

SUBJECT: Land Donation and Project Boundary Modification – Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area– Rock County

FOR: OCTOBER 2012 BOARD MEETING

TO BE PRESENTED BY: Richard Steffes

SUMMARY: The Natural Heritage Land Trust has offered to donate 199.06 acres of land to the Department for the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area in Rock County. The property is located 10 miles west of Beloit and 15 miles southwest of Janesville. It borders Department land on the west and south. It is a mix of wetland, lowland woods, cropland, and pasture. It is entirely encumbered with a WRP perpetual easement which will result in the NRCS converting the existing cropland, after this season, to a mix of grassland and wetland restoration through a plan developed in conjunction with the WDNR Wildlife Management staff. This plan may allow limited haying and grazing (no more than every third year) to assist with long-term brush control.

A unique feature of this WRP easement is that it obligates NRCS to be the primary habitat management entity into the future. While the owner (DNR if transfer approved) is expected to cooperate, NRCS ultimately bears responsibility for all management. This will result in a considerable savings in seed, labor and equipment costs for DNR. In effect, this goes beyond donation of a turnkey wildlife property, to include a partner that will burn or mow the grass when necessary for habitat management.

Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area began in 1960 as a Federal Aid in Fish and Wildlife Restoration project to provide public hunting and produce ducks and pheasants. It is a 2,800-acre property located in Rock and Green Counties. Beginning in the Town of Spring Grove in Green County, the property follows the Sugar River bottoms through the Town of Avon in Rock County to the Illinois border.

Avon Bottoms features a lowland hardwood forest in the floodplain of the meandering Sugar River. Large silver maples, swamp white oaks, and green ash dominate the diverse canopy of this wet-mesic forest. Other tree species are shagbark hickory, hackberry, cottonwood, bitternut hickory, bur oak, American elm, and basswood. Sycamores, at the northern limit of their range, are occasionally present and black willows are common along the river. Numerous sloughs and old oxbows wind among bottomland hardwoods, grassland and agricultural cropland.

The Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area is identified as a Conservation Opportunity Area of state significance for the conservation of floodplain forest communities in Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan. The wildlife area is managed to provide opportunities for public hunting, fishing, trapping and other outdoor recreation while protecting the qualities of the unique native communities and associated species found on the property. The floodplain forest management objective is to protect the ecological river corridor gradients from lowland to uplands, along with protection of the floodplain corridor. Forest management has been primarily passive, with more extensive efforts to maintain grassland communities on the uplands through prairie restoration and management, mowing, prescribed burning and herbicide treatments. Where feasible, populations of invasive species are controlled or eliminated by cutting, pulling, burning, herbicide treatment and/or bio-control.

Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area is gaining new respect for its wild nature in close proximity to Wisconsin and Illinois population centers. Surrounding the many sloughs and oxbows of the lower Sugar River, the property includes two State Natural Areas set aside for their rare intact plant communities, and was recognized in 2006 by the Wisconsin Land Legacy Report as part of Legacy aquatic and floodplain communities. Just recently, Avon Bottoms was declared a Wisconsin Important Bird Area, known for breeding Cerulean and Yellow-throated warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, and Yellow-crowned night-heron. The floodplain forest and grassy sloughs are heavily used by migrating birds.

Acceptance of this transfer opportunity from Natural Heritage Land Trust on this 199.06 acres for Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area will help protect wildlife habitat, provide additional opportunities for public hunting

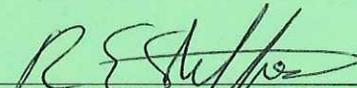
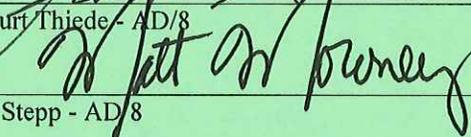
and public recreation, restore and provide habitat for a variety of species, and to consolidate state ownership in this project as well as protect this important resource area. If approved, the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area project boundary will be expanded to include this parcel.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Board accept the donation of 199.06 acres of land for the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area program and expand the project boundary to include this parcel; send a certificate of appreciation to the Natural Heritage Land Trust; and make an expression of appreciation part of the official records of the Natural Resources Board.

LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS:

No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fiscal Estimate Required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Attached
No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Environmental Assessment of Impact Statement Required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	Attached
No <input type="checkbox"/>	Background Memo	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Attached

APPROVED:

 _____ Real Estate Director, Richard E. Steffes - LF/6	<u>10-3-12</u> _____ Date
 _____ Administrator, Kurt Thiede - AD/8	<u>10/3/12</u> _____ Date
 _____ Secretary, Cathy Stepp - AD/8	<u>10/5/12</u> _____ Date

cc: S. Miller – LF/6
R. Steffes – LF/6
L. Ross – AD/5
T. Hauge - WM/6
M. Aquino – Fitchburg

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 3, 2012 FILE REF: WM 60190
 TO: Natural Resources Board
 FROM: Cathy Stepp
 SUBJECT: Proposed Land Donation and Project Boundary Modification, Natural Heritage Land Trust Tract, File # WM 60190

1. PARCEL DESCRIPTION:

Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area
 Rock County

Grantor:

Natural Heritage Land Trust
 c/o Jim Welsh – Executive Director
 303 South Paterson, Suite 6
 Madison, WI 53703

Acres: 199.06Price: GiftAppraised Value: \$260,000; \$278,500Interest: Fee Title PurchaseImprovements: NoneLocation: The tract is located in Rock County 10 miles west of BeloitLand Description: The subject land is level.Covertypes Breakdown:

Type	Acreage
Grassland	53.06
Cropland	146.0
Total:	199.06

Zoning: AgriculturePresent Use: Agriculture and outdoor recreationProposed Use: Public outdoor recreation and conservationTenure: In Matteson family for decades; currently being acquired by NHLTAgreement Date: September 19, 2012Stewardship Land Access: This property will be open to the public for all nature based outdoor recreational activities to include hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking and cross country skiing.2. JUSTIFICATION:

Natural Heritage Land Trust offered to donate 199.06 acres of land for the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area in Rock County to the Department. The property is located 10 miles west of Beloit and 15 miles southwest of Janesville. It borders Department land on the west and south. It is a mix of wetland, lowland woods,

cropland, and pasture. It is entirely encumbered with a WRP perpetual easement, which will result in the NRCS converting the existing cropland, after this season, to a mix of grassland and wetland restoration through a plan developed in conjunction with the WDNR Wildlife Management staff. This plan may allow limited haying and grazing (no more than every third year) to assist with long-term brush control.

A unique feature of this WRP easement is that it obligates NRCS to be the primary habitat management entity into the future. While the owner (DNR if transfer approved) is expected to cooperate, NRCS ultimately bears responsibility for all management. This will result in a considerable savings in seed, labor and equipment costs for DNR. In effect, this goes beyond donation of a turnkey wildlife property, to include a partner that will burn or mow the grass when necessary for habitat management.

Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area began in 1960 as a Federal Aid in Fish and Wildlife Restoration project to provide public hunting and produce ducks and pheasants. It is a 2,734-acre property located in Rock and Green Counties. Beginning in the Town of Spring Grove in Green County, the property follows the Sugar River bottoms through the Town of Avon in Rock County to the Illinois border.

Avon Bottoms features a lowland hardwood forest in the floodplain of the meandering Sugar River. Large silver maples, swamp white oaks, and green ash dominate the diverse canopy of this wet-mesic forest. Other tree species are shagbark hickory, hackberry, cottonwood, bitternut hickory, bur oak, American elm, and basswood. Sycamores, at the northern limit of their range, are occasionally present and black willows are common along the river. Numerous sloughs and old oxbows wind among bottomland hardwoods, grassland and agricultural cropland.

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Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area is gaining new respect for its wild nature in close proximity to Wisconsin and Illinois population centers. Surrounding the many sloughs and oxbows of the lower Sugar River, the property includes two State Natural Areas set aside for their rare intact plant communities, and was recognized in 2006 by the Wisconsin Land Legacy Report as part of Legacy aquatic and floodplain communities. Just recently, Avon Bottoms was declared a Wisconsin Important Bird Area, known for breeding Cerulean and Yellow-throated warbler, Acadian Flycatcher, and Yellow-crowned night-heron. The floodplain forest and grassy sloughs are heavily used by migrating birds of all description. In 2009, the Sugar River Floodplain Forest, primarily the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area and its included state natural areas, was designated a Wisconsin Wetland Gem by the Wisconsin Wetlands Association.

