

# Master Plan Variance Approval

(for master plans approved prior to 1997)

**Property Name:** Van Loon Bottoms Wildlife Area

**Date of Master Plan Approval:** 1981

**Variance to the Master Plan** (The specific language addition or change in the master plan is to be written below, include appropriate maps):

Page 1

Under Annual Objectives add:

7. Establish a 1,574-acre Van Loon Floodplain Savanna State Natural Area as an outstanding example of a floodplain savanna to focus educational and research activities.

8. Establish a 317-acre Van Loon Floodplain Forest State Natural Area as an outstanding example of floodplain forest to focus research and educational activities.

Page 12

Delete Public Use in the title and replace with State

Insert a new paragraph one

"Floodplain savannas are exceptional rare nationwide and occur where floodplain sand and gravel deposits permit the development of prairie grasses and forbs under a sparse canopy of oaks. The savanna at the north end of Van loon is one of the best floodplain savannas known. The ground layer is exceptional rich with over 100 species found. Several rare species find favorable habitat in the savanna."

Paragraph 2 insert floodplain forest between This and zone. Change acres to 317. The remainder of the paragraph stays the same.

Approved:

  
Administrator, Division of Land

Date:

3/18/08

**Variance Initiator/Author;**

Randy Hoffman - SNA Program

**Supporting Approvals**

Thomas J. Wath  
Department Master Planning Manager, LF

Date; 9-21-07

Ron Ductile  
Property Manager

Date; 3-7-2007

Timothy E. Baber  
Land Leader or Area Leader

Date; 3/16/07

**Bureau of Wildlife Management,**

Wanda Zellmer for Tom Hauge  
Bureau Director,

Date; 12/12/07

**Bureau of Endangered Resources;**

Steve L. Holtz  
Bureau Director

Date; 12/10/07

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

**Purpose and Need for the Proposed Variance** (include background and history as appropriate): A statewide GAP analysis of the State Natural Areas Program indicated the need to establish additional savanna and floodplain forest in Western Coulees and Ridges as sites. Van Loon Floodplain Savanna and Forest contain these natural communities and meet the criteria for establishment as a State Natural Area. The designation would focus research and educational activities on these sites without compromising the recreational uses. In addition, the designation would more easily accommodate joint management (Wildlife Management and Natural Areas Management) to maintain the natural communities and remove invasive exotic species.

**Anticipated Primary Benefits of the Proposed Variance:** The designation gives these sites statewide recognition of their natural features. State Natural Areas are unique in that they can exist as stand alone properties or be designated within the boundaries of another property type. The designation helps the State Natural Areas Program achieve statewide representation of savanna and floodplain forest without expending acquisition dollars. A management plan focused on the ecological requirements of the State Natural Area would provide guidance for work planning and grant writing.

**Additional Anticipated Benefits:** Cooperative management of invasive species eases the burden on any one program. The State Natural Areas Program would coordinate educational, research, and monitoring activities.

**Unavoidable Adverse Impacts:** None known. All uses presently permitted on the property would continue.

**Compatibility with Statutes, Codes and Department Policies:** State Natural Areas can be designated on any state property without changing the primary purposes of the property.

**Federal Aid Limitations** (cite if any federal aid moneys are involved with either acquisition or management of the property and whether the proposed plan variance is compatible with the aid requirements):

Land purchase through Pittman-Robertson, Dingell-Johnson, LAWCON, ORAP, or any other known federal, and federal management grants are compatible with State Natural Areas designation.

**How the Master Plan Supports the Proposed Variance** (cite how the proposed variance is consistent with the provisions of the master plan): The Master Plan recognized a need to maintain bottomland habitat, of which floodplain forest, and savanna are subsets. This variance would further recognize the natural communities without compromising traditional uses.

**The Public Review Process Used** (summary of who was notified about the proposal or otherwise reviewed the proposal and the meetings, mailings and other techniques used):

A statewide Class 3 press release was issued that described the overall variance process. Attachments of each variance packet were added for the local press to use with a description of the site, its natural values and proposed use. The public was asked to comment on the proposals to the local property manager or to a central statewide number.

**Description of the Support and/or Opposition to the Proposed Variance (including reasons for the various positions taken) and Any Unresolved Issues or Concerns:**

No comments received.



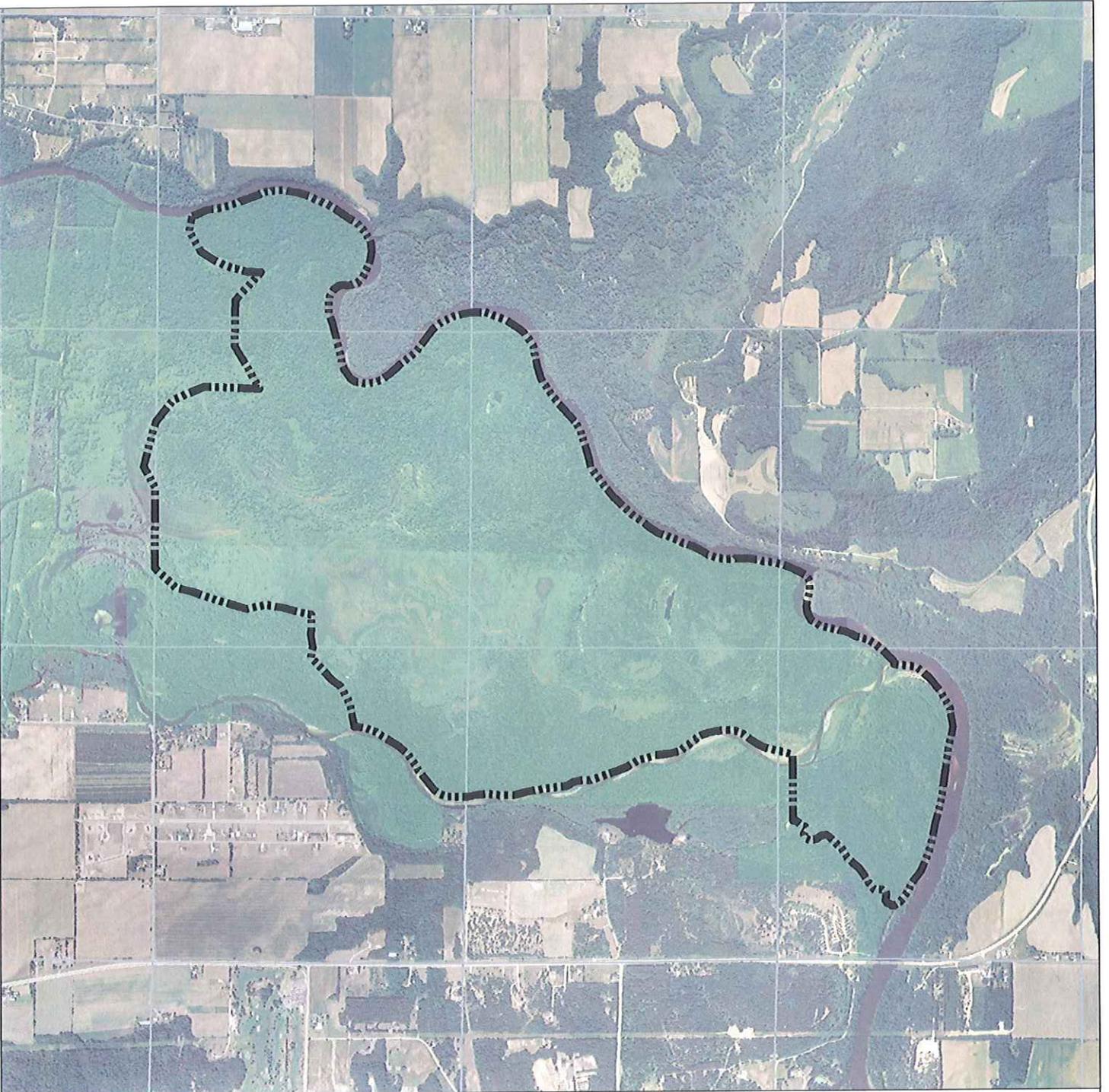
## **Van Loon Floodplain Forest**

Long -Term Goal: Manage the site as a floodplain forest native community site using the natural disturbance patterns as key for decision-making, and an ecological reference area. The native dominant species will be passively managed for the most part. Some thinning of native species may occur during invasive species removal operations. Water level will primarily determine species composition.

Permitted management activities: Removal of invasive exotic plant species, non-manipulative research, educational activities, motorized vehicle traffic on roads and identified trails only, low-impact recreation (such as hunting, fishing and trapping), active fire management program, brushing cutting to assist in achieving compositional characteristics, and maintenance of any existing facilities.

Prohibited activities: vehicular recreation, except access by disabled hunters, and horse-based recreation.

Other activities may occur pending discussion and consultation with partners, NAPC and science experts.



