEC	Grants, Staff time,	Mid-term
Increase the support of local tourism, vacation-oriented businesses, and a non-seasonal base economy.	County Administrator / Board	BLADEC, Cities, Townships, County Board,	Grants, Staff time	Mid-term
Promote redevelopment of sites that detract from the community's character.	Land Services	BLADEC, Cities, Townships, County Board,	Grants, Staff time	Long-term
Prepare and anticipate economic challenges and changes in local consumer behavior to position the county to seize current and future opportunities.	County Administrator	BLADEC, Chambers	Grants, staff time, community education, data	Mid-term



## Housing

<p>Goal: Plan for residential development that meets the needs of residents of all ages and income levels, focusing on an aging population and moderate-priced housing for area workers. Balance interests between short-term rentals and long-term housing needs. Support the development of housing that balances natural resources, creates a sense of community, and connects to recreational amenities and open space.</p>				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Promote policies and development that make housing more attainable for all income levels and abilities, especially workers, seniors, and start-up homes.	Land Services	Crow Wing County HRA	Grants, Staff time, Continuing education, Data	Short-term
Pursue development opportunities that provide for all stages of life and are accessible to all residents.	Land Services	Crow Wing County HRA	Grants, Staff time, Continuing education, Data	Mid-term
Encourage mixed-use development to create neighborhoods and communities around existing and new housing.	Land Services	Crow Wing County HRA	Grants, Staff time, Continuing education, Data	Mid-term
Prioritize housing development in harmony with the natural and recreational resources in Crow Wing County.	Land Services	MN DNR, County Engineer	Grants, Staff time,	Mid-term
Balance the development of short-term rentals with the community's long-term need for permanent housing options.	Land Services	County Board	Staff time	Mid-term
<p>Resiliency Goal: Seek opportunities to develop flexible and easily adaptable housing that meets changing needs to prepare for projected changes in the county population, workforce, and housing market.</p>				
	Land Services	Crow Wing County HRA	Grants, Staff time, Continuing education, Data	Short-term

## Recreation

<b>Goal:</b> Maintain and enhance parks, recreation, and natural resources in Crow Wing County to enhance community well-being by providing diverse park amenities, improving trail connections and safety, and preserving the environment. Ensure accessible and high-quality recreational opportunities for residents while protecting the county's natural areas and open spaces.				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Provide public access to recreational opportunities that meet the diverse needs of the growing community.	Land Services - Environmental Services	County Administrator, MNDNR	Grants, Staff time, Data	Mid-term
Balance the need for recreational amenities with environmental concerns for the county's natural areas.	Land Services - Environmental Services	MNDNR,	Interagency cooperation, Staff time, data	Mid-term
Seek opportunities to increase the connectivity and safety of trail systems in the county.	Land Services - Environmental Services	Highway Department	Interagency cooperation, Staff time, Grant funding	Mid-term
Direct resources to essential parks and public lands where the opportunity for strategically placed amenities enhances community well-being.	Land Services - Environmental Services	Cities, Townships, MNDNR	Staff time, Grant funding	Mid-term
<b>Resiliency Goal:</b> Balance the development of new recreational opportunities with the county's current maintenance capacity and manage to avoid overuse.				
Anticipate challenges and be prepared to adapt to recreational systems trends, change, and issues that arise.	Land Services – Environmental Services	County Maintenance Services	Grants, Staff time, Continuing education, Data	Mid-term

## Transportation

Goal 1: Maintain a safe, cost-effective, and efficient transportation system.				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Ensure all land use and related decisions are balanced with local efforts to implement the County Roadway Safety Plan and Highway Improvement Plan (HIP).	Highway Department	MnDOT, City and townships,	Staff Time	Short-term
Align local and state highway system planning with goals for highway-adjacent land uses.	Highway Department – Transportation Planner	County Board / Administration, Land Service	Staff Time	Short-term
Work with partners to identify and coordinate transportation system improvements to accommodate growth and development.	Highway Department	MNDOT, BLADEC, County Board / Administrator, Cities, Townships	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Short-term
Plan, build, and maintain roadways to accommodate existing and future traffic growth.	Highway Department	MNDOT, County Board / Administrator, Cities,	LRTP Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Short-term
Support area airports responsibly and sustainably to enhance the capacity of passenger and freight movement options	County Administrator	FAA, USDOT, MNDOT, FRA	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Mid-term

