

**VILAS COUNTY
FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN**

February 2015

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

VILAS COUNTY FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 2010, agriculture constituted a \$59 billion industry in Wisconsin. Farmland around the country is being lost at an alarming rate, and, once it is gone, we cannot get it back. Farmland preservation planning is crucial to preserve the agricultural land remaining in Wisconsin, because of the economic importance of agriculture in the State and the potential for loss of our agricultural land base.

Many of the best agricultural areas in the nation are located in the upper Midwest, stretching from Ohio to the Dakotas. While Wisconsin does not contain as much prime farmland areas as some of the other upper Midwest states, there are still many areas where agriculture is important.

Despite its importance, agriculture faces many challenges, especially in the Northwoods, where the main challenge is a shorter growing season. Other challenges to maintaining successful agriculture are the acidic sandy soils that developed under pine forests; and shallow depth to groundwater, which restricts many agriculturally cultivated plants from growing.

OVERVIEW OF WLI/FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLANNING

Wisconsin's Working Lands Initiative (WLI) was adopted in 2009 as part of the 2009-2011 biennial budget. The law is specified in Chapter 91 of Wisconsin State Statutes. The main components include:

1. Modernization of the state's farmland preservation plans;
2. Establishment of agricultural enterprise areas;
3. Increased tax credit opportunities and certainty of credit value; and
4. Development of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

A Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP) provides a vision and guidelines for future growth, development, and land preservation in the County. The plan functions as the primary policy document setting forth directions for how the County intends to preserve agricultural production capacity, farmland, soil and water resources, and rural character. These plans also review the economic and cultural importance of agriculture

in the County. One of the primary components of a FPP is the detailed maps that identify farmland areas for preservation based on established criteria.

OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLAN

The most recent Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP) was adopted in 1983. The dated plan is simply a listing of how conservation standards would be met in accordance with Wisconsin State Statutes. Landowners would make sufficient annual progress to ensure that the standards would be met by the end of the schedule of compliance. Each participant would certify in writing every year that they were complying with the soil and water conservation standards required in the plan.

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING PROCESS

The Vilas County Farmland Preservation Plan was developed during calendar year 2014 in cooperation with the North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC).

To assist in the revision of the Farmland Preservation Plan, Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Department invited participation from a variety of resource protection agencies as well as local farmers. They discussed farming issues and mapped where farmland should be preserved over the next 15 years. A *Resource Advisory Committee* (RAC) was assembled and met on two occasions during the 2014 calendar year. Representatives from a wide variety of backgrounds and agencies participated in the meetings. RAC members are listed on the back of this plan's cover.

A chronological history of the plan update activities is as follows:

- May – July, 2014 – Development of draft plan text and initial maps.
- July 8, 2014 – the first Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) meeting was held at the courthouse in Eagle River and 8 people attended.
 - Mapping criteria established; and
 - Goals, objectives, and policies created.
- August 13, 2014 – a second RAC meeting was held at the courthouse in Eagle River, and 9 people attended.
 - Sample maps based upon mapping criteria were reviewed and mapping criteria was revised and approved;
 - Goals, objectives, and policies revised and approved; and
 - Farming trends and agricultural infrastructure discusses.

- August 4, 2014 – Land and Water Conservation Committee sets public hearing date.
- September 4, 2014 – Draft Farmland Preservation Plan reviewed by Land and Water Conservation Committee. Draft plan and public hearing notice sent to DATCP for plan review.
- September 3, 2014
 - Class I Notice published in the Vilas News Review for the October 2, 2014 Public Hearing; and
 - Each town mailed notice of the Public Hearing, along with maps of their area.
 - Draft plan available for public review online.
- October 2, 2014 – Public Hearing for Farmland Preservation Plan.
 - 13 people attended the public hearing.
 - The public hearing draft plan was amended to:
 1. Include a description under Mapping Criteria that clarifies the process used to create the mapping criteria;
 2. Delete “platted subdivisions” from mapping criteria; and
 3. Include clarifying text under Plan Consistency and Amendments as to how the Farmland Preservation Plan is consistent with the County Comprehensive Plan.
- Winter 2014/2015 – Adoption of the plan by the Vilas County Board of Supervisors, and DATCP sends letter adopting the plan.

PLAN MAINTENANCE AND AMENDMENT

Wis. Stats. 66.1001 requires that an adopted comprehensive plan be reviewed and updated at least once every ten years. This is not a static plan, but one that may change over time because of changing land uses, policy changes and shifting economics. Thus, it will be reviewed on an “as needed” basis and amended if significant changes are seen in land use, policies, economics or regulations.

The Farmland Preservation Plan is an element of County’s Comprehensive Plan. On December 31, 2014, the current farmland preservation plan is set to expire. This document is intended to fulfill the statutory requirements for both the Farmland Preservation Plan (Chapter 91, Subchapter II, WI Statutes) and the Agricultural Element of the Comprehensive Plan (s66.1001(2)(e), WI Statutes).

CHAPTER TWO – PLANNING PROCESS

OVERVIEW

The planning process considers existing and future agricultural conditions, the local economy, existing and future growth trends, and current and future prospective participation in the program. The plan tries to coordinate all of this with other agencies who work with landowners, as well as offer the public the opportunity to have input into the planning process. This chapter will discuss the planning process, including public participation.

REQUIREMENTS

The Farmland Preservation Plan must address certain elements as specified in Chapter 91, Wis. State Statutes. There are several required plan elements to develop the farmland preservation plan. Once certified by the state, landowners become eligible for various tax credits.

Several meetings were held during the development of this plan. All meetings were held in a public place, easily accessible, and in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. They were advertised well ahead of time, with phone numbers and names of contact persons in case of questions or comments. A public hearing was held as part of the formal plan adoption process and this too was published as required by law. Several objectives were met by holding these meetings: Participants of all races, ethnic backgrounds and economic levels had an equal opportunity to voice their opinion and be involved in the process.