The Department recommends the approval of this transfer opportunity from Natural Heritage Land Trust on this 199.06 acres for Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area to protect wildlife habitat, to provide additional opportunities for public hunting and public recreation, to restore and provide habitat for a variety of species, and consolidate state ownership in this project as well as protect this important resource area. If approved the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area project boundary will be expanded to include this parcel.

3. LAND MANAGEMENT:

A unique feature of this WRP easement is that it obligates NRCS to be the primary habitat management entity into the future. While the owner (DNR if transfer approved) is expected to cooperate, NRCS ultimately bears responsibility for all management. This will result in a considerable savings in seed, labor and equipment costs for DNR. In effect, this goes beyond donation of a turnkey wildlife property, to include a partner that will burn or mow the grass when necessary for habitat management.

4. FINANCING:

No funding is required for this transaction. NHLT is acquiring the land from Mr. Matteson for \$130,000, who is donating half the appraised value of \$260,000. Stewardship funds are providing the purchase price through a grant to NHLT.

5. ACQUISITION STATUS OF THE AVON BOTTOMS WILDLIFE AREA:

Established: 1960

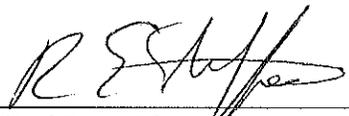
Acres Purchased to Date: 2,798.67

Acquisition Goal: 2,710 *Acquisition goal will be updated to include this parcel

Percent Complete: 103.27 %

Cost to Date: \$1,229,287.64

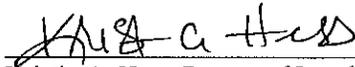
RECOMMENDED:



Richard E. Steffes, Real Estate Director

10-3-12

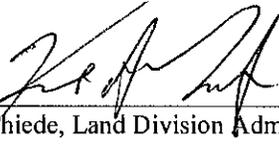
Date



Kristin A. Hess, Bureau of Legal Services

10/3/12

Date



Kurt Thiede, Land Division Administrator

10/3/12

Date

RES:

Acknowledgment of Gift

This is to certify that at its October 2012 meeting, the Natural Resources Board gratefully accepted gift of 199.06 acres of land in Rock County for the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area from