Goal 2: Develop a transportation system that serves the accessibility and mobility needs of all users.				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Plan for trails and other facilities that connect destinations and create a network across the County, providing recreational opportunities as well as multi-modal options for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorized recreational vehicles	Land Services	County Highway, County Board / Administration	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Mid-term
Support regional planning activities to enhance interagency collaboration and coordination.	Land Services	County Highway, County Board / Administration	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Mid-term
Support the creation of a continuous network of non-motorized trails connecting population centers with recreation and providing opportunities for daily commuting.	Land Services	County Highway, County Board / Administration	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Mid-term
Support transit service that provides transportation alternatives responsibly and sustainably.	County Administrator / Board	Land Service, County highway,	Grants, Staff Time	Mid-term
Pursue opportunities to create a continuous network of 10-ton roads throughout the county to accommodate freight mobility.	Highway Department	County Board / Administrator, MnDOT	Grants, Staff Time, Data,	Short-term
Acknowledge the importance of the existing railway network for the movement of freight throughout the region while supporting the advancement of initiatives that enhance the safety of the railway network at locations in conflict with the existing transportation system.	County Administrator/ Board	FRA, MnDOT	-	Short-term



Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Plan for complimentary land uses adjacent to the airport that takes advantage of air travel and restricts land use that would conflict with air traffic.	Land Services	FAA, MnDOT, Brainerd Regional Airport,	Interagency Cooperation, Staff Time	Mid-term
Goal 3: Promote positive environmental and health outcomes by minimizing the negative impacts on sensitive ecosystems, historically and culturally significant sites, and adjacent land uses.				
Select the best routes and realignments for new highway links and local roadways to ensure that environmental factors are sufficiently weighted.	Highway Department	MNDOT, Land Services, MNDNR, Watershed Districts	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Short-term
Balance environmental strategies and best management practices when planning, building, and maintaining the motorized and non-motorized transportation network.	Highway Department	MNDOT, Land Services, MNDNR	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Short-term
Seek opportunities to create new wetlands or wildlife habitat credits, which would act as required mitigation for future transportation system improvements.	Land Services – Environmental Services	MNDNR, County Board/ Administrator	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time	Mid-term
Goal 4: Preserve and modernize the existing transportation system.				
Explore and support emerging technology related to vehicles and information systems to improve the transportation network's planning, construction, and maintenance.	Highway Department	County Board / Administrator, MNDOT	Interagency Cooperation, Grants, Staff Time, Data, Continuing Education	Mid-term

Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Pursue federal, state, regional, and local funding opportunities to preserve, maintain, expand, and modernize the transportation network.	Highway Department	County Board / Administrator, MNDOT	Grants, Staff Time, Data,	Short-term
Coordinate with partners and local jurisdictions to adequately address land use regulatory impacts of road realignments, right-of-way acquisition, and access modifications.	Highway Department	County Board / Administrator, MNDOT, Cities Townships, Counties	Grants, Staff Time, Data,	Short-term