All residents of Vilas County had an opportunity to be aware of the planning process through the advertisement of the meeting and the stated objective of the Farmland Preservation Plan and mapping criteria. Residents were also offered the opportunity to call or write to voice their comments if they were not able to make them in person. Public involvement strengthens the sense of vested interest in the success of the process and in the community as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE - EXISTING CONDITIONS

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a brief summary of the existing conditions in the Vilas County. Some of this information was taken from the County Comprehensive Plan and the County Land & Water Management Plan, among other sources.

A. NATURAL RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Additional detail about the County's natural resources exists in Chapter 2 of the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan.

1. Landscape

Vilas County is located in northern Wisconsin and is bounded by Upper Michigan to the north, Forest County to the east, Oneida County to the south, and Iron County to the west. The county is approximately 651,529 acres in size, including approximately 549,573.08 acres (84.3%) of land and 101,577.2 acres (15.6%) of surface water (including islands). Approximately 76.9% of the county's surface area is covered by forest land (woodland), which is held in both public and private ownership.

The county's landscape ranges from broad, nearly level glacial outwash plains to rough, broken glacial moraines and areas of pitted outwash. There are three distinct physiographic regions in the county. The drumlins and ground moraines in the eastern portion of the county are characterized by low, smoothly rounded, elongated, and oval ridges that are nearly level to moderately steep and are interspersed with long, narrow drainage ways. The Winegar moraine area in the western portion of the county is characterized by short, steep slopes and ridges, and by numerous wet depressions, most of which have no outlets. Outside of these moraine areas is an outwash plain, characterized by a rolling or hilly topography with many enclosed basins and depressions. In scattered areas on this plain, including the communities of Eagle River, Manitowish Waters, Conover, St. Germain, and Boulder Junction, sand flats are present, while end moraines and drumlins are scattered throughout. The glacial melt is directly related to the amount and location of surface water.

The vast amount of surface water and forest land present in Vilas County is the driving force behind the county's economy, which is supported primarily by recreation/tourism and timber production.

See Map 2: Natural Resources.

2. Soils

The soils of Vilas County are primarily sandy and loamy soils which are suited to, and do support, forested/woodland uses. Due to the sandy and droughty nature of the soils, most are of relatively low agricultural value; in addition, the growing season in the county is rather short.

The following provides a general discussion of the general soil associations found within Vilas County. It should be noted, however, that these general descriptions are only guidelines and should be referred to as such.

The majority of the county (42%) is dominated by the Rubicon-Sayner-Karlin association which includes most of the southern and central portions of the county. The far eastern portion of the county, including primarily the Town of Phelps and portions of Conover and Washington, is dominated by the Champion and Padus-Pence associations. The Champion association comprises 8% of the county and the Padus-Pence association comprises approximately 21%. The Padus-Pence association is also found along the Presque Isle/Boulder Junction border, in the central portion of Land O' Lakes, the Sayner and Star Lake areas, and the majority of southern/central Arbor Vitae. The majority of Winchester and Presque Isle and approximately half of Land O' Lakes, are comprised of the Gogebic-Pence-Fence association which comprises approximately 14% of the county. The Croswell-Dawson-AuGres association is found scattered throughout the county, comprising a total of 8% of the soils. The Loxley-Dawson association and the Keweenaw-Karlin association comprise the remaining 2% and 5% of the county's land area, respectively. These areas are also scattered throughout the county.

See Map 3: Soils.

B. POPULATION, HOUSING, AND MUNICIPAL EXPANSION

1. Population

According to the US Census Bureau, the County has an average population growth of 2 percent in the past decade. Table 1 shows the population in each municipality in the County in 2000 and 2010. The table also shows the percent change each town's population experienced during that time. A wide range of changes took place throughout the County, from the Town of Winchester shrinking 15 percent to the Town of Presque Isle growing 20 percent.

Table 1: Vilas County Population, 2000-2010

Municipality	2000	2010	Percent Change
Arbor Vitae	3,153	3,316	5.17%
Boulder Junction	958	933	-2.61%
Cloverland	919	1,029	11.97%
Conover	1,137	1,235	8.62%
Lac du Flambeau	3,004	3,441	14.55%
Land O' Lakes	882	861	-2.38%
Lincoln	2,579	2,423	-6.05%
Manitowish Waters	646	566	-12.38%
Phelps	1,350	1,200	-11.11%
Plum Lake	486	491	1.03%
Presque Isle	513	618	20.47%
St. Germain	1,932	2,085	7.92%
Washington	1,577	1,451	-7.99%
Winchester	454	383	-15.64%
C. Eagle River	1,443	1,398	-3.12%
County	21,003	21,430	2.03%

Source: U.S. Census

2. Housing

The County saw a 12 percent increase in the number of housing units from 2000 to 2010. This is a large growth relative to the 2 percent population increase during the same time period. The significant increase in housing units is mainly due to the construction of seasonal homes built around the lakes. In many of the towns, between 50 and 75 percent of all housing units are seasonal homes. Table 2 shows the number of housing units in each municipality in 2000 and 2010, as well as how that number changed over the decade. All towns, except Boulder Junction, experienced growth during this period.

Table 2: Vilas County Housing Units, 2000-2010

Municipality	2000	2010	Percent Change
Arbor Vitae	2,442	2,703	10.69%
Boulder Junction	1,407	1,398	-0.64%
Cloverland	936	1,105	18.06%
Conover	1,440	1,673	16.18%
Lac du Flambeau	2,981	3,407	14.29%
Land O' Lakes	1,337	1,426	6.66%
Lincoln	1,873	2,094	11.80%
Manitowish Waters	1,103	1,183	7.25%
Phelps	1,605	1,705	6.23%
Plum Lake	762	796	4.46%
Presque Isle	1,216	1,523	25.25%
St. Germain	2,067	2,331	12.77%
Washington	1,706	2,031	19.05%
Winchester	796	865	8.67%
C. Eagle River	726	876	20.66%
County	22,397	25,116	12.14%

Source: U.S. Census

3. Municipal Expansion

There is only one incorporated community in the county – the City of Eagle River. Over the years the city has experienced moderate growth and, from time to time, has annexed adjoining parcels. Several others communities are located around the sanitary (water & sewer) districts in the county that function as incorporated areas, including Arbor Vitae, Lac du Flambeau, Land O Lakes, and Phelps. The majority of public water supplies are obtained from underground aquifers. The quality of the water is generally high.

