



A GREENWAY CONNECTION PLAN FOR THE MILWAUKEE METROPOLITAN SEWERAGE DISTRICT

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MEMORANDUM REPORT
NUMBER 152

A GREENWAY CONNECTION PLAN FOR THE
MILWAUKEE METROPOLITAN SEWERAGE DISTRICT

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A GREENWAY CONNECTION PLAN FOR THE MILWAUKEE METROPOLITAN SEWERAGE DISTRICT

INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), with the assistance of the Conservation Fund¹ staff, completed and adopted a "Conservation Plan" that identifies land parcels which are recommended to be protected for multiple purposes, including flood reduction potential and stormwater management benefits, as well as wildlife habitat, water quality, and recreational benefits. The Conservation Plan identified 165 sites, including 42 high-priority sites, for protection through public acquisition or conservation easements, throughout the Menomonee River, Root River, and Oak Creek watersheds within the District. The Conservation Plan is documented in an October 31, 2001, report.²

In January 2002, the MMSD requested that the Regional Planning Commission assist the MMSD staff in the preparation of a "greenway connection plan" for the MMSD area as a companion to the Conservation Plan. It was envisioned that the requested plan would fulfill an immediate need to identify potential greenway corridors connecting, and typically downstream of, the isolated parcels identified in the MMSD Conservation Plan. In addition, it was envisioned that the planning process would synthesize the results of other related open space planning efforts undertaken in the MMSD area to date, resulting in a comprehensive District-wide greenway connection plan having flood mitigation benefits as well as a wide range of other environmental benefits.

This memorandum report, then, presents a greenway connection plan for the MMSD area, defined in this report to include the entire MMSD service area and the City of South Milwaukee. Subsequent sections of this report discuss the concepts underlying the greenway connection plan; describe the related adopted plans along with the various data sources used in the development of the greenway connection plan; describe the greenway connection plan itself; and set forth the key steps toward implementation of the plan. It should be noted that the identified greenway connections vary in size depending on existing resource sections and, in some cases, may be as narrow as a connecting drainageway in fully developed urban areas.

¹*The Conservation Fund is a national, nonprofit conservation organization.*

²*The Conservation Fund; Applied Ecological Service, Inc.; Heart Lake Conservation Associates; Velasco & Associates; K. Singh & Associates, Conservation Plan, Technical Report Submitted to Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, October 31, 2001.*

UNDERLYING CONCEPTS

For the purposes of this plan, a greenway connection is defined as an essentially linear corridor of open space typically associated with streams, shorelines, and wetlands. The maintenance of such corridors in a natural condition—and the restoration of such corridors in areas which have been developed or otherwise disturbed—can have a number of interrelated benefits. Greenway corridors typically provide space for streams and wetlands to function naturally to accommodate stormwater flows; provide effective filter strips along waterways that trap sediment and pollutants that damage water quality; provide opportunities for natural science and environmental education; provide opportunities for recreational activities, especially trail-oriented activities such as hiking and bicycling; and provide a sense of open space and visual relief from intensive urban development. Since greenway corridors are typically not well suited for urban development because of soil limitations or flooding potential, their preservation helps to avoid development problems such as flooded basements and failing building foundations.

The greenway concept is not new in Southeastern Wisconsin. It has long been fostered by the Regional Planning Commission through the identification of “environmental corridors”—elongated corridors in the landscape which contain concentrations of important resource features, including wetlands, woodlands, wildlife habitat areas, and prairies. The preservation of these environmental corridors is a key recommendation of the Commission-adopted land use and water quality management plans for Southeastern Wisconsin. The environmental corridor concept is also embedded in the park and open space plans of each of the counties that are located in whole or in part within the District and its service area.

The greenway connection plan presented in this report builds upon considerable prior open space planning efforts. It incorporates the environmental corridors delineated by the Regional Planning Commission; the open space preservation elements of adopted county park and open space plans; and recommendations of the recently completed MMSD Conservation Plan. The greenway connection plan also identifies new potential greenway corridors which link the Conservation Plan sites or which are downstream of such sites—a key consideration in the identification of these greenways being potential stormwater management and flood control benefits. The resulting plan represents an overall greenway connection plan for the MMSD area.

