

# Crow Wing Township

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE 2005





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This Plan was prepared by the Community Growth Institute in partnership with the Citizens of Crow Wing Township. The Plan was officially adopted on April 4, 2005 by the Crow Wing Township Board of Supervisors.



# Crow Wing Township

# Section I. Introduction

Located in the southwest corner of Crow Wing County at the gateway to the Central Lakes Region, Crow Wing Township is home to a variety of prairies, wetlands, and heavily forested areas. Rapid population growth in the nearby cities of Brainerd and Baxter has spilled over into the Township, causing a population growth rate of 32.6 percent from 1990 to 2000. Should population continue to grow at this rate as is expected, the population within the Township will more than double over the next 25 years. This growth creates many challenges and opportunities for Township residents who try to plan for how this growth should best be accommodated.

Recognizing the need to be prepared for increasing development pressures, the residents of Crow Wing Township came together in the summer of 2004 to update their existing Comprehensive Plan. The 1992 Comprehensive Plan no longer fully addressed the issues affecting the Township and a fresh outlook was needed to plan for the changing community. The updated plan, contained herein, lays the groundwork for the desired development patterns, land uses, and future growth for the next ten to twenty years. The plan should be used as a framework to direct and shape the zoning, subdivision regulations, and land use ordinances – tools used to implement the comprehensive plan.

## The Planning Process

The planning process began in the summer of 2004 with the first meeting in June, the final meeting in March 2005, and several small group meetings in between. Residents were invited to participate in the process facilitated by the Community Growth Institute. Participants were asked to contribute not only their time, but also their concerns, knowledge, ideas, and expertise about Crow Wing Township in its present state, how the Township has changed, and how the Township should develop and function in the future.

Through the series of community meetings, citizens identified strengths and weaknesses regarding the quality of life and land use in the Township, developed goals to address issues affecting the Township, and created strategies to accomplish their goals. In between the community meetings, citizens met in small groups to refine and expand on the results of the community meetings. This plan was created by the residents of Crow Wing Township for the future of their community and is their vision for how the Township should grow. The plan was adopted on April 4, 2005.



## Section II. Historic & Current Trends

To be equipped to make sound planning decisions for the future of Crow Wing Township, there must be a clear understanding of how the Township has grown and changed in the past as well as and what trends will affect it in the future. An investigation into a wide range of demographic information was used to summarize existing conditions and project future trends. A comparison of the Township to nearby cities and Crow Wing County as a whole identifies the role the Township has in the region. Understanding the history of Crow Wing Township and the trends that affect the area provides a factual base from which to make sound decisions.

The information presented in the tables, figures, and maps in this plan are as current as possible for the year 2004. The information is gathered from variety of sources including the U.S. Census Bureau, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the Farm Service Agency, among others.

### Population

#### *Growth*

The population of Crow Wing Township grew slightly, but steadily, between 1960 and 1980. Population figures for 1990 show an aggressive increase of 33 percent from 1980 to 1990 and from 1990 to 2000. The large jump in population over the most recent decade relates directly to the rapid growth of neighboring Baxter, part of the Brainerd/Baxter Regional Center (**Table 1**).

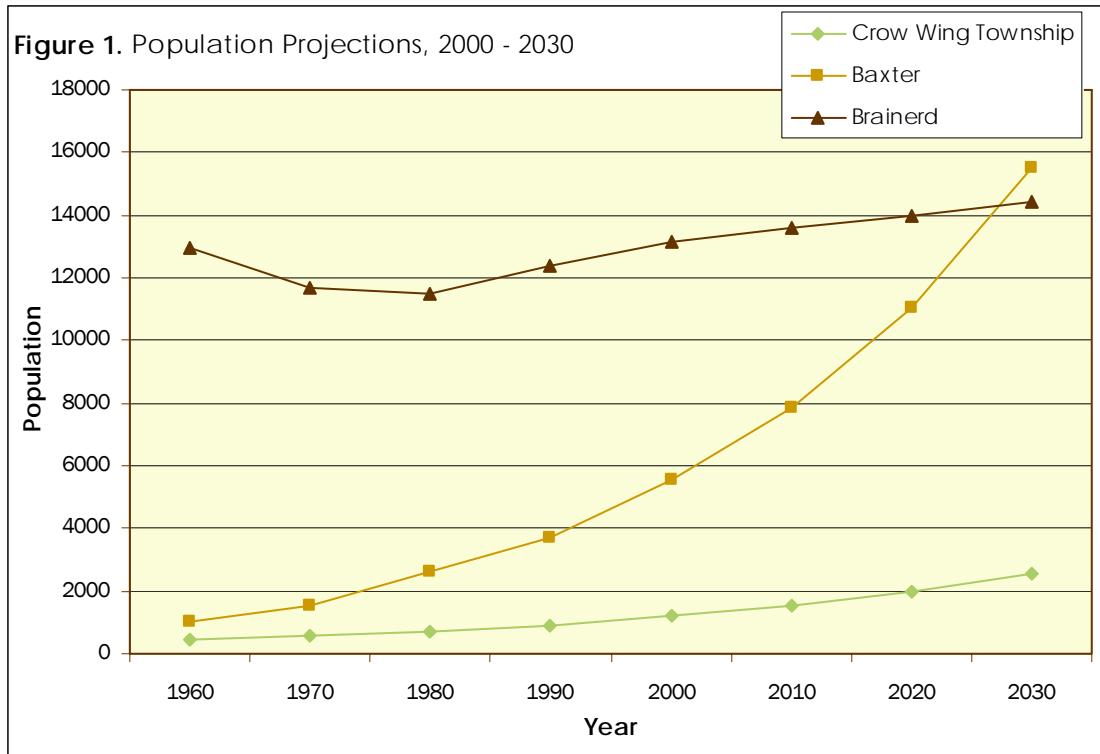
**Table 1.** Population in Crow Wing Township, Baxter, Brainerd, and Crow Wing County – 1960-2000

	1960	1970	% Change	1980	% Change	1990	% Change	2000	% Change
Crow Wing Township	447	560	25.2	687	22.6	914	33.0	1,212	32.6
Baxter	1,037	1,556	50	2,625	68.7	3,695	40.8	5,555	50.3
Brainerd	12,989	11,667	(10.1)	11,489	(1.5)	12,353	7.5	13,178	6.7
Crow Wing County	32,134	34,826	8.3	41,722	19.8	44,249	6.1	55,099	24.5

Source: U.S. Census of Population, 1960 - 2000

All indications are that the population will continue to grow at a high rate. People will move to the Township as long as it continues to have land that is comparably affordable. Other factors also will draw new residents and businesses to the Township. The proximity and growth of job and service centers in Brainerd and Baxter will draw people to reside in the Township, facilitated by the convenient access provided by the completion of the Highway 371 realignment. The completion of the highway realignment also opens new opportunities for commercial and industrial development along the highway, in turn creating new employment prospects within the Township.

Using the per decade growth rate from the last 20 years, the populations for Crow Wing Township, Baxter, Brainerd, and Crow Wing County were projected over the next 30 years up to the year 2030 (**Figure 1**). This analysis shows that the population of Brainerd is expected to grow modestly, while Baxter is expected to grow rather rapidly. Crow Wing Township should also grow rapidly, but because of the smaller size of the Township in comparison to Brainerd and Baxter, the growth rate is not as apparent in the figure. The 2000 population of Crow Wing Township was 1,212, but should grow to about 2,500 people by 2030, more than doubling in size.



### Age Groups

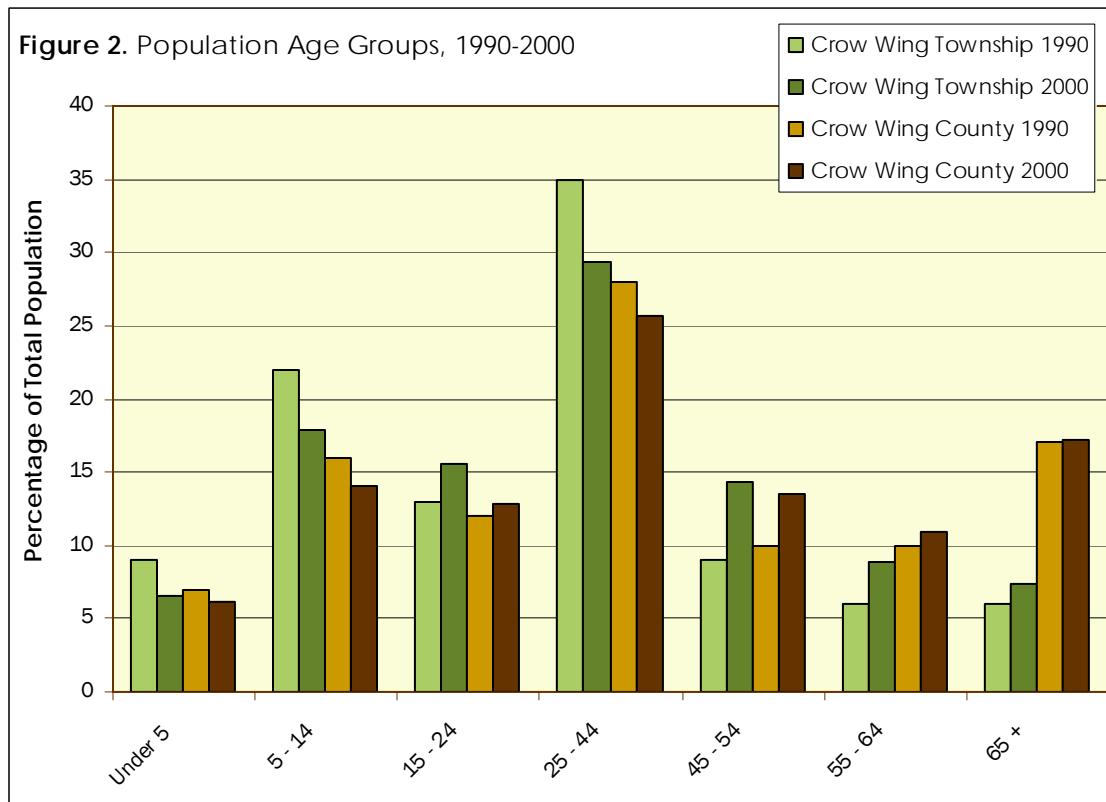
In 1990, the overall Township population was young. The median age of the population in Crow Wing Township was 29, meaning that half of the people in Township were under the age of 29 and half were over that age (Figure 2). This age is considerably lower than the median age of 29 for Crow Wing County in 1990, indicating that the Township had attracted a younger population with more children and young adults.

In general, the Township population has aged since 1980. The median age has changed significantly from 1990 to 2000, from 29 years to 34.8 years. The 2000 median age was still lower than the county's median age, but the overall age has increased. In particular, all of the population groups from 0-44 years declined as a proportion of the population except for the 15-24 age group, while all the age groups age 45 and above increased as a proportion of the population from 1990 to 2000.

The trends are mirrored in the population age groups for Crow Wing County as a whole, reflecting a growing population of retirees making their homes in the area. This trend is not just a local phenomenon. Nationwide, the baby-boom population is moving into retirement, often seeking retirement homes in areas with many amenities. In Minnesota, this movement means that areas with lakes, recreation opportunities, and resorts are highly desirable.

### Households

The growth in the number of households in an area often resembles the overall population growth. However, there are times when household growth can grow at much slower or much faster rates than overall population growth depending on the composition of the population. In Crow Wing Township, household growth rates have been greater than population growth rates over the last thirty years. The number of households in Crow Wing Township increased by 44 percent between 1970 and 1980 and by 41 percent between 1980 and 1990 (Table 2). By 2000, the number of households in the Township had increased by 46%. The increasing rate of household growth indicates that the average household size is declining. As Table 2 shows, the number of persons per



household in the Township has declined from 3.86 in 1970 to 2.79 in 2000. Increasing populations of retirees and baby-boomers in the Central Lakes Region and decreasing populations of families with young children contribute to the increasing household growth rate.