The population of older residents is growing at a faster rate than the younger population, so the need for assisted living areas will grow. These facilities tend to be closer to towns where other services for the elderly are more readily available. This should ease the pressure to build on prime farmland.

C. UTILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Energy:

Xcel Energy, Wisconsin Public Service, Wisconsin Electric, and Eagle River Light & Water provide electrical service and natural gas service throughout the county. Eagle River Light and Water services the City of Eagle River and the immediate surrounding area via power purchased through Wisconsin Public Power, Inc. (WPPI). Wisconsin Electric services the northern half of the Town of Washington with electric and all of the Towns of Phelps, Conover, and Land O' Lakes with both electric and natural gas. Wisconsin Electric serves the Towns of Presque Isle, Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters, and Winchester with gas facilities only. Wisconsin Public Service serves the remainder of the county with both gas and electric service.

Gas and power utility expansion is typically customer-driven based on user density. Vilas County and the local governments can use this information to assist with land use planning.

2. Transportation

Although the County is rural, it is also very accessible and the existing transportation elements are adequate for the foreseeable future. The County road network is in relatively good shape. The future land use plan shows a low level of new development, so no new major road improvements have been identified for the future.

The County Trunk Highways and the State Trunk Highways divide Vilas County in many pieces like a jigsaw puzzle. USH 51 and USH 45 further divide Vilas County into western, central, and eastern sections.

The road system is composed of three levels of government jurisdiction. These include the State and Federal highway systems, the County system of trunk highways, and the system encompassing the local municipal roads. However, in terms of the functional role and the amount of traffic carried by each type, USH 51, USH 45/STH 32, STH 17 and STH 70 are the most significant.

Vilas County has the service of two principal arterials, two minor arterials, 19 major collectors, and 24 minor collectors. The road system hierarchy can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Road System Hierarchy

Principal Arterials	Minor Arterials	
USH 51	STH 70	
USH 45/STH 32	STH 17	
Major Collectors		
STH 155	CTH E	CTH N
STH 17	CTH F	CTH O
STH 47	CTH G	CTH P
CTH A	CTH H	CTH S
CTH B	CTH J	CTH W
CTH C	CTH K	
CTH D	CTH M	
Minor Collectors		
Chain O' Lakes Road	Oxbow Road	Croker Road
Sugar Maple Road	Pomeroy Lake Road	Matke Road
North Farming Road	Indian Village Road	Illinois Street
Buckhorn Road	Buckatabon Road	North Creek Road
Razorback Road	Airport Road	Hall Road
Birchwood Drive	West Shore Road	Bayview Road
Big St. Germain Drive	South Shore Road	Diaryman's Road
Sunset Road	Little Trout Road	Boulder Lane

Source: Wisconsin Department of Transportation

A problem arises with large farm equipment on the smaller rural roads, when a conflict can occur between farm and non-farm traffic. Some of the equipment can take up the entire road. If this plan is going to preserve farm land and give people the right to farm, then information and education needs to be done with the non-farmer population on the conflicts that arise with these types of issues.

Vilas County residents and visitors have access to 5 public-use airports within the county boundaries as well as access to commercial air service in Rhinelander for passenger and cargo transport.

3. Agricultural Facilities & Services

Anticipated changes in the nature and focus of agricultural production, processing, supply and distribution over a fifteen year period is very difficult to predict. At this time it appears that the focus into the foreseeable future will be to grow crops in Vilas County and then store and process them in other Wisconsin counties. Cranberry

production is expanding in Vilas County, generally next to existing bogs, but processing and storage will continue to occur in Wood County. Other crops are grown within the county and stored in facilities located in Oneida, Langlade, and Portage Counties. Outside of cranberry production, other crops are not planned to increase acreage overall within the county. All existing trends of growing crops in Vilas County and storing and processing them outside of the County are projected to continue well into the future.

The growing of the crops and livestock is just a part of the process. Farmers need to have convenient access to supplies – from what they put in the ground to what they feed their animals and how they care for them to maintaining the equipment that runs the daily operations of any type of farm. Without these types of services, a farm would have difficulty staying in business.

Two farm implement dealers exist in Vilas County. Both dealerships cater more to forestry management, but also have repair departments for all farm machinery.

Additional community facilities are described in Chapter 4 of the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan.

4. Communications

Cellular telephone service and wireless internet service have become important tools in today's farming climate. However, concerns over the locations of wireless service facilities and their possible impact on property values and health have led some municipalities to develop restrictions on the location, placement and appearance of wireless service facilities. There is a lack of major broadband providers in rural Wisconsin and the best solution in providing reliable, high-speed service is often left to municipally-owned cooperatives. With parts of Vilas County being very rural and parts of it being very hilly, the access to wireless service for farming operations is problematic.

5. Waste Management

Waste collection and recycling services for county residents are primarily provided by private collection services through individual contracts throughout the county. With the exception of Land O' Lakes, all waste is transported to the Vilas County Landfill located on County Highway G in Cloverland. The landfill also allows individuals to drop-off waste. In addition to the active landfill located on CTH G there are 10 closed (inactive)

landfills located throughout the county within the communities of: Arbor Vitae (2 closed sites), Boulder Junction, Cloverland, Conover, Lincoln, Manitowish Waters, Plum Lake, Presque Isle, St. Germain, and Winchester.

Waste drop off and recycling facilities are scattered throughout the county, including locations in: Arbor Vitae, Boulder Junction, Cloverland, Eagle River, Land O' Lakes, Manitowish Waters, Phelps, Presque Isle, St. Germain, and Washington.

