

**SUBJECT:** Land Acquisition – Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area – Rock County

**FOR:** SEPTEMBER 2012 BOARD MEETING

**TO BE PRESENTED BY:** Richard Steffes

**SUMMARY:** The Department has obtained an option to purchase 165.46 acres of land from Paul and Helen Schilling for \$540,000.00 for the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area in Rock County. The item is being submitted because the purchase price exceeds \$150,000, and because 120 acres are outside of the project boundary.

The parcel is located 12 miles west of Beloit and 16 miles southwest of Janesville and is bordered by state ownership to the west and south. The property is a mix of wetland, lowland woods, cropland, and a Christmas tree farm. About 45 acres are located in the project boundary; this part of the ownership includes channels of the Sugar River.

Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area was established 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 and wafer ash, 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. A large portion of the tree farm on this parcel contains remnant prairie.

The Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area is identified as of state significance for the conservation of floodplain forest communities. The property, as part of the Wildlife Area, will be managed by the DNR's Wildlife Management Bureau to provide opportunities for public hunting, fishing, trapping and other outdoor recreation while protecting the qualities of the unique native communities and associated species. The parcel itself will also offer an off road parking area and improved public access to the entire Wildlife Area and the Sugar River. The floodplain forest management objective is to protect the ecological river corridor gradients from lowland to uplands, along with protection of the floodplain corridor. Management efforts on the state owned uplands has focused on 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 of all description. Purchase will improve access for the public from the town road on the north. After purchase, the Department plans to retain a strip of land 66 feet wide running from the town road in a southerly direction to provide public access to the large block of state land north of the river. The other land outside of the project boundary will be offered to neighbors with a goal of land exchanges to improve ownership consolidation or will be offered for sale.

Purchase of the 165.46 acre Schilling property for Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area will help protect wildlife habitat along the Sugar River, provide additional opportunities for public hunting and public recreation, restore and provide habitat for a variety of species, and improve public access to state ownership in this project.

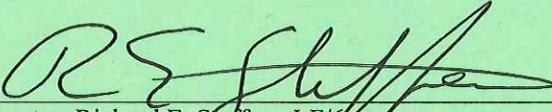
**RECOMMENDATION:** Board approval of the purchase of 165.46 acres of land for \$540,000 for the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area in Rock County.

**LIST OF ATTACHED MATERIALS:**

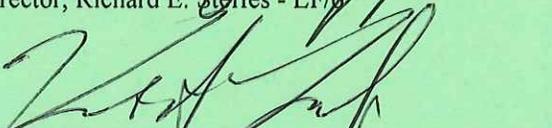
No  Fiscal Estimate Required  
No  Environmental Assessment of Impact Statement Required  
No  Background Memo

Yes  Attached  
Yes  Attached  
Yes  Attached

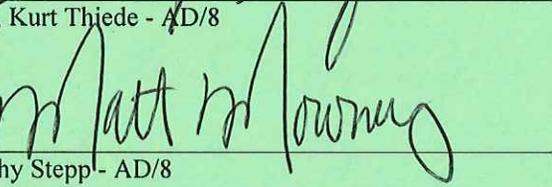
**APPROVED:**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Real Estate Director, Richard E. Steffes - LF/6

8-24-12  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Administrator, Kurt Thiede - AD/8

8-24-12  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Secretary, Cathy Stepp - AD/8

9/4/12  
Date

cc: S. Miller - LF/6  
R. Steffes - LF/6  
L. Ross - AD/8  
T. Hauge - WM/6  
M. Aquino - Fitchburg

## CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 24, 2012 FILE REF: WM 60185  
 TO: Scott Walker  
 FROM: Cathy Stepp  
 SUBJECT: Proposed Land Acquisition, Paul and Helen Schilling Tract, File # WM 60185,  
 Option Expires November 3, 2012

1. PARCEL DESCRIPTION:

Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area  
 Rock County

Grantor:

Paul and Helen Schilling  
 16239 W. Beloit Newark Road  
 Brodhead, WI 53520

Acres: 165.46  
Price: \$540,000  
Appraised Value: \$540,000 and \$592,200  
Interest: Fee Title Purchase  
Improvements: None

Location: The property is located in Rock County 3.5 miles south of Broadhead

Land Description: The subject land is level to gently rolling.