Dramatic household growth in nearby Baxter, nearly doubling the Township's growth rate, will place added pressure on Crow Wing Township as new residents begin to look outside of Baxter for housing. Crow Wing Township's household growth closely resembles that of the county, both averaging around 67 percent growth per decade over the last thirty years.

## Housing

Most of the growth in Crow Wing Township has been in residential development with 88 percent of the housing units in 1990 being owner-occupied, and 93 percent being owner-occupied in 2000. The majority of the housing units in the Township are single-family homes scattered throughout the area. There have not been any residential developments of multi-family units in the Township. In most cases, clusters of homes are within established platted areas. About one out of every ten homes was renter-occupied with little change up until 1990. Home ownership has increased and the number of rental units has declined between 1990 and 2000.

**TABLE 2.** Households in Crow Wing Township, Baxter, Brainerd, and Crow Wing County, 1970-2000

	Households				Avg. Change Per Decade	Persons per Household			
	1970	1980	1990	2000		1970	1980	1990	2000
Crow Wing Township	145	209	296	434	66.43	3.86	3.29	3.09	2.79
Baxter	420	804	1,200	2,007	125.96	3.70	3.26	3.08	2.77
Brainerd	4,019	4,658	5,197	5,806	14.83	2.86	2.41	2.38	2.27
Crow Wing County	10,974	15,171	17,204	33,483	68.36	3.06	2.69	2.57	1.65

**Source:** U.S. Census of Population, 1970 - 2000

**TABLE 3.** Vacant Housing Units, 1990-2000

	Total Vacant Housing Units		Seasonal/Recreational		Homeowner Vacancy Rate		Rental Vacancy Rate	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
Crow Wing Township	20	21	6	2	2.2	1.5	1.9	3.4
Crow Wing County	12,712	11,233	10,966	10,257	1.9	1.1	7.6	3.5

*Source:* U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990 - 2000

In general, the Township's housing stock is quite similar to that of the surrounding area. There are not grossly disproportionate numbers of any particular housing type compared to the County. The Township does have a higher percentage of mobile homes than the county. This is due to the concentration of mobile and manufactured homes in the Crow Wing Estates development in comparison to the relatively smaller housing stock in the Township. Because the Township does not have any multi-family units, the County has a higher percentage of multi-family structures than the Township.

These facts indicate that future growth in housing units will likely continue to be single-family homes. Many residents choose to live in the Township because of its rural setting and because they feel that the Township was a desirable environment to raise a family. Growing numbers of retirees in the area may also increase the demand for single family homes. There are few seasonal housing units in Crow Wing Township, likely because of the lack of lakes that tend to be popular locations for this type of housing.

The homeowner vacancy rate in the Township is slightly higher than in the county, while the rental vacancy rate is significantly higher in the County than in the Township (**Table 3**). Overall the vacancy rates are low, indicating that few units are left empty and the demand for housing units is relatively high. The rental vacancy rate in the Township has increased since 1990 to more closely resemble that of the county. This increase is likely due to declining young adult populations, which tend to be renters. On the other hand, the homeowner vacancy rate has decreased, following the trend of the county, but being slightly higher.

Home values in the Township have been increasing, and trends indicate that they will continue to increase. The median home price in Crow Wing Township has nearly doubled from 1990 to 2000, closely paralleling the change in home prices in the county. In 1990, there were not any homes in the Township with a sale price above \$100,000 (**Table 4**). By 2000, a little more than half of the homes had sales prices below \$100,000, and nearly eight percent of the homes had prices over \$200,000.

**TABLE 4.** Financial Housing Characteristics, 1990-2000

Owner-Occupied	Crow Wing Township (%)		Crow Wing County (%)	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
Less than \$50,000	45.9	11.1	37.4	9.6
\$50,000 - \$99,999	54.1	43.1	37.5	36.3
\$100,000 - \$149,999	-	29.9	18.6	25.1
\$150,000 - \$199,999	-	8.3	5.2	14.0
\$200,000 - \$299,999	-	7.6	1.2	9.1
\$300,000 - \$499,999	-	-	13.0	4.7
\$500,000 - \$999,999	-	-	-	1.1
\$1,000,000+	-	-	-	0.1
Median Home Price	\$52,000	\$97,000	\$54,000	\$107,500
Median Rent	\$ 336	\$ 544	\$ 329	\$ 458

*Source:* U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990 - 2000

Compared to the Township, there are a proportionately greater percentage of expensive homes in the county (most likely on the lakes and rivers) than in the Township.

## ***Economy***

Crow Wing Township, situated as it is at the entrance to the Brainerd-Baxter Area and the internationally-famous lakes and resort area, is not directly affected by the tourist and recreation industry to the north. The economic impact of all the tourist activity largely passes by the Township even though the regional economy is influenced by these expanding industries. On the other hand, the Township is directly impacted by economic growth in the Brainerd-Baxter region. Employees of this region may seek housing opportunities in the Township and many current residents work in Brainerd or Baxter.

Because of the few services and few recreational opportunities currently available, people traveling northward during peak seasons or holidays often do not stop in the Township. The local economy is not very reliant on tourism now, but within the Township there are many features which have the potential for recreational development, such as the lands in the Township that are set aside in the Memorial Forest Program and Crow Wing State Park on the western boundary, which may expand into the Township in the future.

The local economy of Crow Wing Township is no longer mainly reliant on agriculture or its timber and mineral resources, as it had been in the past. Of the residents who still farm, few can entirely rely on farming income for a living. Few residents can even remember the history of the short-lived mining town of Barrows located in the heart of the Township. And although over half of the Township is forested, many timber companies no longer operate foresting activities in the Township, providing little employment and contributing little to the local economy.

So what drives the economy of Crow Wing Township? The answer is difficult to pinpoint. There is not much detailed information available that helps provide an accurate description of the economics of the Township. Many indicators suggest that Crow Wing Township is neither like the areas in the agricultural southern part, nor like those in the northern or eastern lakes areas of the county. The prevalence of "hobby" farms, retirees, and white collar workers suggests it is mostly a rural residential community with many of the residents working in the adjacent urban areas.

While this comprehensive plan should refer to current facts that support apparent trends, it must also suggest the dramatic economic changes this Township will experience in the near future. Retaining a status quo condition in this Township may be an impossibility.

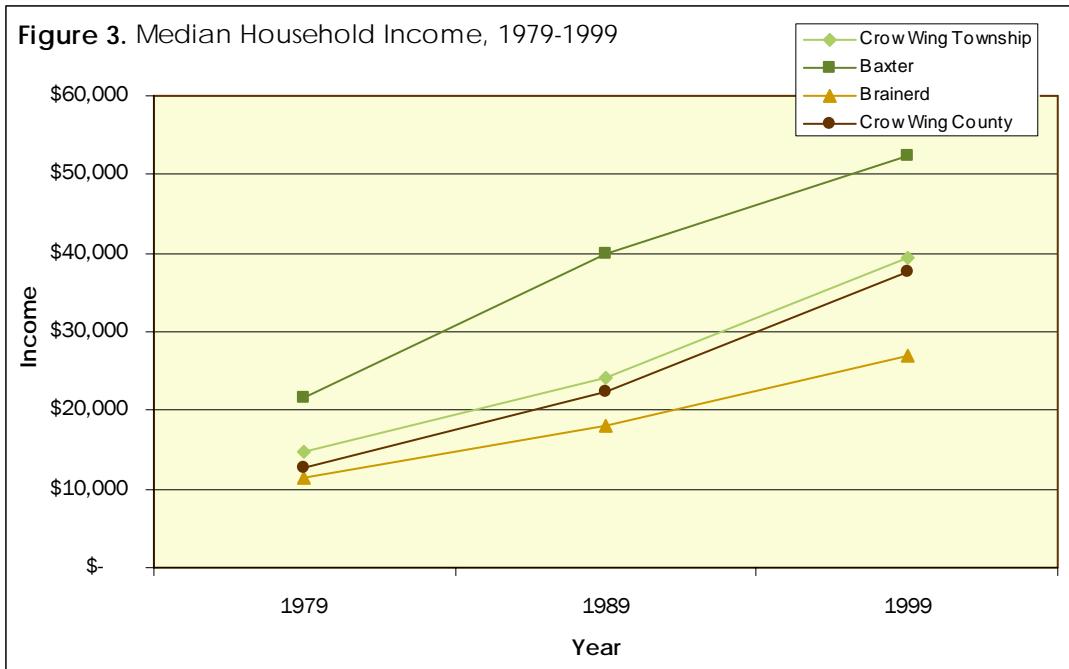
To further explore the economy of Crow Wing Township, two major economic indicators are examined: income and employment.

## ***Income***

Median household income in Crow Wing Township follows the same growth pattern as that of the County, but is always slightly above the County median income. The median household income has increased in the Township from \$14,722 in 1979 to \$39,417 in 1999 (Figure 3), more than doubling in that 20-year period. The median household income in Brainerd is consistently lower than the Township's and the County's, and the median household income in Baxter is always greater than all the others. These trends in income indicate that Crow Wing Township can expect to have similar changes in income as the County as a whole.

## ***Employment***

Two major events since the 1992 Comprehensive Plan have changed the employment situation significantly: the construction of the Highway 371 realignment to the north and the availability of land for industrial and commercial development. The realignment has allowed greater, faster



mobility to existing high employment areas, such as the service industry in Baxter and the resort activity on the lakes to the north. It has also siphoned off traffic congestion to the north, allowing for easier access to Brainerd. Employment opportunities outside of the Township have also increased.

Census information on employment indicates that Crow Wing Township is home to more working households than retirement households, although this number may be changing as the population in the Township ages. The labor force in the Township has remained stable since it continued to have over seventy percent of its population in the labor force from 1990 to 2000, which was very similar to Baxter (Table 5). Crow Wing County and Brainerd both have lower labor force participation rates when compared to Crow Wing Township.

Unemployment rates for the Township were very similar to Brainerd and Crow Wing County. The unemployment rate is almost fifty percent lower than it was a decade ago and labor participation has also increased substantially since 1980.

In 1990, the majority of residents in the Township were employed in retail trade and health services (Table 6). This employment had changed by 2000, with the majority of residents working in the manufacturing and the education, health and social services sectors. Industries with an increasing proportion of the Township in their employ from 1990 to 2000 include manufacturing; construction; finance, insurance, and real estate; arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food services, and education, health, and social services. All other industries had a declining proportion of the population employed.

TABLE 5. Labor Force Status, 2000

	Crow Wing Township	Baxter	Brainerd	Crow Wing County
Persons 16+	859	4,124	10,086	43,106
Civilian Labor Force	650	3,119	6283	27,274
% in Labor Force	75.7	75.6	62.3	63.3
Employed	621	3,006	5,814	25,712
Unemployed	29	105	450	1,490
% Unemployed	4.5	3.4	7.2	5.5

Source: U.S. Census of Population 2000

An industry to take note of is the arts, entertainment, and recreation industry. This industry experienced a dramatic increase in employment from 1.7 percent of the population in 1990 to 9.0 percent of the population in 2000. The businesses in this industry are mostly support businesses for tourism such as restaurants and hotels. Another industry to take note of is the agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and mining industry. Employment in the industry has dropped from 5.4 percent in 1990 to 0.2 percent in 2000. As mentioned previously, the economy of the Township is not driven by the extraction or cultivation of its natural resources and this fact is shown in these employment numbers.

**TABLE 6.** Employment by Industry, 1990-2000

	% Total 1990	% Total 2000
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining	5.4	0.2
Construction	7.3	9.8
Manufacturing	13.6	18.8
Transportation, warehousing, information/communication, utilities	11.7	9.3
Wholesale trade	2.9	2.7
Retail trade	22.0	14.8
Finance, insurance, real estate	2.2	3.9
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, waste management	6.3	4.3
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, food services	1.7	9.0
Education, health and social services	17.1	18.8
Other services	3.9	3.4
Public administration	5.9	4.8

*Source:* U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990 and 2000

## Section III. The Future

Over the course of the planning process, residents of Crow Wing Township identified issues important to them and their community. These issues center around maintaining the rural character of the area, accommodating a growing population, and minimizing the negative effects of new development on the rural character, environment, personal privacy, and land use in the Township.