Vilas County sponsors hazardous waste collections when grant money is available. Hazardous waste collection is also available at the Oneida County Landfill near Rhinelander. (V.C. 2014)

D: Public & Tribal Ownership

Ownership is an important factor to consider related to comprehensive planning. Different levels of government throughout the county own various lands.

See Map 5: Land Ownership.

Federal Ownership

Lands in the county owned by the federal government total approximately 53,969 acres (8.3% of land in county), and are primarily part of the Nicolet National Forest, but include some Chequamegon National Forest lands. The majority of this acreage is located in the Town of Phelps where the Nicolet National Forest comprises 37,578.1 acres, or 54.2% of the town. The remaining federally-owned lands are located in Washington and Lac du Flambeau. Relatively small amounts occur in the Towns of Conover and Lincoln and in the City of Eagle River.

The Nicolet National Forest (NNF) occupies approximately 47,000 acres or 7% of the county's total area. The NNF covers over 661,000 acres in Vilas, Florence, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, and Oneida counties in Wisconsin. Historically, this area, which is now forest land, was subject to destructive logging practices and was then sold to immigrants for farms and homesteads. Farming was not viable in the area's soils which are better suited to trees, and as a result most farms were abandoned. Therefore, the forest was established in 1933 by presidential proclamation to reestablish the area's original tree-covered vegetation. Today, public access is allowed within the forest for enjoyment of its abundant natural resources and beauty. The NNF not only provides

abundant recreational opportunities, but is also a working forest, which provides for timber production.

There are about 6,000 acres of Chequamegon National Forest (CNF) land located in the Town of Lac du Flambeau which comprises approximately 1% of the county's total area. The same discussion provided under the NNF applies to the CNF, as both are managed as one forest unit.

State of Wisconsin Ownership

Within the county, the state of Wisconsin owns the majority of the publicly-owned land with approximately 149,733.6 acres (23% of land in county), the majority of which is included in the Northern Highland - American Legion State Forest (NHAL). Every municipality in the county has some state forest land within its boundaries, except for the City of Eagle River. There are 39,511 acres of state forest land in the Town of Boulder Junction, approximately 34,592 in the Town of Plum Lake, and roughly 27,000 in the Town of Arbor Vitae, while in some other towns the state forest only comprises a few hundred acres. This forest is the largest and most-visited state property in Wisconsin, and occupies a total of over 220,000 acres in Vilas, Oneida, and Iron Counties. The NHAL state forest not only provides abundant recreational opportunities, but is also a working forest which provides for timber management and production. The NHAL state forest is managed using sustainable forestry practices to provide a combination of recreational opportunities, timber production, aesthetics, watershed protection, and habitat for a variety of plant and animal species.

Vilas County Ownership

Vilas County owns 39,502.5 acres, most of which is part of the Vilas County Forest (VCF), comprising 6.1% of the county's total area. Approximately 60% of the county-owned land is located in the Town of Conover, 19% in the Town of Cloverland, and 14% in the Town of Plum Lake. The remaining 7% is distributed in Land O' Lakes and Lincoln, with small portions in the Towns of Lac du Flambeau and Washington.

Town Ownership

Town-owned lands comprise less than 1% of the county's total acreage. Primarily, town-owned land is used for town facilities such as administration buildings, community centers, garages/maintenance buildings, fire stations, etc. Several towns such as Land

O' Lakes, Presque Isle, and Washington own forest land for the purpose of commercial timber production.

Tribal Ownership

Tribal lands comprise approximately 4.5% of the county's total acreage. The majority is located in the Town of Lac du Flambeau which comprises the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation. A small amount of tribal land in the Town of Phelps has been acquired as part of the Lac Vieux Desert Reservation.

E. EXISTING LAND USE

While the vast majority of the county is forested and rural in character with scattered low-density residential uses, there are some areas of higher-density development (lakeshores) and areas where development pressures for higher densities are increasing. Residential development is concentrated around many of the larger lakes and scattered along town and county roads. See Map 1: Existing Land Use

Woodlands were identified as the largest land use in the county. Over 76 percent of the county is considered woodlands, although much of this is also wetland. The second largest use is water, with about 15 percent of the total. Combined, these two uses represent 91 percent of the land use in the county. Residential uses make up less than 5 percent of the total.

Very little productive agricultural land exists within Vilas County in terms of traditional agriculture and production of cash crops. In fact, such uses comprise less than 1% of the county's total land uses. The Town of Washington has the largest area of tillable land in the county. Sandy soils and a limited growing season make cash cropping very difficult. However, cranberry operations

Table 4: Vilas County Existing Land Use, 2010

Land Use	Acres	Percent
Agriculture	4,278	0.66%
Commercial	3,005	0.46%
Governmental	1,026	0.16%
Industrial	1,202	0.18%
Open Lands	10,985	1.69%
Outdoor Recreation	1,965	0.30%
Residential	28,215	4.33%
Transportation	5,184	0.80%
Water	96,653	14.85%
Woodlands	498,481	76.57%
Total Acres	650,994	100.00%

Source: NCWRPC 2010 Land Use Cover

in the Town of Manitowish Waters have been a very strong agricultural component in terms of production and for generating tourism. See Table 4.

F. FUTURE LAND USE

A. Population

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (DOA) population projections are displayed in Table 5. The DOA projections indicate an 11.5 percent growth over the 30-year period from 2010 to 2040. The projected population for Vilas County in 2040 is 23,890 persons.

Table 5: Population Projections, 2010-2040

	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Population	21,430	21,840	22,535	23,645	24,395	24,305	23,890

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration

B. Housing

Additional housing will be needed throughout the county as the population continues to increase. As displayed in Table 5, there will be an additional 2,460 persons in the county by 2040. Based on projected population growth and existing persons per household of 2.29, we determined the total units needed in the county. An additional 1,075 housing units will be needed for the new residents alone. This does not include demand for seasonal housing, which accounted for 57 percent of the housing stock in 2010. Table 6 displays the projected increase for housing units.