Covertypes Breakdown:

Type	Acreage
Cropland	20.0
Upland Woodland	30.0
Lowland Woodland	27.46
Grassland	8.0
Pine Plantation	80.0
Total:	165.46

Zoning: Agriculture  
Present Use: Ag-Tree Farm  
Proposed Use: Conservation and public recreation  
Tenure: 49 Years  
Property Taxes: \$1,326  
Option Date: July 6, 2012

Stewardship 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:

The Department has obtained an option to purchase 165.46 acres of land from Paul and Helen Schilling for \$540,000.00 for the Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area in Rock County.

The parcel is located 12 miles west of Beloit and 16 miles southwest of Janesville and is bordered by state ownership to the west and south. The property is a mix of wetland, lowland woods, cropland, and a Christmas tree farm.

Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area was established 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 and wafer ash, 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. A large portion of the tree farm on this parcel contains remnant prairie.

The Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area is identified as a Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) of state significance for the conservation of floodplain forest communities in Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan and it 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.

Purchase of the 165.46 acre Schilling property for Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area is recommended 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. The Department plans to retain a strip of land 66 feet wide running from the town road on the north in southerly direction to improve public access to a large block of state owned land north of the Sugar River. The balance of the area outside of the project boundary will be offered to neighbors as trade land for helping to consolidate state ownership in the project, or will be offered for sale.

3. LAND MANAGEMENT

The Property, as part of the Wildlife Area, will be managed by the DNR's Wildlife Management Bureau to provide opportunities for public hunting, fishing, trapping and other outdoor recreation while protecting the qualities of the unique native communities and associated species. The parcel itself will also offer an off road parking area and improved public access to the entire Wildlife Area and the Sugar River. The floodplain forest management objective is to protect the ecological river corridor gradients from lowland to uplands, along with protection of the floodplain corridor. Management on uplands has focused on 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. The 20 acres of cropland will be sharecropped with local farmers. Eventually, the department will trade out or sell most of the Christmas tree plantation land to a private landowner.

4. FINANCING:

State Stewardship bond funds are anticipated:

Funds allotted to program:	Balance after proposed transaction:
\$3,741,700	\$2,296,888

5. ACQUISITION STATUS OF THE AVON BOTTOMS WILDLIFE AREA:

Established: 1960  
Acres Purchased to Date: 2,798.67  
Acquisition Goal: 2,710  
Percent Complete: 103.27 %  
Cost to Date: \$1,229,287.64

6. APPRAISAL 1:

Appraiser: Linn Duesterbeck  
Valuation Date: April 23, 2012  
Appraised Value: \$540,000  
Highest and Best Use: Agricultural and recreational with one single-family home site

Allocation of Values:

- a. land: 165.46 acres @ \$3,200 per acre: \$540,000 rounded
- b. market data approach used, 5 comparable sales cited
- c. adjusted value range: \$2,788-\$3,502 per acre

Appraisal Review: Gregory Markus - May 15, 2012

APPRAISAL 2:

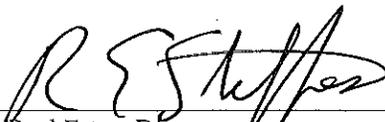
Appraiser: Michael Stone  
Valuation Date: April 12, 2012  
Appraised Value: \$592,200  
Highest and Best Use: Agricultural and recreational with one single-family home site

Allocation of Values:

- a. land: 165.4 acres @ \$3,600 per acre: \$592,200 rounded
- b. market data approach used, 4 comparable sales cited
- c. adjusted value range: \$3,370-\$3,706 per acre

