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Becker County **Land Use Plan** 2024

December 17, 2024



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Introduction

Becker County is experiencing significant changes, including population growth, demographic shifts, and evolving land demand. The 2003 Comprehensive Plan no longer reflects the current conditions and needs of the county. Therefore, county leaders recognized the need for an update to address the new challenges and benefit from opportunities. This 2024 Comprehensive Land Use Plan replaces the 2003 Comprehensive Plan, which was last updated in 2015.

The 2024 Comprehensive Land Use Plan aims to look ten years into the future and prepare Becker County to make informed decisions concerning future growth and development. This Plan achieves this through the following actions:

- Revising goals and policies as well as implementation strategies.
- Identifying current and future needs by incorporating data, public engagement/survey input, and the steering committee's guidance.
- Including and developing the Future Land Use Map and comprehensive goals with policies for land use, housing, natural resources, transportation, infrastructure, utilities, and economic development.
- Determining the intensities at which land can be developed, such as the types of business-related uses, the number of animal units on a farm, or the housing density.
- Providing a development blueprint.

By updating, adopting, and implementing this Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Becker County can create a thriving and resilient community that balances supporting economic growth with preserving agricultural land and natural resources.



Statutory Authority

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan is the foundation and legal basis of land use controls within Becker County. Derived from the policies and actions outlined in this plan, the future land use plan ensures the development of logical patterns that preserve and enhance natural resources, direct growth to suitable areas, and prioritize the well-being of residents.

Minnesota Statutes, Section 394.22(9), defines a comprehensive plan as the “policies, statements, goals, and interrelated plans for private and public land and water use, transportation, and community infrastructure including recommendations for plan execution, documented in texts, ordinances, and maps which constitute the guide for the future development of the county or any portion of the county.” The Comprehensive Land Use Plan draws its authority from MN Statute 394.231, which outlines the considerations for counties in greater Minnesota. The county considered the following goals and objectives:

- (1) minimizing the fragmentation and development of agricultural, forest, wildlife, and open space lands, including consideration of appropriate minimum lot sizes;
- (2) minimizing further development in sensitive shoreland areas;
- (3) minimizing development near wildlife management areas, scientific and natural areas, and nature centers;
- (4) encouraging land uses in airport safety zones that are compatible with the safe operation of the airport and the safety of people in the vicinity of the airport;
- (5) identification of areas of preference for higher density, including consideration of existing and necessary water and wastewater services, infrastructure, other services, and to the extent feasible, encouraging full development of areas previously zoned for nonagricultural uses;
- (6) encouraging development close to places of employment, shopping centers, schools, mass transit, and other public and private service centers;
- (7) identification of areas where other developments are appropriate; and
- (8) other goals and objectives a county may identify.

Municipalities, including cities and townships, can shape their future development through comprehensive planning activities. They can formulate, adopt, and adjust comprehensive municipal plans, executing them through ordinances or official actions, aligning with the provisions of Minnesota Statutes, Sections 462.351 to 62.365.

This plan extends its influence indirectly, impacting land use controls and planning decisions within its 18 incorporated cities and townships and neighboring counties, communities, public agencies, and various private, public, and non-profit stakeholders. This plan does not have land use authority over the jurisdictions of the incorporated cities within Becker County, such as Detroit Lakes, Frazee, Callaway, Lake Park, Audubon, and Ogema. Nor does the county hold jurisdiction over land in the White Earth Reservation owned by tribal members, which the White Earth Nation of the Chippewa Tribe governs. However, it is binding for the townships and unincorporated areas within Becker County's jurisdiction.

The Comprehensive Land Use Plan sets the goals and objectives for Becker County. These goals are accomplished through the revision and enforcement of the zoning and subdivision ordinances, which are administered by staff with the direction of the county board.

General land use categories are based on intensity and the general function of each use, including conservation, agriculture, public, residential, commercial, and industrial.

Zoning regulates the specific type of use within land use categories. It involves dividing land into zoning districts where specific land uses are permitted or prohibited. Zoning also defines development standards such as the types of buildings allowed, their heights, and densities, and it requires regulatory and performance requirements for each use type. The County is in the process of reviewing and updating the zoning ordinance to ensure consistency with the goals and policies of this Plan.

Governmental Administration

The Becker County Board of Commissioners, elected to four-year staggered terms from five commissioner districts, plays a crucial role in managing the county's departments. Annually selecting a Chair and Vice Chair, the Commission oversees overall departmental management by establishing policies, priorities, and goals within statutory guidelines. This includes representing constituents in the five commissioner districts and engaging with state-level affairs through interactions with legislators and administrative departments. The commissioners are dedicated to delivering fair, efficient, and effective services to Becker County residents.

Various boards and commissions support the County Board of Commissioners, including the Economic Development Authority, Board of Adjustments, Planning Commission, Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance Advisory Committee, Becker Soil & Water

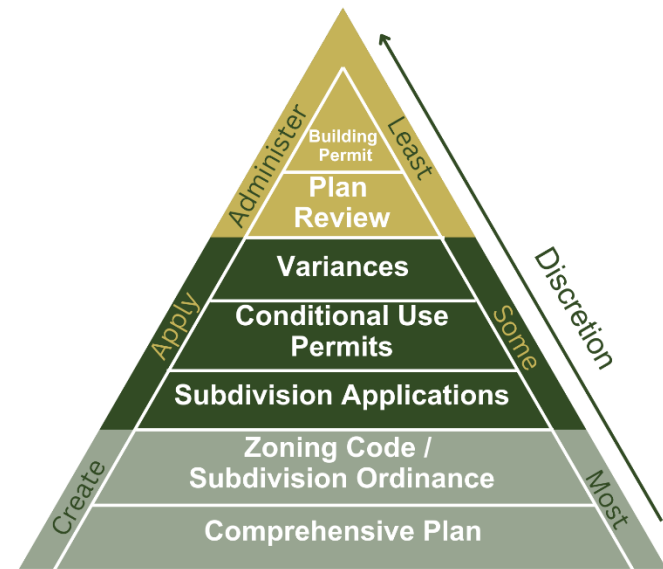


Figure 1: Hierarchy of Planning Authority

Conservation District, and the Recreational Advisory Committee. The county ordinances, enacted or amended through public hearings, cover areas not addressed by state or federal laws, such as zoning, parking, surface water use of two lakes, and solid waste management. Currently, Becker County has 15 ordinances posted online.

Citizen involvement is integral to local governance in Becker County, with volunteers serving on committees, commissions, and boards. Their roles vary, ranging from making final decisions to providing recommendations for consideration by others. This citizen engagement enhances the delivery of local government services. Information about citizen advisory boards and commissions is accessible online.

Residents can find details about townships and related information within Becker County, such as township officials, contact information, and meeting schedules. This transparency lets citizens stay informed about local governance in their areas.

Engagement

The purpose of the engagement was to gain the public's input throughout the process to integrate into the project goals, create transparency, build community trust, and ensure collaboration that results in a plan that stakeholders and the public can support. The County created a public engagement plan to:

- Effectively engage the public and stakeholders.
- Gather input and ensure issues, concerns, and aspirations are consistently collected, understood, and considered.
- Ensure that the process is inclusive and offers a variety of ways to participate.

This project sought to engage the public in ways that would meet the project goals.

- Ensure that project information is made available to the public clearly and effectively.
- Gather meaningful feedback from stakeholders to develop a community-supported recommendation.
- Ensure that stakeholder questions and concerns are heard and addressed.
- Document the progress and effectiveness of the communications plan.

Public and stakeholder engagement was done throughout the three phases of the project:

- Phase 1: Fall 2023 - Educate the public on the planning process and gather input to identify issues and opportunities
- Phase 2: Summer 2024 - Present draft plan and ordinance that was developed using what we heard during phase 1 and seek public and stakeholder feedback
- Phase 3: Fall 2024 – Hold a public hearing before approving the new comprehensive land use plan

The goal for engagement was to get at least 100 responses to surveys and INPUTiD engagement so that the demographics would more accurately reflect the current Becker County community.

Methods of Engagement

Here is a summary of the engagement strategies used for the Becker County Comprehensive Plan. Appendix B includes additional detail and an analysis of what we heard.

We held two workshops with the County Board to kick off the project and develop a vision and mission statement.

The project website was launched in early October 2023. We used several communication strategies to let people know about the project and encourage people to comment on the interactive map or take the survey, including:

- Several newsletters/articles sent to various groups
- Frequent social media posts
- Announcement on the County's news page on the website
- Email/text messages to other government agencies
- Email/text messages to other stakeholder groups
- Email/text to 300+ County Employees
- Flyers and posters distributed to the communities of Detroit Lakes, Audubon, Lake Park, Cormorant, White Earth, Ogema, Richwood, Rochert, Height of Land, Pine Point, Osage, Wolf Lake, Two Inlets, Frazee, and Callaway
- Emailed targeted survey to townships to better understand their issues and concerns

Respondents

Over 470 people completed the survey.

Figure 3: Age of survey respondents

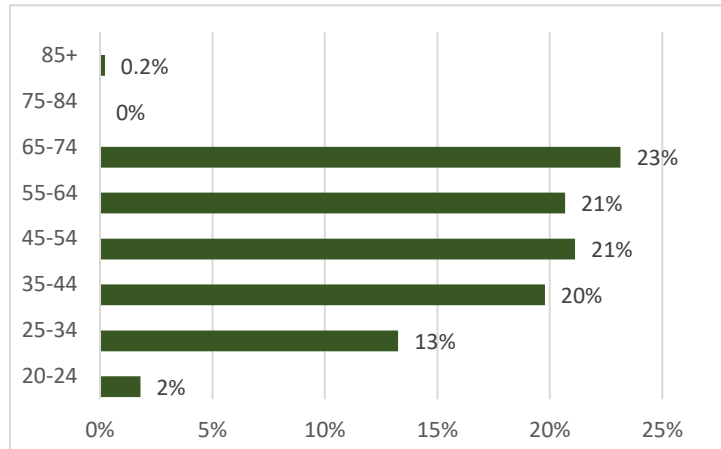
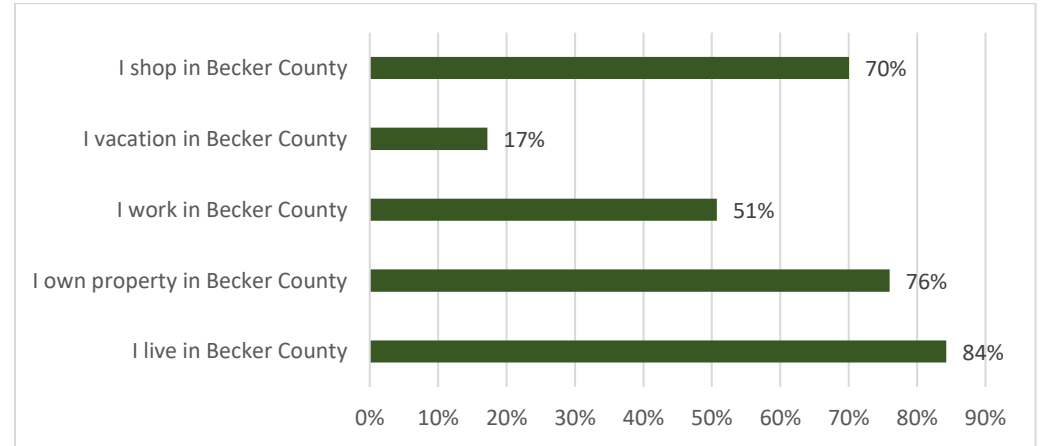


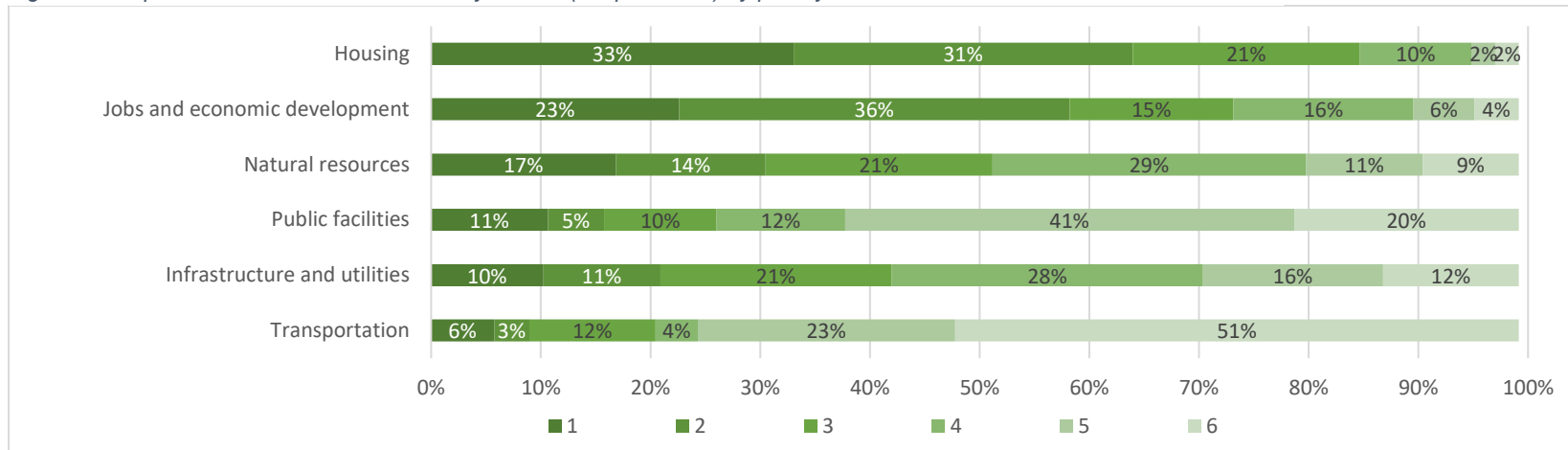
Figure 2: Survey respondent's relation to Becker County



What we heard from the public

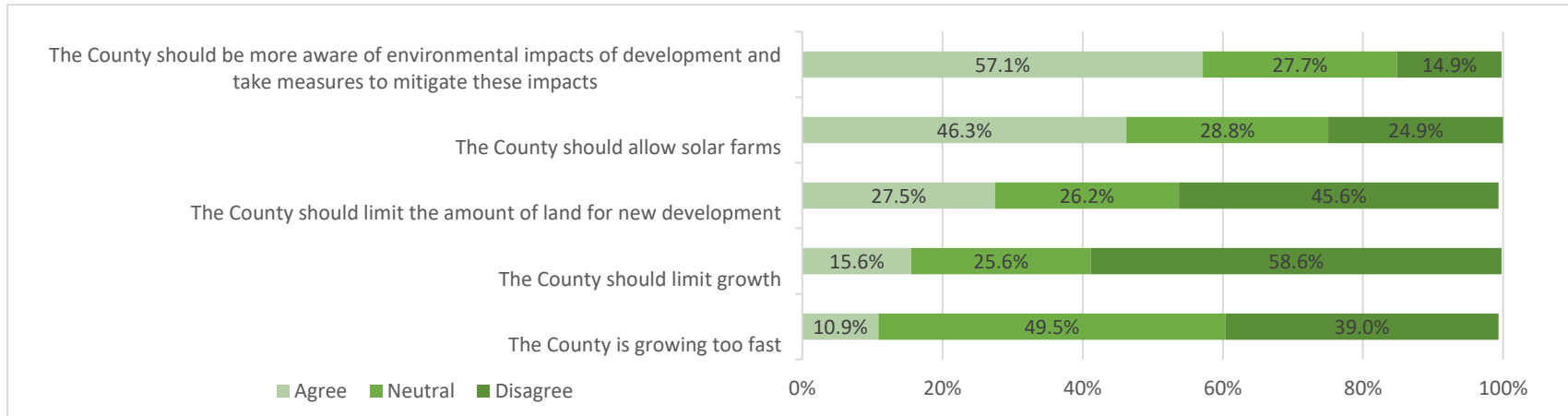
As shown in the graph below, respondents prioritize housing, jobs, economic development, and the protection of natural resources.

Figure 4: Graph of issues in the Becker County ranked (1 top to 6 low) by priority



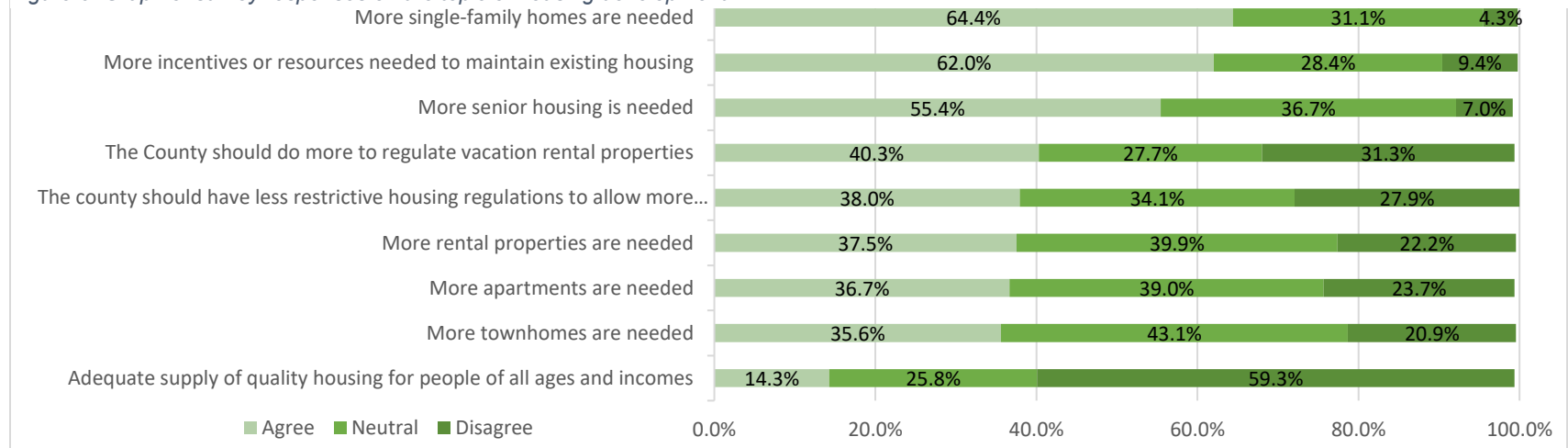
The following graph indicates that responses support growth and development, but that care should be taken to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

Figure 5: Graph of the public survey responses on the County's growth and progress



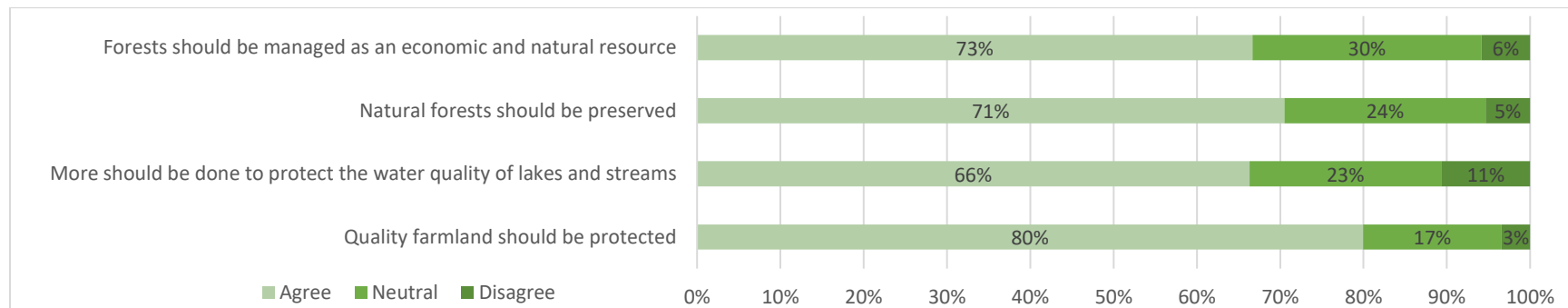
The survey results show that 64% of respondents believe there should be greater growth in the single-family home stock, 62% feel more incentives should be offered to retain existing housing opportunities, and 55% think more senior housing is a community need.