Van Loon Floodplain Savanna  
La Crosse County

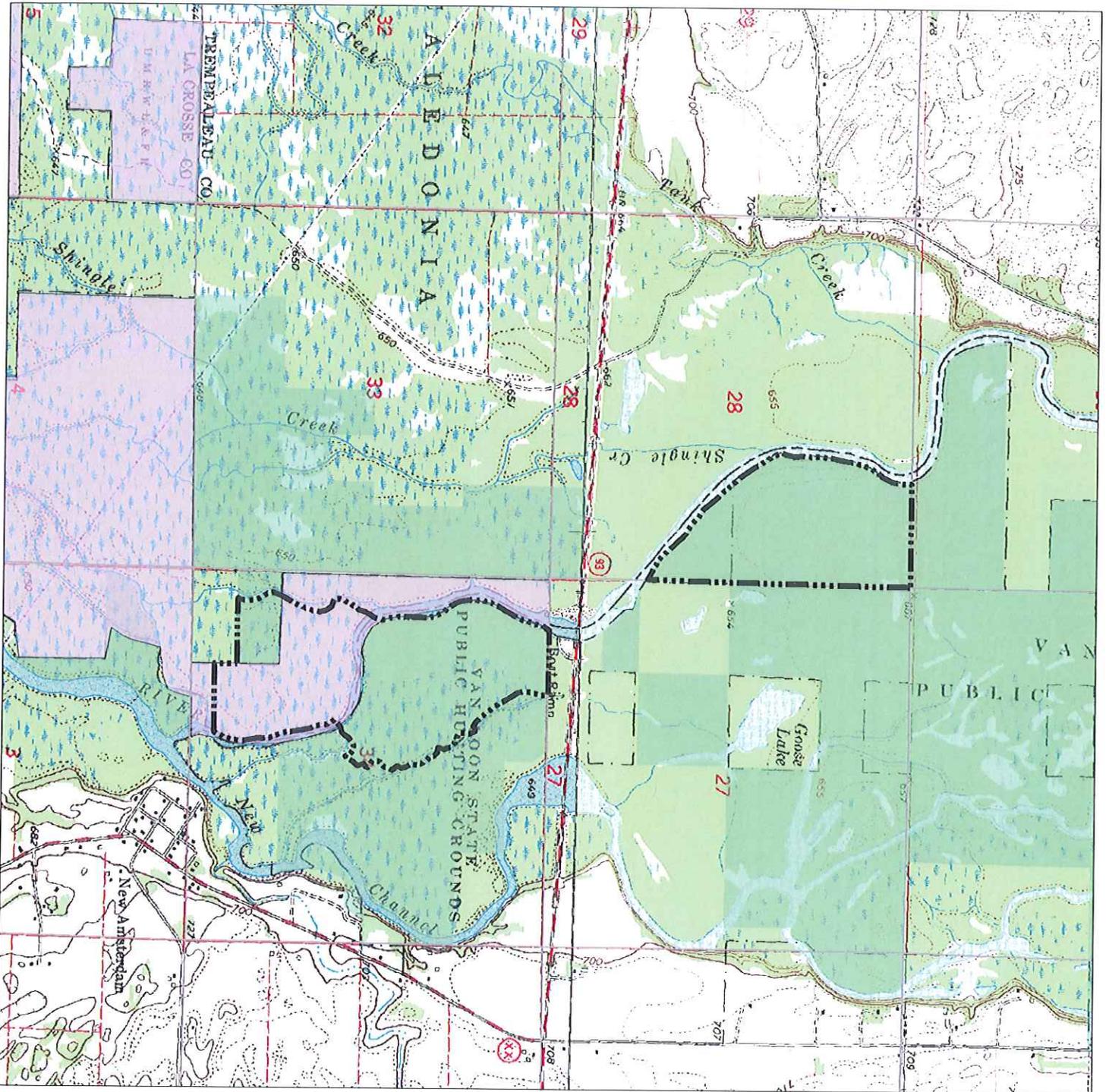
Proposed  
State Natural Area

T18N-R8W, Sec. 2, 3,  
10, 11, 14, 15, 16  
1574 acres



 SNA Project Boundary  
DNR Lands





Van Loon Floodplain Forest  
Trempealeau County

Proposed  
State Natural Area

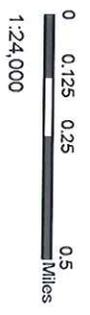
T18N-R8W, Sec. 28, 34  
317 acres



 State Natural Area  
Boundary

 DNR Lands

 Federal Lands



Van Loon Floodplain Forest  
Trempealeau County

Proposed  
State Natural Area

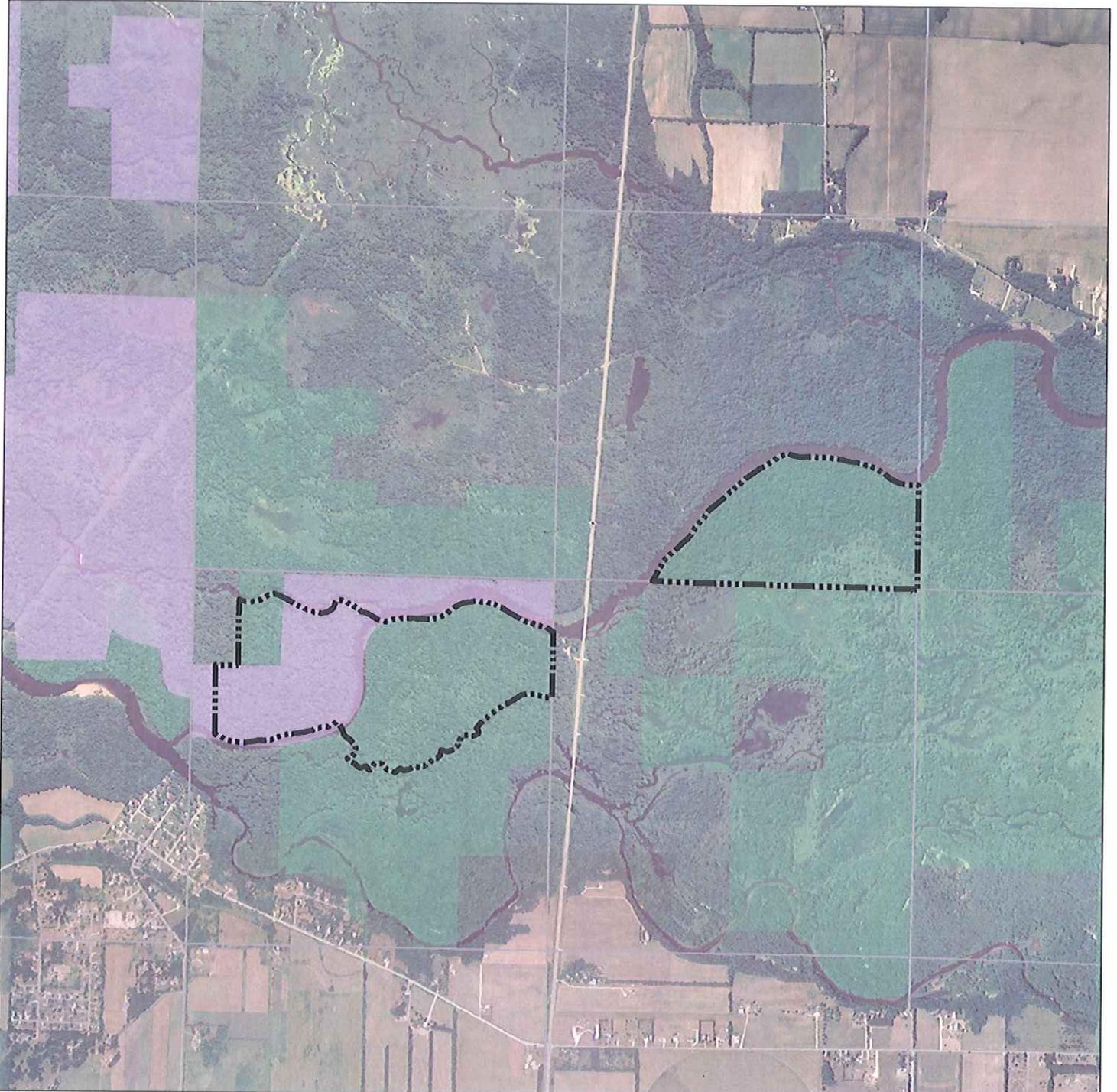
T18N-R8W, Sec. 28, 34  
317 acres



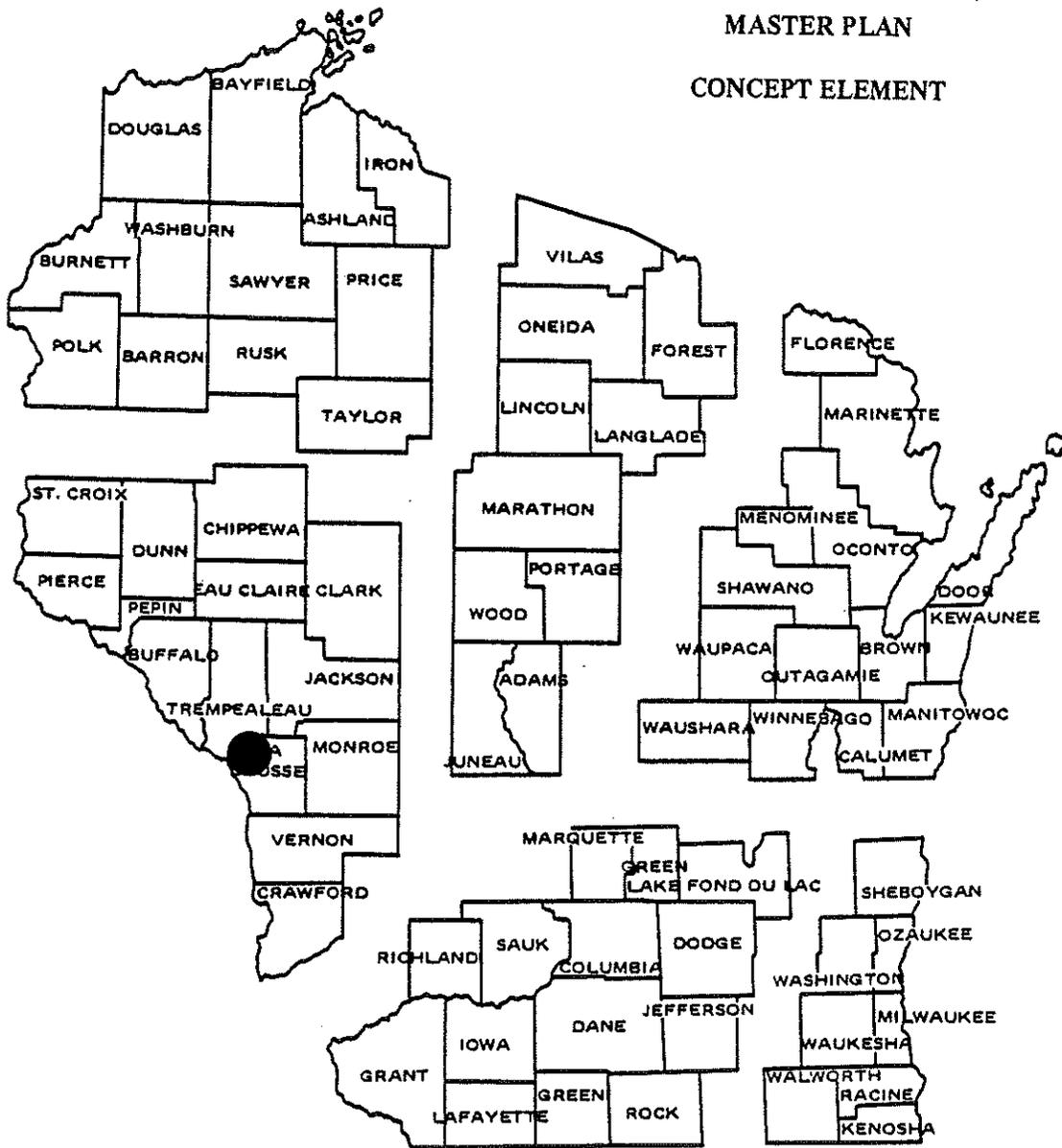
 State Natural Area  
Boundary

 DNR Lands

 Federal Lands



VAN LOON WILDLIFE AREA  
 MASTER PLAN  
 CONCEPT ELEMENT



Property Task Force

Leader: RAYMOND KYRO, WILDLIFE MANAGER  
 KENNETH WRIGHT, FISH MANAGER  
 JAMES MELTON, FORESTER  
 RONALD NELSON, PARK SUPERINTENDENT  
 DOUGLAS RADKE, CONSERVATION WARDEN