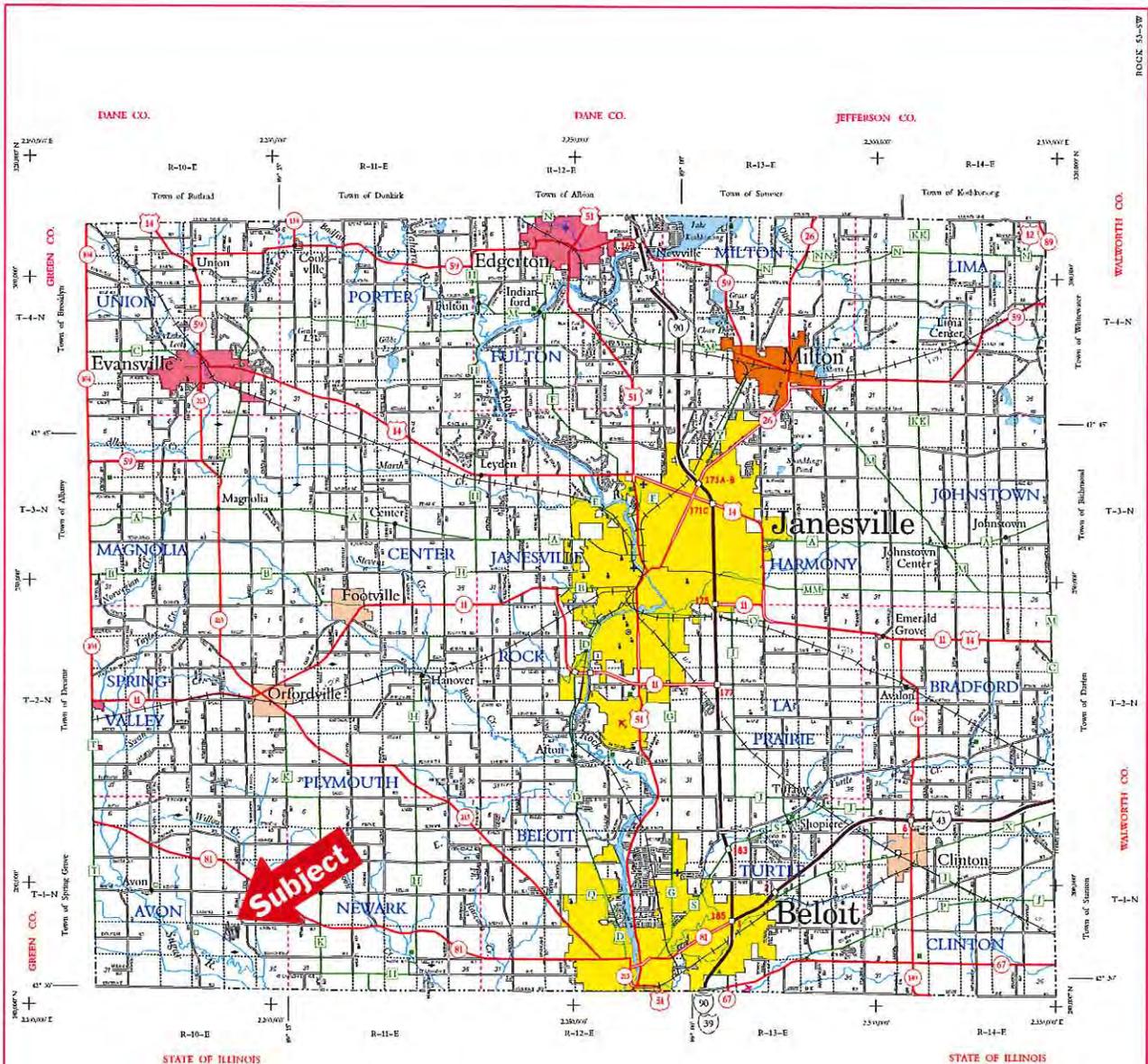
The Natural Heritage Land Trust

It is significant that organizations such as yours are interested in helping protect Wisconsin's natural heritage and contribute materially toward this end.

An expression of our appreciation is a part of the official records of the Natural Resources Board. We present this certificate of sincere appreciation on behalf of present and future generations to thank you for your thoughtfulness and generosity.

Natural Resources Board

David Clausen, CHAIR

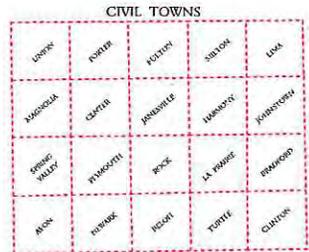


- LEGEND**
- Freeway
 - Multilane Divided
 - U.S. or State Hwy
 - County Trunk Hwy
 - Town Road
 - Firelane
 - Railroad
 - State Trail
 - Interchange
 - Highway Separation
 - Interstate Highway No.
 - U.S. Highway No.
 - State Highway No.
 - County Highway Letter
 - State Boundary
 - County Boundary
 - Civil Town Boundary
 - Section Line
 - Dam
 - Hospital
 - School
 - Airport
 - County Seat
 - Unincorporated Village
 - Fish Hatchery
 - Game Farm
 - Public Hunt or Fish Grd.
 - Public Camp & Picnic Grd.
 - Ranger Station
 - State Park
 - County Park
 - Water Facility
 - Rest Area
 - Mileage Facility
 - Wapole
 - Point Facility
 - Unit of Wisconsin - Rock Co.



SECTION NUMBERING OF A TOWNSHIP

6	5	4	3	2	1
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36



MILES OF HIGHWAY
as of Dec. 31, 2013

STATE 232
 COUNTY 381
 LOCAL HIGHWAYS 166
 OTHER HIGHWAYS 4
 TOTAL FOR COUNTY 783

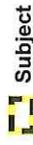
Total Area (from Census) 721 sq. mi.
 Population (2010 Census) 82,307
 County Seat Janesville