Figure 6: Graph of survey responses on the topic of housing development



Becker County residents have strong feelings about their environment, and many deeply care about preserving the agricultural and natural environment.

Figure 7: Graph of survey respondents' opinions on land use and natural resources



What we heard from the municipalities

Officials from cities and townships were asked to give feedback on the existing comprehensive plan through nine open-ended questions. Over 60 people representing Becker County cities and townships responded. The first three questions were related to the current comprehensive plan, the relevance of the current goals, and whether they reflect Becker County today and in the next decade. The consensus is that the vision and goal statements are still relevant but must be adapted to meet the country's growth needs. The second part of the survey focused on the zoning code. The primary issues are that the zoning districts and allowed land use do not align with current development or future land use goals. Emerging uses such as short-term rentals, storage units, and clean energy are significant concerns that township officials want to address in the zoning code update.

How we used what we heard

Staff developed a spreadsheet to categorize comments and track how they are addressed in the comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance update process. The survey results were shared with the County Board and used to frame policy discussions, draft the updated plan, and revise ordinances.

Focus Groups

As part of the public engagement strategy for this comprehensive plan, two focus groups were formed to discuss and better understand key issues as indicated by the survey - economic development, agriculture, and the environment. On February 22, 2024,

two focus groups held their first meetings to discuss these issues. The first group focused on environmental issues and provided the following feedback:

- Concern about environmental impacts from development, especially water quality and loss of trees.
- Interest in protecting natural resources and water quality, considering it one of the prime reasons people want to live in Becker County.
- Opportunity to restore or make improvements as people seek permits or variances for improvements or expansion of existing buildings in the shoreland area.
- Public education and enforcement are important.
- Concern about surface and groundwater impacts from feedlots.
- Concern about wake boats' impact on shoreline.

The second group focused on agriculture and economic development and discussed the following items:

- The best location for feedlots is closest to dairy processors in Perham.
- Concerns for surface and groundwater: The largest feedlots should be planned where soil and water are most appropriate.
- Feedlots should be away from residences and planned residential development.
- New feedlots <2,500 animal units are not profitable.
- Residential development needs to be denser to make it cost-effective.
- 2.5 acre lots are too large; 1 acre lots could be allowed on the fringes of cities served with sewer and water.
- Interest in protecting natural resources and water quality as they are one of the prime reasons people want to live in Becker County.

On July 31, 2024, a virtual meeting was held, with invites to all the original participants in both groups. The meeting was to make changes to the plan specifically based on the feedback known to these groups and demonstrate the effort taken to ensure their voices were heard and listened to in this plan.

Public Review and Comment Period on Draft Plan

On August 5, 2024, a draft of the plan was published on the project website and the county website to solicit public comments. The public had until September 9, 2024, to review and comment on the draft plan by submitting written comments via letter, an online form or email or attending a public hearing before the Planning Commission on August 28, 2024. During this period, 60 comments were received with the majority of comments focused on the themes listed in the following table.

Comment Theme	Response
Concern about guiding land around the lakes for residential development, especially the amount in the three townships south and west of Detroit Lakes	The current plan and zoning allow for 2.5 acre residential development in the agricultural area. Updating the zoning to residential means that future uses, development, or any changes to existing homes would need to meet residential development standards.
Concern about feedlots	Location of larger feedlots will be addressed in the zoning code, with larger operations permitted in areas that are less vulnerable to groundwater contamination and away from residential development and sensitive natural resources.
Concern about forest areas being developed as an economic resource	The county actively manages its forests, especially those acres of publicly owned land, for recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and tourism resources as well as revenue. In May 2024, 9,200 cords of timber were sold that generated \$254,000 in revenue for the county. The county takes biodiversity and sustainability into account in its timber and forest management. More information available online at: https://www.co.becker.mn.us/dept/natural_resource/forest_management.aspx
Questions about the process	In the initial draft, the incorrect statute was cited; Statute followed for this planning process was 394.321. Correction made and more detail was added about the engagement process. Zoning and ordinances updates are underway and will go through another public review and comment process later this year.
Concern about water quality and suggestion that references to additional planning documents and reports be added to the comprehensive plan.	References to the Otter Tail and Redeye Watershed plans and their goals or policies were already in the draft by reference. Wild Rice, Buffalo River, Crow Wing River, and Mississippi Headwater references were added, since they are the other watersheds where Becker County is a partner.
Concern about wake boats impact to shorelines and desire to see them addressed in the comprehensive land use plan.	The county's policy decision is to not address county wide wake boats use as a topic in the comprehensive land use plan. There are means for property owners to petition for a surface water use restriction on a lake by lake basis. A wake boat ordinance could be a stand-alone ordinance, similar to a no wake zone ordinance or watercraft motor restriction ordinance for example. This would need to be vetted through the Sheriff, as enforcement would be done through that office.
Miscellaneous corrections or clarifications.	Other small edits for clarity and corrections were made throughout the document.

Using these goals, policies, and maps as a guide, the land use plan ensures that the County allocates land as envisioned by the community and that development is efficient and well-managed. It provides a framework for decision-making processes, zoning regulations, and development guidelines, fostering a consistent and coherent approach to land use.

The following goals, policies, and maps can promote flexibility in development, preservation of natural resources, inclusivity, and equity by addressing attainable housing, access to amenities, and encouraging economic growth. They can also support environmental stewardship by promoting sustainable practices, conserving natural resources, and protecting sensitive areas.

Ultimately, the land use plan's goals, policies, and maps shape the County's future by setting a growth, development, and preservation roadmap. They provide a foundation for decision-making, fostering a cohesive and inclusive community that reflects the values and aspirations of its residents while ensuring the responsible use of land and resources for generations to come.

Community Profile

Overview

Becker County is located in northwest Minnesota and ranks as the 31st largest county among the 87 in the state by land mass. Over the past decade, the county has experienced a notable population increase, making it the 15th fastest-growing county in the state from 2010 to 2022. In 2022, the county had a population of 35,371 with a median age of 44, higher than the state average, with 23% of individuals aged 65 and older.

Becker County is part of Minnesota Lakes Country, including, but not limited to, Big and Little Detroit Lakes, Big, Middle, Upper, and Little Cormorant Lakes, Lake Melissa, Lake Sallie, and Bad Medicine Lake. The landscape is diverse, with lakes and forests, such as the White Earth Forest, and agricultural land. The county is renowned for outdoor recreation and activities, especially the vast trails through the White Earth Forest and other areas. In addition, The county is home to half of the White Earth Reservation, home to the White Earth Nation tribe of Native Americans in the County's northern region.

Covering 1,445 square miles, Becker County has a wealth of natural resources, including lakes, rivers, wetlands, forests, and prairies, hosting abundant biodiversity. Outdoor enthusiasts can explore the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, offering opportunities for birdwatching, hiking, and wildlife photography. Tourism is also significant, particularly in Detroit Lakes, known for its water-related recreational activities, events, and natural beauty. Becker County hosts various events and festivals, including the renowned "WE Fest."

Historically, agriculture has been a driving force in the county's economy, supported by its rich soil. The agricultural industry, highlighted in the 2017 Census of Agriculture, comprises 1,032 farms covering 307,419 acres. Crops (58%) and livestock (42%) contribute significantly, with main crops including corn, soybeans, wheat, hay, and oats, and significant livestock comprising cattle, hogs, poultry, and sheep.

The county seat, Detroit Lakes, is the largest city and a focal point for manufacturing, banking, retail, health services, government, tourism, and seasonal recreation activities. Other prominent cities and towns include Frazee, Audubon, Lake Park, and Callaway.

U.S. Highway 10 is a vital east-west link connecting Becker County to the Twin Cities metro area, Fargo, ND, and neighboring cities. Minnesota Highways 34 and 59 are key east-west and north-south routes, respectively. With historical railroad ties, the county operates a central agricultural shipping point with a large switching yard. This infrastructure facilitates the transportation of farm products and other goods to state, national, and global destinations.

Historical and Cultural Background

Established in 1858, Becker County holds a rich cultural and historical significance. Named after George Loomis Becker, a prominent lawyer and politician, the county boasts a diverse natural environment featuring lakes, rivers, wetlands, forests, and prairies. The region's history dates to approximately 1400 C.E. when the Chippewa, also known as the Ojibwe or Anishinaabe, migrated to the Minnesota region from eastern Canada. There was also a Dakota Nation presence in the Cormorant area. Both indigenous groups engaged in hunting, fishing, gathering, and farming. The European presence, marked by fur traders and settlers, led to establishing the first permanent European settlement, Detroit (later renamed Detroit Lakes), in 1859 by Norwegian immigrants. In 1867, the Federal Government pressured the Chippewa tribes throughout the state to settle in one location, the White Earth Reservation in the county's northern region.

Becker County's land use has significantly changed over the 20th and 21st centuries. The agricultural and lumber sectors experienced a decline, prompting diversification into manufacturing, education, healthcare, and services. Conservation efforts have been directed towards tax-forfeited lands, parks, trails, and water quality. Despite challenges, the county maintains its allure, attracting tourists and residents who appreciate its many lakes and their rural and scenic character.

Demographics

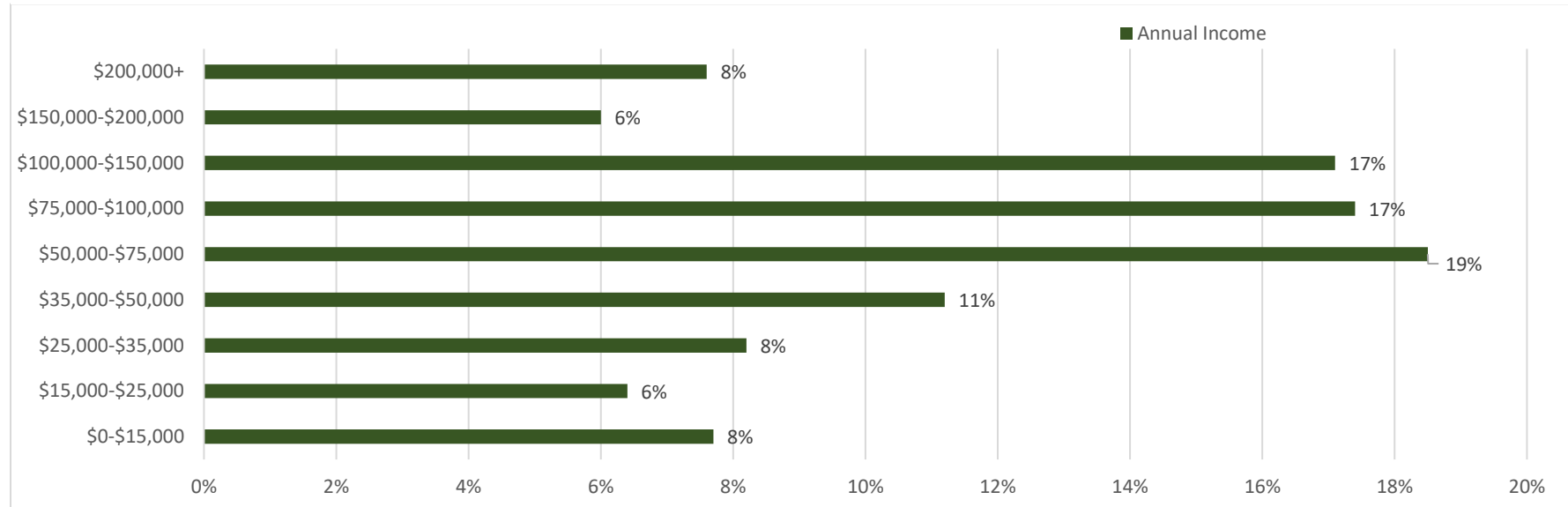
Becker County is the 56th most populous county in Minnesota, with a total population of 35,762 residents. The population's median age is 44, approximately five years older than the state median age of 38.5.

Table 1: Becker County population by age and gender demographics

	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85+
Male	5.8%	6.4%	6.8%	5.8%	4.6%	4.8%	5.3%	5.8%	6.2%	5.5%	5.9%	7.1%	8.0%	7.6%	5.9%	4.3%	2.3%	1.5%
Female	5.9%	6.4%	6.6%	5.8%	4.3%	4.9%	5.3%	5.9%	5.8%	4.9%	5.7%	6.9%	7.6%	7.3%	6.3%	4.4%	2.9%	3.3%

Becker County has an average household size of 2.4 persons per household, smaller than the state average of 2.46. The median household income is approximately \$71,460, lower than the state median of \$84,313, reflecting the lower cost of living in the greater Minnesota region.

Figure 10: Graph of household income distribution



According to 2024 ESRI data, the median home value in Becker County is \$345,493, slightly lower than the state median of \$360,089. However, the median gross rent of \$779 is significantly lower than the state median of \$1,178, making it affordable to live in a rental. Most housing units are owner-occupied, with a rate of 79%. In 2022, 144 residential building permits were issued.

Figure 11: Graph of Becker County home values

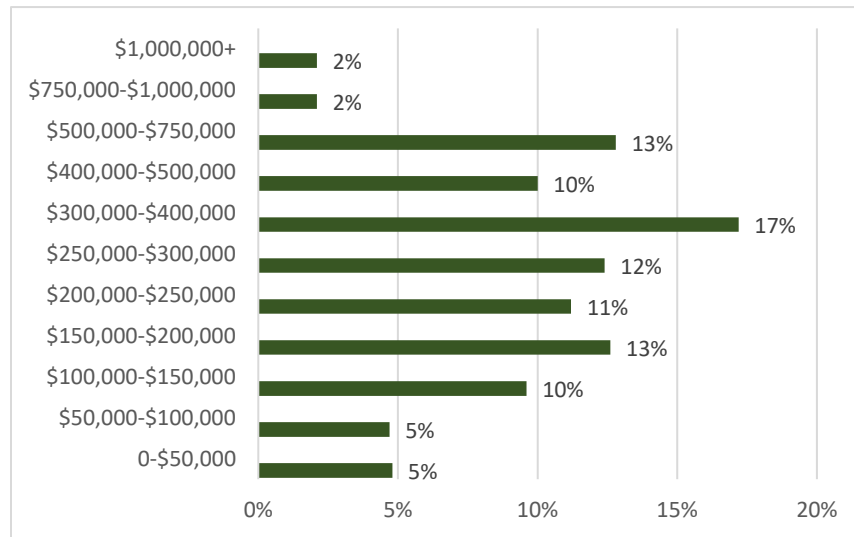
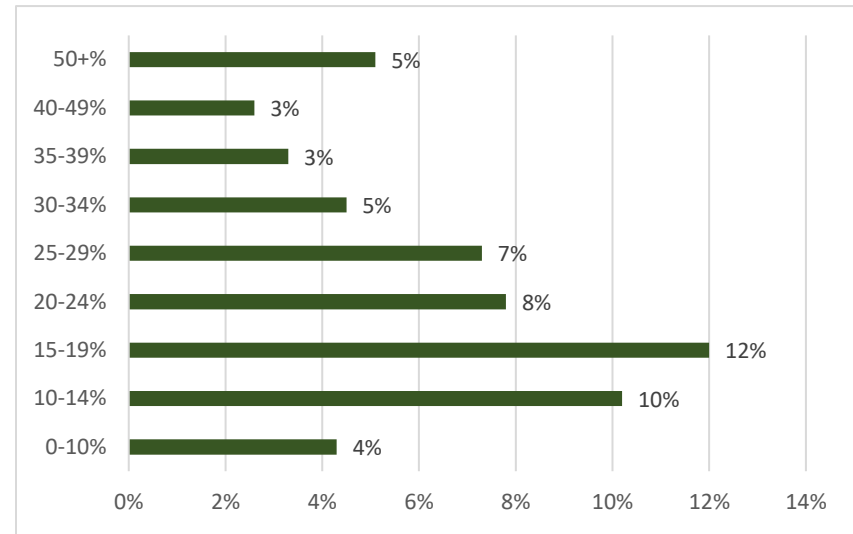


Figure 12: Mortgages as a percent of income in Becker County



Employment in Becker County is largely white-collar jobs at 56%, followed by 27.5% of blue-collar jobs and 16.5% of service industry jobs. The unemployment rate is approximately 4%, higher than the state average of 2.7%, indicating a need for economic development and the opportunity for businesses to come to Becker County and hire local workers. Becker County has a \$39,831 per capita income. Two-thirds of the residents have some level of college education, with 27% having a college degree and 38% having a college education. Nearly a third, or 29%, have a high school education, and only 6% of residents have no high school diploma.

Becker County comprises 87.5% white residents, 7.5% American Indian and Alaska Native residents, and 3.7% residents classified as two or more races.

Economic Conditions

Becker County offers local and county programs to support business development, aiming to provide resources and financial assistance to commercial property owners. One such program is Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE), designed to finance energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades for commercial buildings. This initiative allows property owners to pursue energy-saving measures without incurring upfront costs, as financing is repaid through a separate item on their property tax assessment over a predetermined period. Becker County's commitment to economic growth is evident in its business subsidy programs and tax abatement options.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic recession, Becker County has demonstrated resilience and economic vitality, maintaining the 30th largest economy among Minnesota's 87 counties and ranking as the 15th fastest-growing county in the past year. Becker County has experienced positive momentum in job creation. The region has grown despite the pandemic recession, marking the 20th fastest-growing county since 2019.