### Creating a Vision

The residents of Crow Wing Township are farsighted and proactive when dealing with land use and planning within the Township. The Township created its first comprehensive plan in 1992, long before many municipalities in the area, and even the state, had thought to have a comprehensive plan. Many of the Township's citizens have lived in the community their entire lives, while other residents have lived in the community just a few years, and still others are completely new to the area. This diversity brings a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and knowledge to the planning process that has helped the community create a vision for their future. Residents recognize the conflicts that can arise through the full exercise of an individual's property rights. They seek to have growth and development be respectful of individual property rights without compromising the use and enjoyment of surrounding properties.

#### *The Environment*

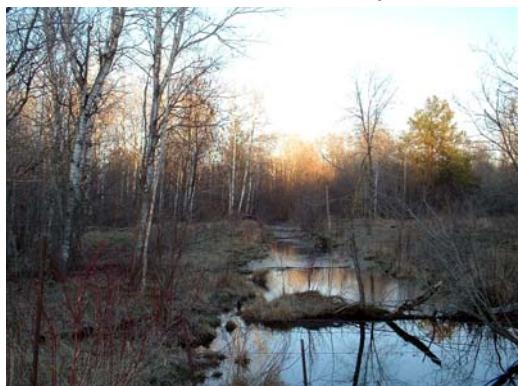
Crow Wing Township is home to beautiful natural resources. Forests, wetlands, and grasslands cover the landscape of the community and the Mississippi River serves as the Township's northwestern boundary. Approximately half of the Township is covered in forest, much of which is characterized by a mix of coniferous and deciduous trees. There are large tracts of core forest throughout the Township, particularly along the Mississippi River in the northwest. These core forest tracts serve as vital habitat for migratory species such as the bald eagle, and can also support plant and animal species that can only survive in undisturbed interior forests, such as wolves, pine martens, and many songbirds.

More than a quarter of Crow Wing Township is covered by prairie grasslands. The prairies are interspersed between tracts of forest and wetlands and are often found on higher, drier ground. Prairie lands have become increasingly rare in Minnesota and the Midwest since most of the lands were plowed and converted to agricultural uses. Remaining prairies provide important habitat for migratory birds and many game species.

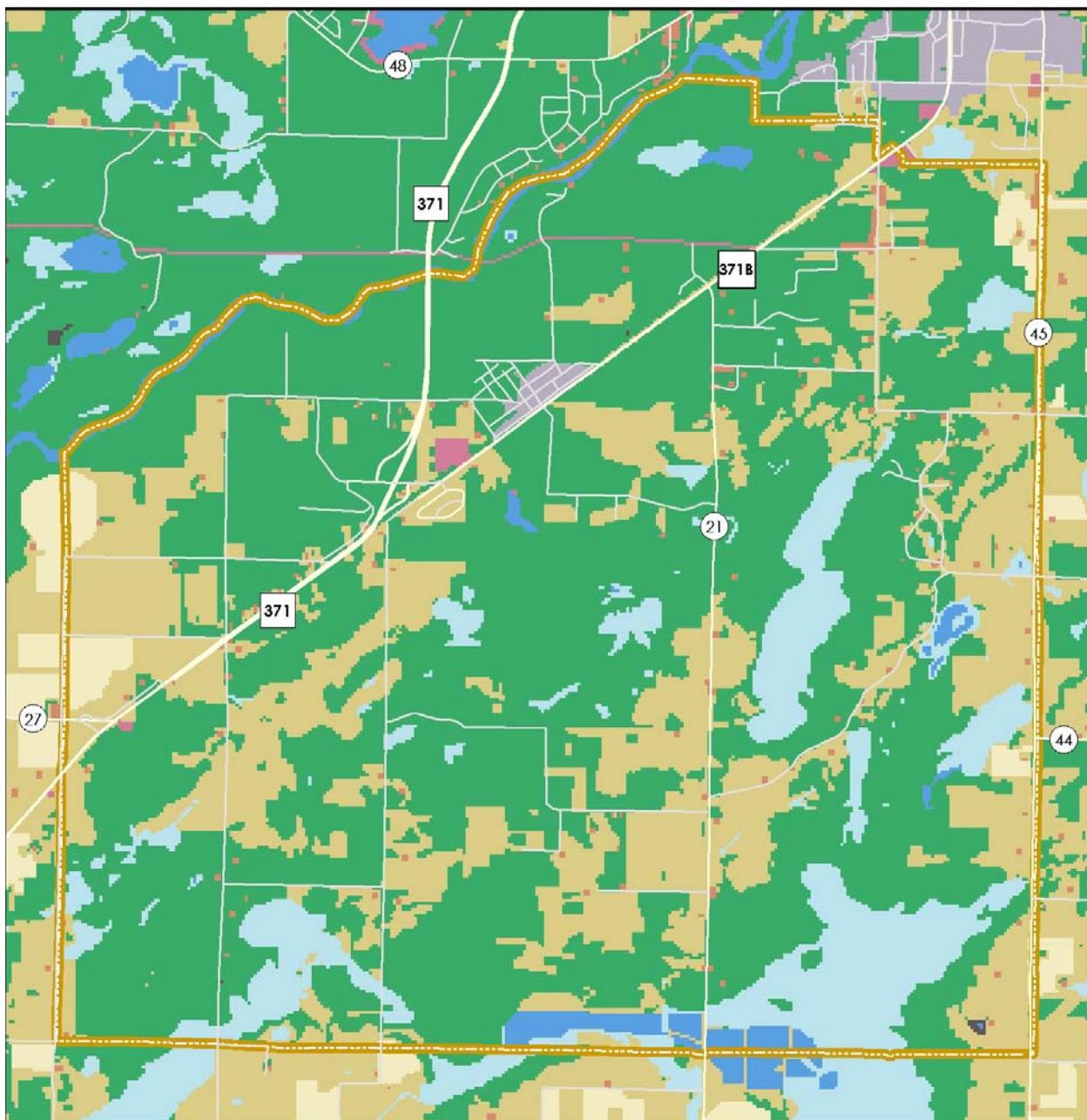
Wetlands and lakes constitute the next largest land use in the Township. While there are few lakes in the area, there are large swaths of wetlands, particularly in the eastern and southern parts of the Township. These wetlands may be difficult to discern since the majority of the wetlands are bogs and

shrub swamps. These types of wetlands have heavy vegetation cover that make them appear similar to their surroundings, when in reality, the soils beneath them are heavily saturated with water, or in some cases, may actually have standing water beneath their vegetation. Wetlands provide nesting habitat for many bird species, including ducks and other game birds. Deer, turtles, and other animals also rely on wetlands for water, breeding, and habitat.

The edges between forests and other habitats, like



## Current Land Use / Land Cover



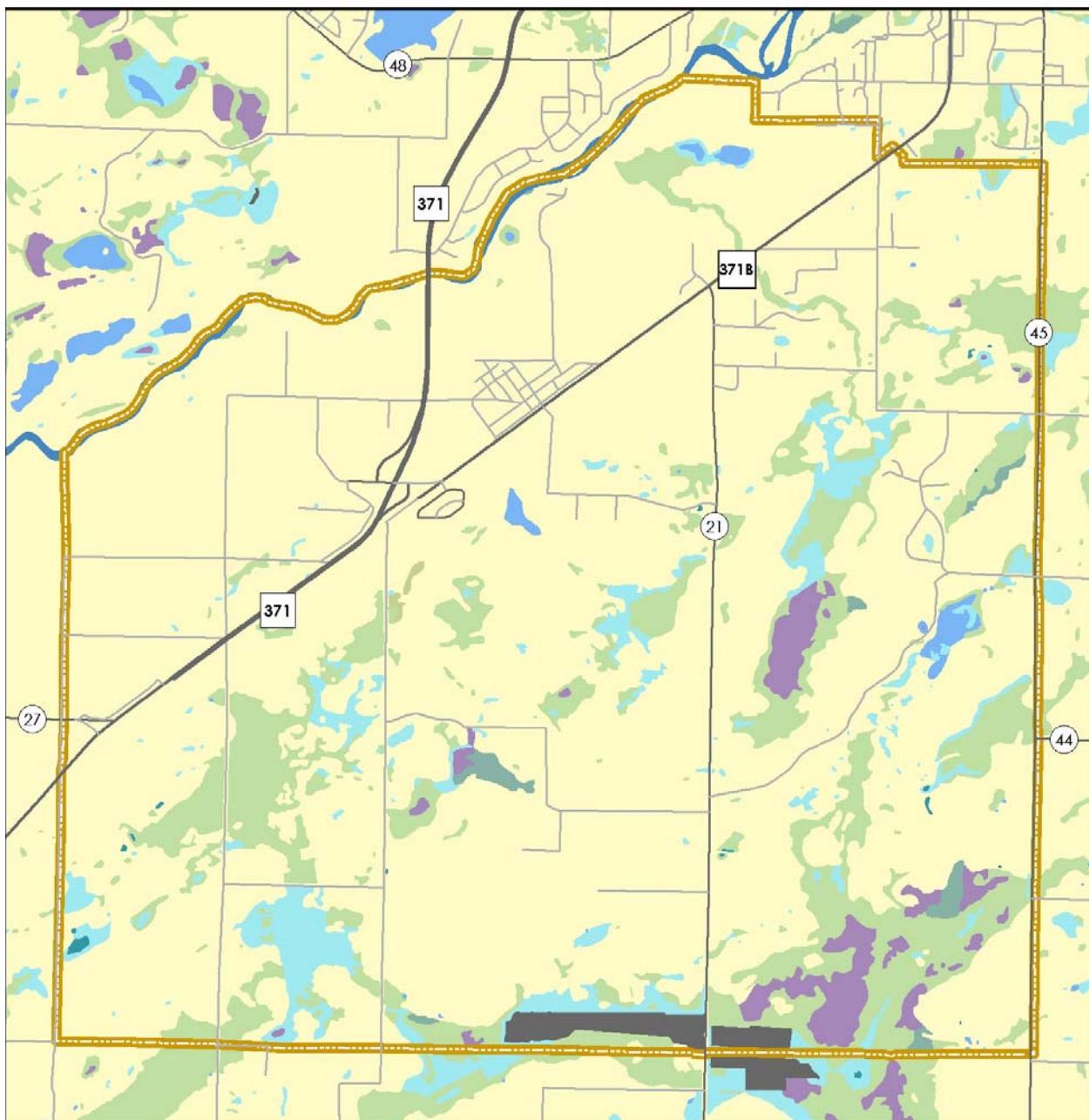
### Legend

Open water	Farmsteads and rural residences
Wetlands	Other rural developments
Forest	Urban/industrial
Grassland	Gravel pits and open mines
Cultivated land	Bare rock



Prepared May 2004  
Data sources: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation

# Wetlands and Water Resources



## Legend

Riverine system	Shrub swamp
Shallow open water	Wooded swamp
Seasonally flooded basin	Bogs
Shallow marsh	Uplands
Deep marsh	Municipal/industrial activities



0 0.5 Miles



Prepared May 2004  
 Data sources: National Wetlands Inventory,  
 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources,  
 Minnesota Department of Transportation.

grasslands and wetlands, provide habitat for many types of game species such as deer, ducks, and other upland game birds. Many residents value these areas because they provide valuable hunting lands.

## *Annexation and Land Use*

The “rural setting” of the Township was the biggest strength that residents cited. Residents enjoy the undeveloped, natural appearance of the area and the many benefits afforded by this setting including privacy, peacefulness, and a clean environment. The rural setting, however, was a topic of great concern because residents felt that it was being threatened by annexation from Brainerd. Annexation had occurred on lands in the northern part of the Township bordering the City of Brainerd in the past, and residents feared that it would continue to the point where most of the Township, if not all, had become a part of Brainerd.

Residents were concerned that properties might be annexed despite the unwillingness of the property owner. Many residents, particularly those with properties near Brainerd, did not wish to be annexed by Brainerd, but worried that increasing growth and development in Brainerd would put them right in the path of annexation.