Approved By: C. L. Brasler  
 Date: 12/10/81

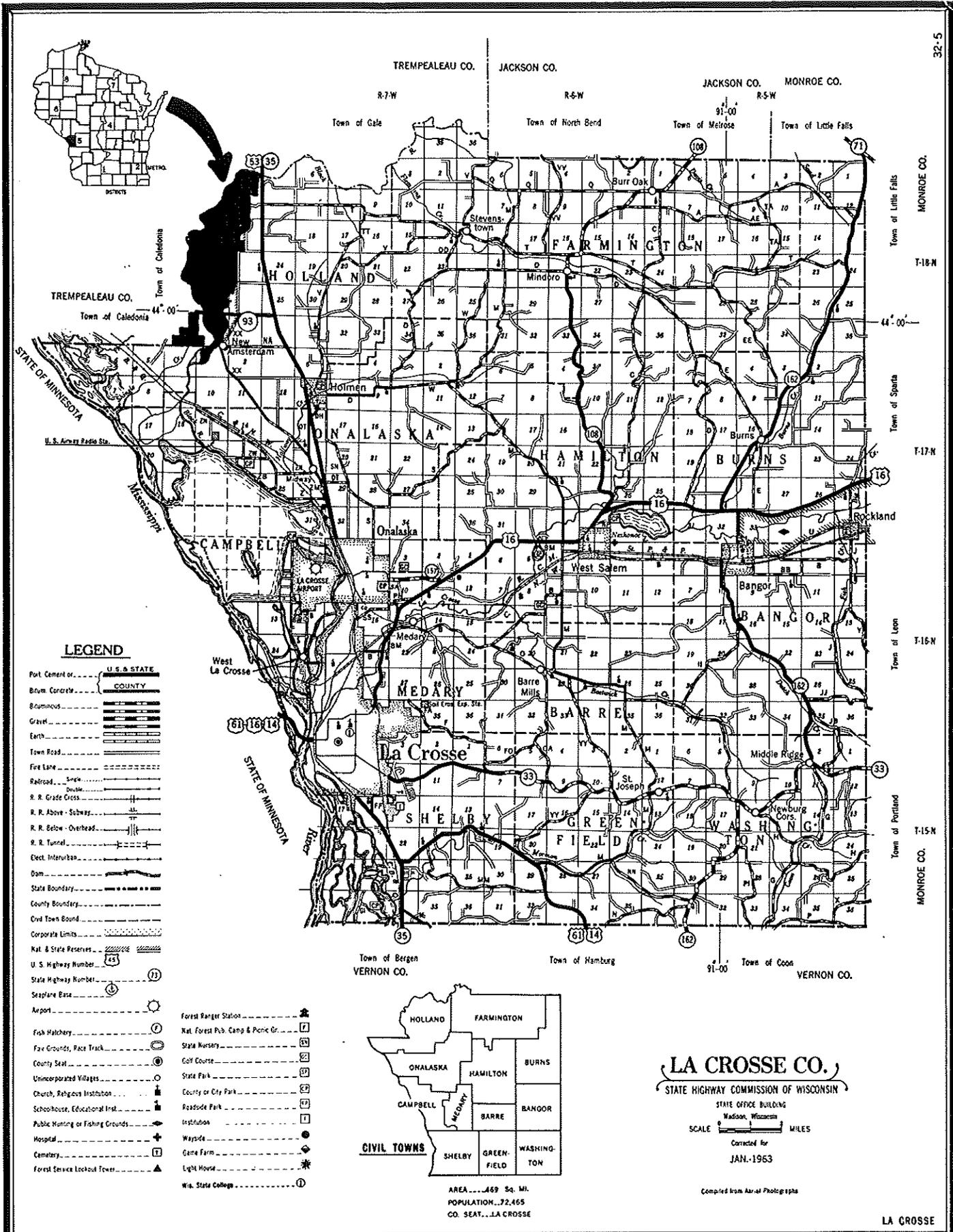


FIGURE 1 LOCATOR

VAN LOON WILDLIFE AREA MASTER PLAN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
SECTION I - ACTIONS	
Goal, Objectives and Additional Benefits. . . . .	1
Recommended Management and Development Program. . . . .	1
SECTION II - SUPPORT DATA	
Background Information. . . . .	5
Resource Capabilities and Inventory . . . . .	6
Management Problems . . . . .	.12
Recreation and Education Assessment . . . . .	.13
Analysis of Alternatives. . . . .	.13
Appendix	
Agency and Advisory Group Comments . . . . .	.15



## SECTION I ACTIONS

### GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

#### GOAL:

To manage a state-owned wildlife area for the benefit of wildlife-based recreation and education as well as to accommodate other compatible outdoor land use activities.

#### ANNUAL OBJECTIVES:

1. Provide 2,500 participant days of hunting opportunity for deer, waterfowl and small game.
2. Produce one duck per acre on 300 acres of permanent water (300 ducks).
3. Provide 100 participant days of primitive canoe camping opportunity.
4. Protect and maintain a minimum of seven sites for scientific and educational study including six nationally historic bridges.
5. Maintain a minimum of two red-shouldered hawk nesting sites.
6. Provide 100 participant days of dog trial and training activity.

#### ANNUAL ADDITIONAL BENEFITS:

1. Provide opportunities for 2,000 participant days of other recreation and educational activities including fishing, trapping, hiking, nature observation and cross-country skiing.
2. Contribute to the habitat of a variety of wildlife including resident and migratory, endangered, and threatened species.
3. Harvest forest products consistent with wildlife objectives.

### RECOMMENDED MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

#### Land Use Designations

The proposed land use classifications for this wildlife management area are Fish and Wildlife Management Area (RD2); Historical and Archaeological Area (HA); Scenic Area (Sc) and Natural Area (N). These areas are described on page 9 and 12.

#### Acquisition and Development

The Van Loon Wildlife Area (Figure 2) has an approved property acreage goal of 4,373.38 acres, of which about 4,000 acres lie within La Crosse County (Town of Holland) and the remainder in Trempealeau County (Town of Caledonia). To date, 3,537.03 acres have been purchased in fee at a cost of \$167,021. A total of 836.35 acres remain to be purchased from willing sellers at an estimated cost of \$200,000.00. Most of this acreage will probably be purchased by 1990.

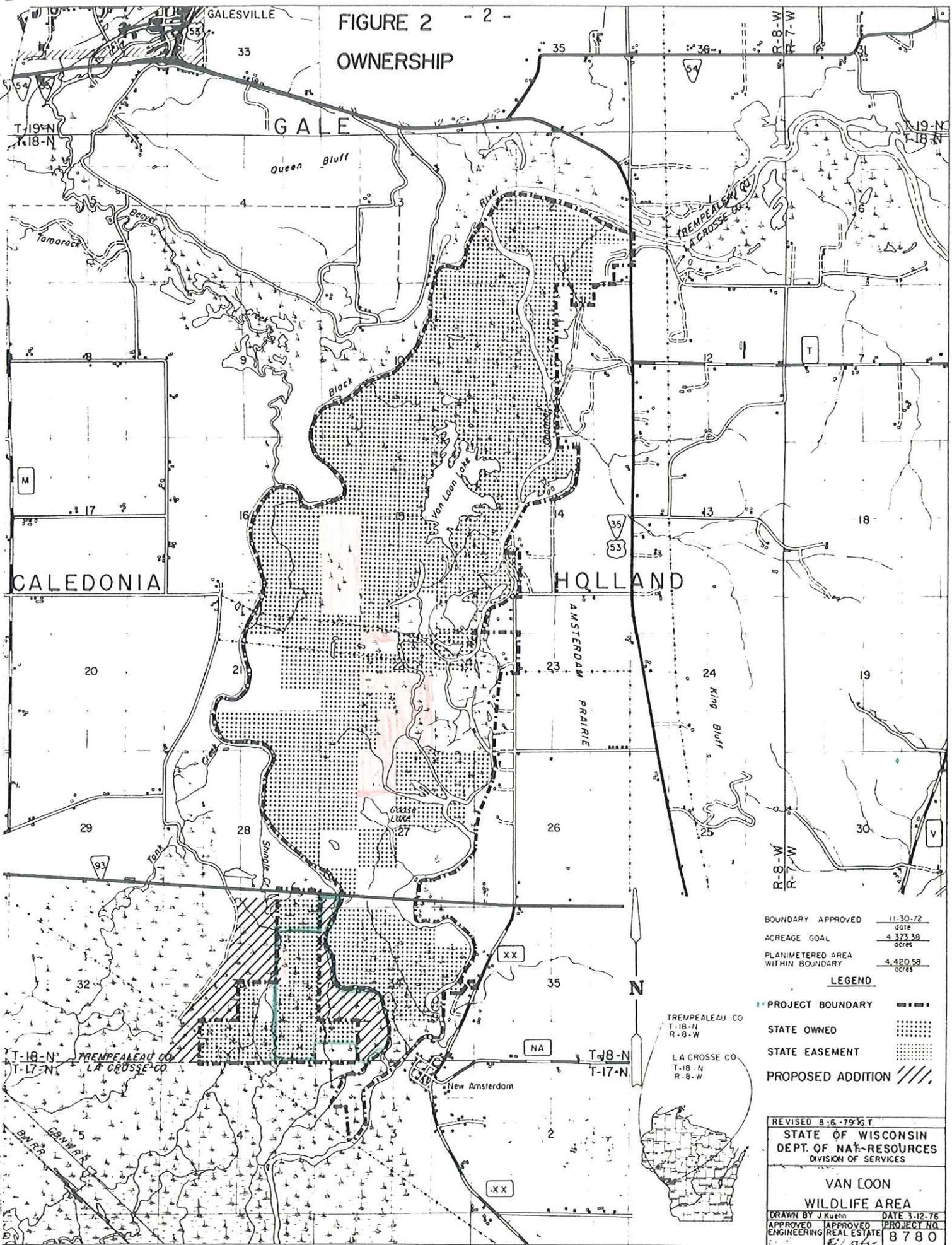
A property boundary modification (Figure 2) is recommended for the southwest portion of the wildlife area in order to insure public access to state-owned as well as federal lands in the vicinity. Lands encompassed by this modification will also provide improved blocking of state lands and eliminate illegal trespass problems. The present acreage goal is adequate, so no change is recommended.

Few major developments (Figure 3) are planned due to the emphasis on maintaining and preserving most of the acreage in a wild, unspoiled condition. Proposed developments are:

1. Repair truss bridge group (see Historical and Archaeological section) for walk-in access and restore said bridges for their historic and educational values at a cost of about \$6,000. This bridge group is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. A Federal Preservation Grant-In-Aid fund request through the State Historical Society has been turned down due to lack of funds.
2. Repair a 9,131 foot long walk-in access road known locally as McGilvary Bottoms Road or Old Highway 93. Filling in washouts and replacing several culverts is needed. Estimated cost is not known at this time.
3. Construction of a 30-car parking lot at the east end of McGilvary Bottoms Road. Estimated cost of this facility is \$6,000.
4. Construction of a 20-car parking lot along Hilt Road south of Highway 93 in La Crosse County. Estimated cost of this facility is \$4,000.
5. Construction of a small canoe launching site at Hunter's Bridge at north end of the wildlife area.