As part of the Northwest planning region, Becker County is projected to have a 5.1% increase in employment levels over the next decade. In 2022, employers posted 20,409 job vacancies in the Northwest planning region, indicating many opportunities across various occupations and industries. For inquiries about these programs, individuals can contact the Becker County Economic Development Authority or the specified direct contacts for more information. According to the Esri 2023 data, the county boasts 1,559 businesses that employ 17,044 employees in the county.

Population Forecast

According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center, Becker County's population is expected to grow from 2025 to 2035 to 38,640, a 6.4% change rate faster than the projected statewide growth rate (4.5%). In addition to the overall growth, the number of people aged 65 and older is expected to increase over the next decade. This indicates that senior housing (single-level and smaller footprints with attached garages and standard maintenance), a range of assisted living options, and products and services that cater to older consumers will be needed to sustain the local economy.

Table 2: Population Projections By Age Group, 2025-2035, source MN State Demographic Center

Becker Co.	2025 Projection	2035 Projection	Numeric Change	Percent Change
0-5 years	2,167	2,283	115	5.3%
5-14 years	4,796	4,925	129	2.7%
15-24 years	4,282	4,419	137	3.2%
25-34 years	3,591	4,021	430	12.0%
35-44 years	4,190	4,259	69	1.6%
45-54 years	4,000	4,683	683	17.1%
55-64 years	4,859	4,746	-113	-2.3%
65-74 years	4,980	4,752	-228	-4.6%
75-84 years	2,678	3,574	896	33.5%
85+ years	758	979	221	29.2%
Total Population	36,301	38,640	2,339	6.4%

Labor Force Trends

According to 2024 ESRI data analysts, Becker County had a lower unemployment rate, at 2.2%, than the state (3.1%). This is lower than both the 2019 pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 4.2% and the 2020 unemployment rate of 6.4%

Table 3: Labor Force Projections, 2025-2035 by age group, MN State Demographic Center, 2017-2021 ACS

Age	2025	2035
16 to 24 years	2,586	2,714
25 to 54 years	10,089	11,100
55 to 64 years	3,344	3,266
65+ years	1,507	1,526
Total Labor Force	17,526	18,606

In recent years, the labor force growth in Becker County has experienced a noticeable deceleration. Between 1990 and 2000, the county saw a robust net gain of 300 workers annually. However, this momentum tapered off to an average annual increase of 195 new workers from 2000 to 2010, further declining to a gain of 143 new workers per year since 2010. The projections suggest that Becker County is poised to add approximately 1,000 workers between 2025 and 2035. In 2022 alone, employers posted 20,409 job vacancies, underscoring the extensive employment prospects available across various occupations and industries. Presently, key sectors contributing to the job market include sales (8.9%), food preparation/service (9%), and administrative/office support (11.5%).

Despite these opportunities, the job market does exhibit some vulnerabilities. The highest concentration of current jobs is in sectors like food services and sales, which are traditionally more susceptible to economic downturns and demonstrate lower resilience. As part of the Northwest planning region, which is expected to witness a 5.1% increase in employment levels over the next decade, the county faces a dual challenge of creating new jobs while addressing retirements and attrition.

Looking into specific industry projections, the leisure and hospitality sector is anticipated to be a significant contributor, with an estimated gain of over 4,400 jobs (2020-2030). On the other hand, the utility sector is expected to experience a notable decline of 14% overall, and the largest exit due to better openings will occur in the food preparation/service sector, which offers the lowest wages.

Table 4: Regional Industry Employment Projections, 2020-2030, source DEED 2020-2030 Employment Outlook

Northwest Planning Region	Estimated Employment 2020	Projected Employment 2030	Percent Change 2020-2030
Total, All Industries	250,722	263,441	5.1%
Natural Resources and Mining	5,790	5,740	-0.9%
Utilities	1,135	970	-14.5%
Construction	10,693	11,157	4.3%
Manufacturing	27,999	28,618	2.2%
Wholesale Trade	11,829	12,347	4.4%
Retail Trade	26,846	25,467	-5.1%
Transportation & Warehousing	6,436	6,741	4.7%
Information	2,276	2,229	-2.1%
Finance & Insurance, Real Estate	7,478	7,641	2.2%
Professional Services & Mgmt. of Companies	5,587	6,025	7.8%
Admin Support & Waste Mgmt.	3,889	4,139	6.4%
Educational Services	22,015	23,101	4.9%
Health Care & Social Assistance	36,901	41,390	12.2%
Leisure & Hospitality	20,446	24,818	21.4%
Other Services	9,052	10,144	12.1%
Public Administration	22,824	23,240	1.8%

Cost of Living

The cost-of-living forecast for Becker County is lower than the state and national averages, but it may change over time due to various factors. Living costs include housing, transportation, utilities, groceries, health care, and taxes. Inflation, economic conditions, and market forces affect the cost of living.

The cost-of-living index in Becker County was 12.8% cheaper than the national average. The county had a lower median household income than the state and a higher percentage of households below \$50,000.

The housing market in Becker County is likely to remain stable or increase slightly. The median home price in September 2024 was \$345,493, down 3% from last year but still lower than the state median of \$360,089.

The cost of living has increased over the past few years, with costs rising in many areas. In 2022, Becker County had a required hourly wage of \$13.78 for a single person living alone to meet basic needs cost of living and an hourly wage requirement of \$15.25 for a typical family with two adults and one child.

The transportation cost in Becker County is likely to decrease or remain the same. Gas prices, vehicle maintenance, and public transit fares are expected to stay low or moderate due to the availability of alternative fuels, fuel efficiency improvement, and public transportation promotion.

The utility cost in Becker County is likely to increase or remain the same, as the electricity, natural gas, water, and waste disposal rates are expected to rise or stay stable due to the increasing demand, environmental regulations, infrastructure investments, and weather conditions.

The grocery cost in Becker County is likely to increase or remain the same, as the food prices are expected to grow or stay steady due to inflation, supply chain disruptions, trade policies, and consumer preferences.

The health care cost in Becker County is likely to increase or remain the same, as the medical expenses are expected to rise or stay high due to the aging population, chronic diseases, technological innovations, and health insurance policies.

The tax cost in Becker County is likely to increase or remain the same, as federal, state, and local taxes are expected to grow or stay constant due to government spending, budget deficits, tax reforms, and public services.

The data reflects a trajectory of labor force growth shifting from manual labor to machine management. It will be essential to prepare the local labor force and services to embrace the integration of artificial intelligence, such as drone delivery and self-driving cars, with commensurate skills for computer coding and management.

Land Use

Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Safeguard water quality and preserve agricultural land, forests, wetlands, and shoreland areas while calibrating the intensity of future land uses based on community goals and sustainability.

Policy 1.1: Coordinate plans, policies, and activities with other agencies, such as Otter Tail River, Buffalo/Red River, Wild Rice, Cormorant, Pelican, Red Eye River, and soon Crow Wing's One Watershed One Plan, on water quality initiatives.

Policy 1.2: Implement land use policies and ordinances to direct intense land use away from unsuitable areas that conflict with natural resource goals and policies.

Policy 1.3: Plan for growth that respects the existing environmental conditions and minimizes the impacts of development on natural resources while achieving growth.

Overview

The 2024 Comprehensive Land Use Plan includes maps visually conveying the plan's vision. These maps articulate where growth is planned to occur and function as a roadmap for future development in the county. This section includes illustrative maps delineating the current land uses, types and densities of development, and infrastructure within the county. These maps depict residential areas, commercial zones, industrial sectors, green spaces, such as agricultural and forest land, transportation routes, and other vital elements shaping the county.

The Current Land Use Map depicts the community's existing land use. The Future Land Use Map provides insights into the community's aspirations and growth objectives. It considers factors such as projected population changes, economic trends, and environmental considerations to guide land allocation for different purposes, ensuring a balanced and sustainable development trajectory.

These maps show transportation networks, infrastructure systems, natural resources, parks, and recreational areas, further showing the connections between all the elements involved in growing a community.

These maps also serve as a tool for stakeholders, residents, and decision-makers, facilitating a shared understanding of the data and strategies outlined in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. By providing a roadmap, the plan can guide and inform decision-making processes related to land use, zoning regulations, and development policies, ultimately contributing to the cohesive and well-planned growth of the community.

Existing Land Use and Constraints

Becker County's land use designations currently interchange land use classification and zoning district. The county's predominant land use is General Agriculture, which aims to preserve suitable areas for agricultural use and forests for recreational, economic, and natural resource protection purposes. It was also intended to deter non-farm development on high quality farmland. In the previous land use plan, this classification extended to non-farmlands near lakes, rivers, and streams. Residential development in General Agricultural designated areas is permitted with a minimum lot size of 2.5 acres. As a result, there are General Agricultural areas that are developing as residential which should be built at residential development standards, not Agricultural. This land use plan addresses this issue by appropriately guiding and zoning areas where residential development is expected to occur. However, townships, such as Spring Creek and Riceville, enforce more restrictive zoning with 19-acre lot sizes in specified agricultural areas.

The previous land use plan also defined a Special Protection District, designed to control development in areas with unique characteristics, but it was not being used. To simplify the land use designations and zoning districts, this is .

Adhering to Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) rules, the Becker County Shoreland Ordinance distinguishes between three lake types with varying lot sizes and setback regulations. Natural Environment Lakes, characterized by limited caps for development, require 200-foot-wide lots with setbacks of 150 feet for buildings and septic systems. Recreational Development Lakes permit 150-foot-wide lots, with building setbacks at 100 feet and 75 feet for septic systems. General Development Lakes allow for greater development and mandate 100-foot-wide lots with setbacks of 75 feet for buildings and 50 feet for septic systems. Sewered lots have lower setbacks for all three lake classes, with additional provisions in certain circumstances or for developments categorized as Planned Unit Development (PUD).

Most lakes in Becker County are designated as Natural Environment, while six lakes—Detroit, Eunice, Floyd, Little Floyd, Melissa, and Sallie—are classified as General Development Lakes. Becker County is covered by five watersheds, which possess land use authority over developments impacting watersheds.

Constraints for this plan are identified conditions that prevent land from being readily developed. The main constraints in Becker County are:

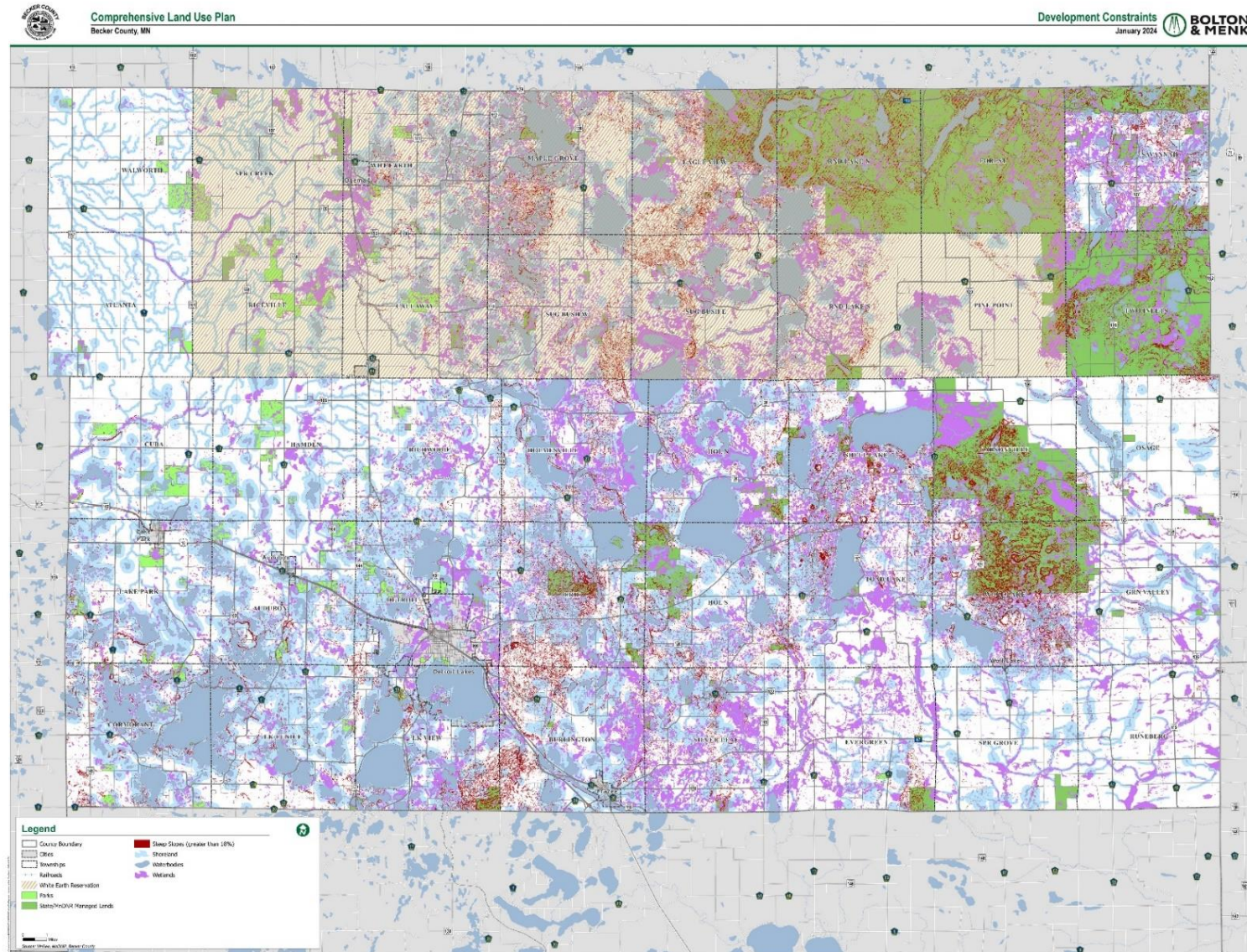
- Slopes with a grade > 18%: Areas with hills, bluffs, and other steep elevation changes where development may not be stable.
- Wetlands: Areas where naturally occurring water from springs and other sources creates a fragile ecosystem, often near bodies of water.
- Shoreland: Area immediately surrounding a body of water extending a set distance from the waterline where development is limited to preserve the adjacent water body.
- Waterbodies: Lakes, rivers, and streams covered in water are thus undeveloped without changing the hydrological or ecological area.

- State-managed lands: Areas owned and maintained by the State of Minnesota within Becker County's jurisdiction.

In addition to the above data layers that are shown on the map on the following page, other mapping tools and state agency resources were used in refining the land use designations and zoning districts. Shorelands, watersheds and soil types are discussed in the natural resources chapter of the plan. Using this data was especially important in determining appropriate areas to plan for residential and higher intensity land uses to minimize impacts to natural resources as well as conflicts between these two uses.

As Becker County and its cities and townships grow, there are online resources that they can consult such as the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Conservation Explorer that shows locations of natural resources such as old growth stands, fens, native plant communities, watersheds, and ecological classification of lakes. This interactive and easy to use tool online at: mce.dnr.state.mn.us/content/explore. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture has a resource that shows areas that are vulnerable to

The map below shows the developable area (unconstrained county land) within Becker County. The developable area indicates the location best suited for the growth of various land uses.



Land Use Trends

Feedlot placement in Northwest and Southeast Quadrants of the County

Feedlots in the county tend to be in the northwest and southeast areas, where surface water is less prominent. In a focus group, members of the agricultural community indicated they prefer to have their feed lots as far away from other residents and surface water as possible to avoid conflict with neighbors over noise and smell and to avoid or minimize impacts to surface water.

Densifying Development South of Detroit Lakes

The land just north of Detroit Lakes, from Old Town to just south of County 149, was initially the site of significant development and commercial activity. Recently, as people move into Becker County, many new residents settled on the land south and west of Detroit Lakes. This concentration of new residents incentivizes increased residential density in this area. Facilitating the division of parcels into smaller single-family lots and keeping an area for multifamily development close to the outskirts of the city of Detroit Lakes will allow for increased density without fundamentally changing the local character of the County. Balanced development maintains the rural lakes country character of the area while welcoming more people to come to live and spend their money in the county.

Mirroring Commercial Activities

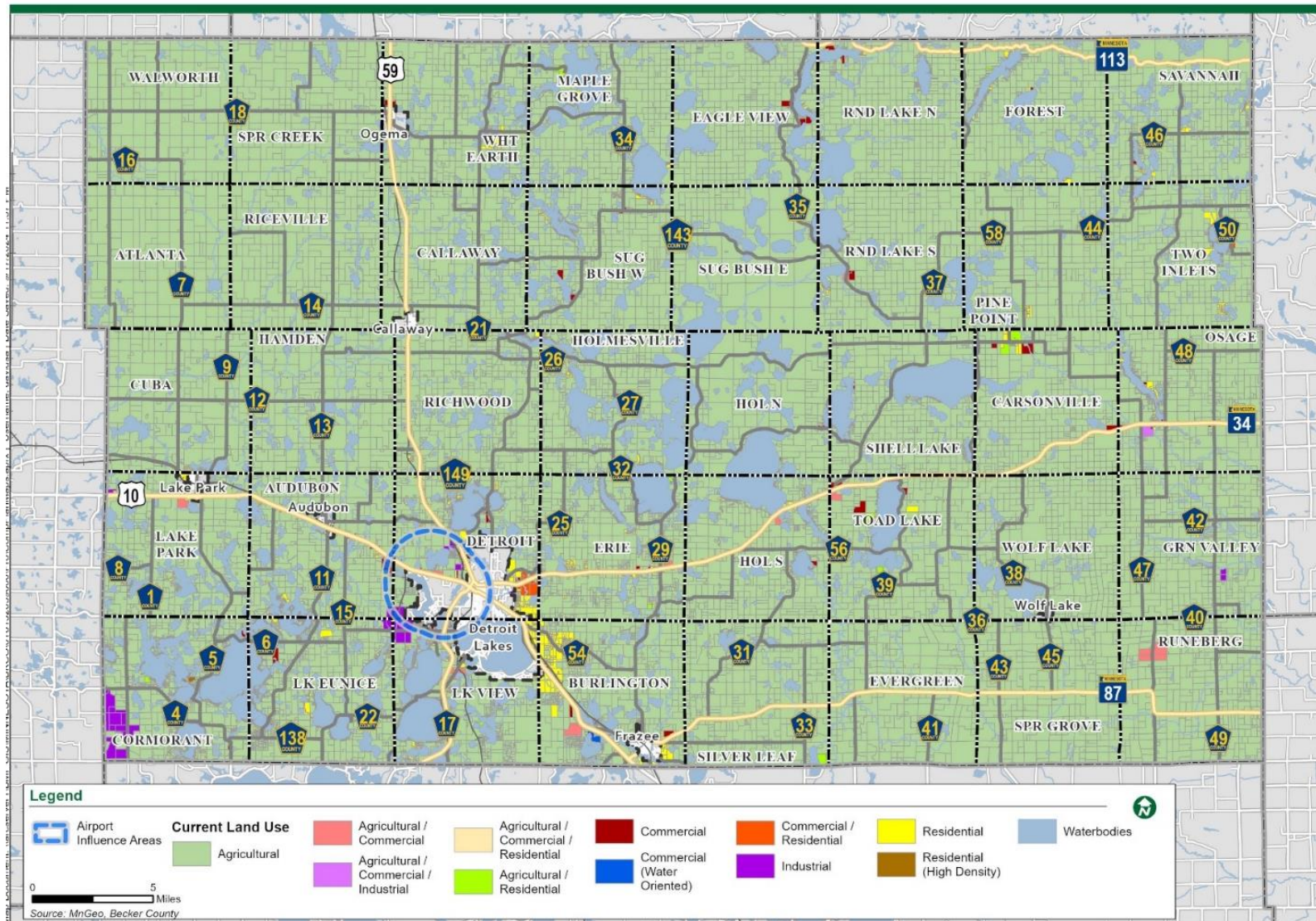
The plan supports growth around existing commercial areas, cities with public sewers and water, and access to main roads. It also introduces a mixed-use overlay zone in areas where there doesn't need to be a traditional separation of uses, such as commercial areas and multifamily housing. The desired outcome is to create more connected and walkable communities where residents, seasonal residents, and tourists can walk and bike to retail, restaurants, recreation, and attractions.