While forced annexation may be a possibility, most properties that had been annexed by Brainerd were annexed either by the request of the property owner, or at least with the property owner’s consent. Most property owners that request annexation seek to maximize the profit on subdividing their land. By requesting annexation, property owners can often build at higher densities, often serviced by municipal utilities, thereby increasing their profits.



Getting to the root of the fear of annexation reveals a slightly different picture. The concern was not so much with annexation itself, but rather with the development patterns that were occurring on annexed lands and other lands in the northern part of the Township. Auto-oriented commercial buildings and residential subdivisions were constructed on these lands. Much of the original vegetation was removed to make way for expansive lawns and pavement. Residents feel that these development patterns degrade the rural character of the area, in addition to the natural resources and privacy that they value. Residents do not want to see these types of development patterns engulf the rest of the township.

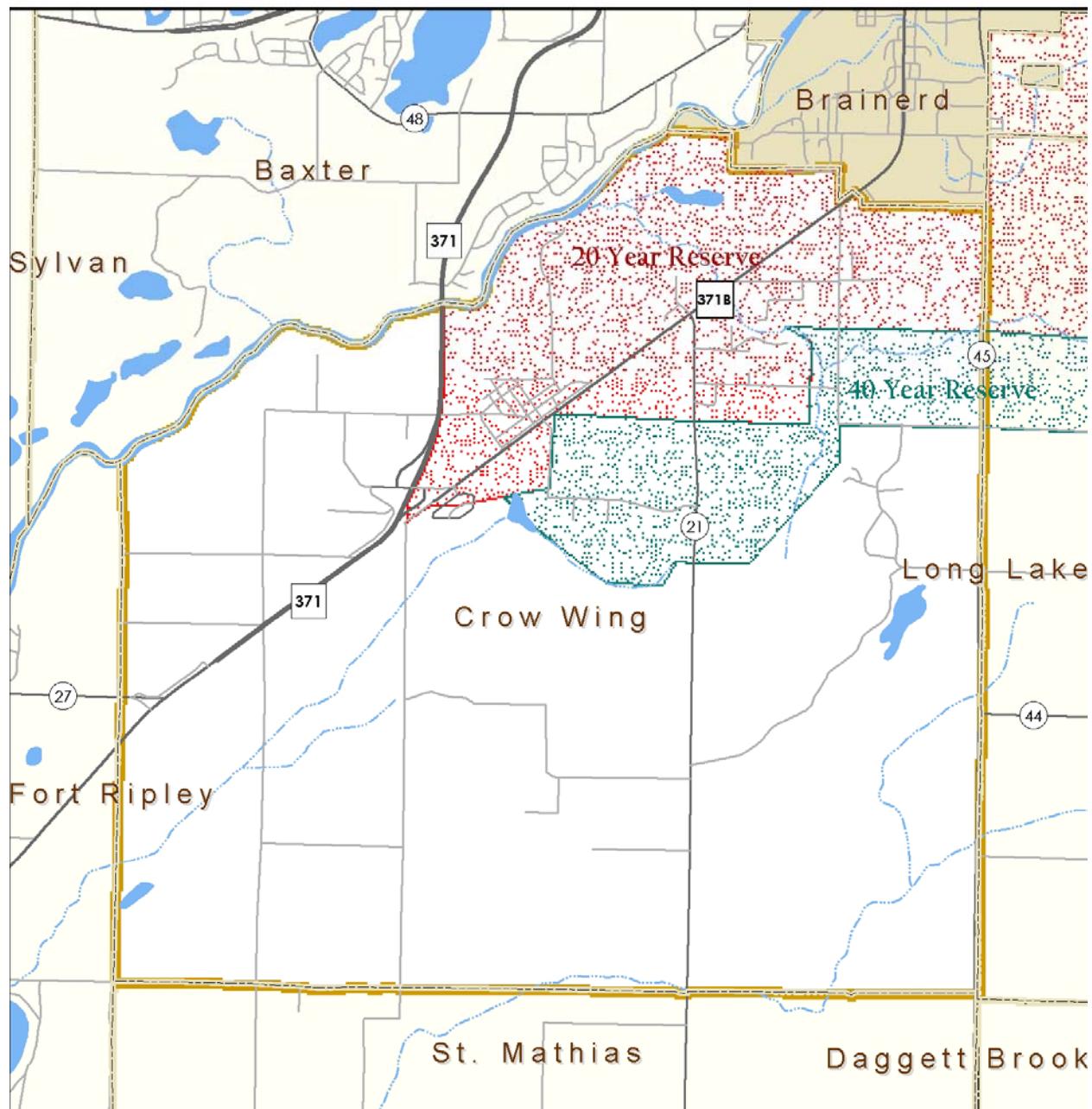
The Township is facing intensive residential and commercial development. The challenge for the Township is to employ strategies that maintain the rural character without compromising individual property rights.

## *Recreation*

Citizens of Crow Wing Township enjoy opportunities for a variety of recreational activities. Citizens appreciate the opportunity to walk or bike on low-traffic roads, hunt and view wildlife in their backyards and on public lands including the Memorial Forests, ride recreational vehicles like ATVs and snowmobiles, or visit nearby Crow Wing State Park just outside their western boundary.

Residents value these opportunities and would like to see them protected and enhanced where possible. They are concerned with the irresponsible use of ATVs and snowmobiles that not only disturb the peacefulness of the area but also degrade the natural resources of the area. Another challenge is the pressures that development places on recreation opportunities. Unplanned and poorly planned growth can fragment species habitat, reducing opportunities for hunting and wildlife

# Annexation Pressure from Brainerd



## Legend

**Brainerd Structured / Planned Growth Areas**

- 20 Year Reserve
- 40 Year Reserve
- Cities and Townships



0 0.5 Miles



Prepared June 2004  
Data sources: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation.

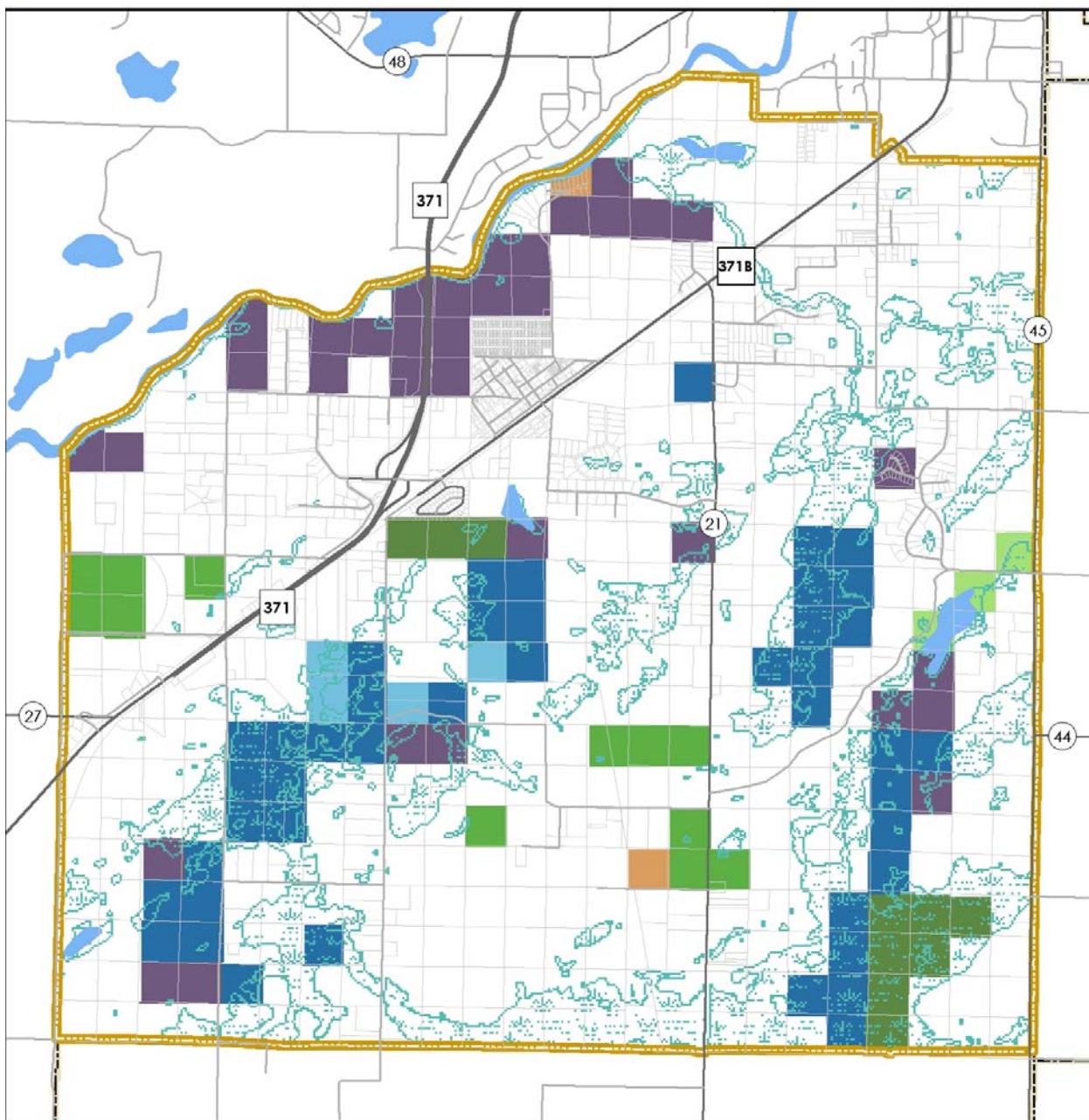


viewing.

Residents are also concerned that public lands within the township are underutilized for recreation and hunting, and that the full benefit to the community is not realized. Residents also believe that the township has not exerted enough influence on the management of these public lands and would like to see that role increased. The challenge lies in developing the appropriate partnerships, both with public agencies and private landowners, along with finding the funding for staff time and facilities.

Another major concern is the management of public lands. These lands are valuable assets to the community as they provide natural, open space for hunting and recreation. Some of the public lands have ATV, snowmobile, and hiking trails running through them, but are not clearly marked making it difficult for recreational users to find their way and difficult for hunters to avoid trail users.

## Publicly Owned Land



### Legend

DNR - Fish & Wildlife	Crow Wing County
MN Dept. of Agriculture	Bureau of Land Management
DNR - Forestry	Potlatch Corporation
Crow Wing County (State Forest)	Brainerd Hardwoods



0 0.5 1

Miles

COMMUNITY GROWTH  
INSTITUTE

Prepared October 2004  
Data sources: Crow Wing County Surveyor's Office  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources,  
Minnesota Department of Transportation.

## Section IV. Goals & Strategies

Through a series of public meetings, residents and property owners developed goals to address the issues that face Crow Wing Township and to provide direction to future planning in the Township. The goals fall into one of three categories: Land Use, Environment, and Property Rights. The residents and property owners also developed strategies to meet these goals.

**Goal 1:** Require that new growth and development, especially in the areas adjacent to Brainerd and Baxter, maintains a rural development pattern.

As the population in the Brainerd-Baxter Region continues to grow, increasing development pressures will be placed on Crow Wing Township, particularly by new residents seeking homes outside the urban areas in a rural setting. Without appropriate planning, these pressures can lead to development patterns that destroy the very thing that new residents are seeking and current residents would like to preserve: the rural character of the area. Rural character in Crow Wing Township consists of undeveloped open spaces, farmlands, woodlands, clean air and water, wetlands, tree-lined roads, and dispersed development. Maintenance of native vegetation and the protection of privacy are just a couple of the facets of the rural character that residents value.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Create choices for development. Allow different lot sizes, gross densities, and development options including smaller lots and cluster developments.
- Allow standard (non-clustered) lot sizes to range between 2.5 acres and 15 acres. Do not limit development to standardized lot sizes.
- Develop ordinances for screening and buffering of new developments.
- Do not require intense, suburban-style landscaping, but rather encourage natural landscaping, or "eco-scaping."
- Require a mix of housing types and a range of housing values so that residents are not limited in their housing options.
- Allow cluster developments as a development option in order to minimize or eliminate annexations.
- Maintain areas of larger lot sizes so that rural livestock can continue to be raised.
- Establish a consensus amongst residents that supports the Comprehensive Plan.

