

**LOWER MUD LAKE**

**RESOURCE PROTECTION PROJECT PLAN**

Adopted by the  
Dane County Board of Supervisors  
February 17, 1994

Prepared by the Dane County Park Commission  
with assistance from staff of the  
Dane County Regional Planning Commission

## LOWER MUD LAKE

### RESOURCE PROTECTION PROJECT PLAN

#### I. Introduction

Lower Mud Lake was added to the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan in 1991 as a resource protection area. Residents and local officials from the Town of Dunn and the Village of McFarland suggested making Lower Mud Lake a resource protection project during meetings on the Dane County Greenspace Plan. Lower Mud Lake is a major wetland area along the Yahara River and is, therefore, a significant environmental feature on the main waterway in Dane County. It joins Cherokee Marsh, Sixmile Creek, Pheasant Branch Creek, Lower Waubesa Wetlands, and Door Creek Wetlands as preservation projects along the Yahara drainage system.

The purpose of a resource protection project is to identify the natural resources and historical features which are desirable as permanent open space and institute a preservation program. For Lower Mud Lake this means the long term acquisition of land or land rights from willing sellers as the land becomes available over the years. The plan consists of a project boundary and recommendations for management of land within the project boundary.

#### II. Objectives

1. Create a preserve along the Yahara River and Lower Mud Lake which has as its primary purpose the preservation and restoration of natural resources.
2. Preserve wetland, floodplain, springs and related features to protect water quality along the Yahara chain of lakes.
3. Provide and protect natural habitat for fish, waterfowl and wildlife.
4. Preserve archeological and historic resource sites.

#### III. Resources

##### 1. Wetlands

The wetland resources of Lower Mud Lake are significant and have been well documented. The Town of Dunn Open Space Preservation Handbook summarizes the marsh as "...the highest quality shallow wetland in the town...(which) supports a wide variety of migrating birds of prey and nesting and feeding habitat for sandhill

cranes and other wildlife species." Natural functions associated with the wetland include wildlife habitat, water quality, flood control, groundwater discharge and fish spawning areas.

The project area includes three wetlands. The wetland on the east side of Lower Mud Lake is a sedge meadow on a deep layer of peat and encompasses about 200 acres. This wetland extends into the Village of McFarland where it is designated as a park and conservancy area. In two places, arms of this wetland extend eastward to connect with the Door Creek wetlands along Lake Kegonsa. The DNR owns 137 acres on the east side of Mud Lake.

A second wetland area is on the west side of Lower Mud Lake. It is about 400 acres in size. This area is a deep peat deposit and is wetter than the east side wetland. Keenan's Creek flows into the wetland, and there are many springs and seepages discharging groundwater. USH 51 bisects the west wetland. DNR owns approximately 180 acres of land on the west side of Mud Lake. Together the east and west wetlands serve as buffers around Lower Mud Lake and contribute to its value as an isolated wildlife area.

The Tower Road wetland, the third wetland component of the project, is about 100 acres in size. It borders Lake Waubesa. This area is similar in character and size to the west side wetland along Mud Lake. It is primarily an emergent wet meadow with some areas of scrub vegetation on wet soils. A segment of this wetland contains several broadcast towers. The quality of the wetland as a wildlife habitat is considered to be below that of the Mud Lake Wetlands because of the presence of adjacent development and the broadcast towers.

The DNR surveyed the fish populations of Lower Mud Lake several times in the past thirty years. Largemouth bass and northern pike are the dominant predator species, with bluegills and black bullheads the most numerous panfish. Walleyes are present during spawning season. All of the fish species use Lower Mud Lake or the Yahara River for spawning as well as for their major habitat. The primary DNR goal for the Lower Mud Lake wetlands is to maintain high water quality through the natural filtering out of sediments and nutrients and by stabilizing water levels.

## 2. Woodlands

The Town of Dunn Handbook identifies 12 woodlots adjacent to the Lower Mud Lake wetlands. The proximity of the woodlots creates important aesthetic and natural relationships with the wetlands. Three woodlots received a classification of "excellent" in the town survey. Two are on the Herro property on the west side of Lower Mud Lake: one is on an undisturbed island in the marsh; the other is on a hilltop adjacent to the marsh. The third high quality woodland is located on the Dyreson and Everson properties on the east side of Lower Mud Lake. It is rated as having an exceptional variety of plant species.