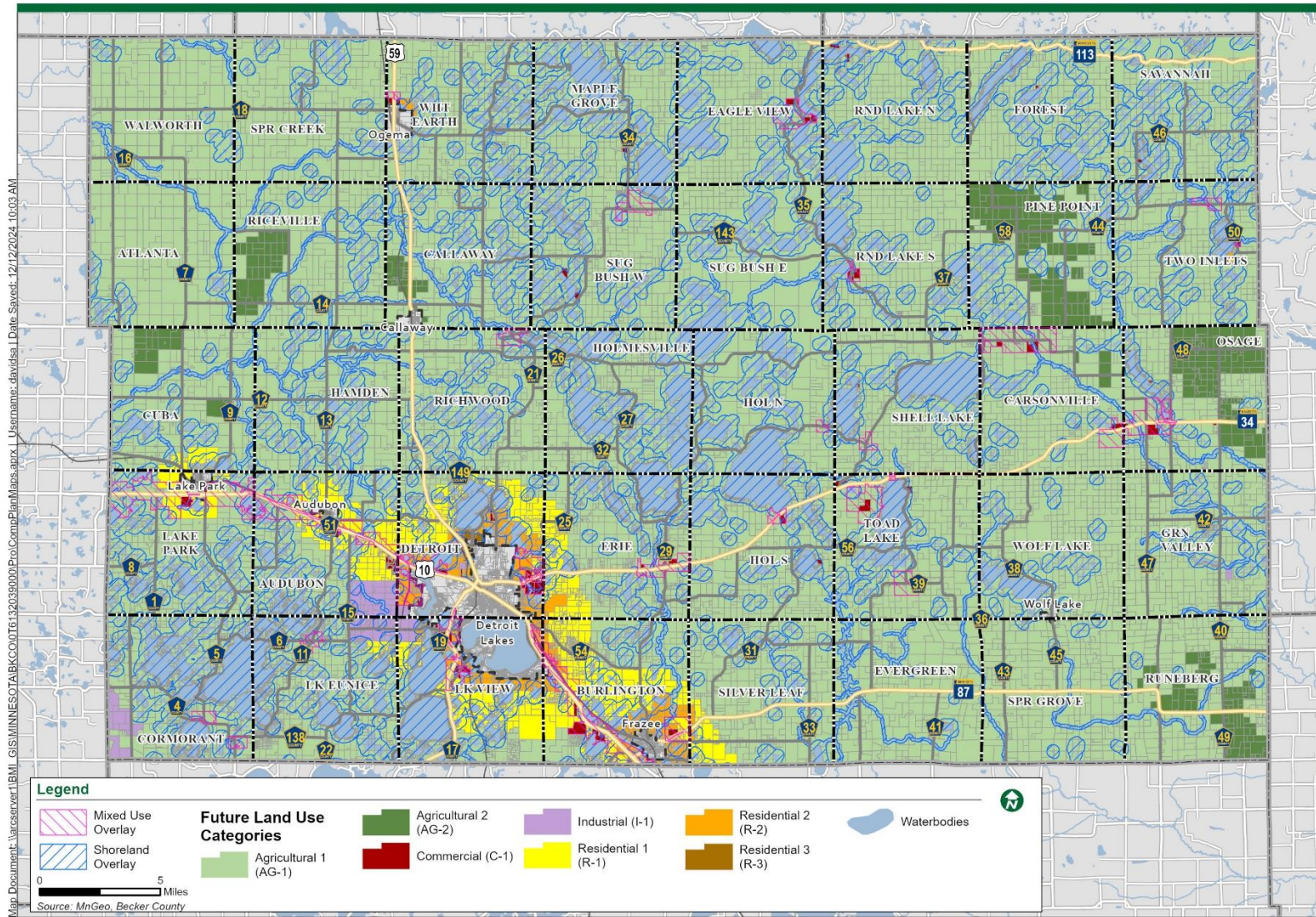
Current Land Use

The Current Land Use Map represents the community's existing land use patterns and distribution. This map highlights the spatial organization of residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational areas, as well as open spaces and natural resources. Studying this map allows for a visual assessment of the current condition, enabling and identifying opportunities for growth, improvements, and future development.

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map illustrates the envisioned land distribution for residential, commercial, industrial, and open space uses. It is critical in guiding decision-makers, developers, and the community to achieve a cohesive and balanced development pattern. This map will guide future land use decisions, infrastructure investments, zoning regulations, and development policies, ultimately contributing to the vision of Becker County over the next ten years.





Future Land Use Categories

Agricultural

Agricultural land allows uses that involve cultivating crops, raising livestock, and other farming activities. It is focused on efficient land resource use to produce food, feed, fiber, and fuel. Agricultural areas support sustainable food production, preserve rural economies, and contribute to environmental stewardship. Regulations for standards and performance ensure proper management and protection of natural resources. The County has two agricultural land use categories, Ag-1 and Ag-2. The primary difference between the two categories is the number of animal units allowed. Ag-1 allows for farms with a lower number of livestock or animals. Ag-2 allows for larger farms with a higher number of livestock or animals and are in areas that are farther away from cities as well as sensitive surface water/

- Agricultural One (Ag-1): 1 Dwelling Unit / 2.5 Acres
- Agricultural Two (Ag-2): 1 Dwelling Unit / 2.5 Acres

Residential

Residential land allows housing development and seasonal uses ranging from low-density detached homes to higher density lots and block subdivisions. Residential Zoning Districts anticipated to be assigned to properties under the County's land use planning authority include:

- Residential-1 (R-1): Density = 1 Dwelling Unit / 2.5 Acres
 - Generally single family.
- Residential-2 (R-2): Density = 1 Dwelling Unit / 1 Acre
 - Generally higher density single-family or detached townhomes.
- Residential-3 (R-3): Density = 4 Dwelling Units / 1 Acre
 - Generally moderate-density housing.

Mixed Use Overlay

The Mixed-Use Overlay is an additional layer that sits on top of the existing zoning and provides additional development options. The County anticipates updating its zoning ordinance to include a Mixed-Use Overlay Zoning District (MX-1) that will describe and allow uses and processes for property owners or developers to develop mixed-used developments along transportation corridors.

Commercial

The General Commercial is intended only for commercial development and land use for general retail and commercial activities.

Industrial

Industrial land is intended for areas used for manufacturing, processing, and other heavy commercial activities. These areas typically have large factories, warehouses, and other facilities to support the production and distribution of goods and materials.

Proposed Zoning Map

MN Statute 394.231 states that “Within three years of updating the comprehensive plan, the county shall consider adopting ordinances as part of the county's official controls that encourage the implementation of the goals and objectives.” The County is in the process of reviewing and updating its land use related ordinances to reflect the goals and policies of this plan. See the Zoning Administrator for the most current official map the county board adopts.

Housing

Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Plan for diverse residential development that meets the needs of residents of all ages, abilities, and income levels, focusing on an aging population and moderate-priced housing for area workers.

Policy 1.1: Promote development that caters to diverse skills and income levels.

Policy 1.2: Explore and implement age-friendly policies in the county to address the needs of an aging population.

Policy 1.3: Partner with the business community to identify workforce housing needs and ways to fill gaps in the housing stock.

Goal 2: Encourage the maintenance and revitalization of existing housing by offering incentives and programs.

Policy 2.1: Identify key areas where investment in the housing stock needs to be incentivized.

Policy 2.2: Identify funding sources to support a home renovation program in a reasonable manner that benefits the business community, property owners, and the county.

Goal 3: Balance short-term rentals and sustainable long-term housing needs of the community.

Policy 3.1: Create a balanced system that allows short-term rentals and preserves neighborhood character while positively supporting access to long-term housing.

Policy 3.2: Enforce licensing policies and standards for short-term rentals to minimize impacts to surrounding neighbors.

Goal 4: Integrate new housing construction with natural resources, recreational facilities, and existing neighborhoods.

Policy 4.1: Plan for new housing areas with existing infrastructure capacity.

Policy 4.2: Prioritize developing in areas served by existing infrastructure or planned expansion areas.

Housing Trends

Public Concern

In Becker County, 56% of survey respondents considered housing one of the county's top two most important issues. The rising cost of housing and the low availability of specific housing types other than single-family homes contribute to the need to address housing as a land-use necessity moving forward. This may require the County and area cities to consider allowing alternative housing options such as accessory dwelling units, mixed-use development, and tiny home development.

In-migration from Urban Areas

With recent trends of residents moving from urban areas into more rural settings, cities in North Central Minnesota are experiencing population growth. As people move to places where they can work remotely while still living near natural amenities, the demand for housing will rise. This phenomenon does not only cause more density in rural areas around lakes and the county's cities and fringes. To accommodate this in-migration, this plan proposes increased housing density in the areas around cities where population centers are established, along with existing infrastructure and services.

Mixed Use Development

Mixed-use development is becoming more common as people want to live in walkable neighborhoods or be close to local stores and restaurants. This plan makes mixed-use development an option by adding an overlay district along highway corridors and key intersections. By allowing small-scale commercial in residential districts and vice versa, the county can increase the tax base, support economic development, and see more housing types. This also provides housing close to goods and services.

Short-Term Rentals

There is a demand for lodging in areas with natural amenities, such as lakes and woodlands, as people seek places close to recreation and tourism. Since the last comprehensive plan update in 2015, short-term rentals have become a big business, and property owners can take advantage of this demand and use online booking platforms. Some property owners use it to provide supplemental income for days they are not using their vacation home or cabin. Other people or companies buy lake homes for the specific purpose of using them as a short-term rental as a business. This does not necessarily directly impact the availability of lower or moderately priced housing; it can affect communities by removing their availability for permanent occupancy and compounding the current shortage of available housing.

Natural Resources

Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Manage natural resources sustainably to balance interests, supporting the restoration of natural habitats with recreational use and economic benefits.

Policy 1.1: Consider establishing a sustainable land management policy standard that respects the economic activity generated by natural resources.

Policy 1.2: Consider-mitigation and restoration when improving existing developed areas where uses impact natural resources.

Policy 1.3: Seek opportunities to develop recreational resources from the natural resources present in the County.

Policy 1.4: Encourage property owners and businesses to employ sustainable approaches and best practices when using natural resources in the county.

Policy 1.5: Coordinate plans, policies, and activities with other agencies, such as watersheds, lake associations, and Becker County Soil and Water on water quality initiatives.

Goal 2: Develop parks, trails, and recreation amenities with an environmentally sensitive approach, coordinating efforts across open spaces, forests, water resources, and farmland.

Policy 2.1: Identify missing strategic trails and recreation area segments in the 2019 Becker County Trails Plan.

Policy 2.2: Create public access to water recreation resources where the economic and environmental impacts are minimized.

Policy 2.4: Prioritize trail connections that increase access to broader regional trail networks such as the Heartland trail system.

Existing Plans

The Master Trail Plan Becker County (2019)

The Master Trail Plan provides a long-term framework for establishing a network of trails that connect Becker County communities, parks, recreation areas, and lakes for various trail users. The Plan aims to support current and future county economic development and growth and improve the quality of life for county residents and was developed with the input of a project advisory committee, public meetings, and an online survey.

The County's vision is to "provide a safe, accessible, and connected trail system that enhances the county's natural and cultural resources, promotes healthy and active lifestyles, and supports economic development and tourism." The Plan identifies the existing and potential trail users, such as walkers, hikers, bikers, equestrians, cross-country skiers, snowmobilers, and ATV riders and analyzes the county's existing trail gaps, needs, and opportunities based on public input and the trail inventory. It also evaluates trail demand and supply, user preferences and satisfaction, and benefits and impacts.

The Master Trail Plan proposes a trail system that covers about 300 miles of trails in the county, with 12 regional trails, 18 county trails, ten local trails, and 14 connector trails. The regional trails are the highest priority trails that connect the county to the surrounding counties and regions, such as the Heartland State Trail, the North Country National Scenic Trail, and the Pelican Rapids to Perham Regional Trail. The county trails are secondary priority trails that connect the county parks, recreation areas, and lakes, such as the Detroit Lakes Loop Trail, the Mountain View Trail, and the Tamarac Trail. The local trails are the tertiary priority trails that connect the communities within the county, such as the Frazee Trail, the Lake Park Trail, and the Audubon Trail. The connector trails are the lowest priority trails that provide short links between the other types of trails, such as the Dunton Locks Connector, the Maplewood Connector, and the Cormorant Connector. The Master Trail Plan also provides guidelines for the trail design, amenities, maintenance, and signage for each type of trail based on the best practices and standards.

The phased approach for the trail implementation includes four phases: short-term (2020-2024), mid-term (2025-2029), long-term (2030-2034), and ongoing (2035 and beyond). The trail prioritization criteria include trail demand, feasibility, connectivity, cost-effectiveness, and partnership potential. The total trail cost estimate is about \$66 million, with \$44 million for trail construction, \$12 million for trail amenities, and \$10 million for trail maintenance. The plan identifies potential funding sources for the trail implementation, such as federal, state, county, local, and private grants and programs, and emphasizes the importance of trail partnerships and coordination among the county, the cities, the townships, the state agencies, the federal agencies, the tribal

Figure 13: The Becker County Master Trail Plan (2019)



governments, the private landowners, the trail organizations, and the trail users. The plan suggests strategies for trail promotion, education, and evaluation, such as developing a trail website, a trail map, a trail brochure, a trail signage system, a trail ambassador program, a trail user survey, and a trail performance measurement system.

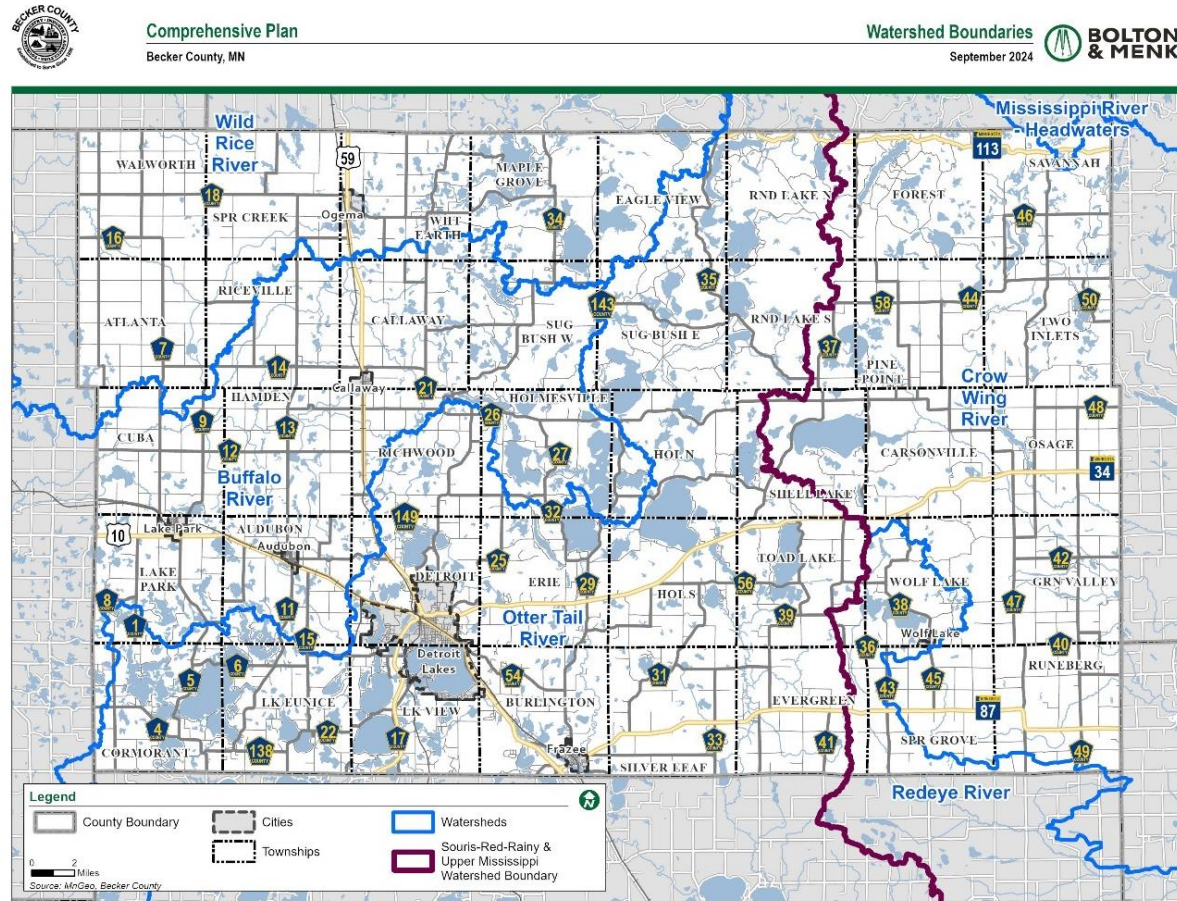
The Master Trail Plan is available on the County's website; search for "Master Trail Plan" at www.co.becker.mn.us

Watersheds

Becker County includes portions of five-watersheds; the western three are part of the Red River Basin and the eastern two are part of the Mississippi River Headwaters Basin.