**Goal 2:** Work to keep Crow Wing Township a safe and peaceful place to live.

One of the reasons residents of Crow Wing Township live in the community is that they enjoy the peaceful setting that the Township provides. The use of ATVs and snowmobiles has become a popular recreation activity among residents of all ages. The use of these and other vehicles, however, has become a problem because some operators are operating in careless, and sometimes, unlawful ways. Irresponsible vehicle operators exceed speed limits, drive their vehicles in prohibited areas, and trespass on private property. In addition to these problems, crime is also becoming a problem, particularly vandalism. Because the Township does not have a police force of its own, immediate resolution to these issues has been challenging.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Develop ways to control traffic speed and development density to make residential areas safer.
- Educate people on how to report crimes anonymously.

- Improve road connectivity for safety purposes. Especially in the eastern part of the township, there are few roads that run east-west, making emergency vehicle travel difficult.
- Form a neighborhood watch and coordinate with the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Department.
- Educate residents about the proliferation of methamphetamine use and production, particularly among teenagers.
- Maintain visibility along roadways, especially at intersections, by regularly trimming vegetation in roadside ditches, especially on high traffic roads.

**Goal 3:** Ensure that new subdivisions and developments are designed to maintain privacy for adjacent properties.

For generations, residents of Crow Wing Township have enjoyed a level of privacy on their properties that cannot be found in typical urban or suburban settings. Residents have become accustomed to having homes tucked away on wooded or otherwise vegetated properties. Residents do not worry about by-passers seeing into the windows of their homes or about hearing the neighbor's radio or television blaring. With increasing development, especially of suburban-style patterns, this level of privacy is declining. Open lawns and reduced vegetation make homes appear closer together and limit the level of privacy afforded to neighbors.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Require buffers of vegetation around developments.
- Upgrade roads in areas likely to develop and likely to have increased traffic flow.
- Develop and enforce side-yard setbacks to protect neighbors' privacy.
- Require minimum road frontage, or lot width, except on the end of cul-de-sacs.
- Develop ordinances that regulate setbacks, lot sizes, and type of development.

**Goal 4:** Define and protect Crow Wing Township's environmental assets.

Only 2.8 percent of the land in Crow Wing Township is covered by agricultural, residential, or urban/suburban-type uses. The remaining land in the Township is covered by forests, prairies, and water resources. In the face of an increasing residential development demand, it is imperative that the Township have the information and data needed to protect the environmental assets of the community. These assets contribute to the rural character of the area as well as provide opportunities for recreation, wildlife habitat, and other environmental and social benefits.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Encourage growth and development in areas where roads are already in place. This method will help to prevent habitat fragmentation in addition to reducing the need for new road construction and maintenance.
- Maintain a responsive comprehensive plan and accompanying ordinances to protect rural areas.
- Educate residents about the environmental assets that are within the Township and what they can do to help protect those resources.
- Educate residents on the opportunities for recycling within the Township and the County.
- Educate residents about the environmental and health impacts of burning household waste. Work to increase enforcement on the illegal burning of household waste.
- Maintain public lands in public ownership. Work to prevent lands from being sold to private owners.
- Support a county-wide sewer district where the Township has membership and input on the operation of the district.

**Goal 5:** Ensure that all annexations are done with the property owner's agreement and that properties are only assessed for improvements where they are requested.

Residents of Crow Wing Township live in the area because they want to have the rural character and privacy afforded within the Township. Many do not wish to live in an urban area or to be forced to have their property annexed by a neighboring city. Nor do residents wish to pay for infrastructure improvements that often come with annexation when they were content with what they already have.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Work with neighboring townships to work together on annexation and present a united front.
- Support property owners who want to fight being annexed.
- Negotiate payments with the city in lieu of lost tax base.
- Establish orderly annexation agreements with neighboring cities.

**Goal 6:** The Township government should work to make financially sound decisions that do not lead to unplanned tax increases.

In an age of dwindling government resources and increasing demands on government for public services, funds for public improvements and services may be difficult to acquire. The Township government will face increasing demands for public services as the population grows and residential development spreads. Tax increases may be necessary to accommodate some of the increased demand, but residents do not want to see taxes rise because the government did not budget or plan appropriately.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Require bonds with plats to make sure that road work is completed.
- Identify roads that need to have more capacity in the future and build that in to the Township's budget and capital improvement plans.
- Plan for more growth where roads are in place, especially along roads that already have higher traffic capacity.
- Enforce and increase road standards so that roads are built to last.
- Charge a fee for the Township's inspection of new roads being constructed.
- Plan for major improvements, where they will be needed, and work to secure the property needed for those improvements.
- Perform a cost-benefit analysis on new developments to ensure that the Township is not taking on a financial burden that it is not equipped to handle.
- Offer incentives and develop ordinances that encourage new growth along existing roadways.
- Based on available information, anticipate state and federal mandates in the budget.
- Post signs on roads that designate the weight capacity of the road. Enhance enforcement of load limits to prevent excessive road damage.

**Goal 7:** Ensure that any Township land use regulation meets the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and is also understandable, fairly applied, and has a clear process for approval.

Residents of the Township value their individual property rights, but recognize the need to have regulations to ensure that environmental assets are protected, property values do not decline, and

property uses do not conflict with one another. The residents want to be treated fairly in the land use regulation process and do not want certain property owners or developers to receive preferential treatment because of personal connections, money, or some other reason. Land use regulations should not stray from the ideas and goals set forth in the Comprehensive Plan developed by the residents.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Ensure that there is a consistent distribution of information to all residents in the Township.
- Enforce codes and educate the residents about land use regulations.
- Allow cluster developments with density incentives as a land development option in the potential Brainerd annexation areas. Consider cluster development in other areas without the density incentive.
- Evaluate the cost of development, through a cost-benefit analysis, that the Township will face in the future for all proposed developments.
- Require developers to establish a homeowner's association where the proposed development includes private roads or common driveways. The association would be responsible for maintenance of the private roads or common driveways. Require the developer to pay for the construction of public roads in new developments.
- Use the Township's power to increase land use regulation standards where applicable.

**Goal 8:** All properties in the township should maintain a basic level of appearance that is neat and non-offensive.

While the appearance of a property can be difficult to objectively quantify, Township residents recognize that excess trash stored in people's yards not only detract from community pride, but also make the community appear less attractive, depresses property values, and potentially pose a threat to public health. Residents would like their community to be clean to have everyone take pride in the appearance of their property. However, without regular garbage pick-up service or the equipment to dispose of some household items, like appliances, some residents may be unaware of where or how to get rid of household waste.



To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Institute community garbage pick-up or cleanup days on a monthly basis.
- Create a Township ordinance that regulated the maintenance of clean property appearances, focusing mostly on old cars, junk piles, and potential health hazards.
- Create a volunteer cleanup committee to help residents improve the appearance of their properties.
- Partner with the county and other groups to clean up problem properties.

**Goal 9:** The Township should work to preserve hunting opportunities within the Township while safeguarding Township residents.

Crow Wing Township is home to great wildlife habitat that residents have enjoyed for generations and value for its hunting and recreation opportunities. With increasing demand for residential development, residents fear that this valuable habitat will be fragmented and destroyed, reducing hunting opportunities as habitats become smaller and houses and people become too close to safely

hunt game. Residents would like to see environmental assets protected, while at the same time protecting residential areas from possible harm resulting from hunting.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Keep high-density development near Brainerd and already-developed areas in order to maintain large tracts of natural open space more amenable to hunting.
- Improve safety by marking trail use so that hunters know that other people are using trails like ATVs and motorcycles.
- Designate tax-forfeit land and public land for hunting use where appropriate.
- Work with the Crow Wing County Land Department to post signs marking lands available for hunting.

## **Goal 10:** Position the Township so that it is thoroughly involved in annexation decisions by adjacent municipalities.

In the past, properties in the northern part of the Township adjacent to the City of Brainerd were annexed with little or no consultation with the Township. The Township would find out about the annexation well into the actual process and then had little opportunity to affect the annexation results. Residents would like the Township to have a greater role in any future annexations to ensure that the properties being annexed are done so with the full consent of the property owner and to ensure that future development on the annexed properties would not adversely affect the residents of the Township.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Encourage property owners to work with the Township ahead of the annexation process.
- Create a group to meet with cities and maintain open lines of communication.
- Support legislation that grants Townships more authority in the annexation process.
- Appoint a liaison to attend city and county meetings to keep up to date on current events in the region.
- Develop a media strategy for politically opposing forced annexation.
- Lobby the County Board for assistance, both personal and with the media.
- Communicate fully with those residing in areas where annexation would likely occur.
- Communicate with officials from Brainerd and Baxter about annexation requests and processes.
- Present the Township's plan to those likely to request annexation and inform them of development options available to them without annexation.
- Increase communication with the County officials.
- Hold a Township public hearing on all annexations.
- Use a mediator to resolve cases of conflict.
- Educate the cities about sprawl and the costs of annexation.
- Keep detailed records of any annexation discussions or proceedings and make the records available to the public.

## **Goal 11:** Work to establish better communication between the Crow Wing County government and the Township government.

The residents of the Township would like to have more control over land use decisions and development patterns in their community. Currently, Crow Wing County administers planning and zoning for the Township, and residents do not always agree with decisions made by the County staff.

Residents would like to maintain an open line of communication between the Township and the County in order to ensure that land use decisions meet the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- The Town Board should seek to have Township residents serve on County committees. These committee liaisons should be appointed by the County Commissioners.
- Encourage changes to the County decision-making process so that decisions are consistent for everyone.
- Mediators should be employed to resolve conflicts between governments.
- Encourage the County to hire a staff person that works specifically with individual townships to avoid communication errors, loss of time, and fragmentation of roles.

**Goal 12:** For the benefit of Township residents, increase the influence of the Township government on the use and management of public lands.

Nearly a quarter of the land in Crow Wing Township is publicly owned or owned by Potlatch Corporation. These lands constitute the majority of the large tracts of undisturbed natural areas in the Township and have provided recreation opportunities to area residents for generations. Because of the multitude of agencies managing these lands, coordination between management practices and availability to the public has been patchwork. Residents would like to see a consistent management plan for all the public lands within the Township and would like to have more involvement in the management planning process.

To achieve this goal, the following strategies should be implemented:

- Partner with the agencies managing the public lands to ensure consistent management and to develop recreation opportunities for the public.
- Develop signage delineating public lands. Many public properties are not clearly marked and residents either do not know where public lands are or whether they are crossing onto private property.
- Construct small parking areas to provide access to public lands.
- Develop a system of non-motorized walking trails through the public lands and connecting the lands across the Township.
- Continue to pressure the County to enforce regulations concerning use of the public lands in their control.
- Work with private land owners, like Potlatch Corporation, to protect or purchase large tracts of land.

## Section V. Future Land Use

A future land use map has been prepared as part of implementing the land use vision of the Township. The map contains the following land use designations that will serve as a guideline for making decisions on future rezoning requests.

**Open Space:** A designation for the preservation of environmentally-sensitive areas, unique resources, and other designated non-developable lands. Areas such as wetlands, lakes, bluffs, threatened and endangered species habitat, historic sites, and land set aside as part of the development process should be zoned Open Space.

**Green Space:** A designation for the preservation of publicly-owned environmentally-sensitive lands. Areas included in this classification are part of the Memorial Forest Program, owned by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, owned by Crow Wing County, or have been privately owned, but have the potential to come into public ownership. These lands tend to be heavily forested or located in environmentally-sensitive areas.

**Rural Preservation:** A designation for sustainable management of secluded, rural areas. This classification provides low density, rural residential development and agricultural areas with a suggested minimum lot size of 10 acres.