## Services and Infrastructure

Goal 1: Create a county-wide inventory of infrastructure and utility plans that identifies areas where infrastructure capacities are available or expandable to serve growth. To support efficient growth, plan for coordinated and connected high-quality infrastructure systems, including roads, trails, and utilities.				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Set levels of service based on budget and strategic goals and priorities.	County Administrator / Community Services	Nonprofit Entities, Relevant State agencies,	Grants, Staff time	Mid-term
Be fiscally accountable and allocate resources to support infrastructure based on budget, goals, and priorities.	County Board/ Administrator / Community Services	Relevant State agencies	Grants, Staff time	Short-term
Provide infrastructure for a growing region to meet projected demands, including clean water, waste management, amenities, roads, broadband connectivity, and services.	County Board	County Engineer, Land Services, Relevant State agencies	Grants, Staff time	Short-term
Goal 2: Manage centralized and individual wastewater systems throughout the County to minimize environmental impacts and protect ground and surface water quality.				
Drive development to areas where existing infrastructure supports the intensity of utilization.	Land Services	County Administration / Board	Staff time	Short-term
Seek opportunities for centralizing septic systems in areas of concentrated land use while managing individual systems.	Land Services	County Administration / Board	Staff time	Long-term

Goal 3: Maintain a comprehensive, self-sustaining waste management system, support robust recycling programs, maximize resources, reduce solid waste, and increase efficiency.				
Policy	County Lead	Other Partners	Resources	Priority
Increase municipal solid waste disposal at the Crow Wing County Landfill to 100% of produced output and increase construction debris disposal to 25% of all production in the county.	Land Services	County Administration / Board	Staff time	Mid-term
Goal 4: Embrace innovative technologies that offer alternative options, including appropriate locations for renewable energy sources.				
	Land Services	County Administration / Board	Grants, Staff Time, Data, Continuing Education	Short-term
Goal 5: Create and maintain a resilient infrastructure and utility system, ensuring safe drinking water and access to high-speed internet.				
Prepare for disasters, increase resilience, and foster innovative technological solutions.	County Administrator	County Engineer, MNDOT,	Grants, Staff Time, Data, Continuing Education	Short-term



## Appendix A: Past Plans and Study Audit Matrix

Topics	2003 - 2023 Comprehensive Plan	2012 CWC Comp Rec Trails Plan	Mississippi-Brainerd 1 Watershed 1 Plan	2013 Water Protection Report	2020 CWC Housing Study	2011 (Updated 2023) Land Use Ordinance	2023-2027 Highway Improvement Plan	1987 (amended 2007) Airport Zoning Ordinance	2015 Forest Resources Plan For Tax-Forfeited lands	2013 CWC Water Plan Fact Sheet	2020 Housing Trust Fund Ordinance	Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway update 2015	2013 - 2023 Local Comprehensive Water Plan	2020 Pine River One Watershed One Plan	2022 CWC Recreational Use Plan	Rum River 1w1p
ADUs					X	X										
Affordable Housing	X				X						X					
Area Competition Summary																
Areas-subject-to-change Analysis							X		X							X
Broadband																
Capacity Issues						X			X					X		X
Charettes																
Community Survey	X				X							X				
Complete Streets																
Connect Natural and Built Environment	X	X				X			X	X		X	X	X	x	X
Connectivity					X											
Deferred Development and Growth							X							X		
Demographics Analysis					X							X				
Development Incentives					X	X	X									
Development Ready																
Downtown Development																
Drinking Water	X			X		X				X			X	X		X
Economic Analysis					X				X							
Economic Development												X				
Employment					X				X							
Existing Conditions Summary												X		X		
Façade Improvement Program																
Growing Senior Population					X	X										
Guiding Principles		X										X		X		
Hidden Parking						X										
History of Crow Wing County																
Housing Choice					X	X					X	X				
Implementation Strategies		X										X		X		X