- Wild Rice – Marsh River
- Buffalo Red
- Otter Tail River
 - Cormorant (active)
 - Pelican River (active)
- Crow Wing River
- Redeye River
- Mississippi River Headwaters

See the following summaries of the plans and respective priorities or goals.



Wild Rice - Marsh River Watershed One Watershed, One Plan

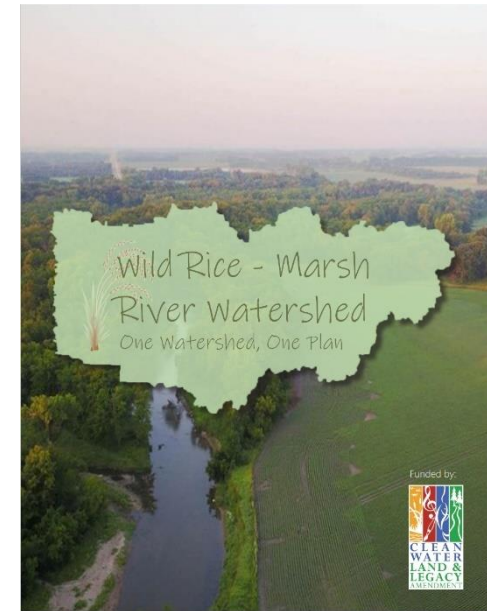
The Wild Rice – Marsh River Watershed One Watershed, One Plan covers the northwest and north center part of the county. It includes the following high priorities that apply to Becker County:

- Flooding and associated damages has economic, environmental, social, and health and safety implications.
- Wind and water erosion of cropland and upland delivers sediment to streams and drainage systems.
- Increased phosphorus loading contributes to elevated concentrations in lakes and streams, causing eutrophication.
- Decreased soil health can impact agricultural productivity and water-holding capacity.
- Altered hydrology associated with a change in the water quantity, timing, and variability of flow in water courses, impacts stream geomorphology and is a stressor for aquatic life.
- Riparian instability impacts stream, riverbank, and drainage system channel integrity.
- Wild Rice needs continued protection for habitat, cultural, economic, and wildlife benefit

Becker County is a partner in the development and implementation of the One Watershed, One Plan which can be found on the Buffalo Red River website at

www.wildricewatershed.org

Figure 14: Wild Rice - Marsh River One Watershed, One Plan Cover



Buffalo – Red River Watershed District

The Buffalo Red River Watershed District's Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan was updated in 2020 and includes six Priority 1 and six Priority 2 goal as outlined below:

Priority 1

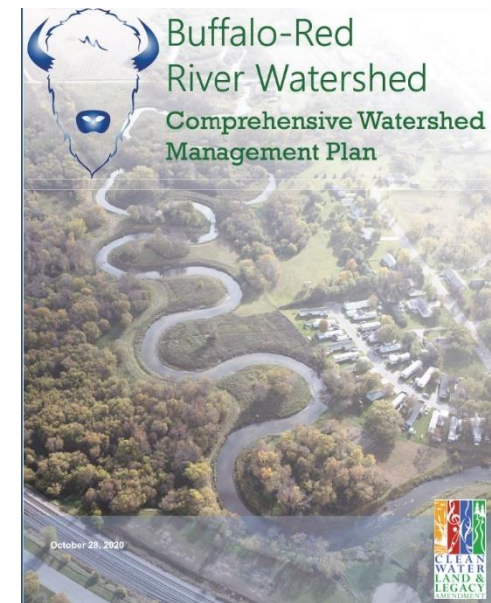
- Sediment - Increased erosion and sedimentation from upland sources in excess of natural rates.
- Altered Hydrology - Altered hydrology associated with a change in the water quantity, timing, and variability of flow in water courses, which impacts stream geomorphology and is a stressor for aquatic life.
- Flooding - Increased surface runoff contributes to flood conditions, which has economic, environmental, social, and health, and safety implications.
- Streambank/Channel - Instability impacting stream, riverbank, and channel integrity.
- Phosphorous - Increased phosphorus loading contributing to elevated concentrations in waterbodies approaching (protection) or exceeding (restoration) water quality standards for aquatic life and aquatic recreation.
- Soil Health - Decreased soil health and its impact on agricultural productivity, water quality and water holding capacity.

Priority 2

- Wetlands – Reduced integrity, health, and functionality of high-value wetlands.
- Groundwater / Source Water Protection – The need to prioritize protection of surface water and groundwater drinking water supplies.
- Dissolved Oxygen – Low dissolved oxygen conditions in streams not attributable to natural conditions.
- Bacteria – Increased bacteria (E.coli) loading contributing to elevated concentrations in waterbodies approaching (protection) or exceeding (restoration) water quality standards for aquatic recreation.
- Ditch Banks/Outlets – Instability impacting public drainage system performance.
- Lake Shoreland- Instability impacting lake shore integrity.

Becker County is a partner in the development and implementation of this plan which can be found on the Buffalo Red River website at www.brrwd.org

Figure 15: Buffalo River -Watershed District Plan (2020) Cover



Otter Tail River – One Watershed, One Plan (2022)

The Otter Tail River One Watershed, One Plan focuses on lakes, streams, groundwater, and habitat and the following issues;

1. Nutrient loading causes algal blooms and eutrophication.
2. Wind and water erosion impacting water clarity, dissolved oxygen levels, and aquatic habitat.
3. Protection for outstanding resources and sensitive species to maintain water and habitat quality.
4. Untreated stormwater, including chloride, impacting water quality.
5. Groundwater quality vulnerability to contamination.
6. Soil health for agricultural productivity and climate change resilience.
7. Land use changes, fragmentation, and loss of forests and grasslands impact land resilience, habitat, and surface and groundwater quality.
8. Aquatic Invasive Species impact the aquatic ecosystem, water quality, recreation, and economic development.
9. Barriers to fish movement affecting fish communities and stream geomorphology.
10. Altered hydrology increases the flow of water, streambank erosion, and impacting aquatic life.
11. Unstable stream channels contribute to sediment loading and reduced habitat quality.
12. High E. coli levels make water bodies unsafe for recreation.
13. Destruction of in-lake and riparian habitats affects water quality, lake health, and fish communities.
14. Groundwater sustainability vulnerability to overuse and loss of recharge.
15. Chloride
16. Climate variability

Figure 16: Otter Tail River - One Watershed One Plan (2022) Cover



The county supports the implementation of the Otter Tail River One Watershed, One Plan, which can be found on the East Otter Tail Soil and Conservation District website at www.eotswcd.org

2019 Mississippi Headwaters Board – Comprehensive Management Plan

The Mississippi Headwaters Board, initially formed in 1981, acts as a protective entity for the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River, was formed in 1981. It was established by statute to protect the area from harmful development and pollution and ensure its availability for future generations' recreation and survival. The plan goals are as follows:

- Organize agencies and organizations to promote the protection of the Mississippi River regarding water monitoring and scientific data accumulation and modeling.
- To preserve and protect the habitat and water quality of the Mississippi River and watersheds that drain into it by coordinating partnerships that meet the goals of the MHB.
- Create partnerships and strategies with organizations to develop, protect, promote, store, display, and increase awareness about the Mississippi River's valuable history and cultural areas.
- Facilitate and maintain new and existing partnerships with stakeholders to promote, develop, and protect the recreational opportunities that complement the Mississippi River.



A copy of the Mississippi Headwaters Board's 2019 Comprehensive Management Plan is available at the board's website: www.mississippiheadwaters.org.

Crow Wing River – One Watershed, One Plan (In Development)

The Crow Wing Watershed is currently being drafted and can be found at this address upon its completion www.cswcd.org/crowwingriver.

Redeye River Watershed– One Watershed, One Plan (2021)

The Redeye River Watershed consists of three main rivers: the Redeye, Leaf, and Wing and is a mosaic of pastures, cultivated lands, and forests. The Redeye River - One Watershed, One Plan includes the following Tier 1 Goals:

- Land Management: Promote and increase known land management, including soil health practices, sustainable grazing practices and forest management by 20% in first priority acres identified per planning region.
- Nitrogen Management: Implement nutrient management practices on 12% of first priority acres with high nitrogen infiltration risk to maintain nitrates in public and private wells below the state standard of 10 mg/L.
- Drinking Water Protection: Protect drinking water by sealing 30 unused wells, protecting DWSMAs, and addressing emerging contaminants.
- Bacteria Reduction: Develop and implement 20 bacteria management projects (i.e., manure management, fencing, SSTS compliance) to address sources of bacteria and make progress towards delisting impairments.
- Phosphorus Reduction Reduce phosphorus loading to lakes with declining water quality trends by 5% through implementing best management practices within the lakeshed.

The county supports the implementation of the Redeye River One Watershed, One Plan, which can be found on the East Otter Tail Soil and Conservation District website at www.eotswcd.org

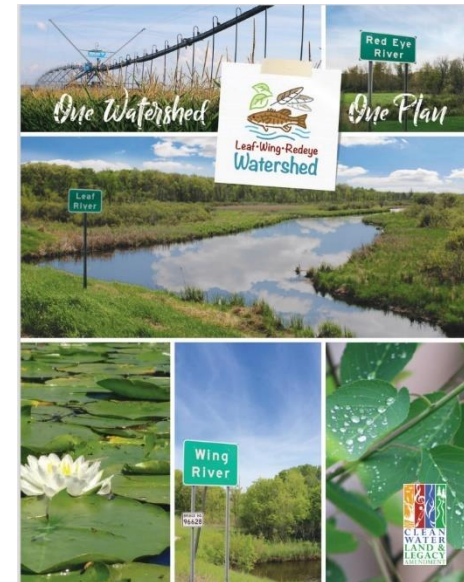
Existing Conditions

Becker County is characterized by three primary topographic forms: the moraine area across the central portion, the glacial outwash in the southern and eastern portions, and the glacial till plain in the northwest and far southeastern corner.

The Natural Resources Management Department in Becker County oversees nearly 75,000 acres of tax-forfeited lands with the aim of responsible management for environmental, social, and economic benefits. The county seeks sustainability through comprehensive forest and land management and recreation programs. Forests in Becker County are strategically managed to produce timber and other essential products supporting Minnesota's forest industries. Various activities, such as pre-commercial thinning and selective harvests, contribute to long-term goals, accessible through the Forest Management page. Also, properly managing forests for timber reduces the risk of wildfires and diseases detrimental to the ecosystem.

The department also manages tax-forfeited lands by designating some for "conservation" and retaining them for environmental and recreational purposes. Minnesota statutes regulate the management of non-conservation lands. Becker County, proud of its status as a recreational destination, manages public lands and waters, including parks, water accesses, beaches, and trails, attracting visitors for various activities.

Figure 17: Redeye River - One Watershed One Plan Cover



With over 360,000 acres of total forestland, 75,000 acres of which are county-managed, proper forest management is crucial for long-term sustainability, considering resource needs, public priorities, site capabilities, regulations, and economics. The forests provide income for local loggers, mill operators, and raw materials for growing communities. In addition to economic benefits, these lands offer diverse public recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and tourism resources.

Becker County aligns its goals with landscape objectives outlined in a North Central Regional Landscape Committee report, aiming for continued forest sustainability and diversity. Based on long-term goals, sustainable harvest calculations guide harvest levels, including full-harvest, partial harvest, and thinning activities. The Annual Harvest Plan provides stand-specific information for planned harvest activities each year, subject to changes due to various factors.

The county enforces a Parks and Recreation Ordinance while offering diverse recreational opportunities such as ATVs, cycling, bird watching, camping, canoeing, kayaking, skiing, hiking, hunting, and public water access. Becker County's holistic approach to natural resource management reflects a commitment to responsible stewardship, balancing environmental conservation, economic growth, and recreational enjoyment.

One resource that Becker County has is aggregate, which is used within the county and distributed to nearby counties for road maintenance and construction projects. Several environmental issues are associated with aggregate mining, primarily due to historic mining procedures and inappropriate buffering from residential and some commercial land uses.

Trends

Natural resources were one of the top three priorities of respondents to the survey. Natural resources include forests, agricultural lands, aggregate, surface water, groundwater, and shoreland.

Public Opinion on Environmental Impacts:

In Becker County, 57% of the survey respondents agreed that the County should engage in mitigation strategies and be more aware of environmental impacts, and 66%—70% support protecting lakes, streams, and forests.

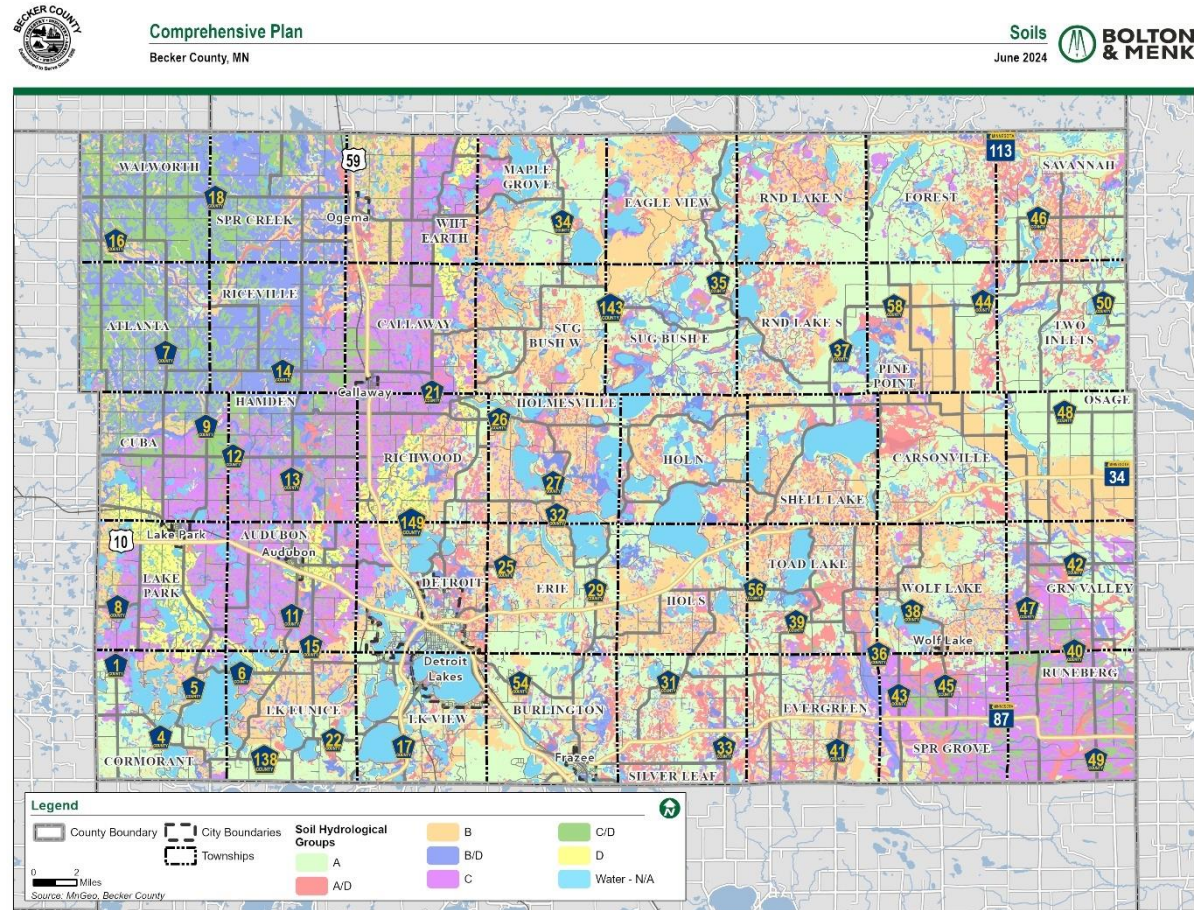
Agricultural Land Protections

Becker County has over 360,000 acres of forestland, much of it in public control, but including substantial private woodlands as well. Nearly 80% of the people in Becker County believe in protecting quality agricultural land, which may conflict with the public's love of nature. Agricultural activities can result in environmental impacts. Balancing these needs to promote natural resources stewardship and promote the county's agricultural heritage and legacy may become difficult.

Soils

Part of what has made Becker County a haven for agriculture is its soil. The following are descriptions of the four main soil classes:

- Group A. Soils with a high infiltration rate (low runoff potential) when thoroughly wet. These soils consist mainly of deep, well-drained, excessively drained, or gravelly sands. They also have a high rate of water transmission.
- Group B. Soils have a moderate infiltration rate when thoroughly wet. These consist chiefly of moderately deep or deep, moderately well-drained, or well-drained soils with moderately fine to coarse texture. These soils have a moderate rate of water transmission.
- Group C. Soils have a slow infiltration rate when thoroughly wet. These consist chiefly of soils with a layer that impedes the downward movement of water or soils of moderately fine or fine texture. These soils have a slow rate of water transmission.
- Group D. Soils have a very slow infiltration rate (high runoff potential) when thoroughly wet. These consist chiefly of clays with a high shrink-swell potential, soils with a high water table, soils with a claypan or clay layer at or near the surface, and soils that are shallow over nearly impervious material. These soils have a very slow rate of water transmission.



Surface Water and Shoreland

The most popular real estate in the county is the lakeshore property, which allows the owner access to the lake and its vistas. However, the development and redevelopment of these parcels can cause environmental impacts, which contribute to the overall health of the watershed systems within Becker County. With water being as much a recreational resource as a natural resource, the county's residents wish to see a continued commitment to protecting their water bodies.