**Low Density Preservation:** A designation for the management of lands within the Army Compatible Use Buffer. Suggested minimum lot size in this zone would be 20-40 acres with a maximum allowable density of one dwelling unit per ten acres. Appropriate landscaping would be encouraged to buffer noise from nearby Camp Ripley. Nearby Crow Wing State Park would be

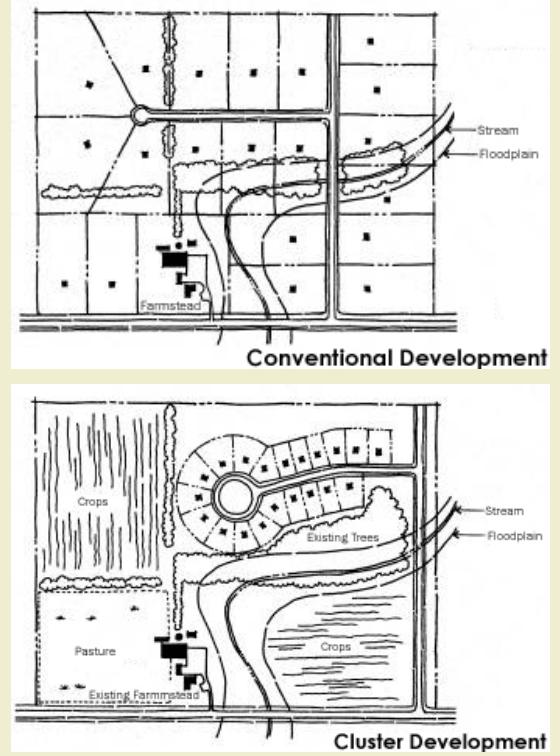
### What is cluster development?

The basic premise of cluster development is to group new homes onto part of the property to be developed and preserve the rest of the property as open space. The clustering of the homes can have dual benefits:

- building more homes than would otherwise be permitted
- protecting natural resources

Typically, subdivision design divides up all the development property so that the entire property is designated as private residential parcels or as roadway, regardless of the natural resources, topography, or surrounding development in the area.

On the other hand, cluster development would place the new homes on smaller lots usually using no more than half of the development property while designating the remainder of the property as public open space through conservation easements, land trusts, or homeowners associations.



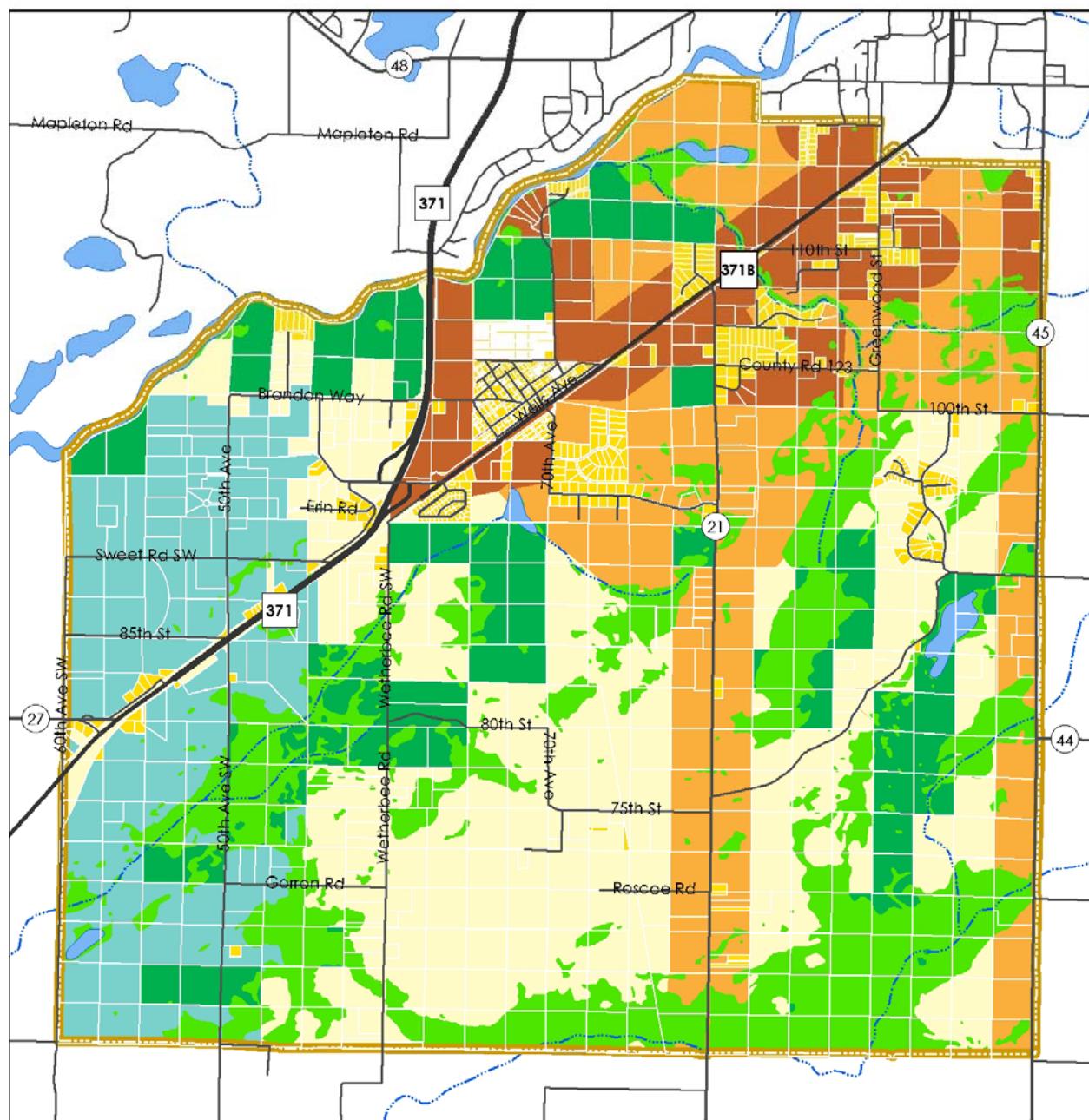
encouraged to purchase property and extend its park boundaries into this area.

**Neighborhood Residential:** A designation for already developed properties, properties where infrastructure is in place for higher density development, and properties developed as a rural neighborhood cluster. Land in this zone could not be further subdivided unless the land is incorporated into a development on an adjacent property.

**Medium Density Residential:** A designation that provides medium density residential development serviced by existing roads. Suggested minimum lot size would be 2.5 acre. Allowances could be made for higher density developments as part of a rural cluster.

**Rural-Urban Transition:** A designation that provides market-based options for land development in potential annexation areas. Although developments in this district could be done at 2.5 acre lot sizes, much higher densities would be allowed as part of a rural cluster. Rural clusters would need to be designed to preserve the outward appearance of rural character through open-space preservation while still allowing for flexibility of design. Commercial and light industrial uses would be allowed in this zone, focused along the Old Highway 371 Corridor and would abide by the same open-space guidelines.

## Future Land Use



### Legend

Open Space	Medium Density Residential
Green Space	Rural-Urban Transition
Rural Preservation	Township Boundary
Low Density Preservation	Water Bodies
Neighborhood	Rivers and Streams



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Miles

 **COMMUNITY GROWTH  
INSTITUTE**

Prepared April 2005  
Data sources: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation.

## Section VI. Implementation

Compared to a municipality, Crow Wing Township is somewhat limited in its abilities to control land use within its boundaries. Despite this, there are ways the Township can use its authority to leverage change and influence decisions, either directly or indirectly. The following describes three phases for implementation of this plan.

**Phase 1: Work with Crow Wing County to implement the Plan.** The simplest way for the Township to implement their Comprehensive Plan is for the township to have Crow Wing County adopt and administer the plan as part of their planning processes. Crow Wing County has requested a future land use map from the township and has expressed a willingness to work to implement it. There are already procedures in place for plan review. This is an easy approach.

After it adopts the plan itself, the Township should forward the plan to Crow Wing County for adoption. Since Crow Wing County does not have ordinances that would address the land use needs of the Township, the Township will need to develop some zoning classifications and subdivision standards that the County can adopt as an overlay zone. The overlay zone approach would allow the County to approve the standards and apply them only to Crow Wing Township.

The Township Planning Board would continue to operate as it currently is, giving recommendations to the County on land use requests. Since the underlying regulations would more closely match the Township's objectives, recommendations could be supported with findings of fact based on the laws that are in place. This should streamline the review process and make those reviews more effective.

Although this approach is simple, there will certainly be some difficulties. Even if the County adopts the Township's plan, it is under no obligation to follow it or the Township's recommendations. Getting an ordinance approved by the County, even an overlay zone that would apply only to the Township, may be politically difficult. Additionally, Crow wing County does not have a history of continuity in their Planning Department. Since much of this phase of implementation is contingent on a good-faith relationship between the County and the Township, there is some risk that changes as the County could change how it deals with township issues. Finally, there are responsibilities by the Township – most notably the responsibility to provide legal and defensible recommendations – that will take time and resources to uphold.

**Phase 2: Exercise the Township's authority to administer zoning documents.** If the first phase proves ineffective or otherwise undoable, Crow Wing Township can decide to administer its own land use regulations locally. The Township would need to first adopt the Comprehensive Plan. Next, it would need to develop its own land use and subdivision ordinances. Finally, it would need to create administration tools (applications, a review process, legal notifications, etc.) in order to administer the regulations. Some of the existing processes can be modified slightly to reach the legal threshold needed to administer a zoning ordinance at the township level, but there will still need to be a commitment of time and resources to make this happen.

Although the Township has a lot of rights and authority under this scenario, it also has a lot of responsibilities. Developing and administering an ordinance can be difficult. The Township would become responsible for any legal ramifications of land use decisions and would have to be prepared to defend its actions, in court if necessary. The Township would also bear the costs of enforcement. While permit revenue would offset some of the costs, this phase would likely require at least some Township expenditures.

**Phase 3: Incorporate into a municipality.** The most dramatic, and most effective, step for the Township to take would be to incorporate into a municipality. This is not a simple process without risk. According to the Minnesota Association of Townships, Crow Wing Township could, by State order, wind up part of Brainerd and/or Baxter if it chose to try and incorporate. Even if Crow Wing Township were allowed to incorporate into its own city, the responsibilities of running a fast-growing municipality are numerous.

This third phase should only be considered where Phase 1 and Phase 2 have been shown to be absolutely ineffective. If incorporation is seriously contemplated, the Township should study the ramifications in depth before beginning the process.