## 3. Hilltops and Slopes

Only a few points of significant relief or steep slopes border the wetlands in the project area. The wooded hill on the Herro property adjacent to the west side of

Lower Mud Lake has slopes of over 20%. Disturbance of these slopes would create an erosion problem for the wetland as well as impact a high quality woodlot. Another steep, wooded hillside is located on the Gustrowsky, Solheim, and Fischer properties at the southernmost point of the wetlands. The remaining significant slopes are in the 12-20% range and lie along the southern boundary of the wetland west of Mud Lake. One of the hills has been developed for five residential sites on Rivercrest Road, the only significant development along Lower Mud Lake outside of McFarland.

#### 4. Archaeological and Historic Sites

A number of important Indian mound sites are located on hills adjacent to the wetlands. The most notable site is on the larger of the two hills on the Herro property with a total of 11 mounds. The Dane County Archeological Inventory concluded that this site contains the largest mound group remaining in the town and the third largest left in the county. The group is judged to be in excellent condition and well taken care of by the property owners. The inventory also notes that development on the hill would be very difficult because of the number and location of the mounds.

Other mound sites are located on the McClain/DNR properties in the NE NE quarter of Section 15 and the SE SE quarter of Section 10, on the Fitzgerald property on Rivercrest Road, on the Larsen property along the Yahara River, on the Schneider property along Creamery Road, and on the Huff property on Evans Road. A final site is located beneath the broadcast towers in Section 9.

#### 5. Recreational Resources

The Lower Mud Lake Area provides some existing scenic and recreational opportunities. The DNR has public hunting lands along Lower Mud Lake. Recreational boating and fishing occur along the Yahara River and on the lake itself. Babcock County Park provides a campground, boat launch and other facilities. Other boat access sites include Fish Camp Launch, a motorless launch site in McFarland, and a walk-in launch site in the Town of Dunn. The Village of McFarland has several parks and conservancy lands adjacent to the Lower Mud Lake Area.

Any additional recreational use should only be allowed following a detailed plan for such uses with input from local municipalities and landowners.

### IV. Project Boundary

The proposed project boundary is shown on Map 2. The boundary encompasses approximately 1700 acres, including 1000 acres of lowlands and 700 acres of adjacent uplands. Approximately 434 acres are currently in public ownership by Dane County, Village of McFarland, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Town of Dunn.

### Project Acreage

Lowlands	-	1000 acres
Uplands	-	<u>700 acres</u>
Total Project	-	1700 acres

Existing Public Ownership - 434 acres

The lowland portion of the project includes the floodplain and wetland areas of the Tower Road Wetlands and Lower Mud Lake Wetlands. Wetland types within the project boundary range from palustrine (wet) soils to submerged marshlands. These lands are not developable under present circumstances, nor should they be in the future. The best uses for the lowlands is preservation for fish and game habitat, floodwater storage, nutrient and sediment filtrations and natural open space.

The 100-year floodplain elevation shown on Map 2 is established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A.). The United States Geological Survey assists F.E.M.A. in establishing the 100-year floodplain throughout the United States. This floodplain elevation is established for insurance purposes.

The upland portion of the project area includes land for several purposes: to maintain a fringe of natural vegetation around the wetlands, to provide a variety of open and woodland habitats for wildlife, to protect historic and archeological resource sites, to maintain the aesthetic character of the area, and to provide for limited recreational access.

The basic upland boundary is a 300' corridor around the lowlands. The upland corridor is wider than 300' in places to provide for some of the functions listed above. These locations include: 1) the entire Seiferth property up to Bible Camp Road to include a steep wooded slope and connection to Babcock Park; 2) the large hill on the Herro property which contains mound sites, steep slopes, and a high quality woodland; 3) the wooded slope on the Gustrowsky and Solheim properties; 4) the woodland on the Stenjem and Linnerud properties; 5) the slopes on the Fischer and Kramper parcels; 6) the Dyreson property, including the high quality woodlot which extends onto the Everson parcel; and 7) the wooded knoll on the Schneider parcel. The Dyreson property is the most extensive of the upland areas. It contains wetlands, fields, woodlands, and frontage along the Yahara River.

The recommended project boundary is drawn to conform to contours, resources, and physical features of the environment. As acquisition proceeds, it may be necessary to adjust the boundary to accommodate landowner's wishes for rectangular boundary lines, field sizes, or other individual circumstances that may add or subtract to the recommended boundary.

Any residential or otherwise improved parcels which are mapped within the overall project boundary are not recommended for purchase by the county. These properties, or portions of properties, are considered to be excluded from the acquisition plan.

The project boundary does not convey the right of public access on private land within the boundary.