Topics	2003 - 2023 Comprehensive Plan	2012 CWC Comp Rec Trails Plan	Mississippi-Brainerd 1 Watershed 1 Plan	2013 Water Protection Report	2020 CWC Housing Study	2011 (Updated 2023) Land Use Ordinance	2023-2027 Highway Improvement Plan	1987 (amended 2007) Airport Zoning Ordinance	2015 Forest Resources Plan For Tax-Forfeited lands	2013 CWC Water Plan Fact Sheet	2020 Housing Trust Fund Ordinance	Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway update 2015	2013 - 2023 Local Comprehensive Water Plan	2020 Pine River One Watershed One Plan	2022 CWC Recreational Use Plan	Rum River 1w1p
Increased Tree Canopy						X			X							
Industrial Village																
Infrastructure Evaluation/Improvements		X				X						X			X	
Key Performance Standards				X		X										
Livable Community																
Marketing												X			X	
Mixed Use Emphasis																
Mixed-Use					X											
Natural Resources		X	X	X		X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Parking						X										
Parks and Rec		X				X			X	X				X	X	X
Plan Implementation Matrix		X										X				X
Private Sector Investment Tools					X											
Psychographics/Target Markets																
Residential Area Analysis					X											
Resiliency			X						X	X			X	X		X
Restaurants						X										
Retail Possibility Analysis						X										
Retail/Micro Retail						X										
Specific Use Recommendations					X											
Stakeholder Meetings/Public Input Groups		X	X		X							X	X			X
Street Trade Area Demographics																
Streetscape																
Sustainability			X			X			X	X			X	X		X
Tourism					X				X			X				
Trails and Paths		X				X			X			X			X	
Transportation					X	X		X	X			X				
Urban Design/Architecture					X											
Urban Forestry			X			X			X			X		X		

Topics	2003 - 2023 Comprehensive Plan	2012 CWC Comp Rec Trails Plan	Mississippi-Brainerd 1 Watershed 1 Plan	2013 Water Protection Report	2020 CWC Housing Study	2011 (Updated 2023) Land Use Ordinance	2023-2027 Highway Improvement Plan	1987 (amended 2007) Airport Zoning Ordinance	2015 Forest Resources Plan For Tax-Forfeited lands	2013 CWC Water Plan Fact Sheet	2020 Housing Trust Fund Ordinance	Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway update 2015	2013 - 2023 Local Comprehensive Water Plan	2020 Pine River One Watershed One Plan	2022 CWC Recreational Use Plan	Rum River 1w1p
User's Guide																
Utilities						X										
Walkability															X	
Watershed Districts			X			X			X	X		X	X	X		
Zoning Changes and Review					X	X		X			X	X	X		X	X
Water Resources			X	X		X			X	X		X	X	X		X
Land Use						X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	

## Appendix B: Sample Communications


### Social Media Posts



10.0



## Newsletter Updates



### COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

CROW WING  
COUNTY  
MINNESOTA

March 5, 2024

#### The Comprehensive Plan Update & Next Steps

The Comprehensive Plan Update is beginning its second phase. This work will ensure the county has a clear direction for making future decisions related to land use and developments that reflect the communities' needs in Crow Wing County. During the first phase, the existing conditions and needs of the area were analyzed through research and community feedback. The project team held a public Open House, a tour with county and project staff, and received over 220 public survey responses.

The community survey input showed the top two issues to address are housing (27%) and Jobs and Economic Development (27%). Many survey respondents feel there should be higher quality housing options for those of all incomes and age groups. 48% of responders felt more senior housing options are needed and 58% say there needs to be better incentives or resources to maintain existing housing. The survey also identified

respondent's top priorities for the areas natural resources including increased protection of water quality (73%), preserving natural forests (75%), and protecting quality farmland (64%). For more information about public engagement, visit the project website listed below to view the Phase One Engagement Summary.

This information is being used to draft a Comprehensive Plan Update, which will be published this Spring for public feedback. As the project enters the second phase, public involvement will continue to be crucial. The county and project staff will be holding monthly County Board Workshops to review the draft plan and gather feedback. These workshops will also be posted to the project website and allow for feedback through an online comment system. To learn more about the project, the County Board Workshop dates, or sign up for updates visit the project website [here](#).

Staff will update the County Board at the Committee of the Whole Meeting on the third Tuesday of each month from March – June at 9:00am. March 19, April 16, May 21, and June 18. Come in person to the County Board room at the Historic Courthouse, 326 Laurel Street, Brainerd. The public can also watch on our YouTube channel [here](#).

For more information, contact Land Services at 218-824-1010 or [landservices@crowwing.gov](mailto:landservices@crowwing.gov)

Visit the Project Website

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