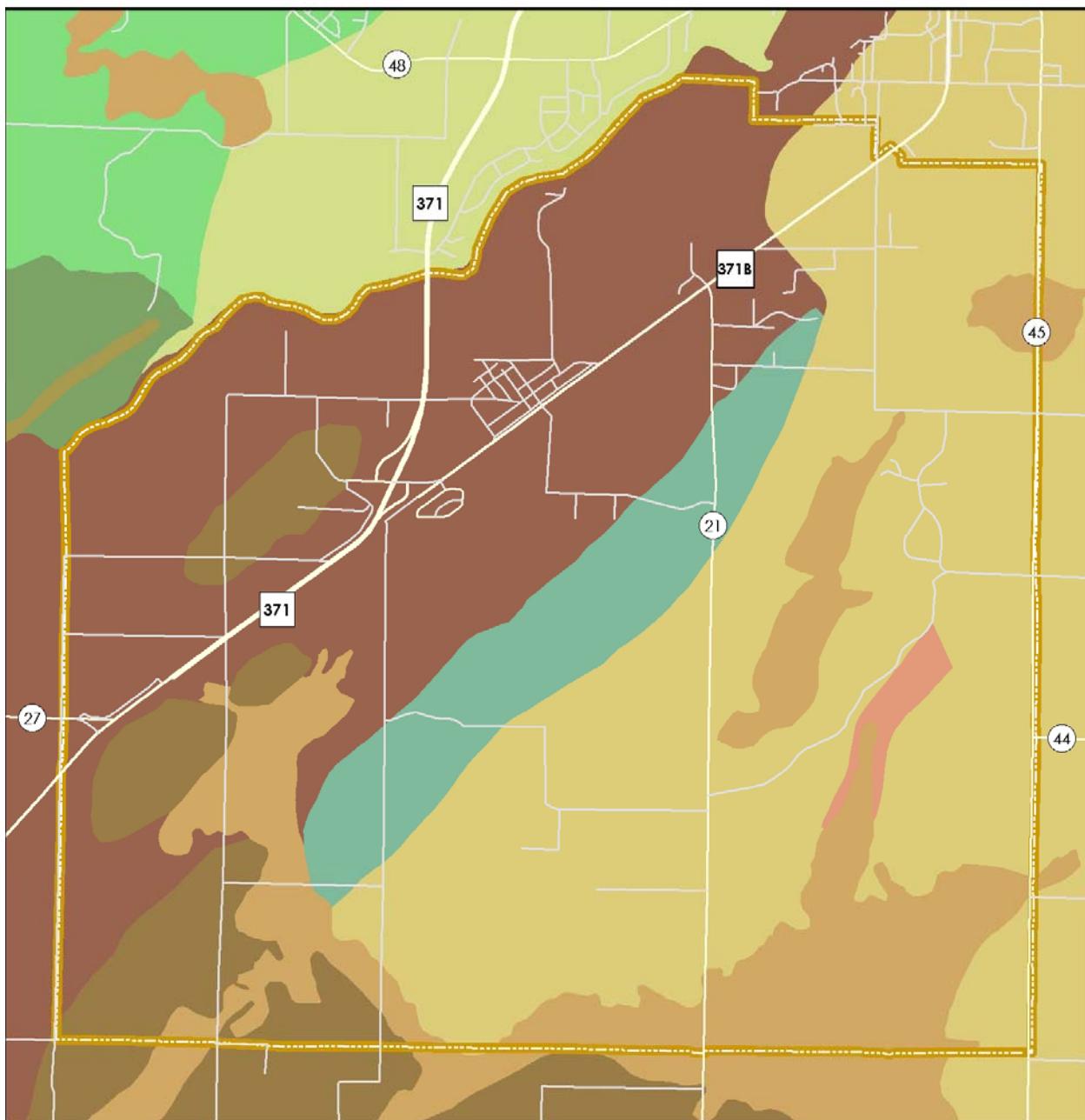
# Appendix. Additional Planning Maps

A series of maps were created at the beginning of the planning process in order to facilitate a better understanding of the Township's land and characteristics. These maps assisted in developing many of the goals and strategies contained in this document and also guided the development of the Future Land Use Map and the accompanying policies. Several of the planning maps have been included in the body of this document, with additional planning maps included in this appendix.

## Maps:

- Geomorphology
- Topography
- Presettlement Vegetation
- Soils
- Groundwater Contamination
- Development Suitability

# Geomorphology



## Legend

Peat, level	Esker
Outwash, level	Hummocky, ice contact
Outwash Channel	Shallow Water Facies, level
Undulating Till Plain	Shallow Water Facies, hummocky
Drumlin	Superglacial Drift Complex, hummocky

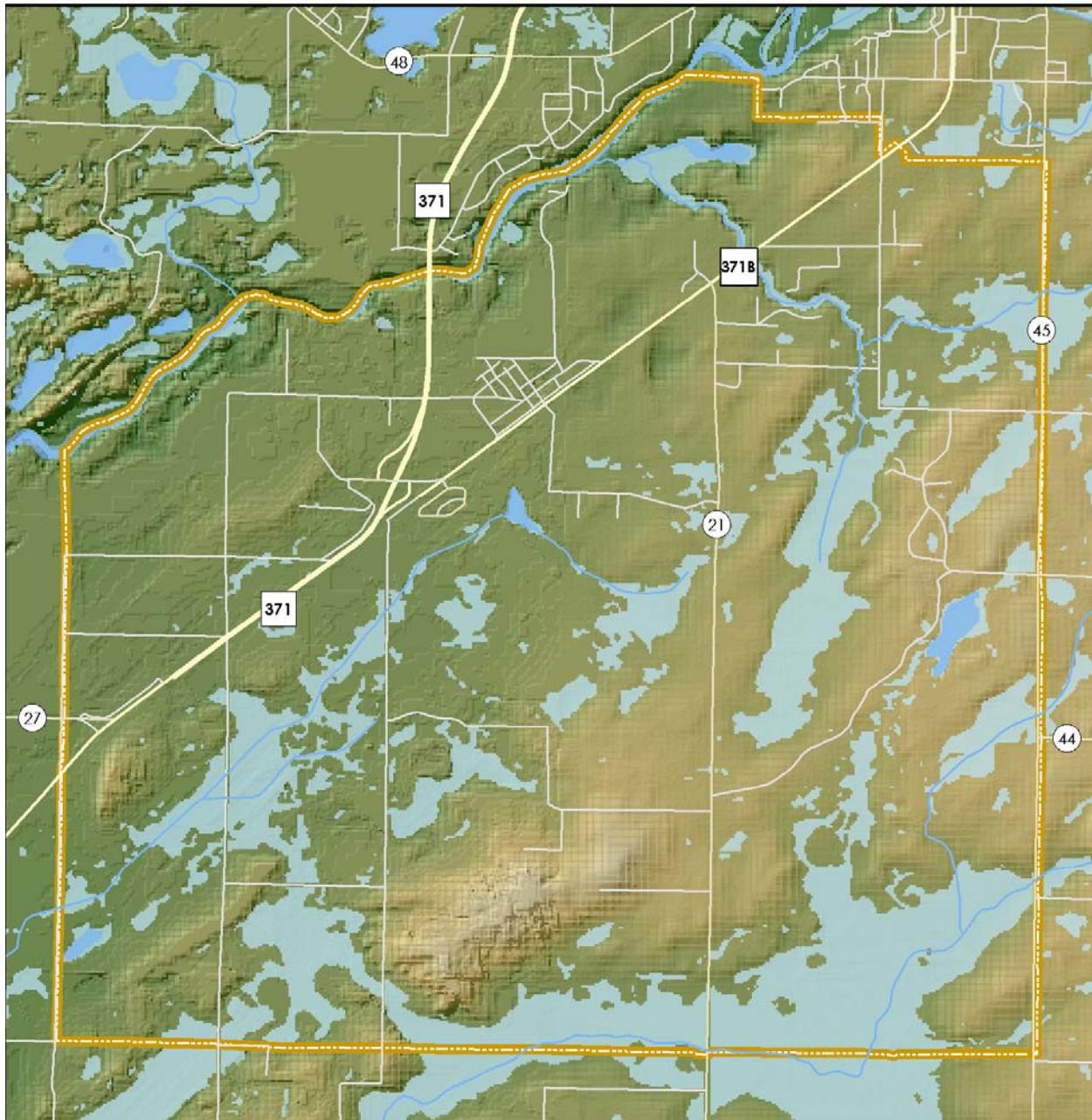


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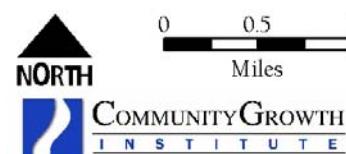
Prepared May 2004  
Data sources: Minnesota Department of Natural  
Resources, Minnesota Department of  
Transportation

# Topography



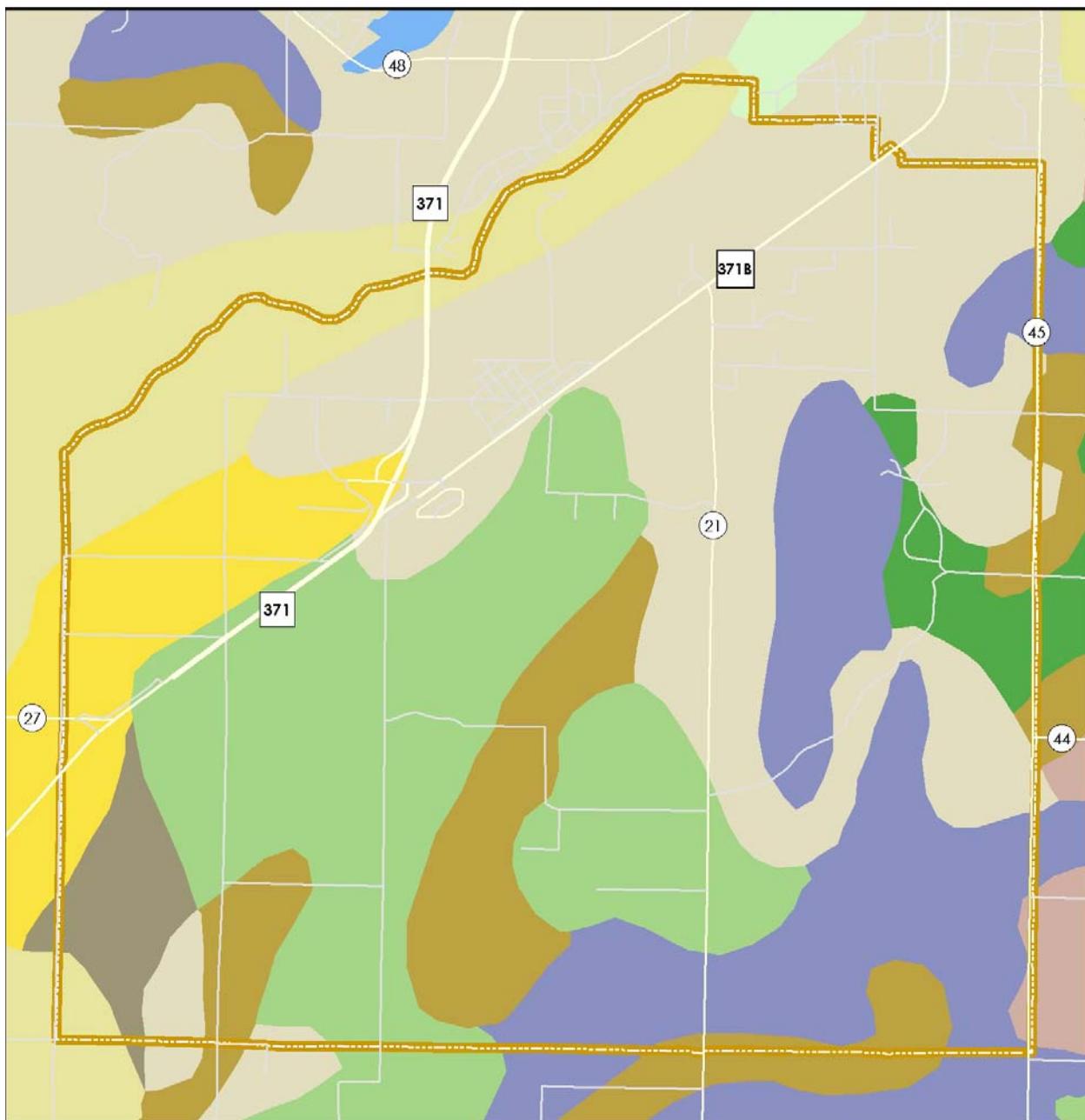
## Legend

Elevation	
High : 1487 feet	Lakes, rivers, and streams
Low : 900 feet	Wetlands



Prepared May 2004  
Data sources: National Wetlands Inventory,  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources,  
Minnesota Department of Transportation.