RELEVANT NATURAL RESOURCE BASE DATA AND RELATED OPEN SPACE PLANS

The formulation of the greenway connection plan involved the synthesis of relevant existing natural resource base inventory data and of existing natural resource-related plans. The fact that most of the required information was available in a digital format greatly facilitated the preparation of the greenway connection plan. The following items were considered in the preparation of the greenway connection plan:

- **MMSD Conservation Plan Priority Areas**

In 2001, the MMSD adopted a “Conservation Plan” that identifies sites throughout the Menomonee River, Root River, and Oak Creek watersheds within the District which are recommended to be protected through public acquisition or through conservation easements for multiple purposes. The sites identified consist of privately held undeveloped land having soil characteristics with potential flood reduction benefits. These sites were categorized into high-priority and low-to-medium priority areas based on potential flood control benefits, site configuration, and the number of parcels within the site. As previously noted, one of the objectives of the greenway connection plan is to identify linkages between the Conservation Plan areas and other resource areas. The priority areas identified by the MMSD are shown on Map 1.

The MMSD, along with Conservation Fund staff, are currently in the process of implementing the plan by contacting landowners to ascertain the availability of identified sites for public acquisition or for conservation easements. In cases where willing sellers have been identified, appraisals and purchase offers are in process.

- **Environmental Corridors and Isolated Natural Resource Areas**

One of the most important tasks completed under the regional planning program for Southeastern Wisconsin has been the identification and delineation of those areas in the Region in which concentrations of the best remaining elements of the natural resource base occur. The preservation of such areas in essentially natural, open uses is vital to maintaining a level of environmental quality in the Region, protecting its natural heritage and beauty, and providing recreational opportunities in scenic outdoor settings. These areas, referred to by the Regional Planning Commission as environmental corridors, were identified based upon the presence of the following important elements of the natural resource base: 1) rivers, streams, lakes, and associated shorelands and floodlands; 2) wetlands; 3) woodlands; 4) prairies; 5) wildlife habitat areas; 6) wet, poorly drained, and organic soils; and 7) rugged terrain and high relief topography. The presence of elements that are closely related to the natural resource base, including park and open space sites, natural areas, historic sites, and scenic viewpoints, were also considered in the delineation of environmental corridors.

Primary environmental corridors are concentrations of significant natural resources at least 400 acres in size, at least two miles in length, and at least 200 feet in width. Secondary environmental corridors typically connect with primary environmental corridors and are at least 100 acres in size and one mile in length. Areas at least five acres in size which contain important resource base elements but are separated from primary and secondary environmental corridors by intensive urban or agricultural land uses have also been identified and have been termed "isolated natural resource areas."

As shown on Map 2, the delineation of these environmental corridor areas results in an essentially linear pattern of the natural resource and resource related features within the MMSD gateway connection planning area. The environmental corridor network provided an important part of the framework for the preparation of the gateway connection plan.

- **Floodlands**

Floodlands are wide, gently sloping areas contiguous to, and usually lying on both sides of, a stream channel. For planning and regulatory purposes, floodlands are normally defined as the areas, excluding the stream channel, subject to inundation by the one percent probability floodplain. This is the flood that may be expected to be reached or exceeded in severity once every 100 years—or stated another way, there is a 1 percent chance of this event being reached or exceeded in severity in any given year. Floodland areas are generally not well suited to urban development, not only because of the flood hazard, but also because of the presence of high water tables and of soils poorly suited to urban uses. Floodland areas often contain important natural resources, such as woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat, and, therefore, constitute prime locations for park and open space areas. Every effort should be made to discourage incompatible urban development on floodlands, while encouraging compatible park and open space uses.