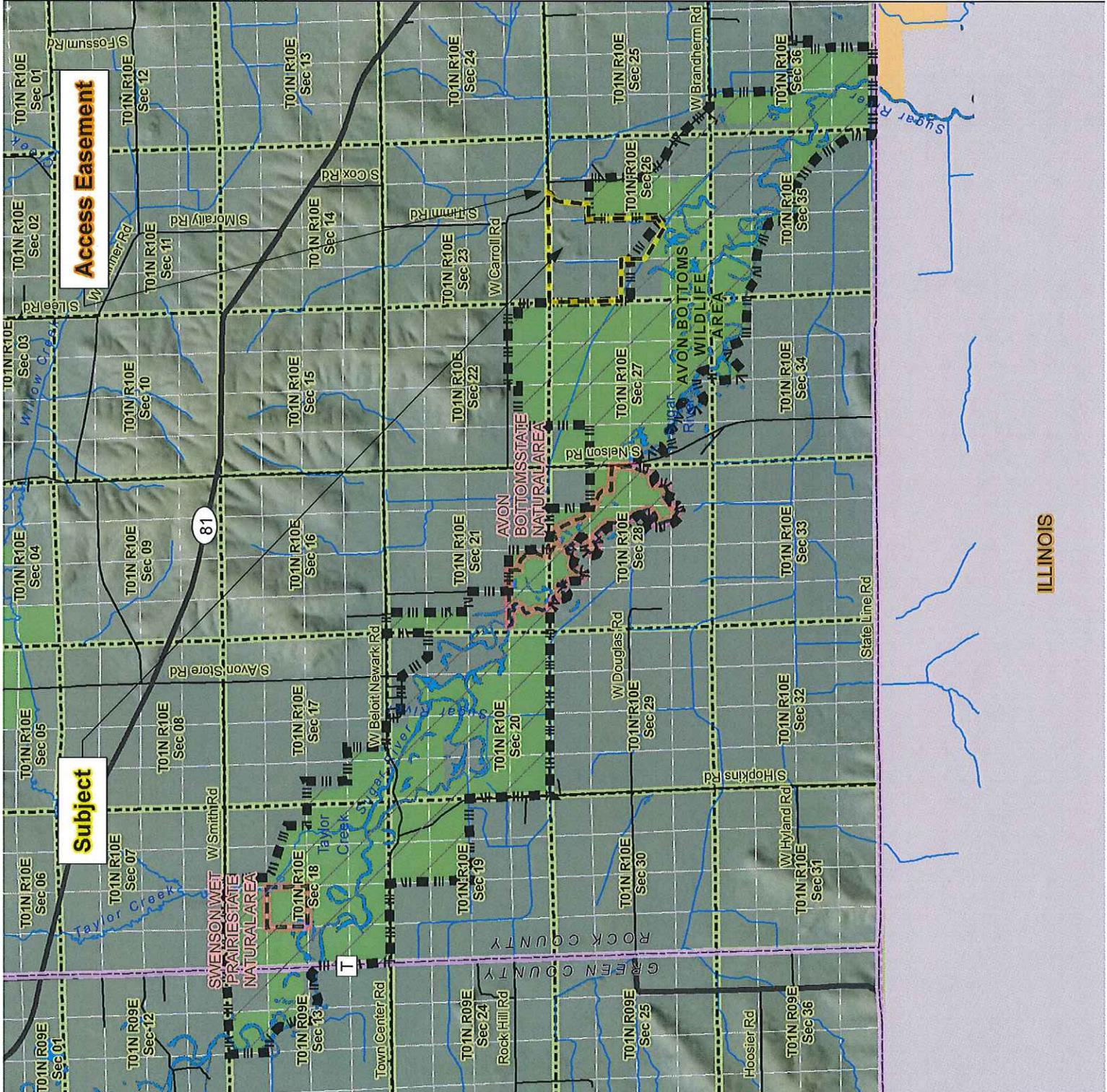
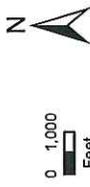
ROCK CO.
 DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
 STATE OFFICE BUILDING
 Madison, Wisconsin

SCALE 1" = 10 MILES
 Correct to
 JAN. 2012
 Rec. compiled from USGS Quadrangle
 EIV/AV/SL/LS

**Natural Heritage
Land Trust (Former
Matteson) - Fee/Gift
Avon Bottoms -
Wildlife Area**

WM 60190
T1N R10E Sec 26
Town of Avon
Rock County
199.06 Acres

-  Subject
-  Access Easement
-  WDRN Owned
-  WDRN Easement
-  DNR Project Boundary
-  County Forest Land
-  State Natural Area
-  PLSS Section Line
-  QQ Section Boundary