Appraisal Review: Gregory Markus - May 15, 2012

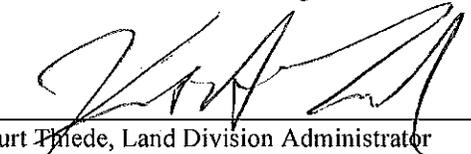
RECOMMENDED:

  
Richard E. Steffes, Real Estate Director

8-13-12  
Date

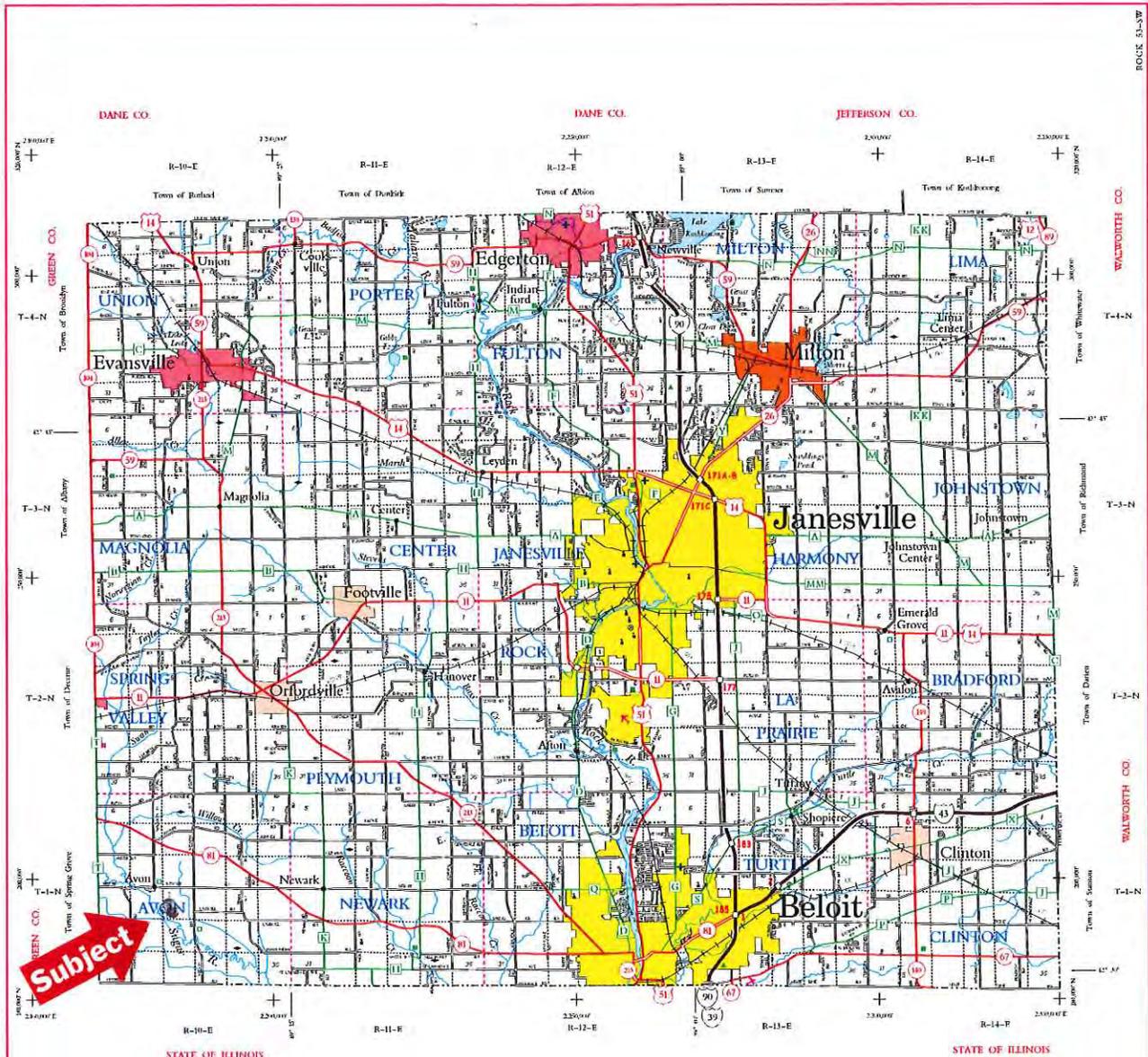
  
Kristin A. Hess, Bureau of Legal Services

8/14/12  
Date

  
Kurt Thiede, Land Division Administrator

8/24/12  
Date

RES:



**Subject**

**LEGEND**

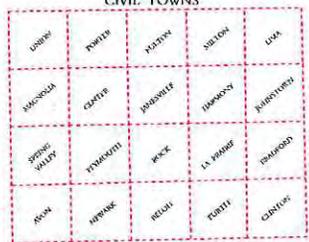
- Freeway
- Multi-lane Divided
- U.S. or State Hwy
- County Trunk Hwy
- Town Road
- Fireline
- Railroad
- State Trail
- Interchange
- Highway Separation
- Interstate Highway No.
- U.S. Highway No.
- State Highway No.
- County Highway Letter
- State Boundary
- County Boundary
- Civil Town Boundary
- Section Line
- Dam
- Hospital
- Schools
- Airport
- County Seat
- Unincorporated Village
- Fish Hatchery
- Game Farm
- Public Hunt or Fish Geds.
- Public Camp & Picnic Geds.
- Ranger Station
- State Park
- County Park
- Wild or Exposed
- Best Area
- Misc. Facilities
- Wayside
- Un. of Wisconsin
- Rail Co.



**SECTION NUMBERING OF A TOWNSHIP**

6	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	36

**CIVIL TOWNS**



**MILES OF HIGHWAY**  
as of Dec. 31, 2017

STATE	252
COUNTY	201
LOCAL ROADS	406
OTHER R/WAYS	0
<b>TOTAL FOR COUNTY</b>	<b>1059</b>

Total Area (2010 Census) - 729 sq. mi.  
Population (2010 Census) - 123,807  
County No. - 1400000

**ROCK CO.**

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
STATE OFFICE BUILDING  
Madison, Wisconsin  
SCALE: 1" = 1 MILE  
Current As of  
JAN. 2012  
Not compiled from USGS Quads  
11/10/10 500'

For boundaries of public hunting and fishing grounds please contact the Department of Natural Resources  
Grid based on the state plane coordinate system with note and the FAD 27