Table 6: Housing Projections, 2010-2030

	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030
Housing Units	23235	23618	23974	24258	24444

Source: NCWRPC Housing Projections

CHAPTER FOUR - AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

OVERVIEW

Identifying the resources and land uses in the County is important in order to recognize areas that need to be protected, or characteristics that would limit development potential.

The following will provides a brief review of some of these resources in Vilas County.

RESOURCES AND LAND USES

As seen in Table 4 from Chapter 3, agriculture counts for less than one percent of the existing land use in Vilas County. Woodlands make up over 76 percent of the land, and Water an additional 14 percent. Residential uses are the next largest use, with less than five percent. Table 7 shows how the agricultural land is divided among various agricultural uses in Vilas County. Agricultural woodlands account for about 45 percent and crop lands for another 40 percent.

Table 7: Agricultural Land Use

Use	Acres			Distribution in 2012
	2007	2012	% Change	
Total Crop Land	3,573	2,805	-21.5%	40.8%
Total Woodland	4,714	3,070	-34.9%	44.6%
Permanent Pasture and Rangeland	566	344	-39.2%	5.0%
Land in Buildings, Livestock, Facilities, etc.	1,089	662	-39.2%	9.6%
Total	9,942	6,881	-30.8%	100.0%

Source: USDA 2012 Census of Agriculture

FARMLAND CONVERSION

The rate and speed at which farmland is being converted to other uses is an important factor in understanding County-wide land use trends. The Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program, enacted in 1977 to preserve good agricultural land from development and provide income tax credit to farmers, is a helpful tool to limit where the farmland conversion can take place. Since the rate of population growth has increased, it is likely that either total farm land sold has increased, and/or the percent converted to non-farm uses has increased.

PROGRAMS

With the abundance of natural resources in Vilas County and the growing pressure on both public and private lands, the need to protect these precious areas is increasingly important. There are many Federal, State and Local programs in place that offer technical assistance and cost-share funding to help preserve the environment.

Some of these are as follows:

Federal Programs:

Backyard Conservation

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Conservation Security Program (CSP)

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Farmland Protection Program

Forestry Incentive Program (FIP)

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP):

State:

Managed Forest Law

Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP)

Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP)

WI Association of Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D)

Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claim Program

WI Farmland Preservation Program (FPP)
WI Forest Landowner Grant Program (FLGP)
WI Non-point Source Pollution Abatement Program

Potential Funding Sources for environmental preservation may come from the following:

Private Sources:

Private Foundations
Individual Contributions
Volunteers
Conservation Organizations
Outdoors Forever
Trout Unlimited
Ducks Unlimited
Wisconsin Waterfowl Association

Local Government Sources:

County Land & Water Resource Department
County Planning & Zoning Department
County Forestry and Parks Department
County Highway Department

State Government Sources:

Department of Natural Resources
Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection
University of Wisconsin-Extension
Priority Watershed Program
New Nonpoint Sources
Stewardship Grants
Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program
Lakes Planning Grants
Lakes Protection Grants
Land & Water Management Plan Implementation Funds

CHAPTER FIVE - ECONOMICS

OVERVIEW

Agriculture is a significant economic sector in Vilas County. The statistics of Wisconsin Agriculture are published every year by the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Forestry is a significant employer and economic driver for Vilas County. The county produces a variety of forest products like lumber, pulpwood, hardwood flooring, paneling, animal bedding, Christmas trees, and maple syrup. The forest products industry infuses a significant amount of revenue into the county economy.

A. AGRICULTURE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Like most areas in Wisconsin, the economic impact of agriculture, scale of livestock operations and production methods within the county is changing. The diversity of agricultural enterprises is growing. This trend offers greater opportunities to new and emerging farm operators. Christmas trees, maple syrup, small scale vegetables, fruits, and horticulture operations, and small hobby farms make up most of the County's agriculture.

According to the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan, the segment of population that is employed with the agriculture and natural resources sector accounts for 5.3 % of the population. Compare this to the 2.9% on average in Wisconsin and the conclusion can be drawn that Vilas County is more heavily agriculture than some of the other counties in the State. While 5.3% is a small percentage, it should receive special attention because of the importance agriculture plays in a rural County.

1. Economic Impact

The agriculture industry in Vilas County continues to grow. In 2012, agriculture generated more than \$18 million in exports through the sale of agricultural products to customers outside of the State of Wisconsin. The agricultural industry supports a variety of additional industries like transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, wholesale trade, retail and service.

2. Farms

In 2012 there were 47 active farms in the county. Between 2007 and 2012, the total number of farms in the county decreased by 24. In both 2002 to 2007 there were 71 farms.

Land in farms increased slightly between 2002 and 2007 increasing 221 acres. The County experienced a 3,061 acre reduction in farm land between 2007 and 2012. However, while the total land in farm decreased, the median size of farms increased 6 acres over the five year period (2007-2012) and increased 9 acres over the ten year period (2002-2012). The increase in median size of farms indicates that the 24 farms lost between 2007 and 2012 were smaller in size compared to the existing farms. The total decrease in land in farms indicates that several of the 24 eliminated farms have been reused for purposes other than farming, not consolidated into one of the surrounding farms.

3. Agriculture Production

Vilas County has insufficient data to identify any trends and analysis of agriculture production. According to the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics, Vilas County's agricultural data was included in the state's total, but not published individually. Therefore data for corn for grain and silage, soybeans and oats is unavailable.

In 2000, Vilas County harvested 1,000 acres of hay alfalfa resulting in 1,500 tons of production, or 1.5 tons per acre. The hay alfalfa production for 2010 and 2012 is unavailable and therefore a comparison is not possible.

4. Cattle

The number of cattle in Vilas County remained stable at 200 between 2010 and 2012. No dairy cow information is available indicating that there is little – if any - dairy production in the county.