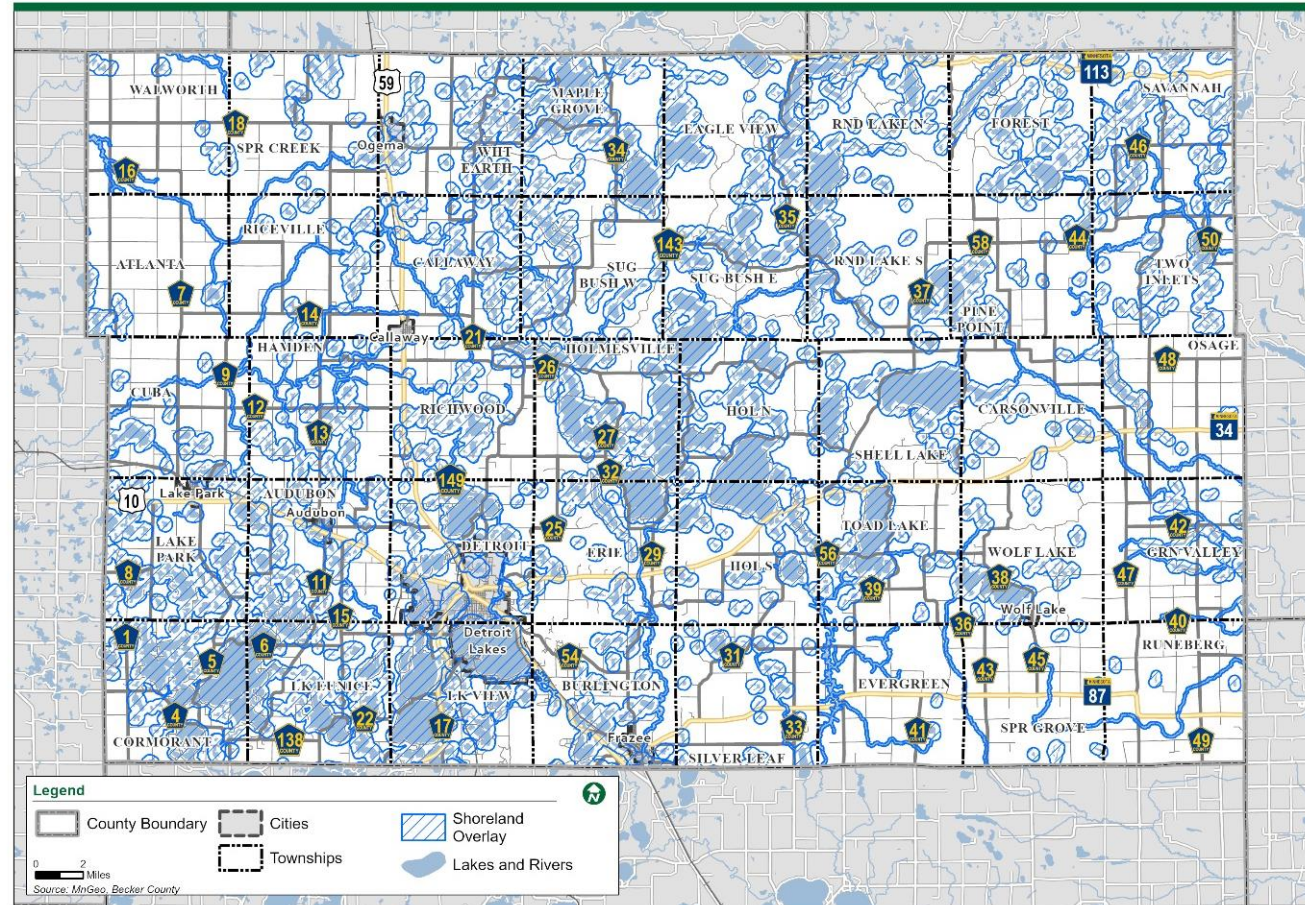


Comprehensive Plan

Becker County, MN

Shoreland Map

June 2024



Transportation

Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Maintain and invest in the road and freight networks in alignment with local and state design, safety, traffic demands, community goals, and government budgets.

Policy 1.1: Evaluate and prioritize existing road networks for alignment with safety, traffic flow, and design standards.

Policy 1.2: Strategically invest in new infrastructure to facilitate community development goals as county board budget allocations allow.

Policy 1.3: Maintain existing county roads and transportation infrastructure based on capital improvement plans, prioritizing improvements based on development needs and growth projections.

Policy 1.4: Capitalize on the location of a critical freight line in the county as an economic development and transportation tool.

Goal 2: Develop and maintain a trail system throughout the County for transportation and recreational purposes based on the county board's established budget priorities.

Policy 2.1: Evaluate the existing trail system for connection opportunities that serve strategic recreational and transportation needs in line with the implementation plan of the 2019 Becker County Master Trail Plan.

Policy 2.2: Allocate resources towards developing trail systems in the areas where collaborative partnerships are most feasible and align with regional goals.

Policy 2.3: Establish a maintenance plan for the trail systems that prioritize those trails that serve multiple uses and existing high-traffic areas.

Goal 3: Consider providing and locating public transit systems that facilitate access to essential services, jobs, and community institutions while connecting with regional transit systems.

Policy 3.1: Evaluate public transportation needs throughout the county and where transit system improvements are most feasible and practical.

Policy 3.2: At strategic contact points, connect to critical regional transit systems like Lakes Transit and Amtrack.

Goal 4: Value of the airport and its role in supporting economic development and recreation.

Policy 4.1: Plan for complimentary land uses adjacent to the airport that take advantage of air travel and restrict land uses that conflict with the use and safety zone requirements.

Existing Conditions

The regional roads that converge in Detroit Lakes are US Highway (US) 59, US 10, and Minnesota Highway (MN) 34. Design standards are provided by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and MNDOT.

Road Network

The transportation network in Becker County comprises a network of arterials, collectors, and local roads owned and maintained by the state, county, or local municipalities. Understanding roadways, capacities, and use in the greater system allows for land use planning. The map below is a depiction of the roads under Becker County's jurisdiction:

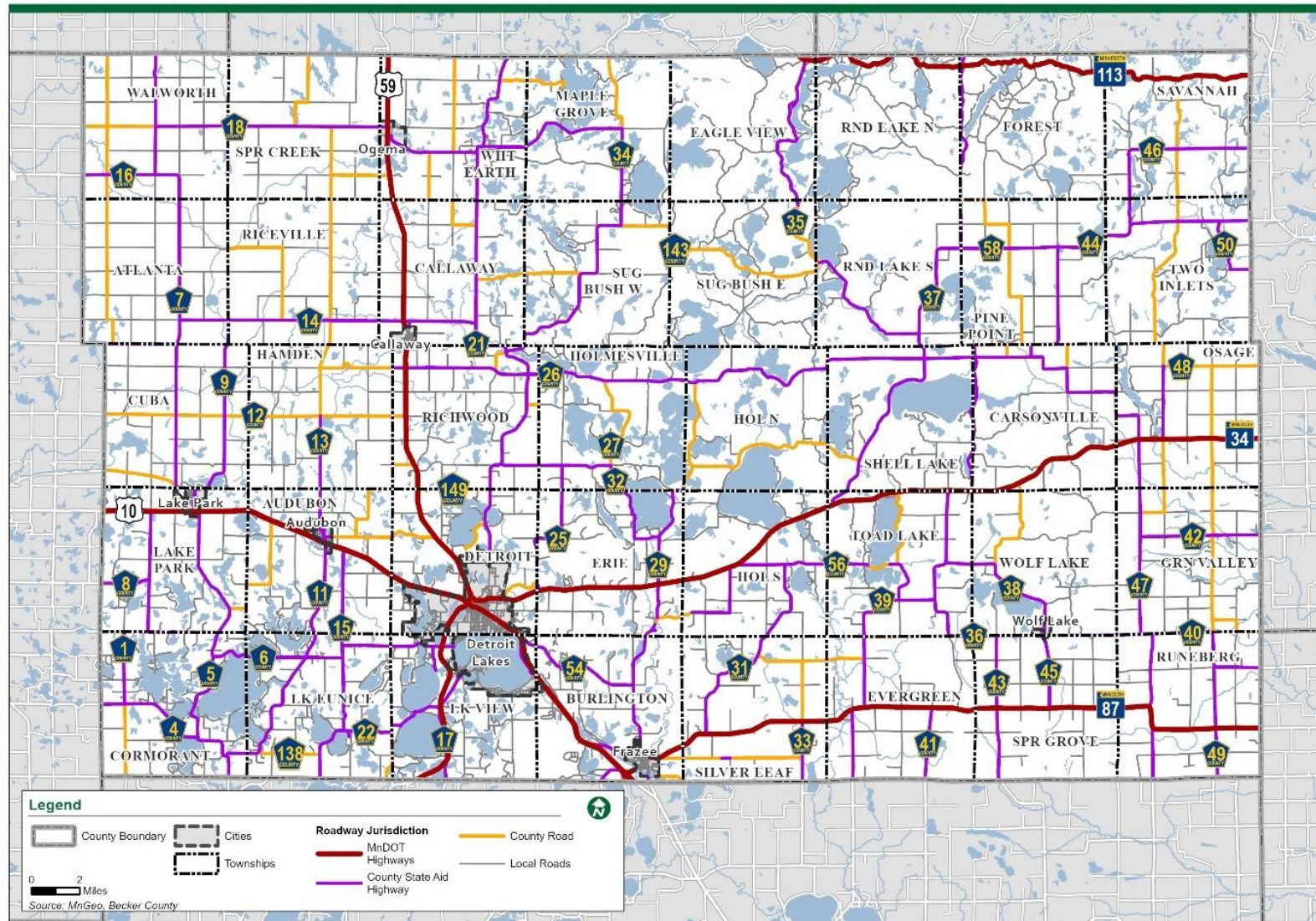


Comprehensive Plan

Becker County, MN

Road Jurisdiction

June 2024



Federal Functional Class Definitions

The intersection of Minnesota Highway 10 (MN 10), Minnesota Highway 59 (MN 59), and Minnesota Highway 34 (MN-34) in Detroit Lakes functions as the point at which three principal arterials meet. Most regional traffic is funneled to this point, making it a key feature of the local transportation network.

- **Principal Arterial:** These major roads provide mobility across regional communities. They typically have multiple lanes, controlled intersections, and higher speed limits. They are designed to handle high volumes of traffic and facilitate long-distance travel such as MN-10, MN-59, CH-34
- **Minor Arterial:** These roads link cities and towns within the regional community, often linking to principal arterials.
- **Major Collector:** These roads serve a critical role by gathering traffic from local roads and funneling it to the arterial network; in rural areas, they are primarily used for intra-county travel. These roads vary in size and capacity depending on their location and function. They generally connect smaller towns and rural areas and provide access to local amenities such as County Roads 26, 36, and 37.
- **Minor Collector:** These roads function like their major counterparts but usually for shorter distance travel with more access points and lower speeds, such as County Roads 46 and 48.
- **Local Roads:** All other remaining roads within the transportation network. Local roads are designed to provide access to residential areas, schools, parks, and local businesses. They usually have lower traffic volumes, speed limits, and fewer lanes, and they prioritize safety and convenience for residents.

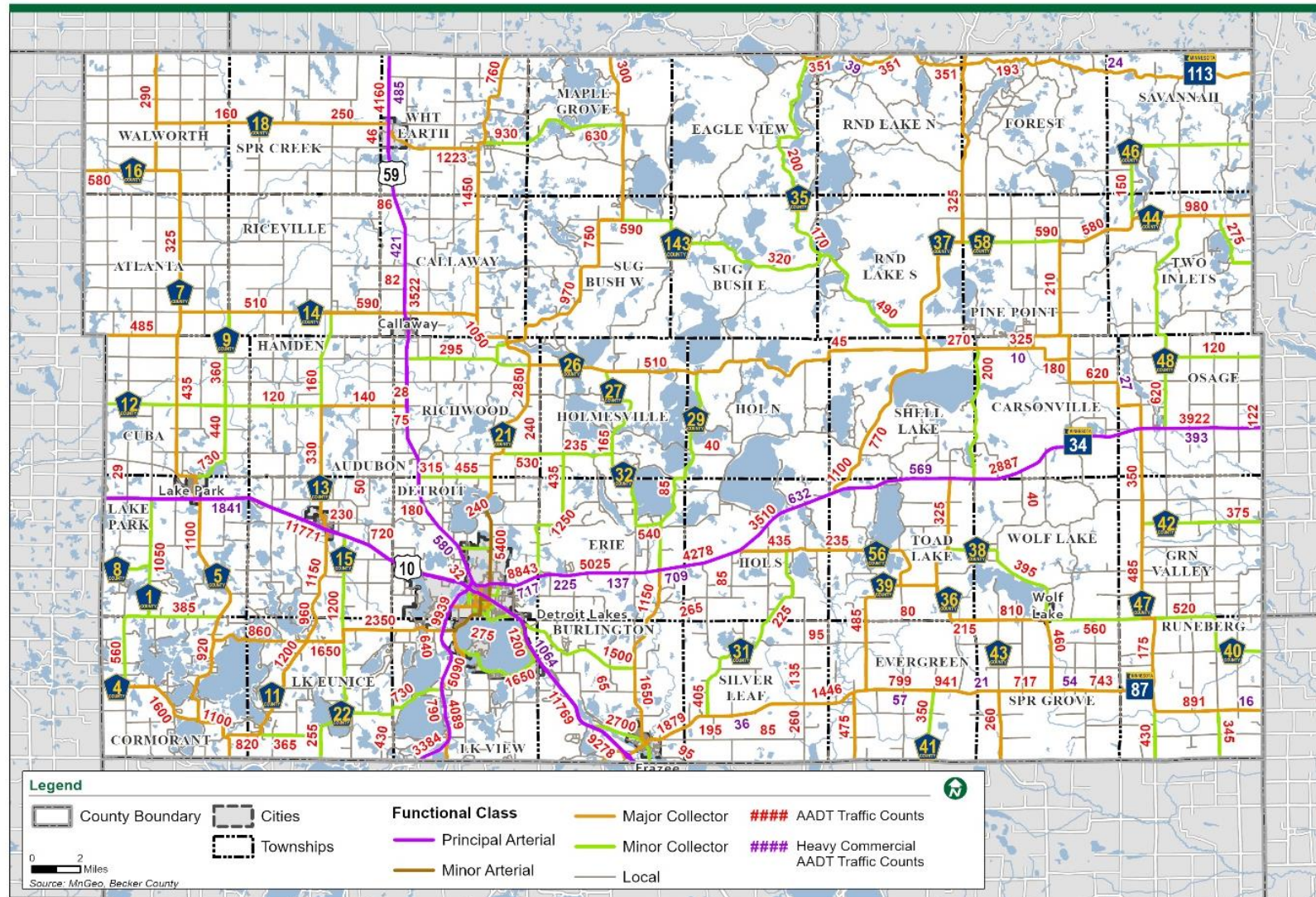


Comprehensive Plan

Becker County, MN

Functional Classification and Traffic Counts

June 2024



Traffic Safety

Safety is an integral component of planning for transportation improvements and expansions. The crash heatmap shows where crashes occurred between 2019 and 2023. This map shows that many traffic accidents happen where traffic volumes are highest near cities and along Arterial or Collector roadways such as Highways 34 and 10 and County Roads 10 and 17.

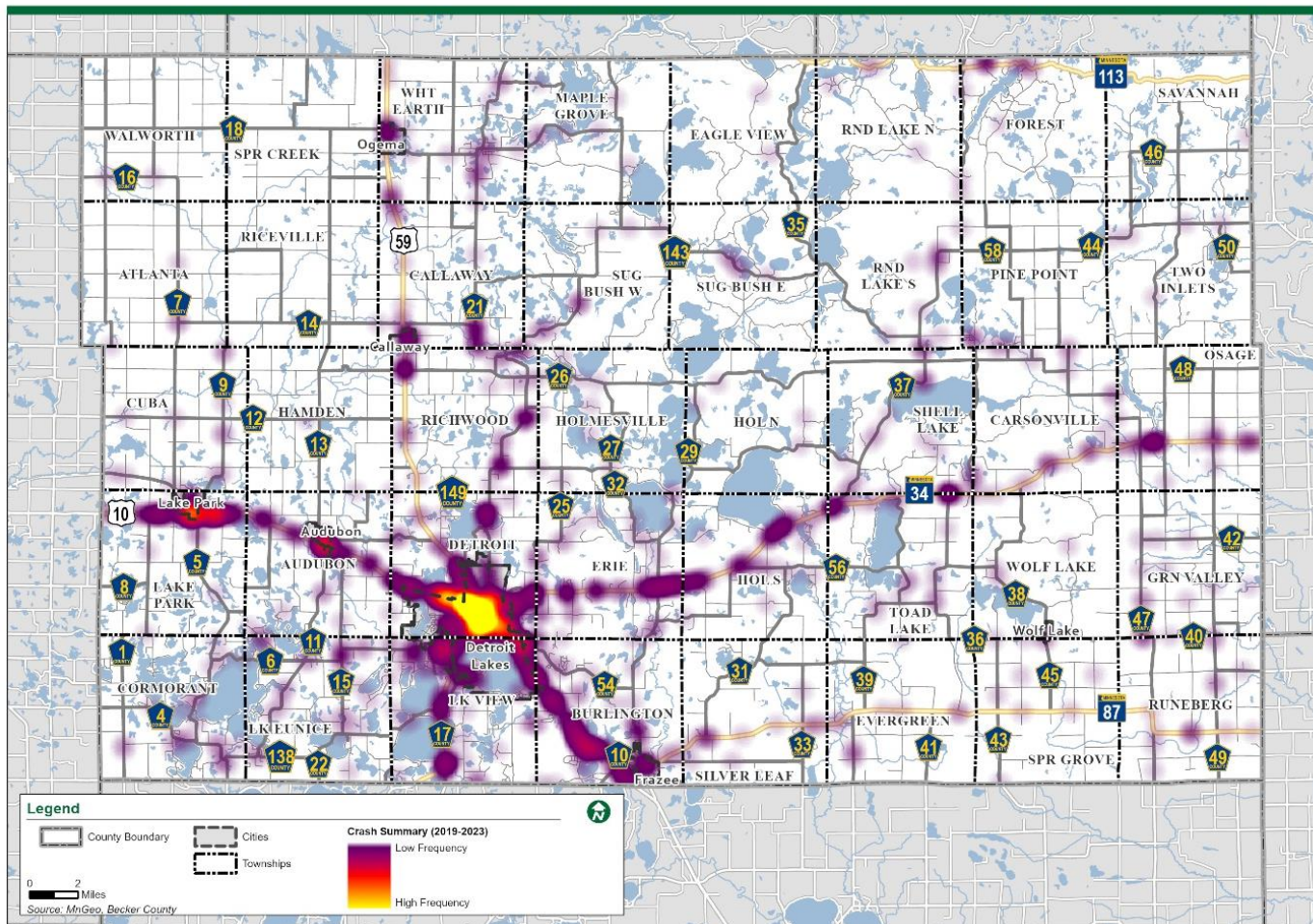


Comprehensive Plan

Becker County, MN

Crash Heatmap

June 2024



Transit

Becker County Transit owns and operates a public transit system in the county. The system provides a dial-a-ride service. More information is available on the website www.co.becker.mn.us; search for the keyword transit. The White Earth Reservation also provides a Transit System with stops in Becker County jurisdiction that are available for public use.