V. Project Management Recommendations

1. Land Management

The purpose of the plan is to maintain or restore the area to as natural a state as possible. This applies particularly to the wetlands, wetland fringes and woodlands. Over time it may be desirable to replant some of the upland buffer area in prairie grasses rather than the existing row crops.

The Dyreson property, if acquired, would present the opportunity for a prairie restoration project on existing agricultural land. The prairie habitat would complement the adjacent woodlands, wetlands and open water features. This parcel would be the most actively managed land in the project.

Management of water resources will continue to focus on improvement of spawning areas in the Yahara River upstream from Lower Mud Lake. Creation of stone and gravel beds will aid the spawning of desirable species. Dredging or altering of Lower Mud Lake for navigational purposes is not recommended. Dredging to improve wildlife and fish habitat in the lake and Yahara River is consistent with this plan.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Dane County Parks Department should develop a cooperative agreement for managing lands within the project. The DNR should assume management of wetlands. Under the agreement DNR could integrate any future county owned wetland areas into DNR wetland holdings for the purpose of common administration. The county should likewise manage upland areas and prairie restoration projects.

2. Inventory of Existing Public Access Points

<u>Place</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
Babcock Park	Camping, picnic shelters, boat launch along Lake Waubesa and the Yahara River.
Hidden Farm Road	Limited access (no parking or improvements) to DNR public hunting grounds.
McFarland Parks (several)	Nature trail links to state lands, motorless canoe boarding site on Yahara River.
Fish Camp Launch	Boat launch at mouth of Yahara River on Lake Kegonsa.

All existing and any future public access points should be carefully controlled, including signage, supervision and enforcement, to protect natural features and protect the rights and privacy of adjacent private property owners. Local municipalities, agencies and citizens should be consulted on the location and type of any access improvements.

3. Potential Public Lands

If parcels are acquired in fee, then public use should be considered subject to a planning process involving local municipalities and citizens.

4. Boating on Lower Mud Lake

Motorboating on Lower Mud Lake should be controlled to prevent disturbance of waterfowl and to reduce erosion caused by motorboat wakes. Wave action erodes cattail clumps and causes sediments to be released into the water. A "no wake" zone should be established by ordinances enacted by the Town of Dunn, the Village of McFarland, and Dane County and properly enforced by DNR and Dane County Sheriff's Department personnel.

It is recommended that the use of gas powered boats, personal watercraft (jet skis) or aircraft be restricted from the waters of Lower Mud Lake.

Development of new boating access sites is strongly discouraged and is not recommended as part of this plan.

5. Hunting on Public Land

No hunting shall be allowed on lands within the project boundary which are acquired by Dane County. The Department of Natural Resources should restrict hunting on state lands within the project boundary to bow hunting, with the exception that shotguns may be used for waterfowl hunting. Public hunting areas should be clearly posted.

VI. Acquisition Recommendations

The goal of the county is to acquire the minimum necessary interest in property on Lower Mud Lake to achieve resource preservation and accommodate the needs of landowners.

Preservation easements conveyed to either public or private agencies are preferred throughout most of the project area. Preservation easements provide a range of options to preserve land while maintaining private ownership and use. Under a preservation easement the land is deed restricted in return for compensation. This allows for preservation, while also allowing owners to recoup equity for ownership rights which are relinquished.

Private efforts at preservation through the sale or donation of easements to private organizations are valid ways of implementing the goals of the plan. These actions are encouraged. In other cases the availability of public funds may provide sufficient incentive to spur preservation efforts.

Fee simple acquisition may be necessary for some lands within the project, and recommended for other lands when it is the only available option.

All public acquisitions, whether fee simple or easements, follow established state laws and guidelines to assure compensation is at fair market value.