5. Gross Regional Product (GRP)

Total gross regional product (GRP) in Vilas County in 2012 was \$492,268,243 as seen on table 5. The revenues from NAICS 11: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting in Vilas County resulted in a total GRP of \$7,950,857 in 2012. In comparison to other industries, the agriculture industry generates the 6th lowest gross regional product in

the county and accounts for 2 percent of the county's GRP. The county's top producer (excluding government), other non-industries, accounts for \$52,789,624 or 11 percent of the GRP. Retail trade accounts for \$50,887,330 or 10 percent and arts and entertainment accounts for \$47,406,169 or 10 percent of the of the county's GRP.

6. Exports

In 2012, Vilas County exceeded \$600 million in export revenues. Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting accounted for over \$18 million in export revenue, or 2.93 percent of total export revenues, see Table 6a. The agriculture industry is the eighth highest export industry. Excluding government, accommodation and food services is the largest export industry exporting over \$66 million in 2012. The agriculture industry is not considered an export industry with a location quotient of 1.12 in 2012.

Decreasing slightly from 2001, agriculture is satisfying the local demand and is as concentrated in Vilas County as it is on average in the nation. The 1.12 location quotient indicates that the industry is not an economic driver. The decrease in the location quotient further indicates that the industry may be struggling as positions are eliminated and the county is reducing their concentration in the agricultural industry, suggesting that there may be trouble for the entire agricultural economy (i.e. suppliers, ancillary businesses). The ability to export goods and services is essential to the county's economy as it introduces new money to the economy, rather than simply circulating money that is already in the region. This influx of new revenue is redistributed throughout the economy at local restaurants, suppliers, and retailers.

7. Job Growth

Further evidence that the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting industry is struggling is shown in job growth. Vilas County decreased employment in the agriculture industry 20.65 percent from 2001 to 2012, eliminating 32 jobs, see Table 7a. In 2012, the agricultural industry directly employed 123 persons. The decrease in jobs is the result of the county's unique competitiveness. Shift share analysis shows that Vilas County's competitive advantage resulted in the reduction of 27 jobs from 2001 to 2012, see Table 7b. Based on National Growth (3 jobs) and an Industry Mix (-9 jobs), the region would expect to lose 6 jobs in this industry over the 11 year time period. The industrial mix effect represents the share of regional industry growth explained by the growth of the specific industry at the national level.

The national growth effect articulates how much of the regional industry's growth is explained by the overall growth of the national economy. The regional competitive effect explains how much of the change in a given industry is due to some unique competitive advantage that the region possesses, because the growth cannot be explained by national trends in that industry or the economy as whole. As a result of the region's unique competitiveness in this specific industry, the county experienced a decrease in jobs (32 jobs). The low employment number and the decrease in employment combined with a decrease in location quotient identifies that the agriculture industry in Vilas County is not growing as fast as it is in the national economy.

In the last five years, Vilas County has seen a decrease in the number of farms and the acres of land in farms; see Table 8. The total number of farms is up slightly from 1997, but is lower than in 2002 and 2007.

Table 8: Vilas County Farm Statistics

	1997	2002	2007	2012	Change: 1997- 2012
Number of Farms	44	71	71	47	6.8%
Average Size (Acres)	172	137	140	146	-15.1%
Land in Farms (Acres)	7,578	9,721	9,942	6,881	-9.2%

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture

Table 9 shows the number of medium-sized farms is decreasing, while the number of small farms is rising. This trend in farming is important to economic development for two reasons. First, the rapid increase in small farms demonstrates the explosion of "hobby farming". These farms may produce on a very small or local scale but they generally do not employ labor or produce food for general consumption. While these types of farms are not being discouraged, it is not this type of land that needs to be preserved by a farmland preservation plan. Second, the largest farms produce large quantities of food but often are so modernized that they require only a fraction of the labor force as previously. As farming moves towards these two extremes of very small and very large farms, the economic impact will be seen and agricultural employment will likely decline.

Table 9: Number of Farms by Size

Acres	1997	2002	2007	2012	Change: 1997- 2012
1 to 9	6	7	9	11	83.33%
10 to 49	8	30	28	17	112.50%
50 to 179	18	19	23	12	-33.33%
180 to 499	10	10	2	4	-60.00%
500 to 999	0	4	3	1	
1,000 +	2	1	2	2	0.00%
Total	44	71	67	47	6.82%

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture

B. FORESTRY ECONOMIC GROWTH

The agro-forest industry employs approximately 1.3% of the jobs in Vilas County. Easy access to timber on public lands in Vilas County contributes to steady employment and a supply of raw materials within the forest products industry. The steady demand for raw materials and high stumpage values also helps support continued public ownership of these lands. The abundance of land in public ownership (43%) and the numerous natural lakes serve as a major driver in Vilas County's economy due to tourism (e.g. day usage and seasonal home ownership) and natural resource based recreation in terms of both employment and economic impact. Protection of Vilas County's waters and preservation of the public land base will insure continued growth in Vilas County's most significant industries.

C. HEALTH CARE

Easy access to quality health care is important to any community. Farming is a particularly hazardous occupation and health care is a necessary component to the overall plan of operation. Vilas County as a whole has been designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a Health Professional Shortage Area. This designation is used to determine eligibility for at least 34 federal programs and state loan programs. One hospital and five clinics are located in Vilas County. There are no nursing homes, but there are 18 Assisted Living Facilities with capacities ranging from 4 persons to 40 persons.

D. OFF-SITE JOBS

With health insurance being an issue and the economy being what it is, many farm families are working off the farm. This necessitates commuting. There is no bus service in Vilas County, commuting is done primarily by personal vehicles. There is a taxi service.

Of the 11,220 workers in Vilas County, 3,730 commute outside of the County to work. This indicates that most workers have found work within the County. This is helpful in a number of ways. In part, it saves on gas, wear and tear on vehicles, supports the local economy and keeps the family close to home.