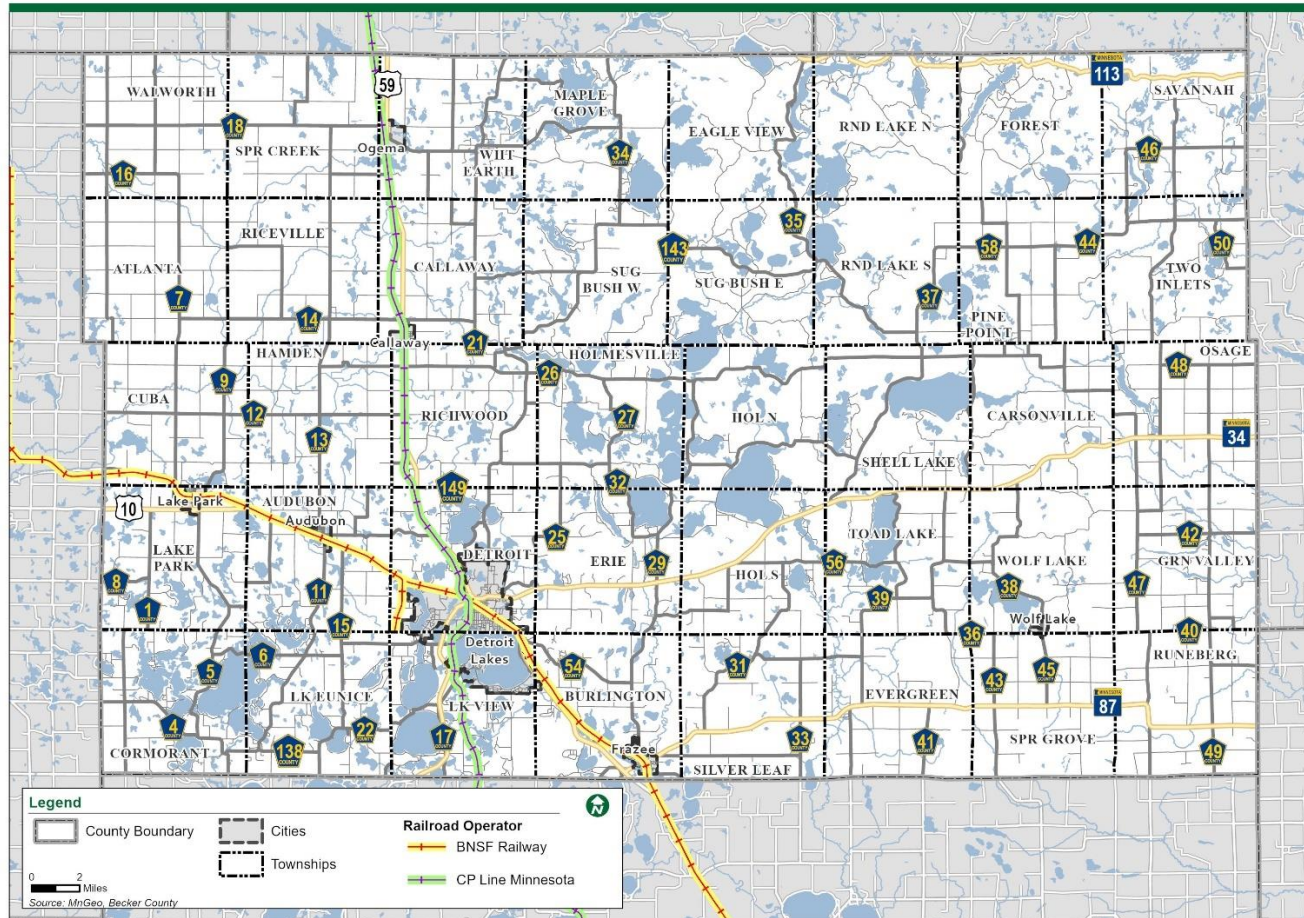
Trails

Trails can serve the dual function of transportation networks and recreational opportunities. In 2019, the County Adopted the Master Trail Plan, which is available on the website; search for “Master Trail Plan” at www.co.becker.mn.us

The existing trail system in Becker County primarily consists of over a thousand miles of snowmobile trails. In addition, there are about 70 miles of walking trails with numerous proposed extensions.

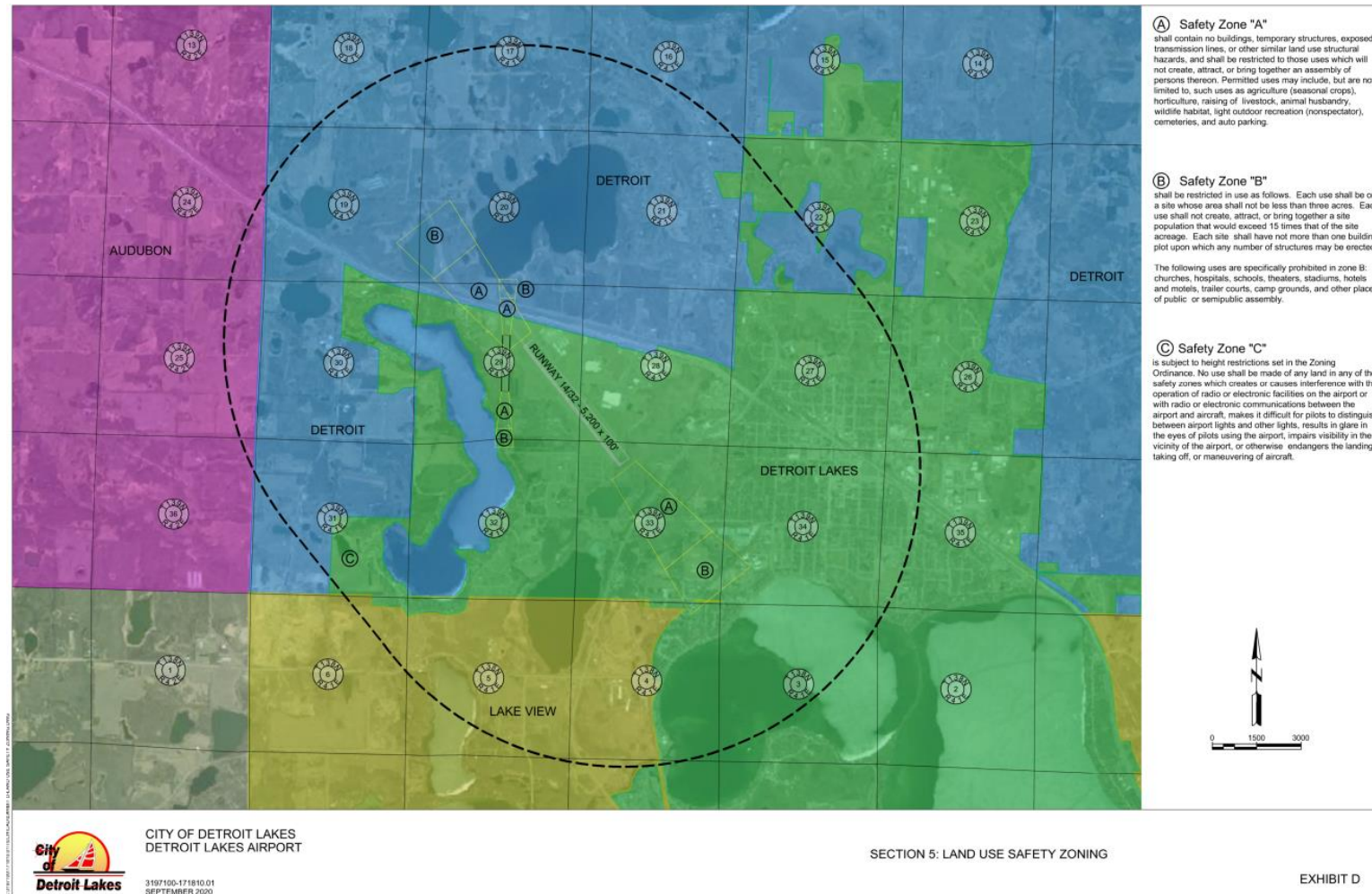
Rail

The railroad system in Becker County consists of two major railroad corridors. Burlington Northern and Santa Fe (BNSF) provide east/west rail service and Canadian Pacific (CP) provides north/south service. Amtrak maintains a station in Becker County at Detroit Lakes, and this stop lies along their Empire Builder line from Chicago to Seattle.



Detroit Lakes – Becker County Airport

The Detroit Lakes – Becker County Airport is the only publicly owned airport in Becker County under shared municipal and county jurisdiction. While it is not a passenger service airport, the facility handles commercial service with its current infrastructure. The following map shows the airport's location, just west of downtown Detroit Lakes, along with the Safety Zones and restrictions on land uses surrounding the airport. More information is available on the City of Detroit Lakes website, www.cityofdetroitlakes.com,



Transportation Trends

Public Satisfaction with Maintenance and Network

Most of the public believes that the roads in Becker County are in good or excellent condition and do not see a need to expand the current roadway network. However, increasing development in residential and commercial uses may increase the traffic and loads utilizing this infrastructure, changing the public's perception of the County and its efforts.

Increasing Prominence of Other Transportation Modes

Becker County hosts an Amtrak station and an airport that is growing in air traffic volume. If the airport begins to receive commercial services from a hub such as Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport, additional transportation modes will be necessary for land use in the county, which could allow for more significant tourism traffic. The Amtrak line, which connects the county to Fargo, the Twin Cities, and St. Cloud, may also increase the number of people flowing into and out of the county through this entry point.

Residential Development Pressuring Road Infrastructural Changes

As residential development extends to previously undeveloped and less intensely developed areas of the county, the public's desire for infrastructural improvements on the roadways increases. The chip-and-seal or gravel roads, which are characteristic of the locality's character, are not optimal for areas with low density, as the cost per capita rises due to the more intensive maintenance and relatively lower population densities of users.

Transportation Improvements

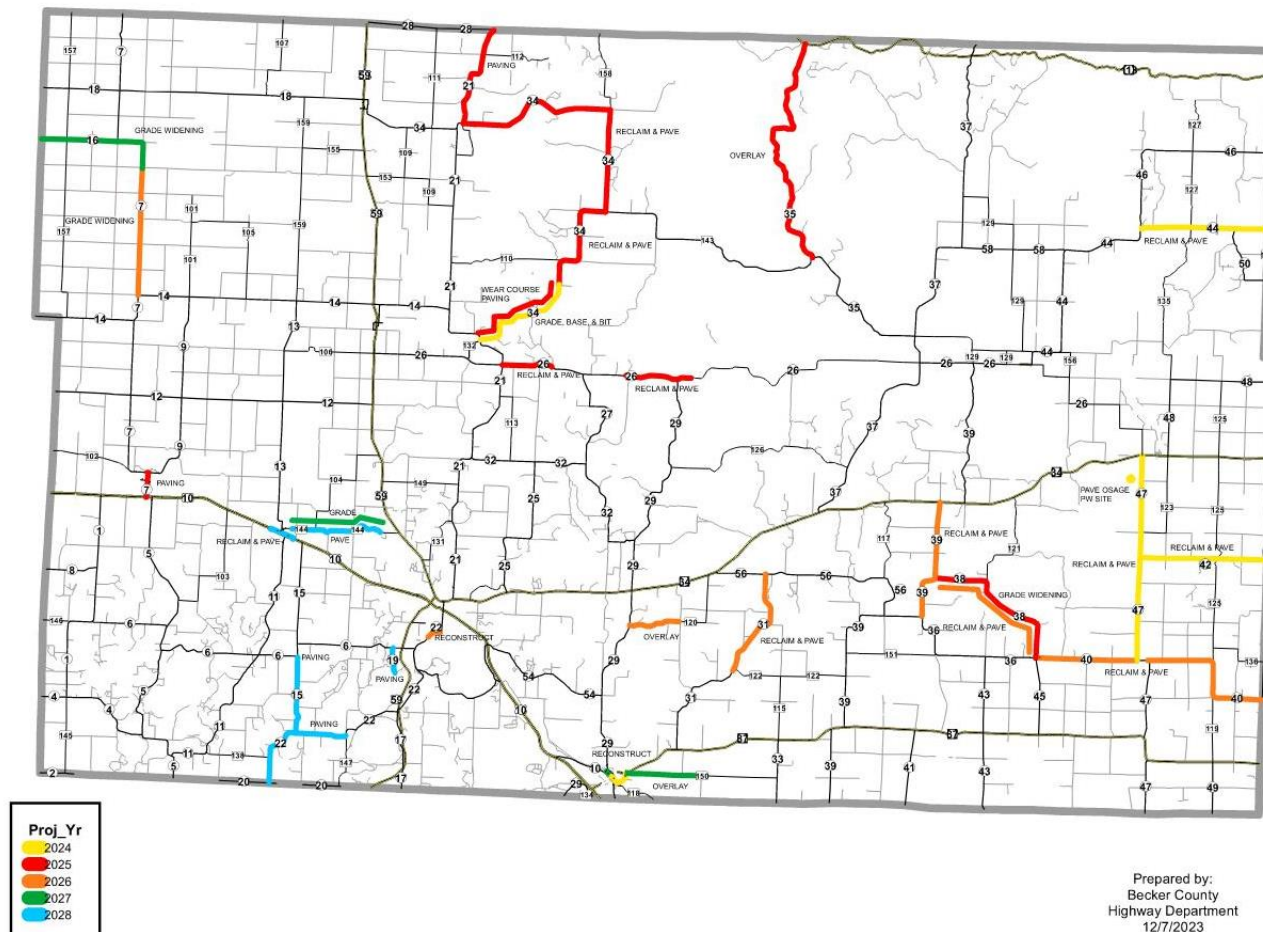
The Becker County Highway Department is dedicated to ensuring the safety of residents and visitors by maintaining the highest standards in the county's highway system. The department's mission revolves around providing efficient and timely maintenance services while implementing cost-effective construction improvements. Several highway construction projects were completed in 2023 in line with this mission. Recent projects included:

- West Lake Drive - Phase 1 from Legion Road to County Hwy 6 and Phase 2 from County Hwy 6 to the Pelican River
- County Highway 21 underwent improvements from State Highway 34 to County Highway 149
- County Highway 37 saw enhancements from State Highway 34 to Shell Lake Public Access.
- Reconstruction of Highland Drive.

These accomplishments highlight the department's commitment to optimizing the county's highway infrastructure, ensuring its efficiency and safety for those traveling through Becker County. The department remains dedicated to providing a safe, well-maintained highway system for the community's benefit.

The 2024 CIP map is shown below, and more information is available on the county website at www.co.becker.mn.us.

2024 BECKER COUNTY HIGHWAY FIVE YEAR PLAN



Infrastructure and Public Services

Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Encourage efficient and phased expansion and maintenance of infrastructure and services systems.

Policy 1.1: Work with local jurisdictions to expand infrastructure maintenance based on Land Use Plan use and development densities.

Policy 1.2: Develop CIPs (capital improvement plans) aligned with the Land Use Plan and explore the Paycheck Protection Program as a mechanism for efficient project funding and execution.

Goal 2: Identify infrastructure capacities and coordinate with adjacent municipalities to plan for urban growth areas.

Policy 2.1: Foster inter-governmental collaboration to coordinate growth where infrastructure capacities exist.

Policy 2.2: Plan infrastructure expansion with adjacent jurisdiction for increased regional benefits and encourage orderly annexation agreements and growth plans.

Goal 3: Embrace infrastructure efficiencies and innovation that accommodate emerging technologies and build resilience.

Policy 3.1: Allow cutting-edge solutions that facilitate the integration of solar, wind, or other sustainable energy sources into the infrastructure network.

Policy 3.2: Enhance telecommunication access by developing high-speed and reliable networks and seek funding sources to support extension in underserved areas.

Goal 4: Encourage community water, stormwater, and septic systems for cluster and lakeshore development.

Policy 4.1: Encourage community water, wastewater, and stormwater systems in cluster and lakeshore development.

Policy 4.2: Promote efficient, compliant, and innovative water management.

Policy 4.3: Enforce regulations on all septic systems, especially in lakeshore development, to uphold water quality standards and ensure responsible waste management practices.

Goal 5: Use solid waste management methods that promote recycling and innovative reuse with minimal use of landfills.

Policy 5.1: Create educational programs and incentives for businesses to adopt sustainable practices.

Policy 5.2: Set targets to minimize landfill usage, promoting the development and adoption of technologies that prioritize waste reduction, recycling, and repurposing.

Existing Conditions

Becker County's impressive geographic size, current population, and anticipated residential growth drive the demand for upgraded infrastructure and services. The county's commitment to economic development further amplifies the need for enhanced capacity to meet the evolving needs of its residents. As Becker County continues to flourish, its facilities must be primed to cater to this growth, ensuring seamless service delivery with unwavering county oversight and support.

The County fully understands that achieving its objectives hinges on seamless coordination and collaboration with various government levels. This partnership is pivotal to providing top-notch public infrastructure and services, charting the course for growth, aligning land use goals, and safeguarding natural resources. By proactively preparing for development, the county can foster efficiencies that reduce costs and enhance the delivery of public services, especially in areas expecting dense growth and development. The future looks bright for Becker County, with ample opportunities for progress and prosperity!

Municipal Services

While a County does not directly provide utilities, it is the host, regulator, and stakeholder for many agencies and businesses operating within its jurisdiction. Utilities and facilities such as public water supply and wastewater systems are the foundational services cities provide to ensure health, safety, and welfare and support the growth of their community. Below is a chart outlining utility services provided by seven cities in Becker County.

Table 5: Becker County Municipal Services Table

Municipality	Water	Sewer	Storm Sewer	Electricity
Audubon	X	X		
Callaway	X	X	X	
Detroit Lakes	X	X	X	X
Frazee	X	X	X	
Lake Park	X	X	X	
Ogema				
Wolf Lake				

Solid Waste

The Environmental Services Department in Becker County provides residents with cost-effective and environmentally responsible solid waste management. Adhering to guidelines set by the EPA and MPCA, the department, led by an appointed director, comprises ten staff members with diverse training and responsibilities. All staff members are certified landfill operators trained in household hazardous waste management.

The department's budget operates as a special revenue fund, with a portion derived from taxes specifically allocated for Corrective Actions and Remediation Measures at the closed MSW Landfill. Additional revenue sources include volume-based tipping fees at the Transfer Station, a SCORE Grant for recycling from the State of Minnesota, and a Household Hazardous Waste Grant.

Revenue covers transportation and disposal of solid wastes, education programs on recycling and source reduction, collection and transportation of recyclables, management of problem materials (tires, appliances), handling and disposal of household hazardous wastes, and corrective actions on tax-forfeited properties.