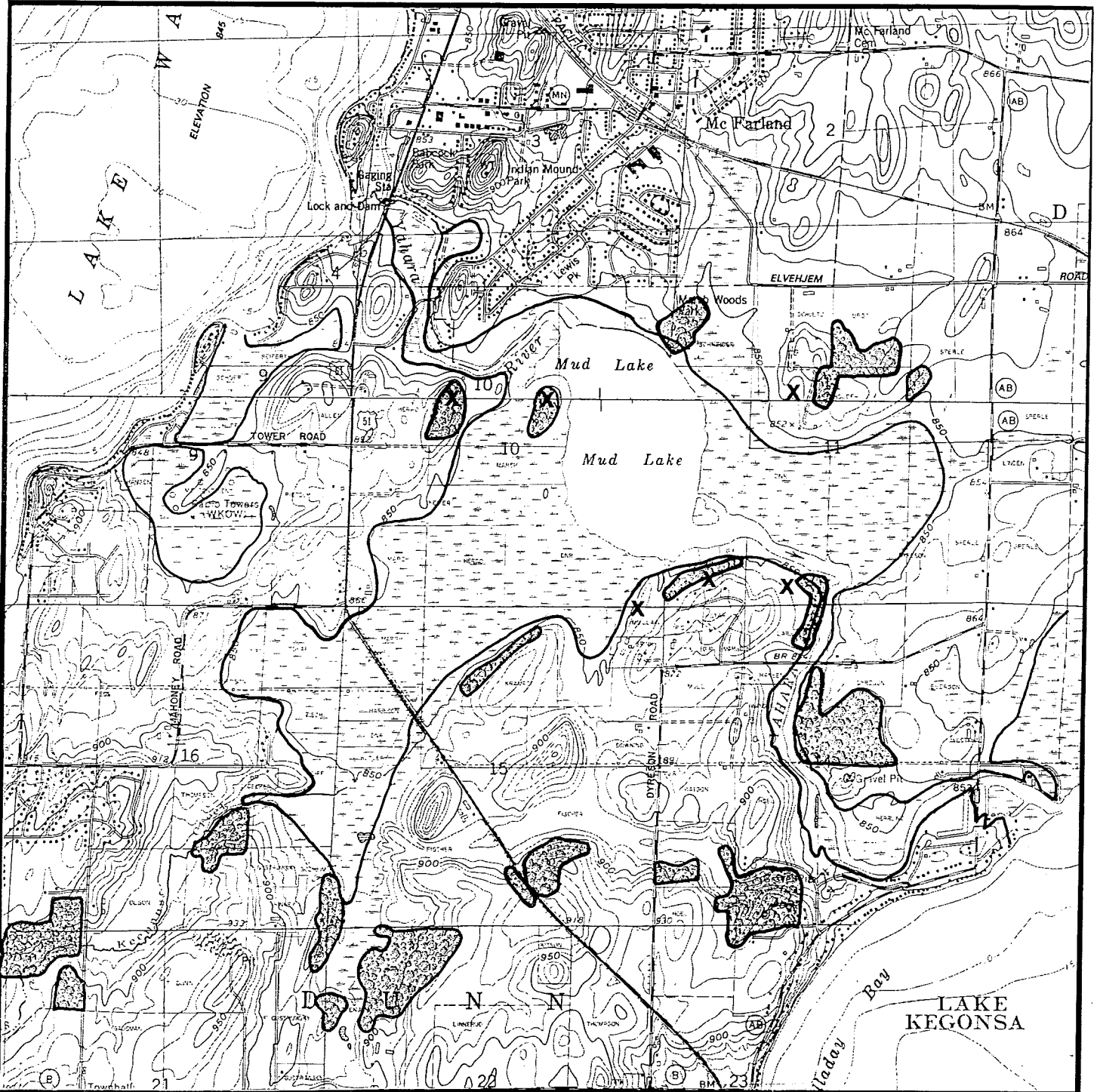
## VII. Relationship of Lower Mud Lake Plan to Land Use Plans and Land Use Recommendations

This project plan is not a land use plan or zoning ordinance and does not override or replace existing regulations. This plan offers the options of land acquisitions and preservation easements at fair market value as a means of implementing preservation of the Lower Mud Lake area.

1. This project plan has been designed to be compatible with adopted Dane County, Village of McFarland and Town of Dunn Land Use Plans and development guidelines, so that future county acquisitions aid in achieving adopted plan goals. Specifically:
  - a. The lowland, woodland and slope components of the project plan generally correspond to the designated open space system in the Town of Dunn Land Use Plan.
  - b. The designated open space system portion of the Town of Dunn Land Use Plan has been adopted by the county and the Dane County Regional Planning Commission as part of the Regional Development Guide's open space corridor.
  - c. The Village of McFarland Master Plan directs future urban development eastward from present village boundaries, and designates the general project area as park and conservancy lands.
  - d. The Village of McFarland is developing a stormwater management system to eliminate direct runoff into Lower Mud Lake.
2. Prior to considering rezoning for development within the project boundary, the county should refer the zoning petition to the County Park Commission for a response.