FIGURE 2 - 2 -

OWNERSHIP



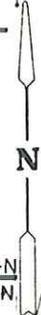
BOUNDARY APPROVED	11.30.72
	date
ACREAGE GOAL	4,373.38
	acres
PLANIMETERED AREA WITHIN BOUNDARY	4,420.58
	acres

LEGEND

- PROJECT BOUNDARY
- STATE OWNED [stippled pattern]
- STATE EASEMENT [dotted pattern]
- PROPOSED ADDITION [hatched pattern]

TREMPEALEAU CO  
T-18-N  
R-8-W

LA CROSSE CO  
T-18-N  
R-8-W



REVISED 8-6-79 JGT

STATE OF WISCONSIN  
DEPT. OF NAT. RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF SERVICES

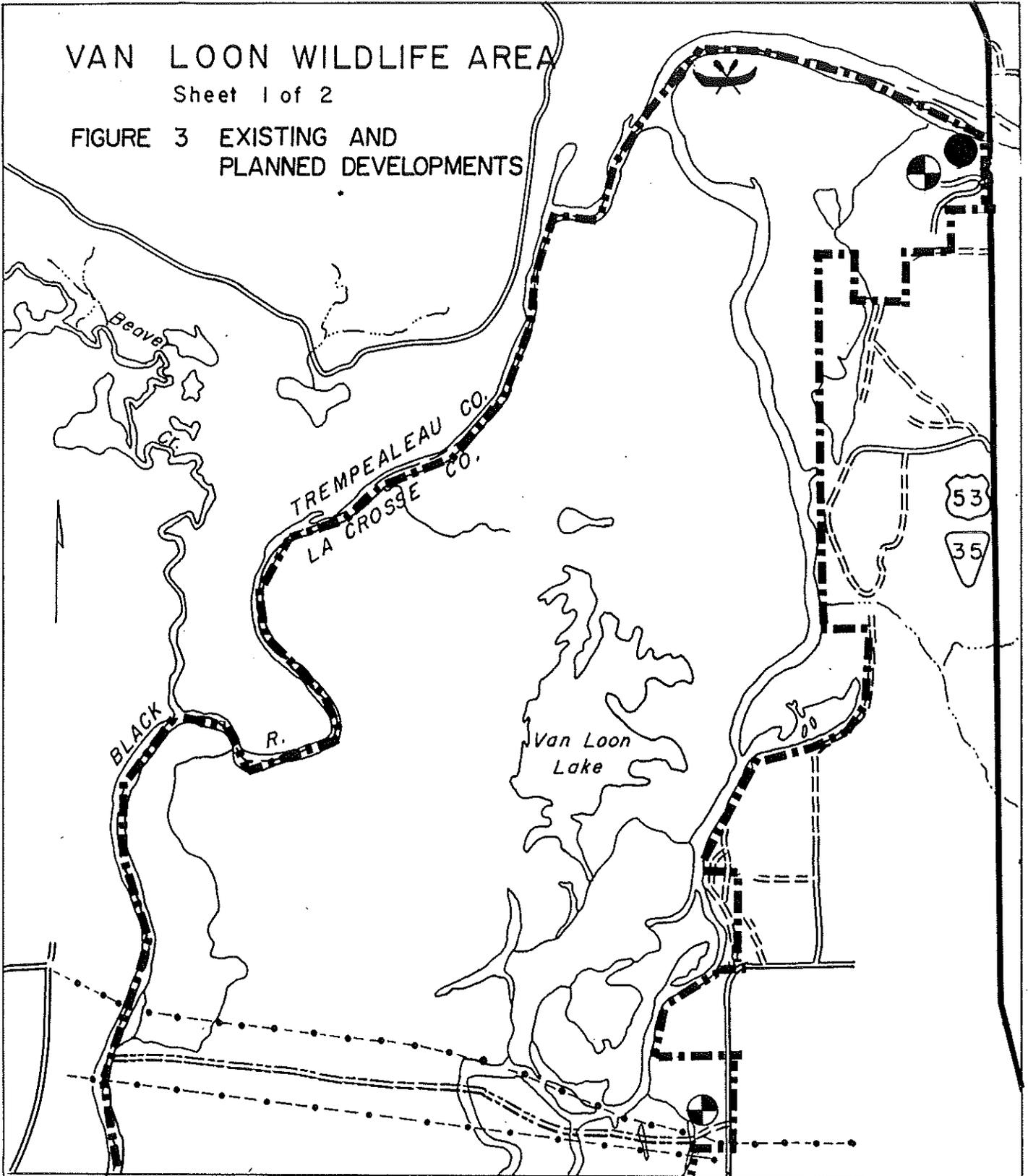
VAN LOON  
WILDLIFE AREA

DRAWN BY J. Kuenn	DATE 3-12-76
APPROVED ENGINEERING	APPROVED REAL ESTATE
	PROJECT NO. 8780

# VAN LOON WILDLIFE AREA

Sheet 1 of 2

## FIGURE 3 EXISTING AND PLANNED DEVELOPMENTS



### LEGEND

- (Match line)
- PROPOSED CANOE & CAMPING SITE
- EXISTING PARKING AREAS & ACCESS
- PROPOSED ROAD & BRIDGE IMPROVEMENTS
- PROPOSED PARKING AREAS & ACCESS
- EXISTING POWER LINE

**LEGEND**

■■■■ APPROVED BOUNDARY

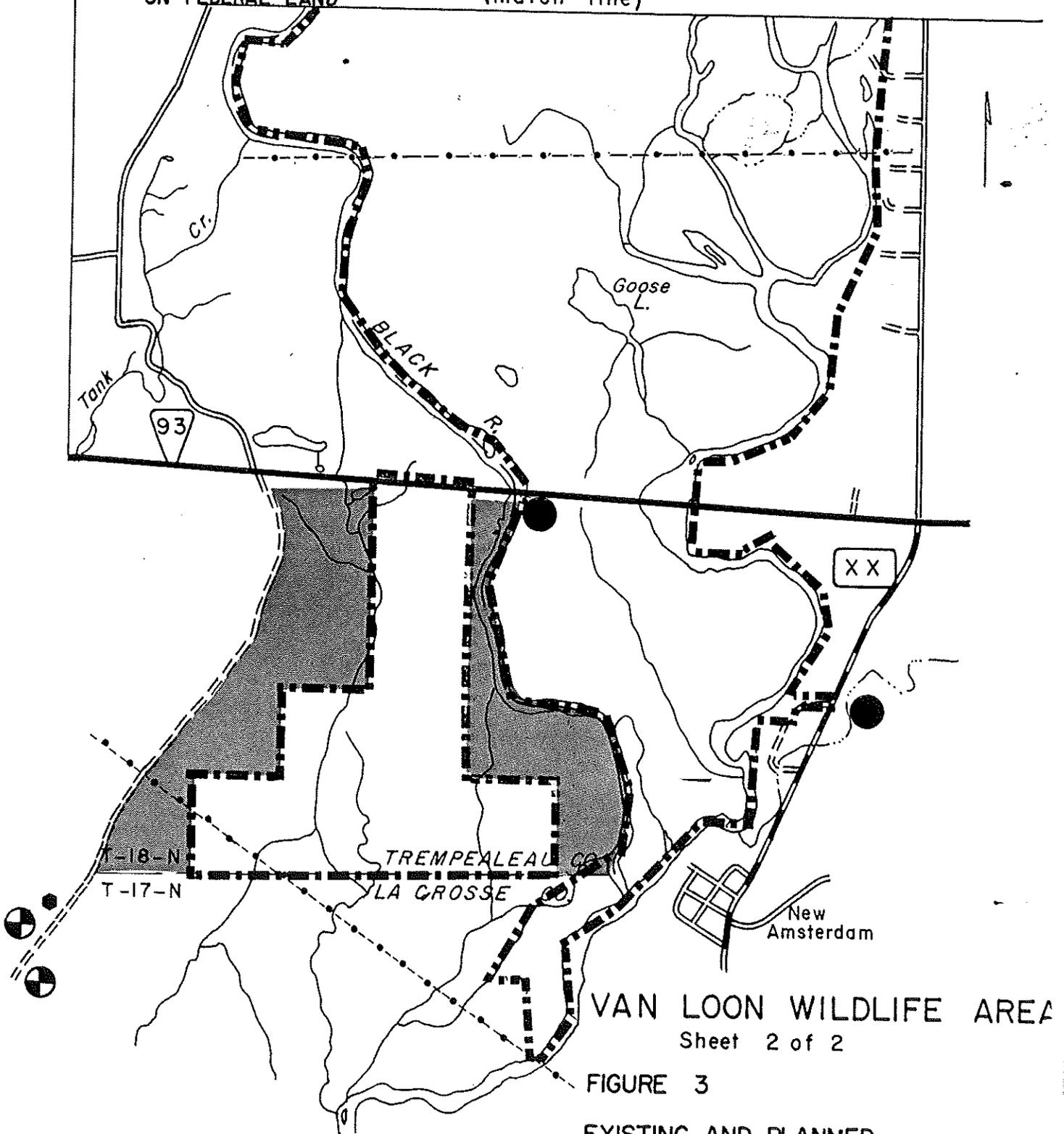
■■■■ PROPOSED ADDITION

● POSSIBLE PARKING LOT LOCATION ON FEDERAL LAND

● EXISTING PARKING AREAS & ACCESS

⊕ PROPOSED PARKING AREAS & ACCESS

--- EXISTING POWER LINE (Match line)



VAN LOON WILDLIFE AREA  
Sheet 2 of 2

FIGURE 3  
EXISTING AND PLANNED DEVELOPMENTS

6. Develop a small primitive canoe camping site at the north end. Some tree removal will be necessary. No toilets or water will be provided and site will be kept as natural as possible. Proposed site is on DNR-owned land. Project completion scheduled for 1982 and the estimated cost is \$300.
7. Construction and placement of 75 wood duck nesting boxes in suitable habitat throughout the bottomlands. This is an approved state waterfowl duck stamp project \$1,500. To date, 40 boxes have been installed. Sportsmen and youth groups will be asked to assist in this effort.
8. Forest management will be an on-going program. Periodic timber harvests will upgrade the bottomland hardwood forest stand, contribute to the health of local wood-working industries, improve wildlife habitat and produce income for the state conservation fund.
9. The utilization of a small portion (40 acres+) of the property for the dog trial and training activities is consistent with the resource and promotes hunting dog use. Local clubs will assist in site selection.

A complete biological inventory will be conducted as funds permit. Property objectives may be developed following completion of such an inventory.

All areas proposed for development will be examined for the presence of endangered and threatened wild animals and wild plants. If listed species are found, development will be suspended until the District Endangered and Nongame Species Coordinator is consulted, the site evaluated, and appropriate protective measures taken.