## Presettlement Vegetation



### Legend

Prairie	Jack Pine Barrens and Openings
Brush Prairie	Lakes (open water)
Wet Prairie	Conifer Bogs and Swamps
Aspen-Oak Land	River Bottom Forest
Oak Openings and Barrens	Mixed Hardwood and Pine
	Big Woods

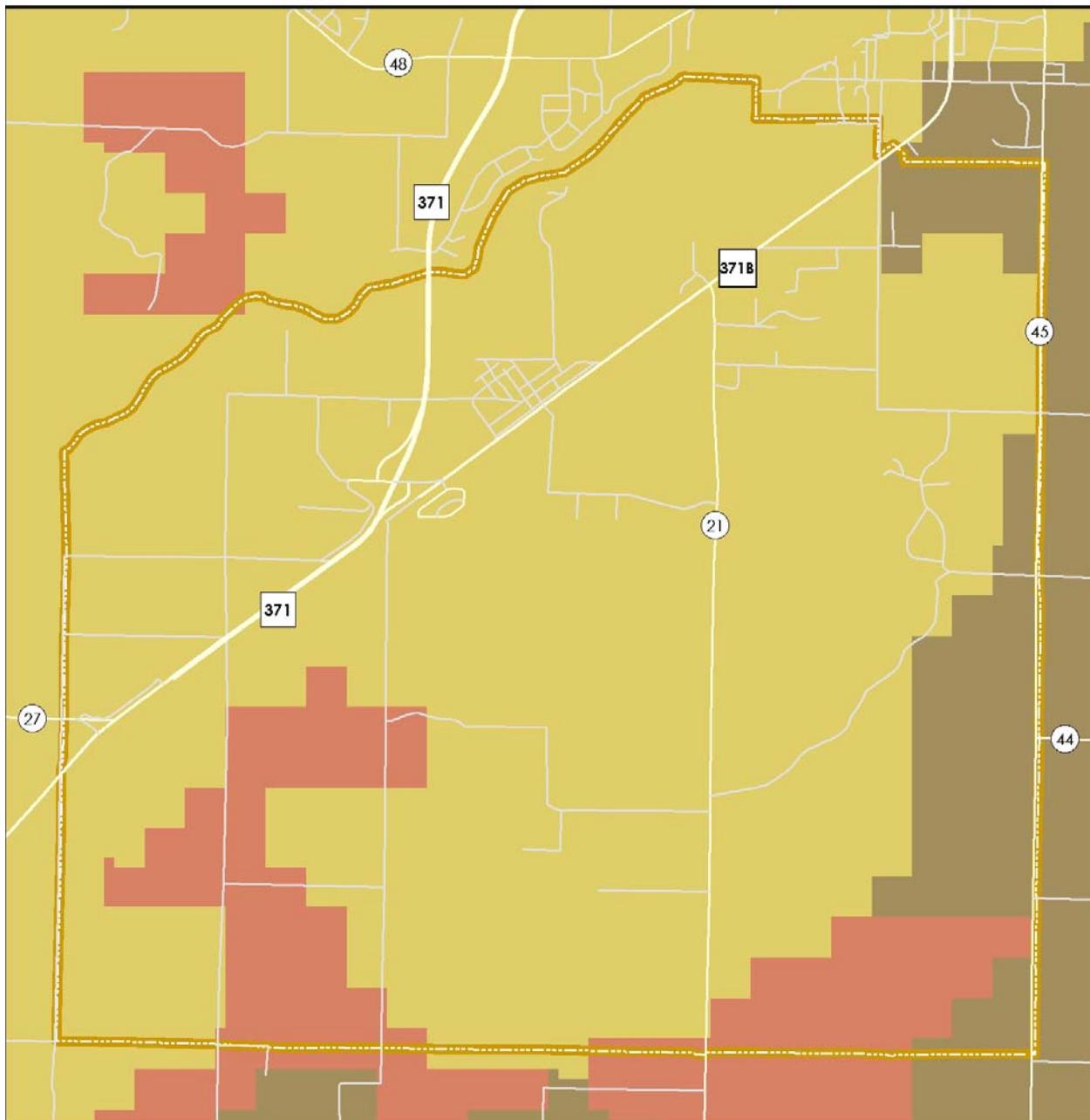


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Prepared May 2004  
Data sources: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation

# Soil Layers



## Legend

- Loam over loam
- Sand over sand
- Water and Wetlands

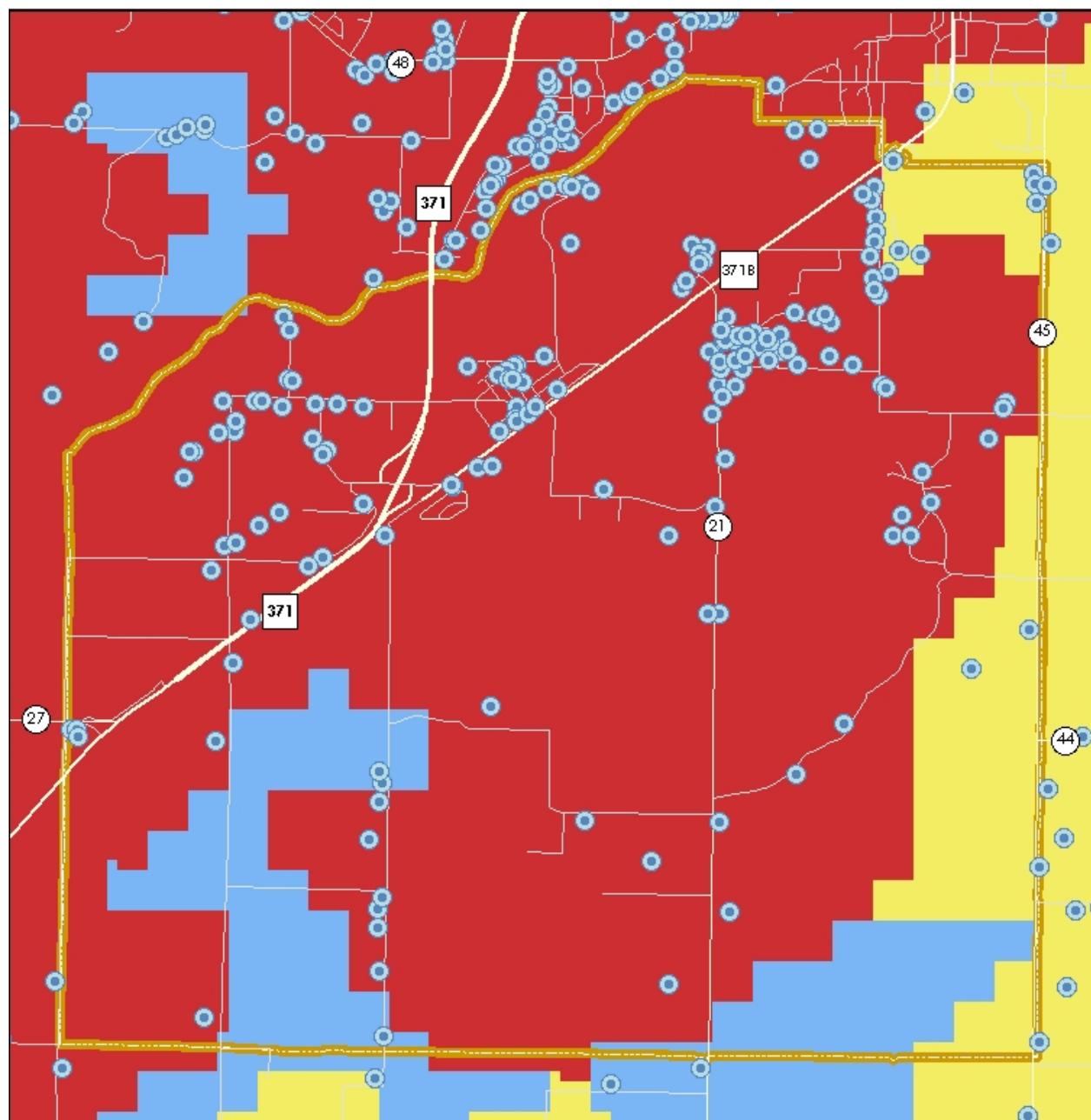


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Prepared May 2004  
Data sources: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Transportation

## Groundwater Contamination Potential



### Legend

- Low
- Moderate
- High
- Water/wetlands, marsh, peat, alluvial
- Wells



0

0.5

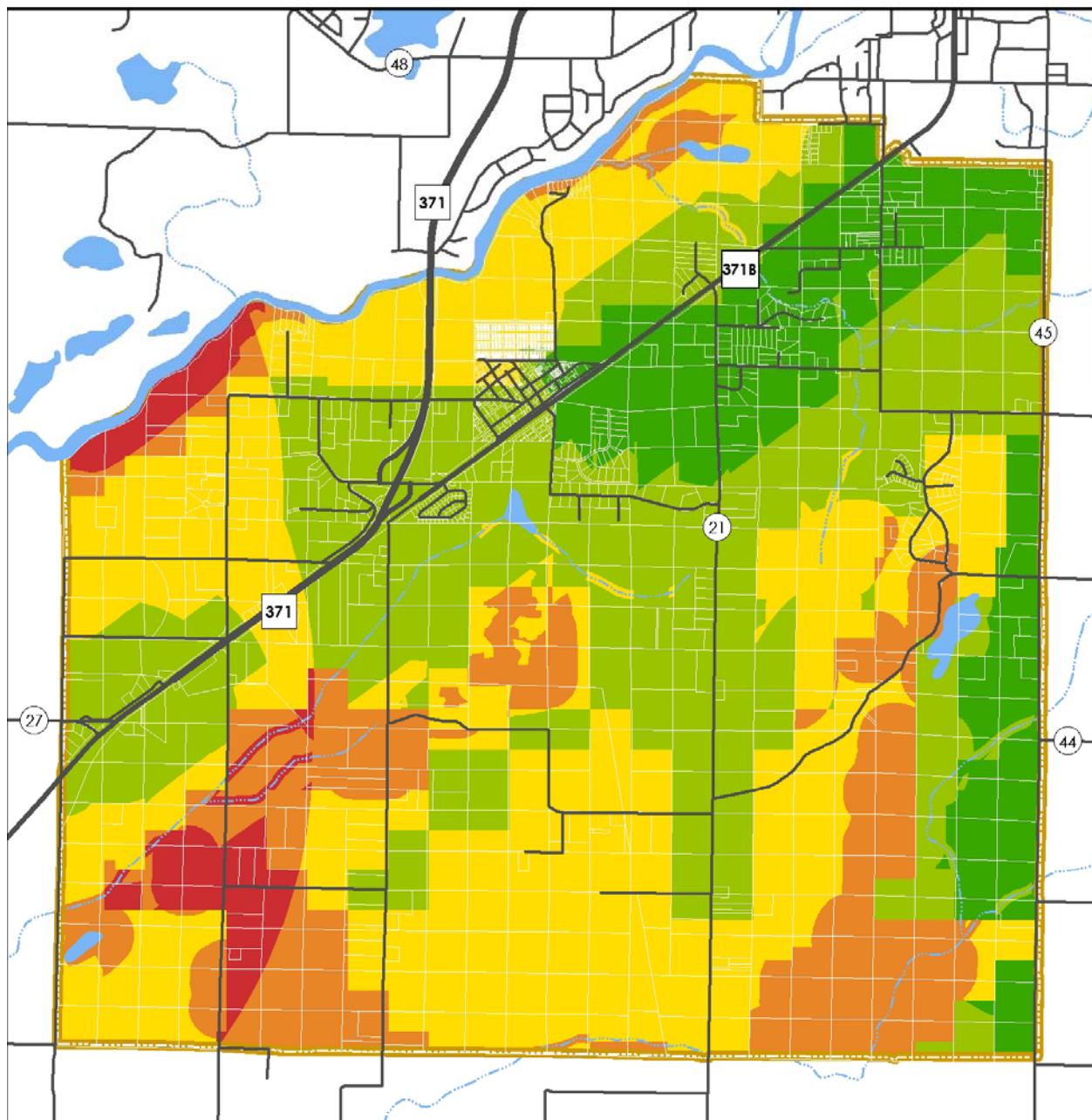
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Prepared May 2004  
Data sources: University of Minnesota,  
Minnesota Department of Transportation

# Suitability for Development



## Legend

### Development Suitability

- Severely Limited
- Limited
- Some Limitations
- Suitable
- Very Suitable

The suitability index was created by rating several factors influencing commercial and residential development including: groundwater contamination potential, ISTS suitability, proximity to existing roads, road functional classification, Camp Ripley Army Compatible Use Buffer, erosion susceptibility, and potential conservation areas\*. These numerical ratings were then combined and classified, resulting in the suitability index. This map is not intended for site-specific planning, but rather should be used as a guide for land use development in the Township as a whole.

\* Potential Conservation Areas data was supplied by the Brainerd Lakes Area Conservation Collaborative and was originally created for the publication, "Inventory and Assessment of Natural Resources in Crow Wing County: A Framework for Conservation and Recreation Planning".



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Miles



Prepared August 2004  
Data sources: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, MN Department of Transportation, Brainerd Lakes Area Conservation Collaborative.