# DANE COUNTY WISCONSIN

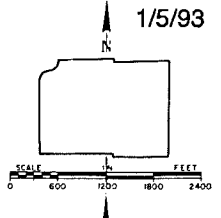


## LOWER MUD LAKE: Resources

Map 1

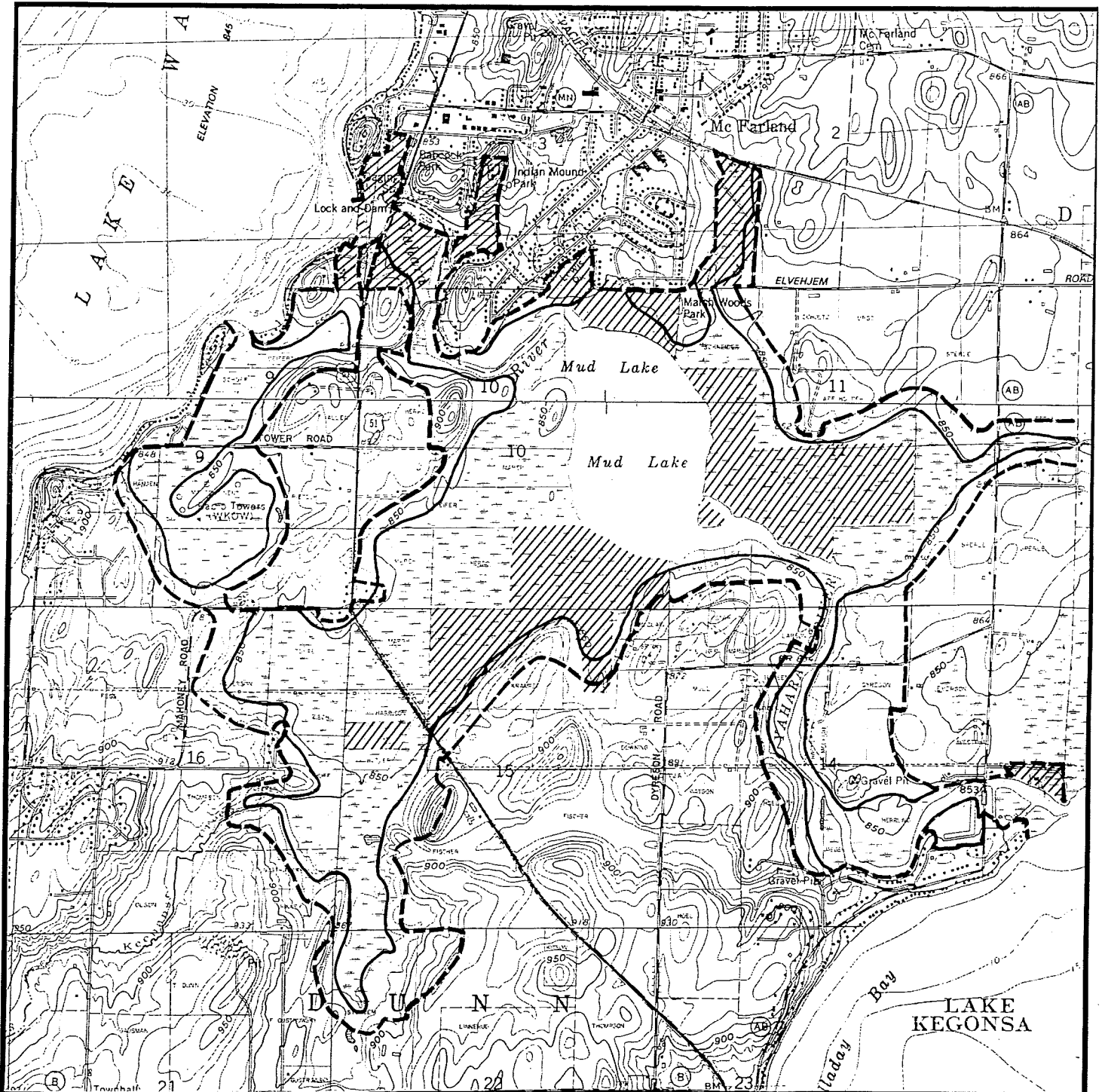
- |   |            |   |             |
|---|------------|---|-------------|
|  | Woodlands  |  | Wetlands    |
|  | Floodplain |  | Mound Sites |

NOTE: Contour slope interval=10'



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REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