★ Location of Property

Natural Heritage Land Trust (Former Matteson) - Fee/Gift

T1N R10E Sec 26, Town of Avon, Rock County



Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area



Subject

Access Easement

-  DNR Owned
-  DNR Eased
-  DNR Project Boundary
-  Section Line
-  QQ Section Lines

0 150 300 450 Feet

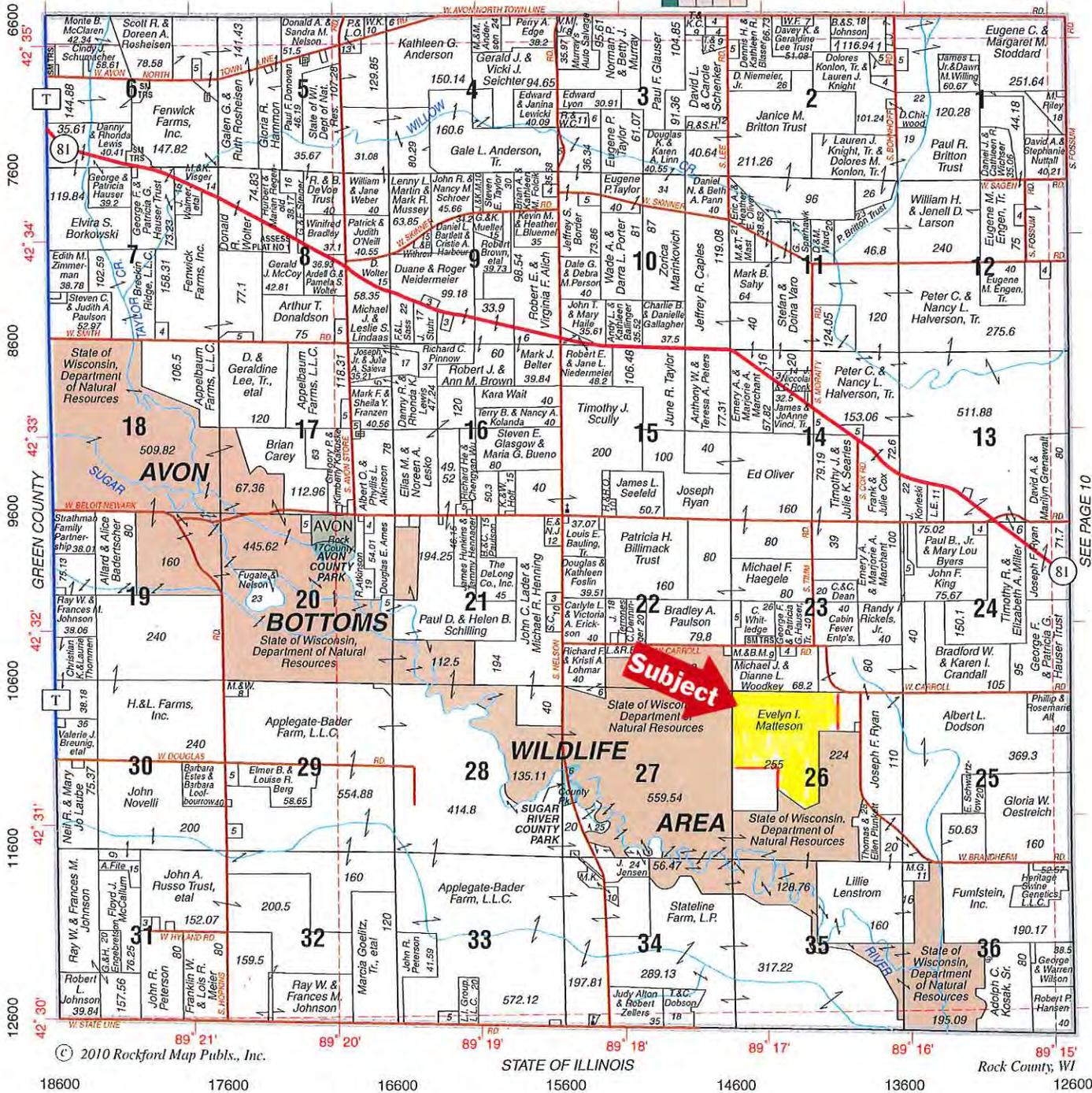


Oct 01, 2012 kmh
 Real Estate Section
 Bureau of Facilities and Lands

AVON

SEE PAGE 18

T.1N.-R.10E.



SEE PAGE 10