All areas of future development will also be investigated for the presence or absence of historical or archaeological sites and appropriate protective measures taken to protect significant sites. Should any sites be found during development, construction will be suspended until the State Historical Preservation Office is consulted.

#### Operating and Maintenance Costs

Current operations consist of periodic repairs to bridges on McGilvary Bottoms walk-in access road for public safety, posting informational signs, maintaining wood duck nesting boxes, general surveillance to enforce hunting and trapping regulations, and periodic checks for timber trespass and unauthorized property use.

Currently, about 20 man days are required to carry out the aforementioned activities at a cost of approximately \$1,000.00 per year. Upon completion of all projects, about 20 man days will be required annually for maintenance and surveillance at a cost of approximately \$1,000.00. Note, refuse and litter pickup cannot be completed on a regular basis because of budget limitations and other work priorities.

## SECTION II SUPPORT DATA

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### History

The Van Loon Wildlife Area (McGilvary Bottoms to local residents) originated as a lease project in 1948. By 1949, 5,000 acres were under lease. Fee acquisition began in 1957 with the purchase of 758 acres from the William Van Loon estate. The original property acreage goal of 2,200 acres was amended several times during the 1960's and 1970's to a current goal of 4,373.38. Due to land acquisition progress, the leased acreage had dropped to 508 acres.

#### Current Land Use

Because approximately 80 percent of the property is under state ownership, the primary land use is outdoor recreation, education and periodic timber harvests. Hunting (especially duck and deer hunting), trapping, hiking and canoeing are the most popular sports. Private landowners periodically harvest timber for firewood, home lumber and commercial sale. Local schools and colleges use the area for biological studies and research projects. Amateur naturalists use the area rather extensively for both plant and animal study. The channels, ponds and river crossings provide fishing opportunities. Catfish and northern pike are the most sought after game fish species.

## RESOURCE CAPABILITIES AND INVENTORY

### Soils, Geology and Hydrology

Alluvial land, poorly drained; alluvial land, moderately drained; and marsh, are the most common soil types. No definite soil profile can be given for this material, which ranges from heavy silt loam to fine sand in texture, and from nearly black to pale yellow or light grayish brown in color. Topography is flat, and much of the area is cut by old stream channels and sloughs.

The wildlife area is underlain with Upper Cambrian sandstone covered by deep deposits of sand and silt. Depth to bedrock is five feet or more and permeability of the soil and filtration rate are moderate. Depth to water table ranges from one to ten feet, and the soil is slightly acid to neutral.

### Fish and Wildlife

Fishing within the property is largely restricted to the Black River. The lakes and large sloughs support a modest fishery, but are subject to winterkill. Northern pike, channel catfish and panfish are the predominant fish species. Walleye are also present.

Fishing pressure is low. Contract fishing is present but low key. Generally, it is carried out in the southern part of the property near New Amsterdam. Nine species of game fish and four species of panfish have been identified within the property. A list of fish species present, is available from the area Department of Natural Resources office in La Crosse. One endangered fish species (starhead topminnow); three threatened fish species (river redhorse, speckled chub and the blue sucker) have been found in or near the wildlife area.

A list of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians known to be found on the property is available at the Department office in La Crosse.

To date, 229 wildlife species have been identified. They include 174 species of birds, 30 mammals and 25 reptiles and amphibians. A wide variety of birds, both resident and migratory, inhabit the area. Endangered bird species include the bald eagle and osprey (occasional visitors). Several pairs of red-shouldered hawks (threatened species) are known to nest on the property. A low to moderate population of massasauga rattlesnakes (endangered species) are found in the area. The wood turtle (also endangered) is believed to breed on the property.

Predominant game birds are ducks, woodcock, jacksnipe and ruffed grouse. Several hundred wood ducks are produced annually in natural tree cavities and wood duck boxes. Other common nesting ducks are mallards and blue-winged teal. Periodic flooding tends to depress wildlife populations. The property also serves as a staging area for locally-produced wood ducks. Large numbers of these birds are present in September and early October. The lakes and ponds within the property annually attract several hundred migrating Canada geese (fall migration), producing some "quality" hunting. The estimated annual Canada goose harvest is 25.

Common game mammals include deer, raccoon, gray and fox squirrels, cottontail rabbits and red and gray fox. Periodic flooding tends to depress rabbit populations; mast shortages and flooding produce wide fluctuations in the squirrel population.

The property has an excellent furbearer population, with muskrats and beaver being the most important species. A permanent beaver-otter closed area (N.R. 11.17) of 5,600 acres, which includes about 4,000 acres of State-owned lands has been in effect for many years and has resulted in a high beaver population. The wildlife area has a permanent otter population estimated at between 15 to 30 animals. Flooding of bottomland hardwood timber by beaver is occurring and is resulting in some economic loss. This flooding has resulted in improved waterfowl nesting conditions. The beaver-otter closed area should be continued for the protection of otter and the benefits to ground-nesting ducks.

Muskrats, raccoon and red and gray fox are trapped within the wildlife area boundaries. A small mink population provides limited trapping opportunity.

A wide variety of non-game bird and mammal species are also found within the property boundary. Marsh and shorebirds, raptors and songbirds are common. Numerous mice, mole and shrew species are present.

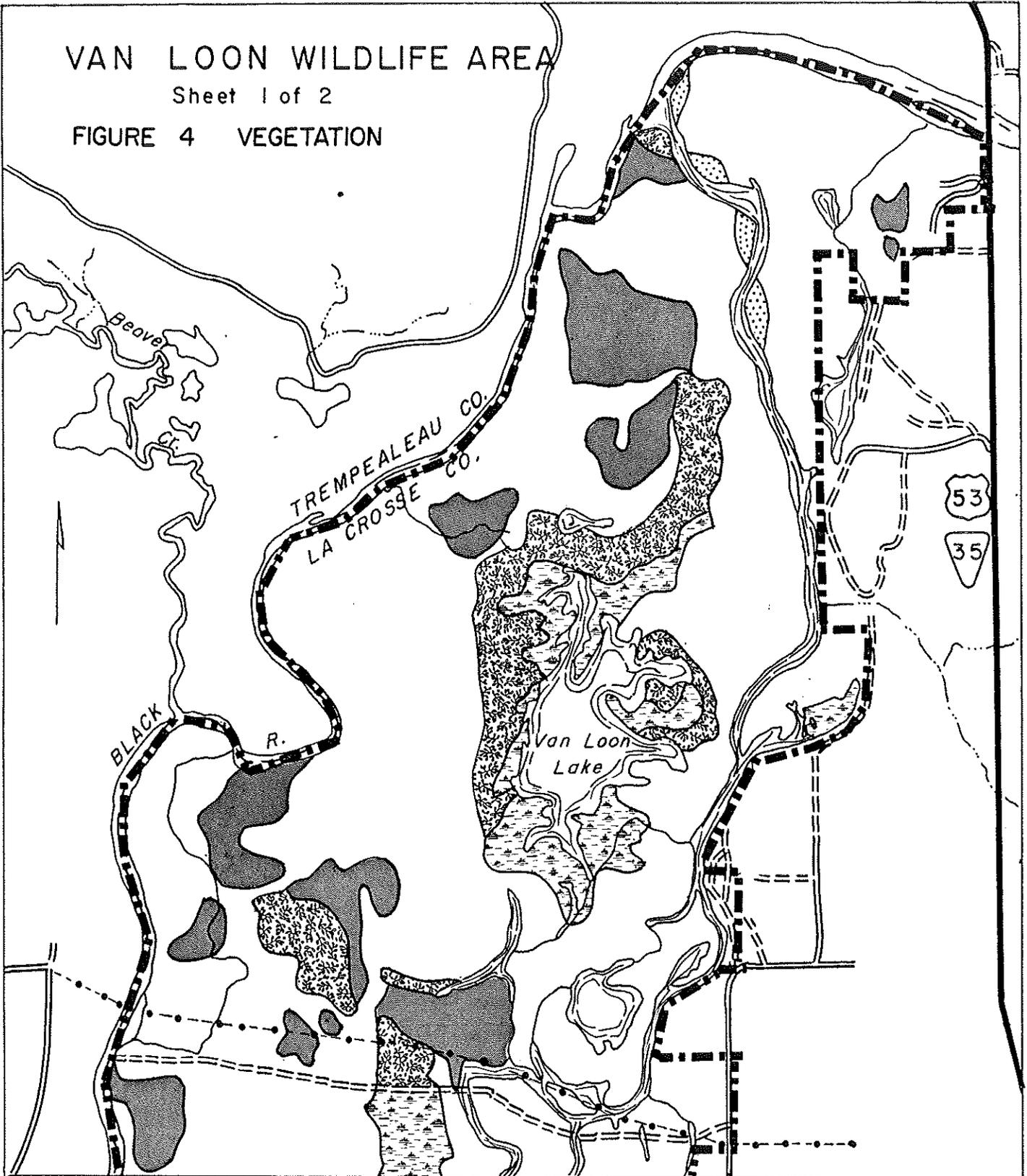
### Vegetative Cover (Figure 4)

Predominant vegetative cover is bottomland hardwood forest with an understory of weeds, vines and shrubs including nettles and poison ivy. Important tree species are silver maple, American elm, river birch, eastern cottonwood and green ash. The condition of the forest is poor, and Dutch elm disease has killed most of the mature American elm trees. Periodic timber harvests will upgrade the quality of the fast-growing bottomland-hardwoods.