# DANE COUNTY WISCONSIN

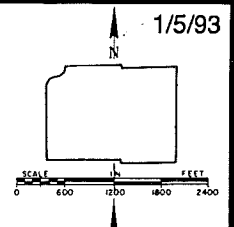


## LOWER MUD LAKE: Proposed Project Boundary

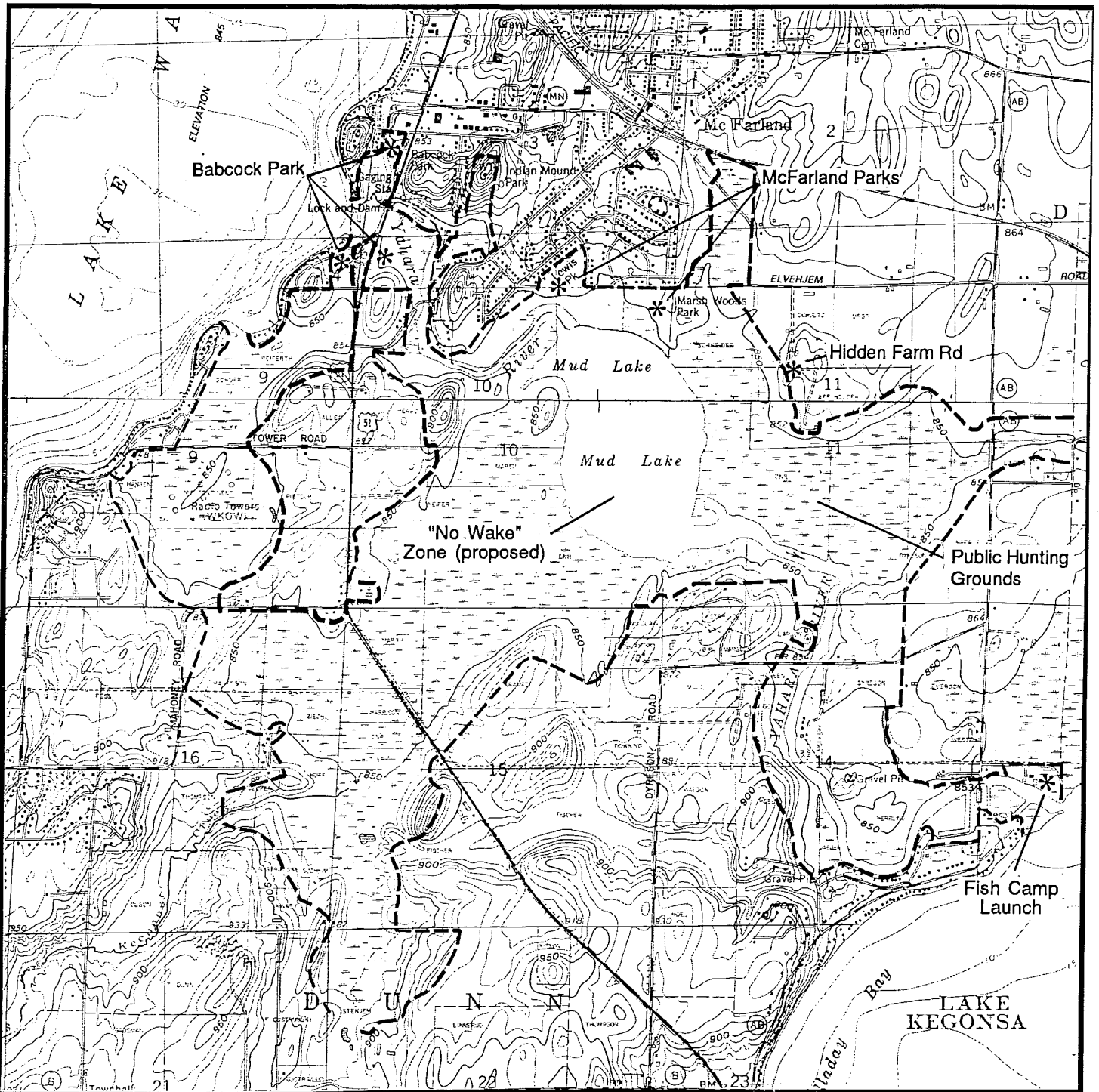
- Proposed Project Boundary
- Floodplain/Wetland Boundary
- /// Existing Public Ownership

Map 2

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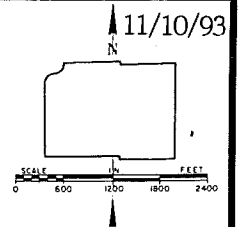
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**LOWER MUD LAKE: Preliminary Concept Plan**

Map 3

- Project Boundary
- \* Access Points



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