**Paul & Helen Schilling - Fee Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area**

**WM 60185**

T1N R10E Sec 21  
Town of Avon  
Rock County  
165.46 Acres

**Subject**

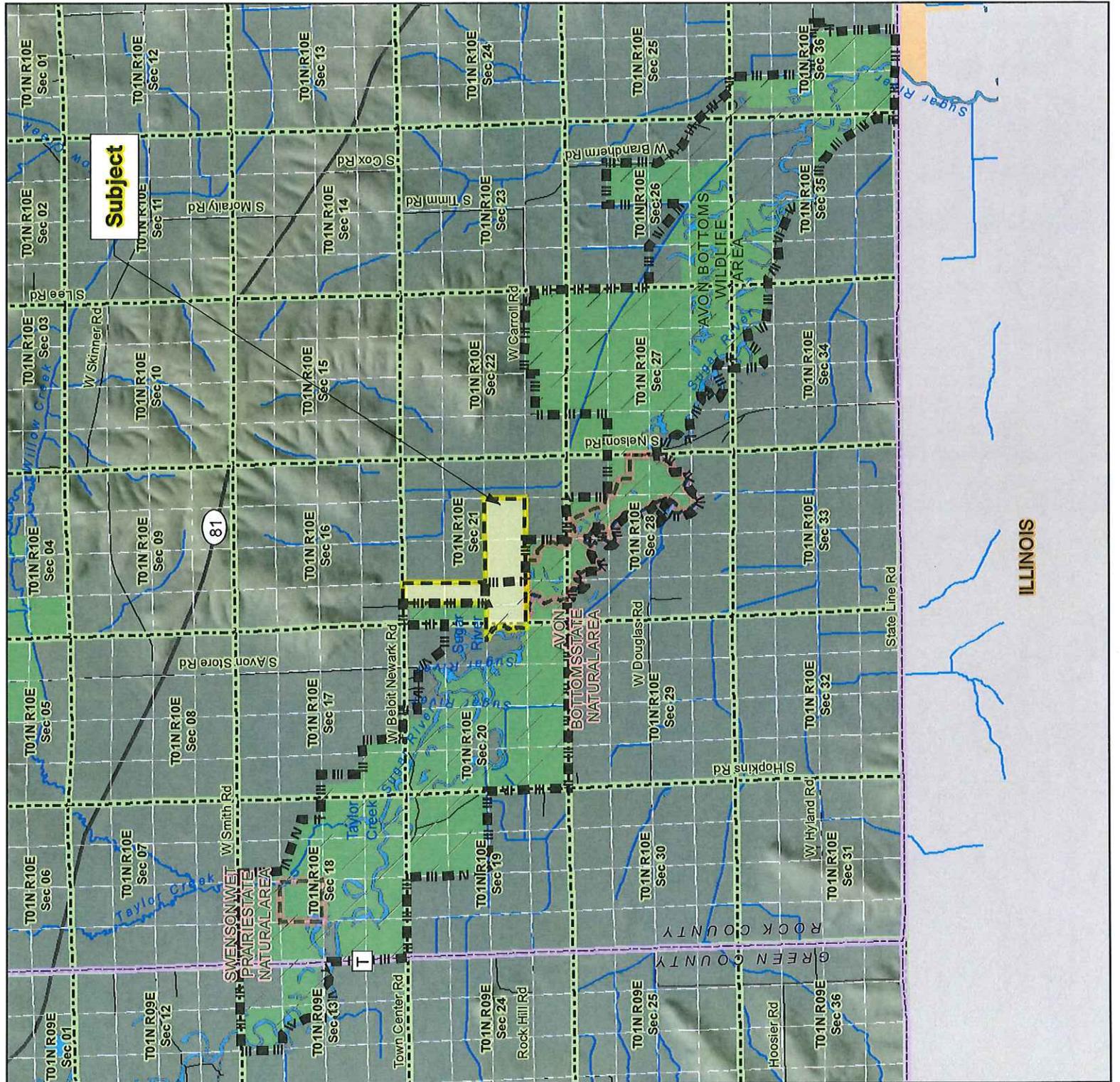
-  WDNR Owned
-  WDNR Easement
-  DNR Project Boundary
-  County Forest Land
-  State Natural Area
-  PLSS Section Line
-  QQ Section Boundary



Illinois

**★ Location of Property**

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
Bureau of Facilities of Lands  
Map Created: Jul 23, 2012 kmh