# VAN LOON WILDLIFE AREA

Sheet 1 of 2

## FIGURE 4 VEGETATION



### LEGEND

 TIMBER

 BRUSH

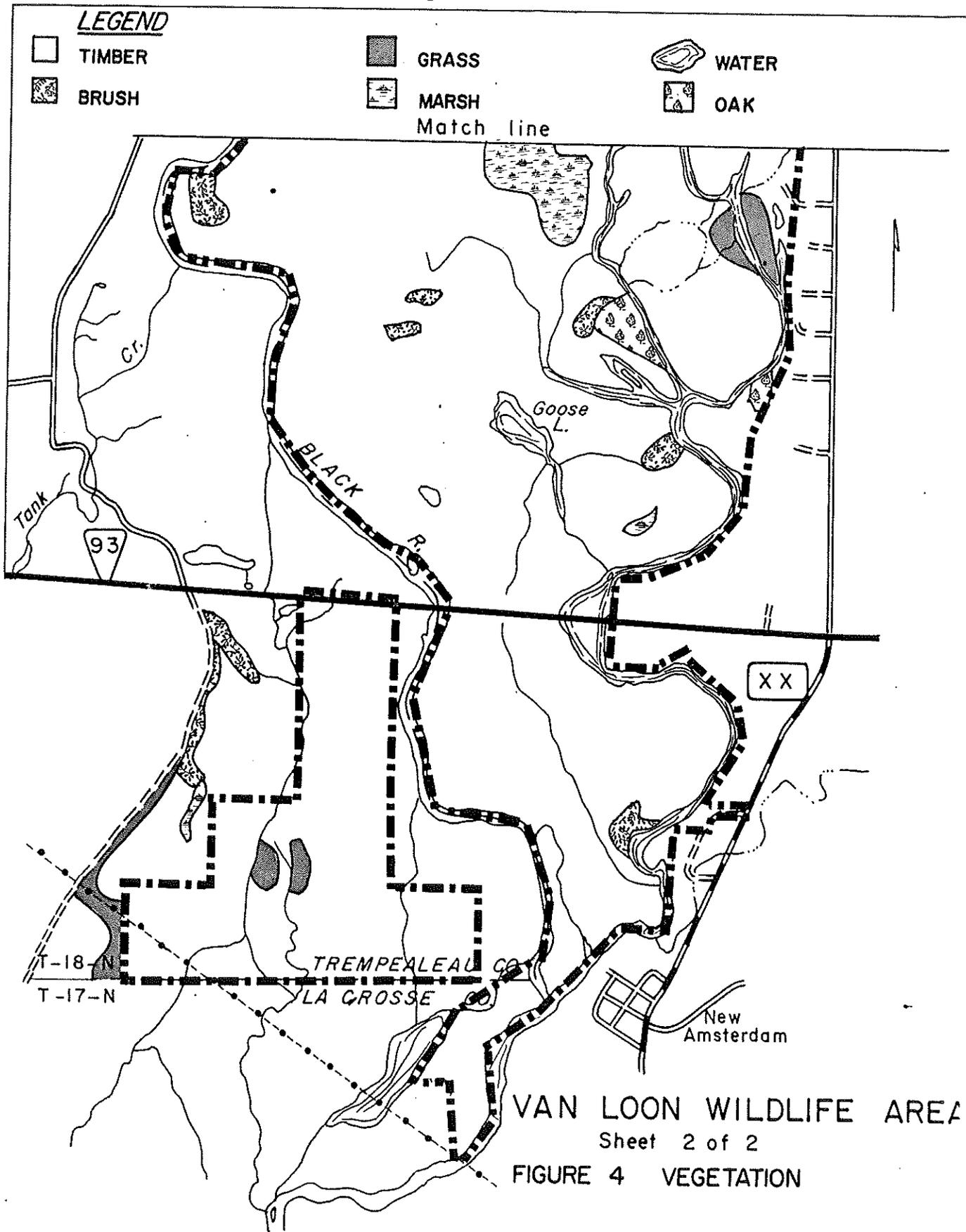
Match line

 GRASS

 MARSH

 WATER

 SAND



Reed canarygrass, sedges, buttonbush, red osier dogwood and tag alder predominate in the openings and sloughs. River bullrush, arrowhead and cattail are common in the small lakes, ponds and the deeper marshes. No endangered plant species are known to grow on the property. However, tuberclad orchid, a threatened species in Wisconsin, has been identified and will be protected.

Table 1. Vegetative Cover and Acreage

<u>Type</u>	<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Percent of total</u>
Forest (bottomland hardwoods)	3,368.98	72.0
Forest (upland)	100	2.1
Grass	200	4.2
Marsh (E2) narrow-leaved persistent	250	5.3
Brush marsh (S3) Broad-leaved deciduous	150	3.2
Upland brush	75	1.5
Open water (W)	250	5.3
Sand	30.0	.7
	<u>4,273.98</u>	

#### Water Resources

The property has abundant water resources, with three named and three unnamed lakes and numerous running sloughs, backwaters and ponds. The east and the west channels of Black River form the boundaries for most of the wildlife area.

The lower Black River within the property is a medium hard, light brown, alkaline river that forms part of the Mississippi River watershed. It flows in a southerly direction. Sand is the predominant bottom type, with traces of rubble, clay, silt, muck, gravel and boulders present. The river is a warm water fishery, with a summer average temperature of 72° F. mid-channel and slightly higher in the backwaters. Deep pools, rocks, fallen trees, woody debris and shallow weedy backwaters provide suitable fish habitat and cover. The lakes within the property are replenished with water and fish by periodic flooding, and they support a small fishery. Winter-kill is common.

Canoe use within the property is moderate. Predicted future canoe use is heavy.

#### Historical and Archaeological Features

The property is an important historical area. State Historical Society information indicates that one Indian mound group is located within the present property boundary. Several Indian mounds, mound groups and one cemetery are located just outside of the property.

The six old bridges located on the abandoned McGilvary Bottoms Road (Figure 3) have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. This "Truss Bridge group" will be preserved and repaired to provide a walk-in access.

The lower Black River is famous for the large volume of timber that it carried to the mills in North La Crosse after the Civil War. Estimates are that over 4 billion board feet of logs and lumber were floated through this area from the pine country up-river from 1865 to about 1897.

Indian Mounds were discovered by avocational archaeologists about 90 years ago. Since the entire property has not been systematically surveyed by a qualified professional, other sites may be present.

#### Land Use Potential (Figure 5)

##### Fish and Wildlife Management Area - RD 2

This zone includes most of the property acreage including the bottomland hardwood forest and associated sloughs, backwaters, ponds and wild hay meadows. Hunting and trapping will be permitted and periodic timber harvests will upgrade the quality of the forest cover. Raptor, heron, and egret nest sites will be given complete protection. Timber cutting will be timed to provide maximum protection for these species during spring and summer. Most of this area is included in a beaver-otter closed area to provide protection from over-trapping and to improve waterfowl habitat.

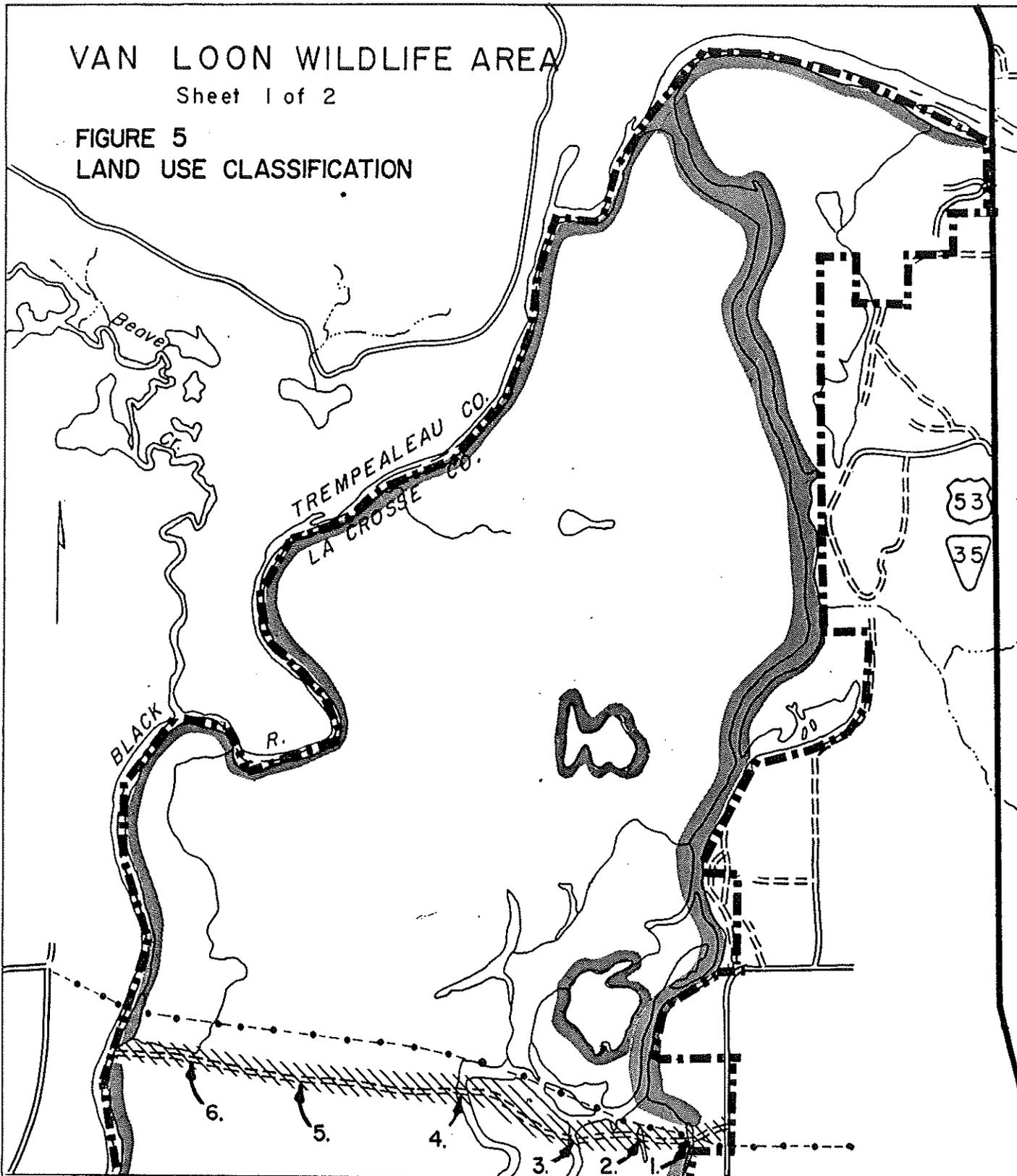
Planned developments in the Fish and Wildlife Management Area include:

- (1) Periodic timber harvests.
- (2) Placement and maintenance of 75 wood duck nesting boxes.