The department manages critical facilities, including the Becker County Transfer Station and Demolition Landfill, the countywide Recycling Program, and the Household Hazardous Waste Facility in Detroit Lakes. Additionally, it oversees Corrective Actions and Remediation Measures at the closed Mixed Solid Waste Landfill and administers the Solid Waste Special Assessment on property tax statements.

The department collects waste pesticides and containers in collaboration with the county extension service. Furthermore, in partnership with Becker County's Natural Resources Management department, it coordinates the cleanup of leaking underground storage tanks and tax-forfeited lands. A notable initiative is managing the VSQG program, which addresses hazardous business waste upon request. The department's comprehensive approach ensures effective waste management while prioritizing environmental sustainability and regulatory compliance.

Broadband

Becker County is committed to achieving full broadband access. As of 2024, all of Becker County is served by broadband speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps, which is sufficient for most residential uses.

As shown in the second map below, over 85% of the area is served at speeds sufficient for business uses at 250/25 Mbps. More information is available on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) website at www.broadbandmap.fcc.gov.

Table 6: Broadband map of 110/20 mbps Coverage in Becker County

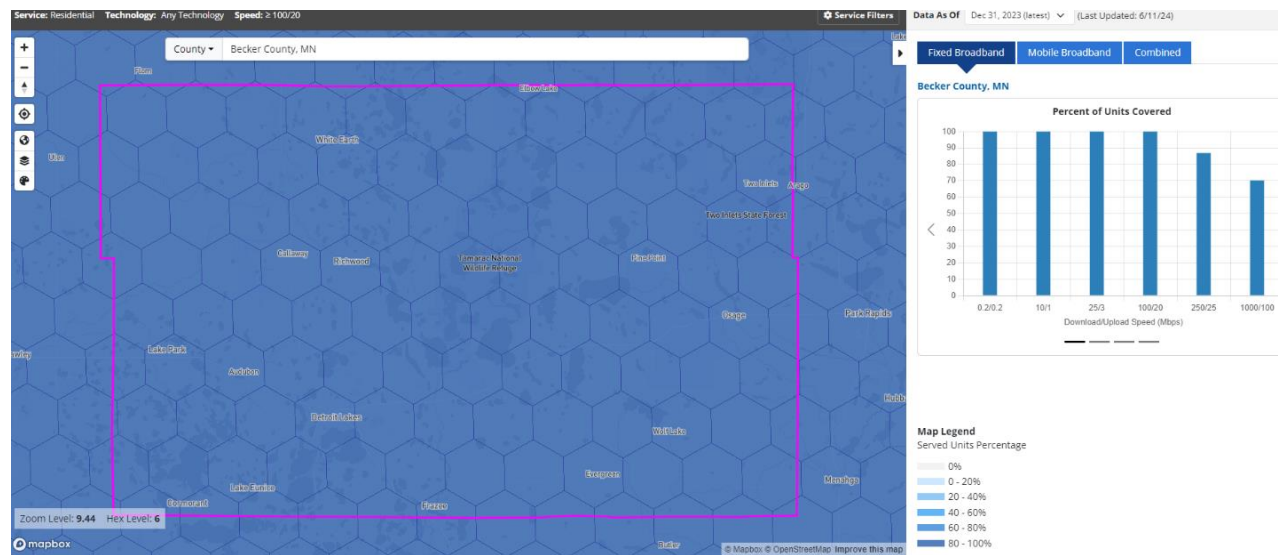
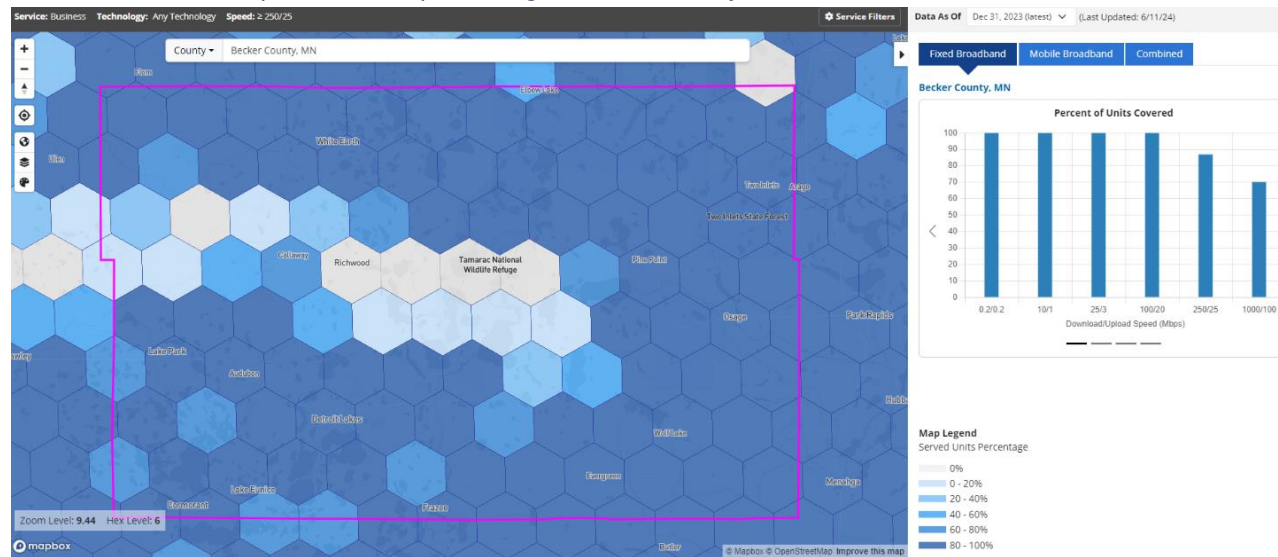


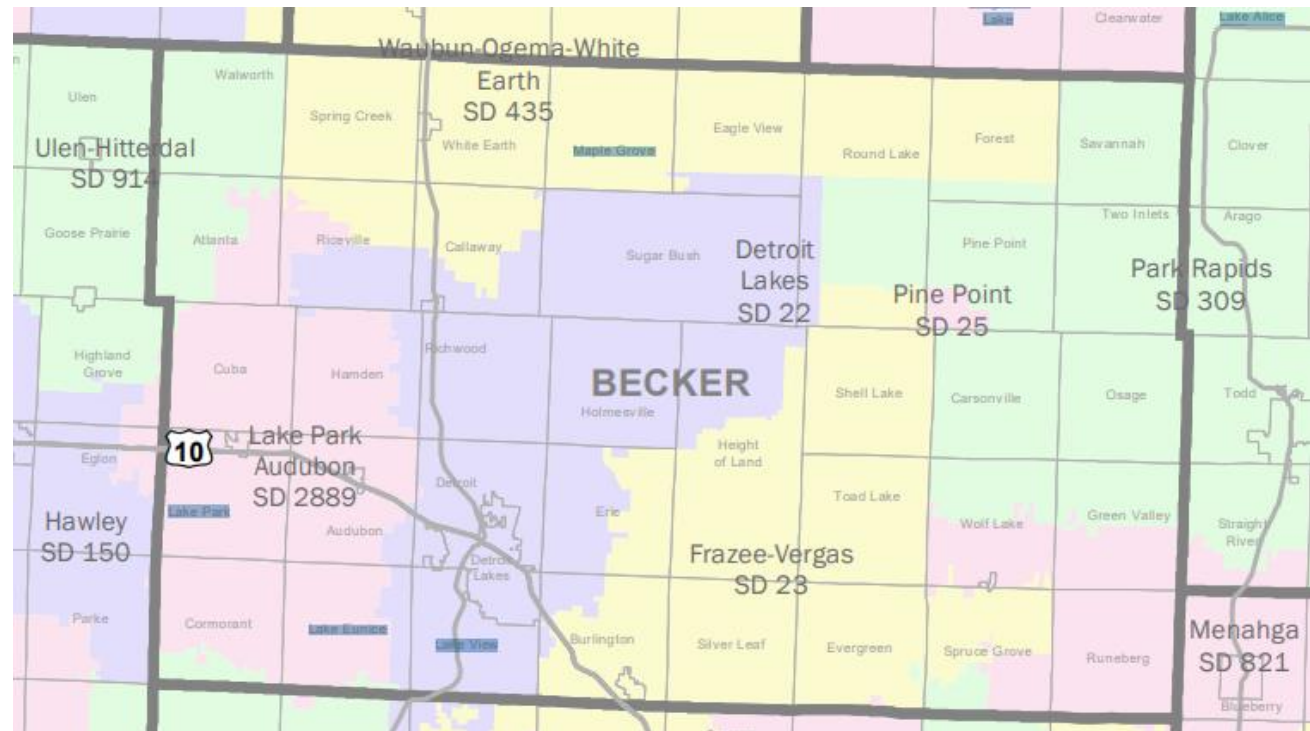
Table 7: Broadband map of 250/25 mbps coverage in Becker County



Education

Eight independent school districts serve Becker County; one Pine Point is entirely within the county, although Detroit Lakes is the next closest to being entirely within the County. In addition to the K-12 Education System, the county is home to the Minnesota State Community and Technical College in Detroit Lakes, with 12 programs.

- ISD 22 – Detroit Lakes
- ISD 2889 – Lake Park/ Audubon
- ISD 914 – Ulen / Hitterdal
- ISD 435 – Waubun Ogema-White Earth
- ISD 23 – Frazee / Vergas
- ISD 309 – Park Rapids
- ISD 25 – Pine Point
- ISD 821- Menahga
- ISD 548 - Pelican Rapids



Social Services

Becker County Human Services is committed to promoting safety, health, and self-sufficiency by providing comprehensive and fiscally responsible services to individuals and families. The agency, led by an appointed Human Services Director, offers two primary types of services to the county's residents.

The first category is financial support, which fosters county residents' self-sufficiency through various administered programs and services. Additionally, the agency facilitates referrals to community resources, enhancing the overall support network for individuals and families.

The second category is Social Services, which operates on a sliding fee schedule. This includes assistance for low-income families in need of daycare, support for families with children under 18 facing child dependency, neglect, or abuse, as well as pregnant adolescents and adolescent parents under 18 and their children. The agency also provides aid to adults needing protection and vulnerable individuals, including those aged 60 and over experiencing difficulties living independently. Furthermore, services extend to individuals facing drug dependency and intoxication issues, those at risk of harm to themselves or others due to substance ingestion, and developmentally disabled persons unable to meet their own needs or engage independently in community activities. Additionally, Becker County Human Services supports individuals with intellectual disabilities who require assistance for their needs or engagement in community activities.

Through its multifaceted approach, the agency addresses diverse needs within the community, striving to create a supportive environment that promotes the well-being and self-sufficiency of residents in Becker County.

Becker County hosts a variety of volunteer opportunities through different organizations, each contributing to the community's well-being. "A Place to Belong" operates as a social club, providing essential services to individuals with serious mental illness, such as food, laundry, recreation, and community integration. Similarly, Becker County Energize focused on community health improvement, addressing concerns raised by the public, including mental health, affordable housing, and substance abuse; however, this program is no longer active.

The Becker County Food Pantry actively serves needy residents, promoting nutrition and connecting clients with community resources. The Detroit Lakes Regional Chamber of Commerce offers volunteer opportunities for events and informational booths, fostering community engagement. Additionally, organizations like Hospice of the Red River Valley, Mary's Place, Lakes Crisis & Resource Center, DV Shelter, and Lakes Area Kinship provide vital services, including hospice care, advocacy, and mentorship.

Volunteer opportunities extend to diverse areas, such as Let's Go Fishing Detroit Lakes Area, which offers fishing excursions for seniors, veterans, youth, and special needs individuals, and Minnesota Flyers Gymnastics, which focuses on youth development through gymnastics and fitness. The Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge and Friends of Tamarac offer environmental conservation and

education opportunities. United Way of Becker County collaborates with local programs, school districts, and social service agencies to create lasting positive change in the community.

With a wide array of volunteer options, individuals can find meaningful ways to contribute to the betterment of Becker County and its residents.

Infrastructure Trends

Increasing Demand for Infrastructure

County growth will eventually cause the existing infrastructure to reach its capacity for meeting new development demands. This, in turn, would require expanding infrastructure systems, which can be large and costly projects. Planning for future needs now will prepare the county to meet future funding needs without impacting current public services.

Concern for Impacts on Nature

With significant public concern about the impact of development on environmentally sensitive areas, infrastructure will become more important in addressing sustainability. The county can balance growth with sustainability by proceeding cautiously when making land use decisions and infrastructure investments.

Accommodating Growth in Areas Served by Public Utilities

Development at city fringes creates the opportunity for the adjacent cities to provide public water supply and wastewater services and the prospect of future annexation.

Economic Development

Goals and Policies

Goal 1: Foster a diverse business environment focusing on growth in designated commercial/industrial areas served by infrastructure and services.

Policy 1.1: Consider an economic development study to identify business sectors with growth opportunities and develop land use policies and standards to support the development of these sectors.

Policy 1.2: Direct commercial development along specifically identified corridors with infrastructure for higher intensity uses.

Goal 2: Support business development that creates livable wage jobs, improves residents' quality of life, and enhances tourism.

Policy 2.1: Retain and attract businesses that provide livable wages and new employment opportunities.

Policy 2.2: Identify business growth opportunities that create in-demand goods and services based on local resources, skills, and assets.

Policy 2.3: Develop opportunities to enhance the tourism experience for visitors and residents of Becker County.

Goal 3: Address blighted properties, nuisances, light pollution, and other negative impacts to enhance community character and preserve quality of life.

Policy 3.1: Consider developing and enforcing a -nuisance ordinances that balance personal rights, curb public offenses, and protect health, welfare, and community character.

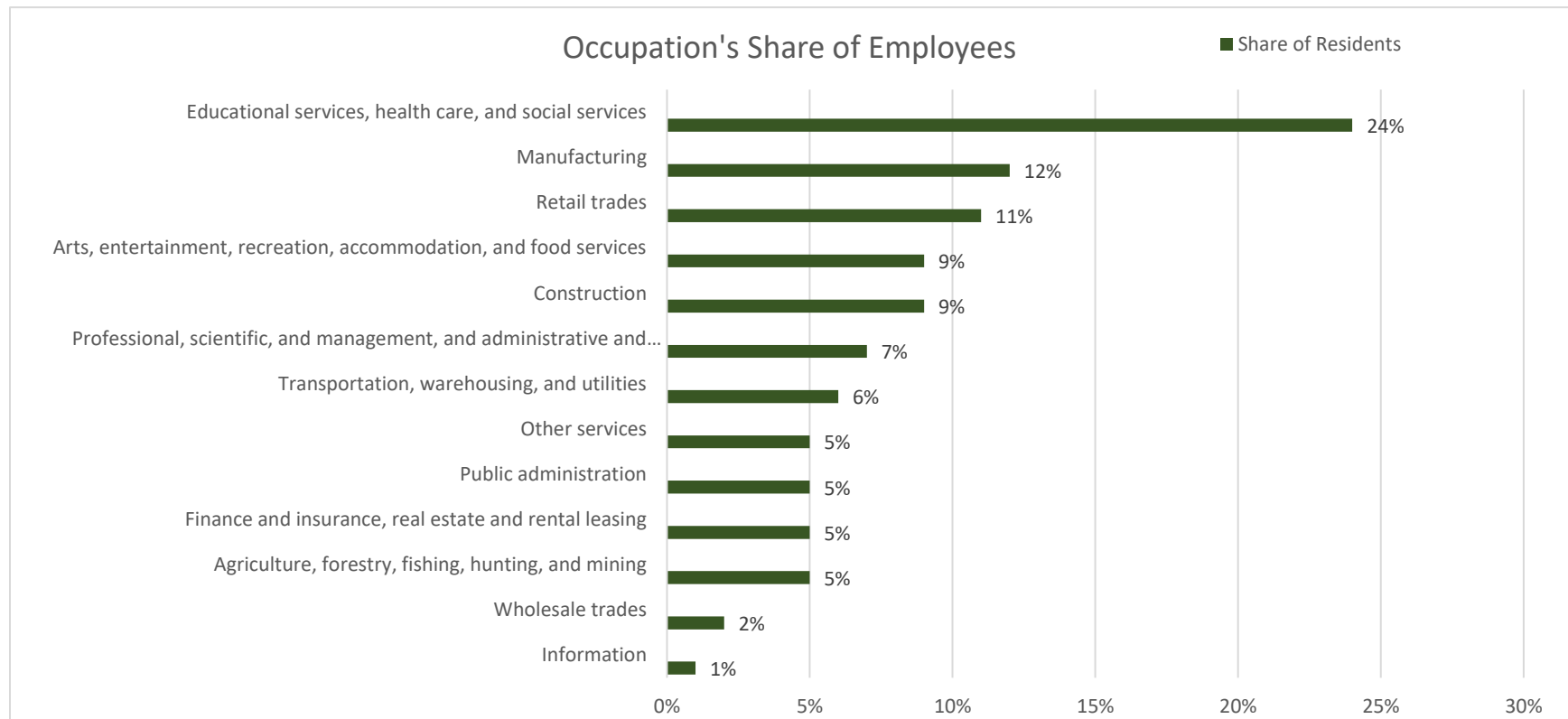
Policy 3.2: Encourage reducing light pollution that respect the county's rural character and protect quality night skies.

Existing Conditions

Key Industries

Becker County has a civilian labor force of 17,044 people and a 4% unemployment rate. Of the employed residents, the highest number of workers are in educational services, health care and social services, with 3,977 employees (24.1%). The second major industry is manufacturing, with 2,047 employees (12.4%), and the third is retail trade, with 1,805 employees (10.9%). Becker County has 1,559 businesses offering diverse jobs to the locality.

Figure 18: Graph of Occupations in Becker County by share of employees



Economic Development Trends

Publicly Accessible Goods and Services

During the public engagement phase of this plan, Becker County residents surveyed displayed their agreement that they can access all essential goods and services in the county. The rate of agreement with access to health care and amenities such as arts and culture was 79% and 69%, respectively. The public's access to their needs and desires in the area makes the county attractive to those looking for places to live in the region. The high public recognition of their access to critical goods and services will help drive people and businesses to the area.

Public Partnerships for Economic Development

In the survey, 65% of the public respondents indicated a desire to see the county partner with other public and private organizations to increase employee and business attraction and retention. Strategic partnerships can magnify the impact of both organizations' work. With the retention of employees and attraction of new business, the County can experience economic growth that retains the benefits locally and keeps the money from flowing out of the county's economy so quickly. This ties into the public's desire for more promotion and assistance for local businesses.

Local Business Preference

The survey conducted for this plan indicated that people want to see more local businesses grow and more food establishments. Supporting local entrepreneurs in their journey to start a business in a Becker County community with support programs and locations such as business hubs is crucial in driving regional economic growth.