Floodlands, identified by the Regional Planning Commission and by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, are shown on Map 3. Most of the undeveloped floodlands are located within primary and secondary environmental corridors.

- **Surface Water Resources**

Surface water resources, consisting of streams and lakes, form a particularly important element of the natural resource base. Surface water resources provide recreational opportunities, influence the physical development of the area concerned, and enhance its aesthetic quality. Streams and lakes within the MMSD gateway connection planning area are shown on Map 4.

Lakes and streams are readily susceptible to degradation through improper land use development and management. It is important that existing and future development in riparian areas, as well as areas throughout the entire watershed concerned, be managed carefully to avoid further water quality

degradation and to enhance the recreational and aesthetic values of surface water resources. Along with the environmental corridors, the system of streams, especially major streams, provided an important part of the framework for the preparation of the greenway connection plan.

- **Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Sites**

A comprehensive inventory of “natural areas” and “critical species habitat sites” in the Southeastern Wisconsin Region was completed by the Regional Planning Commission in 1994. The inventory sought to identify the most significant remaining natural areas—essentially, remnants of the pre-European settlement landscape—as well as other areas vital to the maintenance of endangered, threatened, and rare plant and animal species in the Region. The inventory findings and a plan for the protection and management of such areas are presented in SEWRPC Planning Report No. 42, *A Regional Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin*.

Natural areas are tracts of land or water so little modified by human activity, or sufficiently recovered from the effects of such activity, that they contain intact native plant and animal communities believed to be representative of the landscape before European settlement. Natural area sites are classified into one of three categories: natural areas of statewide or greater significance (NA-1), natural areas of countywide or regional significance (NA-2), and natural areas of local significance (NA-3). Classification of an area into one of these three categories is based upon consideration of the diversity of plant and animal species and community types present; the structure and integrity of the native plant or animal community; the extent of disturbance from human activity, such as logging, agricultural use, and pollution; the commonness of the plant and animal community; unique natural features; the size of the site; and the educational value.

Critical species habitat sites are those areas, outside of natural areas, where the chief value lies in their ability to support rare, threatened, or endangered species. Such areas constitute “critical” habitat that is important to ensure survival of a particular species or group of species of special concern.

Natural areas and critical species habitat sites are shown on Map 5. Most of the natural areas and critical species habitat sites are located in the Commission-identified environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas.

- **Soils**

Soil properties exert a strong influence on the use of land. Soils are an irreplaceable resource and mounting pressures upon land are constantly making this resource more valuable. A need exists in any planning program to examine how soils can best be used and managed.

The soil information presented herein is based upon soil surveys completed by the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service. Such surveys provide definitive data on the physical, chemical, and biological properties of soils enabling interpretation of their suitability for various urban and rural uses.

Of particular importance in the development of a greenway connection plan are those soil types which have the capability to support wetland or prairie vegetation and which are, therefore, logical locations for the reestablishment of natural vegetation. The reestablishment of natural vegetation in these areas has the best potential for absorbing and holding stormwater and thereby reducing downstream flooding, as well as for providing buffers along streams and increased wildlife habitat. As part of this planning process, the Commission staff identified soil mapping units that are characteristic of wetland or prairie pre-settlement vegetation types.³ Areas covered by these soil types are identified on Map 6.

³See SEWRPC Planning Report No. 8, *Soils of Southeastern Wisconsin, June 1966*.

- **County Park and Open Space Plans**

Park and open space plans have been completed by the Commission for the counties in the MMSD greenway connection planning area. Each of these plans includes recommendations related to the protection of environmental corridors, natural areas, and related resource and open space areas—recommending that such open space lands be protected through a combination of public or nonprofit conservation ownership or through the application of protective zoning. Map 7 presents a graphic summary of the open space preservation recommendations of the adopted county park and open space plans (plans for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Washington, and Waukesha Counties) as they pertain to the MMSD greenway connection planning area. This map identifies open space lands that are recommended to be protected through public land use regulation and those recommended to be protected through public interest ownership. The latter is particularly important insofar as it identifies potential and county and local partners for the implementation of the MMSD Conservation Plan, as well as this greenway connection plan.