# VAN LOON WILDLIFE AREA

Sheet 1 of 2

## FIGURE 5 LAND USE CLASSIFICATION



### LEGEND

(Match line)

-  SCENIC AREA
-  HISTORICAL & ARCHEOLOGICAL AREA (BRIDGES 1-6)
-  RD<sub>2</sub> FISH & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

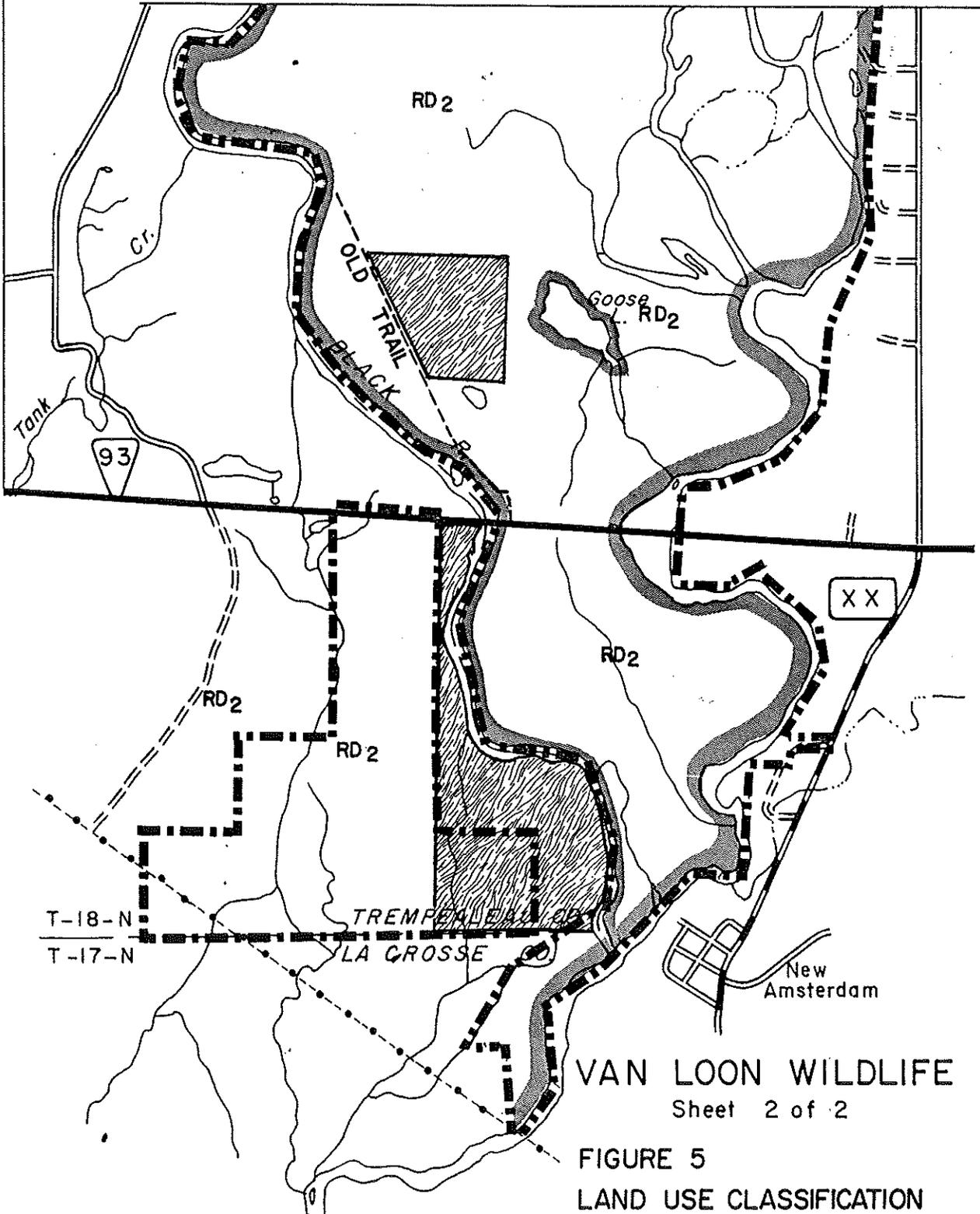
**LEGEND**

 SCENIC AREA

 NATURAL AREA

BEAVER / OTTER CLOSED AREA -  
ALL LANDS NORTH OF HIGHWAY 93

RD2 FISH & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA  
(Match line)



VAN LOON WILDLIFE AREA  
Sheet 2 of 2

FIGURE 5  
LAND USE CLASSIFICATION

#### Historical and Archaeological Area - HA

This zone includes the 9,131.4-foot (10.48 acre) McGilvary Bottoms Road right-of-way containing the six bridges in the Truss Bridge group listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and one Indian mound group located within the property boundary.

#### Scenic Area - Sc

This zone includes all that part of the lower Black River (east and west channels) lying within the property boundary and a strip of land 100 feet in width abutting all river and lake frontage. Timber production will be a secondary consideration in this area. Orderly removal of some mature trees from this zone is recognized as essential to the maintenance of a vigorous, healthy and pleasing forest cover. However, aesthetic cover management will take precedence over timber management in this zone.

Zoning laws prohibit cutting more than 30% of the trees in a corridor 35 feet along the river measured from the ordinary river water line. No tree tops or slash may be left in or on the bank of the river in compliance with Section 13 of the River and Harbor Act of 1899.

One primitive canoe camping site is proposed for the Scenic Area (Figure 3). Only a few trees will be removed and the site will be maintained in an essentially wild and unspoiled condition.

The Scenic Zone includes a total of 19 miles of river frontage located primarily along the east bank of the west channel and the west bank of the east channel of Black River. To date, approximately 15 miles of the river frontage has been purchased in fee by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

#### Public Use Natural Area - N

This zone includes 231.35 acres of land in the Town of Caledonia, Trempealeau County. A 91.35-acre federally owned land parcel with 1-1/4 miles of Black River frontage (west channel) is part of this zone. This area is wild and unspoiled and contains unique vegetation including mature and overmature bottomland hardwoods. No timber has been harvested from the federal land for 50 years.

#### MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS

##### Private Inholdings

Twenty-six land parcels totaling 836.35 acres remain to be purchased within approved property boundary. The private inholdings present no major problem for property management, but they do produce trespass problems and result in confusion for outdoor recreationists and nature study enthusiasts. Blocking of public land through additional land purchases will help to eliminate this problem.

##### Difficulties in Fire Control

The possibility of serious wild fires is minimal due to the abundance of surface water (rivers, sloughs and channels) and periodic inundation by Black River. However, in times of drought, fire fighting would be very difficult due to poor road access.

A fire suppression agreement for cooperative forest fire control has been signed with the Holmen Fire Department covering the La Crosse County portion of the property. The appropriate fire department in Trempealeau County will be contacted to obtain a similar agreement to cover property lands in the Town of Caledonia.

##### Tree Diseases

The major disease problem is Dutch elm disease. This disease has destroyed most of the mature elm trees on this property.

##### Lack of Adequate and Parking Facilities

Public highways provide reasonably adequate access to the property via State Highway 93 on the south and County Highway XX on the east. The most urgent need is for a parking lot and roadway improvement for walk-in access at the east end of McGilvary Road. Persons viewing the historic bridges and using the McGilvary Road for recreation will make good use of this facility.

A parking lot for improved hunter access to the large block of federal land south of S.T.H. 93 is needed along the Hilt Road. Refuge personnel have expressed a desire to build such a facility. This plan recommends construction of the parking lot if not provided by the federal government.

Canoe access is poor. The rough, unimproved launching site at Hunter's Bridge will be abandoned when new Hunter's Bridge is built in the near future. DNR is cooperating with DOT (Division of Highways), the local Boy Scout Council and an adjacent landowner to provide a safer launching site on highway land near the present site at no cost to DNR.

#### Unauthorized Activities

Misuse of the property includes littering, timber theft (for fuel wood), illegal trapping in the beaver-otter closed area and sign vandalism. Damage to the six bridges on the McGilvary Bottoms walk-in access road is a constant problem.

Unauthorized use of vehicles (especially 4-wheel drives) occurs regularly. Construction of a stronger barrier at the east end of the McGilvary Bottoms road will reduce illegal vehicle use.

Relic hunters continue to damage Indian Mounds within the property boundaries. In addition to news media attention to this problem, an effort will be made to patrol these areas more frequently.

#### RECREATION AND EDUCATION ASSESSMENT

The Van Loon Wildlife Area was originally established to provide a large block of public land for hunting, fishing and trapping. Use of this property for a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities including the aforementioned, as well as hiking, canoeing and cross-country skiing has greatly increased in recent years.

Outdoor recreation and education pressure on all public lands near La Crosse is increasing rapidly. In recent years, a population shift to the north and east of the City of La Crosse has moved several thousand people to within ten miles of this property. Energy problems will force many of these people to direct more of their outdoor activities to the lower Black River bottoms including this property.

Opportunities for outdoor recreation and education within 20 miles of La Crosse continue to shrink as wild lands are converted to rural homesites and other non-public recreation uses. Some of the very best hunting and hiking areas have been closed to public hunting. This property will provide continued quality outdoor recreation and education experiences for the hunter, fisherman, hiker and other outdoor users.

#### ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

##### Status quo

A decision to maintain the status quo would result in continued trespass, boundary and access problems. Property development and maintenance would be restricted and purchase of certain important land parcels would be postponed or completely missed.

Maintaining the status quo would delay development and wildlife habitat improvement. It would result in inadequate protection of endangered and threatened species and their habitat, further deterioration of bridges for walk-in access and loss of merchantable timber through natural causes.

Most of the land with the existing boundary is already in state ownership. Public use for outdoor recreation is growing. The area population is increasing rapidly and posting of private lands is widespread. Maintaining the present ownership is unrealistic in view of projected demands for public outdoor recreation lands in the La Crosse population area. Maintaining the present boundaries will affect public access and hamper efforts to attain projected goals and objectives. This alternative is not recommended.

##### Intensive development

This alternative is unrealistic due to zoning restrictions and periodic flooding of virtually all of the property. Most individuals and organizations surveyed about proposed future property uses indicated they preferred no intensive development. This alternative is not recommended.

##### Establishment of Wilderness Area

This alternative is not considered feasible. Much of the property was purchased primarily for public hunting with hunting license funds. This use must be continued or the Department would be required to provide replacement lands or refund federal monies at current market value.

Numerous public roads skirt the property and detract from a wilderness environment. Adjacent federal lands are managed somewhat like a wilderness area and allow no timber harvesting. It would be unwise to "lock up" additional bottomland hardwood forest in this way. This alternative is not recommended.

Reduce Property Size

Since most of the approved acreage is already under state ownership and outdoor recreation use is growing rapidly, reducing the size of the wildlife area would be unwise. Reduced property size would result in crowding and fewer quality outdoor recreation experiences. The highest and best use for the wildlife area acreage is outdoor recreation and timber production. Management and development for the aforementioned uses can best be accomplished by the DNR with a large, solid block of land. This alternative is not recommended.

Enlarge Property Size

The property is located in one of the largest bottomland hardwood floodplain areas in western Wisconsin. Outdoor recreation and education use is popular and will undoubtedly increase over time. Because state lands lie adjacent to the 195,000 acre Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge, enlarging the size of the property to any significant extent does not appear warranted. However, modifying the boundary in the portion of the wildlife area indicated in Figure 2 is needed for the following reasons:

- (1) Public access to state-owned lands as well as several thousand acres of federal lands is difficult in the southwest portion of the wildlife area. If the existing public road was abandoned, access could be eliminated if state ownership was not established.
- (2) Present wildlife area boundaries in the vicinity of the proposed addition are irregular and confusing to outdoor recreationists. Identification of property lines is difficult and trespass on adjacent private properties is common. The addition would improve identification of public lands.
- (3) The proposed addition would improve blocking of state land in an area that is now a mixture of state and private ownerships.
- (4) Parcels proposed for addition to the wildlife area are essentially wild and unspoiled. They contain excellent wildlife habitat and are very scenic.
- (5) Inclusion of a 91.35 acre tract of federal land will provide uniform blocking and regulation. This land will be acquired by gift, trade or long-term lease.