Off the farm jobs in Vilas County tend to pay lower. Lack of higher paying jobs and competition with the County has been an economic development issue in the area. The Comprehensive Plan has goals and policies in place to encourage commercial development in more urbanized areas already set up for services such as water, sewer and other such infrastructure. These types of policies will help to ensure the continued progressive economic development of the County and all of its citizens while maintaining the integrity of the surrounding rural community.

E. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMIC GROWTH

Vilas County is currently dominated by the manufacturing sector. This sector shows a slight downtrend in growth over the next seven years. Health care, education, social services, entertainment, food services and accommodations show modest to good potential for growth in each category. The shift appears to be from a manufacturing-driven economy to one focused on service.

A variety of economic development programs are available in the County. These promote business growth and economic development through non-profit organizations, job centers, County, State and Federal programs and grants. Some of these are specific to farming and agriculture.

CHAPTER SIX – GOALS, POLICIES AND MAPPING CRITERIA

OVERVIEW

This chapter will provide a description of what is included in the Farmland Preservation Plan map and why it was or was not included in the mapping process. Vilas County has no exclusive agricultural zoning in any township, and the trend with the farmland preservation program has indicated declining participation. Because of these two factors, the future of the program in the County is somewhat uncertain. Policies, goals and actions will take this into account.

GOALS AND ACTIONS

The Farmland Preservation Area is mapped generously in order to include as many potential participants as possible, while taking into consideration the 15-year future growth of the County.

All county residents went through the comprehensive planning process. Housing demand was projected during the process, and residents identified where additional housing would be located. These areas can be seen on the Future Land Use map. Residents identified why new residents would move into their communities, and recognized that future housing development would take a variety of forms. Two of the most common housing trends identified were conversion of resort housing to condominiums and continued subdivision of land for single family “cottages” of various lot sizes.

No additional housing related goals, objectives, and policies were identified from what already exists in the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan, because of the housing trends identified.

Goal:

Protect the economic viability of existing areas of farmland and forestry to remain in those uses.

Objectives:

1. Implement farmland preservation and other programs as requested by agricultural property owners.

2. Maintain the integrity and viability of existing forestry and agricultural areas so that those practices can occur without conflict with other uses.
3. Encourage retaining large, contiguous, forestry and farmland tracts.

Policies:

1. Promote farmland preservation programs from all levels of government.
2. Promote agricultural cost share programs to farmers per the Vilas County Land & Water Resource Management Plan.
3. Promote DATCP's tax credit program for eligible farmland owners.
4. Promote Managed Forest Law participation to forestland owners.

MAPPING CRITERIA

The Vilas County Farmland Preservation Plan Map (Map 6, and Attachment A maps) identifies two areas: "Farmland Preservation Areas," and "Planned Out" areas. "Existing Agricultural Areas" is an overlay that shows where farming was occurring when Comprehensive Plan maps were made in 2009. Farmland preservation areas were determined by including all the soils listed as prime agricultural (Map 3), and by including the following existing land uses (Map 1): agriculture, open lands, and woodlands. The next step was determining what land to exclude. Basically, all land that is planned for development over the next 10-15 years was removed from farmland preservation, because non-agriculture is planned.

Below are the map legend definitions:

Farmland Preservation Areas – Parcels that meet the Farmland Preservation Plan mapping criteria. Landowners in this area may apply for farmland preservation program. These areas have been identified during the planning process to be agricultural uses (including forestry uses per Sec.91.01 Wis. Stats.) or open spaces. No non-agricultural development is planned in the next fifteen years for those areas identified as farmland preservation areas. In addition, if there is a conflict with other plan maps, the Farmland Preservation Plan map will supersede those other maps.

Planned Out – Parcels that do not allow the owner to apply for farmland preservation income tax credits. These parcels are "planned out," or excluded because they meet the criteria for non-farmland preservation areas.

Existing Agricultural Areas – This is an overlay that identifies land that was actively farmed when the Existing Land Use map was created for the Comprehensive Plan in 2009. The “farmland preservation areas” and “planned out” areas superseded this designation to determine if the underlying land is preserved farmland or not.

Criteria for Farmland Preservation Areas:

- Lands depicted on the Soils Map as farmlands.
- Lands depicted on the Land Use Map as farmlands.
- Lands depicted on the Land Use Map as woodlands.
- Cranberry waterbodies (these lands are parts of working farms, and are not waters of the state).

Criteria for Non-Farmland Preservation Areas:

- Municipal land.
- Local, county, state, and federal forest lands.
- Any group of parcels that resemble a subdivision (parcels less than 5 acres, access road to all parcels, road frontage to all parcels).
- Any parcels that are tax exempt (e.g. churches, cemeteries, government owned lands, utilities, trust tribal lands).
- Lands depicted on the Future Land Use Map that allow any development other than for a farming or forestry purpose to occur.

CHAPTER SEVEN - IMPLEMENTATION

OVERVIEW

This chapter will look at the tools available to those who work with the landowners of the County. They also have the charge of implementing the standards and statutes filtered down from national and state agencies. All of this will affect how this Plan is implemented.

TOOLS

While some tools are specific, tangible and measurable; others are vague, such as education. Educating the public and local government agencies about the economic benefits of farming and the cost of converting/developing farmland to other uses is an important part of the implementation strategy. Equally important is showing the benefit of protecting the environment while gaining a financial benefit. Not all of these tools have funding available at any given time. The more specific tools that may be available are as follows:

Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEA) - This is a tool set forth in Chapter 91 of the Wisconsin State Statutes. Designation of an AEA identifies the area as valuable for current and future agricultural use. Eligible farmers in an AEA can receive income tax credits per an agreement with DATCP.

General eligibility requirements are:

- Five eligible land owner participants
- All land in the proposed AEA area must be in the farmland preservation area
- Land must be contiguous
- Land must be primarily in agricultural use

Benefits of the AEA designation are that the land is identified as important for agricultural preservation. This designation provides reassurance about future farmland use and may encourage investment in agriculture.

Eligible landowners can enter into a voluntary Farmland Preservation Agreement that allows them to claim a tax credit in exchange for keeping land in agricultural use for 15 years and meeting conservation standards.

Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE Program) - Agricultural Conservation Easements are deed restrictions that landowners voluntarily place on their properties to protect productive agricultural land. They sell a conservation easement to a government agency or private conservation organization. Landowners retain full ownership and continue to pay property taxes, and manage and operate the farm. Conservation easements are tailored to each property: purchasers and landowners decide which activities should be restricted or limited. When the landowner eventually sells the farmland, the development restrictions are passed on to the new owner.

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) - A similar program is the Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) where government agencies buy up the development rights to a property. The program does not give the government agency the right to develop the agricultural land; it simply permits it to extinguish those rights in return for appropriate compensation.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) - These programs allow landowners to transfer the right to develop one parcel of land to a different parcel of land. The programs are usually established by local zoning ordinances, and they are used to shift development from agricultural areas to designate growth zones closer to municipal services. The parcel of land where the rights originate is called the "sending" parcel. Once the development rights are transferred from a sending parcel, the land is restricted with a permanent conservation easement. The rights are transferred to a "receiving" parcel, which allows an owner purchasing the rights to build at a higher density than ordinarily permitted by the base zoning. Most TDR transactions are between private landowners and developers. Local governments approve transactions and monitor easements. Some jurisdictions have created "TDR banks" that buy development rights with public funds and sell them to developers and other private landowners. TDR programs can prevent non-agricultural development of farmland, reduce the market value (and tax burdens) of protected farms and provide farmland owners with liquid capital that can be used to enhance farm viability.

Mitigation Ordinances - Mitigation ordinances require developers to permanently protect a certain amount of farmland for every acre of agricultural land they convert to other uses. Developers can place an agricultural conservation easement on farmland in another location or pay a fee to satisfy mitigation requirements.

Comprehensive Land-Use Planning - The County and Towns can use their comprehensive plans as the basis for farmland preservation zoning ordinances. This not only protects these areas for agricultural uses but also offers a greater tax incentive for landowners.

Farmland Preservation Zoning - Agricultural protection zoning ordinances (Farmland Preservation Zoning) allow some residential development but can restrict density. Such constraints on development potential can limit land speculation and keep land affordable to farmers. Keeping large areas relatively free of non-farm development can reduce the likelihood of conflicts between farmers and their non-farming neighbors.

Tax credits for land under Farmland Preservation Zoning are as follows:

- \$10.00/acre if land is zoned and located in an Agricultural Enterprise Area.
- \$7.50/acre if land is zoned exclusive agriculture.
- \$5.00/acre if landowner has an agreement through the Farmland Preservation Tax Credit Program.

MONITORING

Monitoring is an important step to the whole planning process in order to assess what is working and needs to be adjusted. The County will continually evaluate the plan and that the decisions made remain consistent with the goals and objectives of the Farmland Preservation Plan and the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Any participants in the programs will be monitored according to rules and regulations set forth by the Federal, State or Local agencies participating in the program.

PLAN CONSISTENCY AND AMENDMENTS

This farmland preservation plan fulfills the statutory requirements for both the Farmland Preservation Plan (Chapter 91, Subchapter II, WI Statutes) and the Agricultural Element of the Comprehensive Plan (§66.1001(2), Wis. Stats.).

Several methods were used to ensure consistency between this plan and the Vilas County Comprehensive Plan.

1. The Farmland Preservation Plan was adopted as an attachment to the Comprehensive Plan.
2. Goals, objectives, and policies initially came from the Comprehensive Plan, then were modified to focus on farmland preservation, while still complementing the Comprehensive Plan goals, objectives, and policies.
3. All maps came from, or are consistent with, the Comprehensive Plan.
4. Mapping criteria used the Future Land Use Map from the Comprehensive Plan.

Now that the Farmland Preservation Plan is part of the Comprehensive Plan, Wisconsin Statute §66.1001 requires that an adopted plan be reviewed and updated at least once every ten years. This is not a static plan, but one that may change over time. Changing land uses, policy changes, regulatory changes, or shifting economics are some reasons to review if this plan is still current.

The plan has a long-term outlook, one that may need to be readjusted as policy or trends become irrelevant or contradictory or errors/omissions have been identified. The plan has been written with some flexibility incorporated so future amendments should be limited in scope. The process to amend the Plan is similar to that of writing this initial document. The steps to amend the document or the plan map will be as follows:

1. As a result of the request of a local government, a property owner or a developer, the County staff and Committee will evaluate the proposed amendment to see if it meets the goals and objectives of the Plan, the State requirements, and any other laws or standards that may be in effect at the time of the request. If all is in order, the proposal will be brought before the County Board.
2. The County Board adopts a resolution outlining the proposal/amendment.
3. The County staff prepares the text and/or map that amend the specific part of the Farmland Preservation Plan or Plan map.
4. County Staff forward the amended materials required under Section 91.20, Wis.Stats. to DATCP for certification of the Plan amendment.
5. A public meeting is held for input on the amendment
6. A Class 1 notice is published at least 30 days before the County Board public hearing is held.

7. The County Board holds the formal public hearing on an ordinance that would incorporate the proposed Plan amendment into the County's Farmland Preservation Plan

8. Following the public hearing and DATCP certification, the County Board approves or denies the ordinance adopting the proposed Plan amendment.

9. County staff forward a copy of the adopted ordinance and Plan amendment to DATCP and any landowners who have requested a copy in writing, as well as Township chairpersons.



Map 1 Existing Land Use

Map 2 Natural Resources

Map 3 Soils

Map 4 Future Land Use

Map 5 Land Ownership

ATTACHMENT A

Town Farmland Preservation Maps

ATTACHMENT B

Public Participation Plan and Resolution

ATTACHMENT C

Farmland Preservation Plan Resolution and Ordinance

INSERT: Resolution from Land and Water Conservation Committee to adopt plan.

INSERT: Resolution from Zoning and Planning Committee to adopt plan.

INSERT: Ordinance from County Board to add plan to comprehensive plan.