ILLINOIS

# Paul & Helen Schilling - Fee

T1N R10E Sec 21 Town of Avon, Rock County



## Avon Bottoms Wildlife Area

 Subject

 DNR Owned

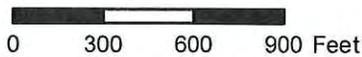
 DNR Eased

 DNR Project Boundary

 State Natural Area

 Section Line

 QQ Section Lines

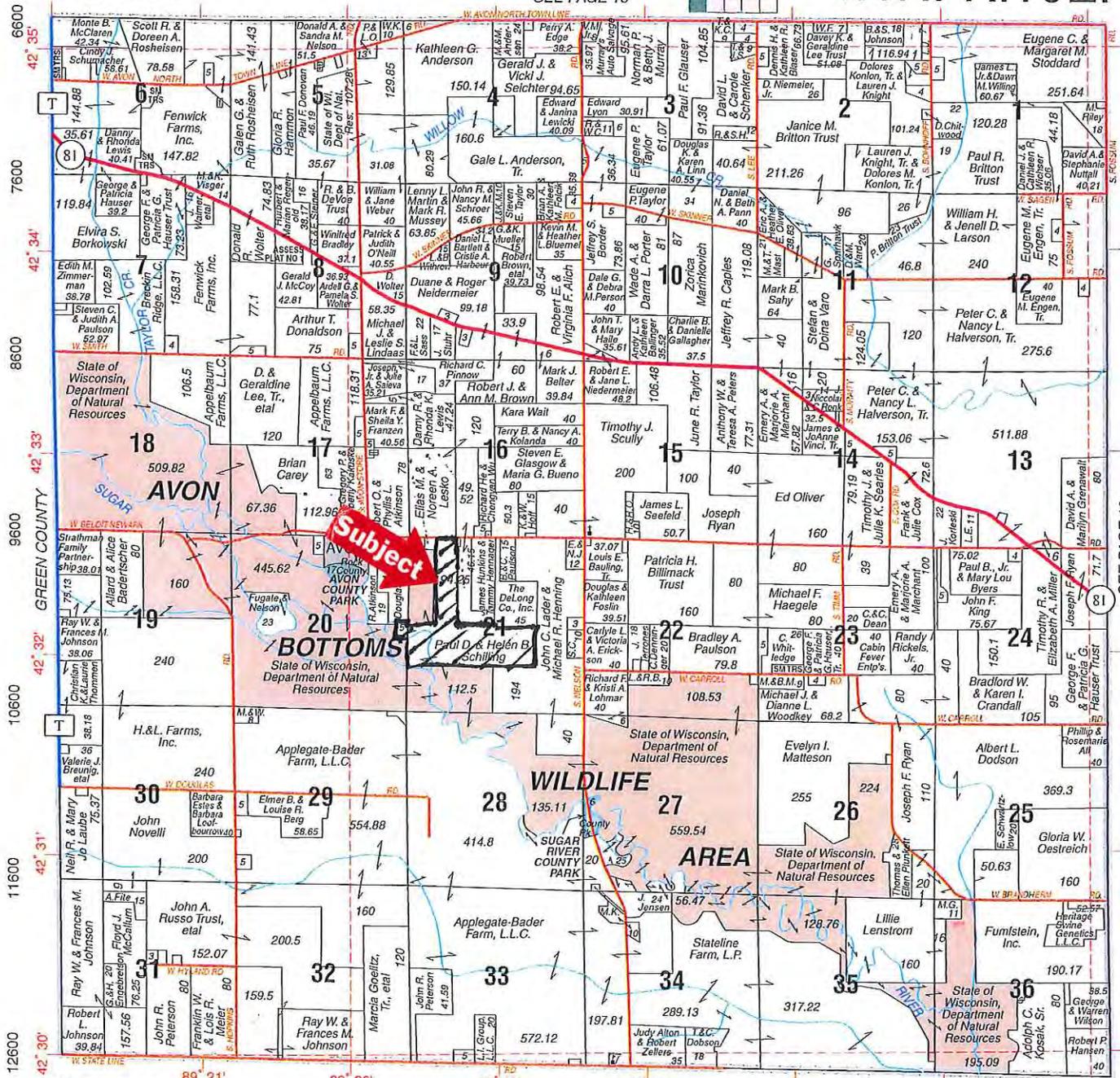


Jul 23, 2012 kmh  
Real Estate Section  
Bureau of Facilities and Lands

# AVON

# T.1N.-R.10E.

SEE PAGE 18



© 2010 Rockford Map Publs., Inc.

18600 17600 16600 15600 14600 13600 12600 STATE OF ILLINOIS Rock County, WI

SEE PAGE 10