08500

APPENDIX

Master Plan Comments

In the estimation of the Wild Resources Advisory Council the Task Force of the Van Loon Wildlife Area has prepared a reasonable Master Plan Concept Element. The Council is somewhat disappointed in the light treatment of many of the natural assets of the area.

General Review

The Wild Resources Advisory Council is impressed with the quality and diversity of the The Wildlife Habitat as presented by the Van Loon Wildlife Area Master Plan Concept Task Force. The Council, a member of the project reviewing groups, is not satisfied with the general purpose chart. There are too many omissions. Item 4 under Annual Objectives lists six national historic bridges. These should be spotted on a general purpose chart. Item 4 under Acquisition and Development lists Hilt Road. This site likewise should be shown as well as the canoe launching site at Hunters Bridge. Also, the Council is not sure of the location of McGilvary Bottoms walk-in access road. Under Wildlife Management (page 9) the Task Force states that "Most of this area is included in beaver-otter closed area". Our question - Why not show on chart the remnant exempt from this regulation. Under the Historic and Archaeological Section reference is made to Indian Mounds and mound groups. It is the Council's contention that these should be shown on one of the charts.

WRAC is concerned, that considering the high quality of the Van Loon Wildlife Area, that more wild resources categories were not designated.

DNR Response: Concur; text/figures corrected. The Natural and Scenic Areas were expanded.

Comments and Recommendations

1. Page 1 -- Goal

WRAC is not impressed with the Goal statement. We recommend the following alterations: Insertion of and education between the words recreation and and; Insertion of other between accommodate and compatible; and cancellation of words recreation and between words outdoor and land. These recommended alterations provide greater substantive meaning to the Goal statement.

DNR Response: Concur; text modified.

2. Page 1 -- Annual Objective, Number 4

WRAC admires the intent of protecting seven sites for scientific and educational study. The Council recommends that the designated archaeological site receive better visibility in the text and that all seven be pinpointed on one of the figures (charts).

DNR Response: Concur; additional text provided in addition to bridge locator on Figure 3.

3. Page 1 -- Annual Additional Benefits, Number 1

WRAC recommends the insertion of and educational activities between the words recreation and including.

DNR Response: Concur; text modified.

4. Page 1 -- Land Use Designation

The last sentence in the paragraph is incomplete.

DNR Response: Text completed.

5. Page 1 -- Acquisition and Development

WRAC finds the figures used in paragraph one confusing and noncompatible. Adding the 3,519.32 acres in fee ownership to 881.36 acres remaining to be purchased results in a total of 4,400.68 acres. This sum is not consistent with other totals listed in the text.

DNR Response: Text corrected.

6. Page 2 -- Figure 2

If this chart is intended to be the basic one, WRAC recommends that the legend be expanded and the map be modified to include the critical identities listed in General Review.

DNR Response: Figure 3 modified.

7. Page 3 and 4 -- Figures 3 and 4

The item labeled Proposed Road and Bridge Improvements is meaningless since bridge symbols are not posted on the chart (Figure 3). Since the track symbolized dots and dashes on Figure 3 are posted on the map, why not include it in the legend, with identification.

DNR Response: Figure 3 modified.

8. Page 5 -- Item 8

WRAC is more concerned in the habitat for the high canopy avian species in the Van Loon Wildlife Area than in the commercial aspects of the bottomland forest stand.

9. Page 5 -- Current Land Use

WRAC recommends the insertion and education between words recreation and and on the second line of the paragraph.

DNR Response: Text modified.

10. Page 6 -- Fish and Wildlife

The general survey of this category is excellently presented by the Task Force. However, in the opinion of the WRAC, since this wildlife area is sought and used by amateur and professional naturalists, the Task Force owes more than general specie listings. The Council recommends that a substantial, if not exhaustive, one be prepared of all wildlife in the project area. That should include nesting and migratory species of birds, nongame mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

DNR Response: While a more comprehensive list has been compiled, the Department does not agree that such a listing is required in the text of the master plan. The inventory need has been added to the text.

11. Page 6 -- Vegetative Cover

WRAC recommends a more exhaustive listing of plants for the same reasons as listed in the preceding paragraph.

DNR Response: Same as 10.

12. Page 9 -- Water Resources

WRAC recommends that some of the six lakes in the wilderness setting be designated as wilderness lakes.

DNR Response: The human disturbance on and around property lakes is too apparant for wild or wilderness designatons. However, a 100 foot, no-cut zone has been added to protect lake aesthetics.

13. Page 9 -- Planned Developments, Item 1

In the proposal of periodic timber harvest, WRAC recommends that emphasis of habitat concern for species using mature timber be expressed equally.

DNR Response: No specific objective has been identified for such wildlife. However, natural and scenic area protection as well as portions of the property with very restrictive access will provide adequate quantities of old stand timber.

14. Page 12 -- Natural Area

WRAC wishes to commend the Task Force for designating the tract of land listed in the paragraph as natural area, conditioned by expected agreements with present owners. The Scientific Areas Preservation Council considers a block of land including Goose Lake also worthy of Natural Area designation. WRAC endorses this recommendation, realizing that the designation is contingent on future acquisition.

15. Page 12 -- Private Inholdings

WRAC recommends that the second sentence of the paragraph conclude with and nature study enthusiasts following recreationists.

DNR Response: Concur; text modified.

16. Page 13 -- Second and third paragraphs

- a. Insertion of and education between the words recreation and pressure (second paragraph).
- b. Third paragraph from top of page, insertion of and education between recreation and within.
- c. Insertion of and education between recreation and experiences.
- d. Insertion of and education between Recreation and Needs in the heading of this section, top of page.

DNR Response: Concur; text modified.

17. Pages 13 and 14 -- Enlarge Property Size

WRAC recommends the insertion of and education between words recreation and use.

The Council endorses this alternative, supports the Task Force's five reasons for recommending this alternative, and urges the Natural Resources Board to accept their recommendation.

DNR Response: Text modified.

By: Cliff Germain  
Representing: Scientific Areas Preservation Council  
Date: October 19, 1981

Your letter of September 30, 1981 asked for comments on your final recommendations regarding scientific areas or natural area.

This matter was reviewed at the last meeting of the Scientific Areas Preservation Council. Our original recommendation asked for Public Use Natural Area designation of approximately 100 acres in the W1/2 of Section 27 and supported the area you had originally proposed for Scientific Area classification in Section 34, west of the Black River.

Since most of the area in Section 34 is federally owned and acquisition is not assured, we recommend that the originally proposed Natural Area in W1/2 of Section 27 of approximately 100 acres be retained in the plan. If you have a reason for objecting to this classification we would be glad to discuss it.

DNR Response: The W1/2 of Section 27 has been designated Public Use Natural Area

By: Robert W. Baker  
Representing: Department of Transportation  
Date: October 2, 1981

Master Plan Review and Environmental Impact Assessment for the Van Loon Wildlife Area.

We have reviewed the above noted documents and have no comments on the proposal.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Master Plan and Environmental Impact Assessment for this project.

By: Richard W. Dexter  
Representing: The State Historical Society  
Historical Preservation Division  
Date: October 7, 1981

I have read the Van Loon Wildlife Area Master Plan Concept Element and offer the following comments for your consideration.

We commend the Department's efforts to restore and maintain the historic truss bridges along McGilvary Bottoms Road. If our staff can be of any assistance in reviewing the bridge rehabilitation plans, please contact me.

The master plan correctly states that there is an Indian mound group within the present property boundaries as well as several mounds, a mound group, and a cemetery just outside the property. However, it is important to point out that these sites were discovered incidentally by avocational archaeologists approximately 90 years ago, and that the refuge property has not been systematically surveyed by a qualified professional. Based on our experience elsewhere in La Crosse and Trempealeau counties, we expect that there may be many more prehistoric archaeological sites within the wildlife area, particularly on better drained soils along the eastern edge of the area. In view of this, we recommend that both proposed parking sites be examined by a qualified archaeologist prior to beginning any construction. Only in this way can the Department ensure that valuable archaeological material is not inadvertently destroyed and irreplaceable scientific information lost.

It has recently come to our attention that the mound group inside the refuge has been damaged by relic hunters. We recommend that patrols in the area of the mound group be increased to discourage further looting of this important site.

If you have any questions on the above matter, please contact me (267-3732).

DNR Response: Text modified to reflect concerns expressed.

By: William J. Knoll  
Representing: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission  
Date: October 9, 1981

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission staff has reviewed the plan. We find it to be consistent with goals, policies, and plans adopted by the Commission. We recommend that the plan be sent to affected town officials for review and comment.

DNR Response: Local officials notified.

By: Byron Evenson  
Representing: La Crosse County Alliance of Sports Clubs (LCASC)

The LCASC support the plan for the wildlife area. We represent 5,000 sportsmen in La Crosse County.

By: Fred Funk  
Representing: Wis. Conservation Congress  
Date: October 9, 1981

Overall view: Excellent  
The Wisconsin Conservation Congress wholeheartedly supports the proposed Master Plan for the Van Loon Wildlife Area as outlined in File Ref 2300 dated August 26, 1981 and the major development projects (page 1-5) except for changes as noted.

1. Major comments: Page 5-7 Recommend the Department of Natural Resources involve local area sportsmen clubs and youth organizations (Scouts etc.) for construction of wood duck houses. This would create interest and would encourage involvement on the part of these area organizations in this project. Installation and maintenance of the wood duck houses could be handled by the Department of Natural Resources. This would also tend to hold down project costs; although not major for this item. Page 5, para. 8. It is recommended there be no timber cutting on a 100 ft. strip (width) of land on all bordering rivers (East and West fork of Black River) and on all major ponds and lakes within the area located on state-owned land.

DNR Response: Concur.

2. Editorial comments: The Department of Natural Resources used great foresight in establishing the Van Loon Wildlife Area in 1948 and with the subsequent land acquisition in 1957 and thereafter. This Wildlife Area is surrounded by numerous communities (La Crosse, Onalaska, Holmen, Galesville, Trempealeau) comprising well over 120,000 Wisconsin residences. Because of the nature of the area it provides a tremendous variety of outlets for the Hiker, Naturalist, Hunter, Fisherman, Cross Country Skier and Canoeist. The proposed projects outlined in the Master Plan (with few modifications) will greatly enhance the use of this facility for present and future generations.

By: Marc A. Schultz  
Representing: University Extension  
Date: September 24, 1981

1. Major comments: I suggest that a 100 foot Scenic Area be established on all shoreland adjacent to navigable waters. This 100 foot zone has been used successfully in other similar "wild area" management strategies.

DNR Response: Concur.

2. Additional comments: Refuse and litter pick up on a regular basis should be budgeted for each year for the Van Loon and other Department lands. It is part of the cost of land management and provides a good "public image" to the Department

DNR Response: Concur within budget constraints.

08150