- **Recreation Trails**

The regional park and open space plan, adopted by the Regional Planning Commission in 1977, recommended the development of a network of hiking and bicycling trails. Most of the trails recommended in the regional plan were proposed to be located in areas having natural resource values of regional significance, such as the Lake Michigan shoreline, and the riverine areas of the Menomonee, Milwaukee, and Root Rivers.

Those recommendations have been carried forward and refined through the preparation of county park and open space plans for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Washington, and Waukesha Counties and most recently in the regional bicycle and pedestrian plan for the year 2020.⁴ Existing and proposed recreation corridor trails are shown on Map 8.

RECOMMENDED GREENWAY CONNECTION PLAN

The recommended MMSD greenway connection plan presented herein was prepared by synthesizing the open space preservation recommendations of previously adopted plans for the area, as described above, supplementing those recommendations with certain additional greenway linkages that have been identified as part of the current planning effort.

The recommended MMSD greenway connection plan is presented on Map 9. The basic “building blocks” of this plan are identified on Map 10. These building blocks—which overlap in many areas—include the following:

1. MMSD Conservation Plan sites, as previously presented on Map 1.
2. Primary and secondary environmental corridors, identified by the Regional Planning Commission and recommended for preservation in the regional land use plan and in county park and open space plans—previously presented on Map 2.
3. Existing and proposed parkway lands adjacent to environmental corridors, as identified in county park and open space plans and included in the graphic summary of the county park and open space plans previously presented on Map 7.
4. Potential linkages between, and areas downstream from, MMSD Conservation Plan sites.

⁴Amendment to the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities System for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2020, December 2001.

Items No. 1, 2, and 3 above provide the basic framework of the greenway connection plan. The areas referenced in Items No. 1, 2, and 3 have been incorporated directly into, and provide the overall structure of, the recommended MMSD greenway system plan as presented on Maps 9 and 10.

Item No. 4 above represents a new consideration in the greenway connection plan and is an outgrowth of the recently completed MMSD Conservation Plan. Identified in red on Map 10, this component of the greenway connection plan consists of potential linkages between, and areas downstream of, the MMSD Conservation Plan sites. The permanent preservation of the proposed linkage areas would have the potential to provide positive flood control/stormwater management impacts as well as numerous other environmental and recreational benefits.

All of the identified potential linkage areas shown on Map 10 are currently in nonpublic ownership. These linkage areas are essentially riverine areas which would directly link the MMSD Conservation Plan sites or which would complete a public open space corridor linking such sites. The identified linkages include one or more of the following types of areas: environmental corridors; floodplains; areas covered by soils having the capability to support wetland or prairie vegetation; and developed or otherwise disturbed areas where a commitment has been made to restore natural conditions. Also taken into account in identifying and evaluating potential linkage areas were the relationship of the potential linkage to identified natural areas or critical species habitat sites; the relationship to the regional trail system plan; and the relationship to the acquisition recommendations of currently adopted county park and open space plans. As indicated on Map 10, there is some overlap between the proposed linkage areas and the other components of the greenway connection plan. It should be noted that other potential linkage areas may exist that do not include the resources described above. Such areas should be identified through the refinement of this plan at the local or neighborhood level.

In total, the greenway connections shown on Map 9 (including all four of the above-referenced components) encompasses 60.2 square miles, or 14.0 percent of the total MMSD greenway connection planning area. Most of this area—60 square miles, or 99.7 percent of the total—has been recommended for preservation under previous plans (i.e., the MMSD Conservation Plan and the respective county park and open space plans). The current planning effort expanded the proposed open space system by only 0.2 square mile, or 0.3 percent.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The greenway connection plan implementation recommendations presented herein were also drawn, for the most part, from related recommendations of previous plans, including the MMSD Conservation Plan and county park and open space plans for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Washington, and Waukesha Counties. Those plans recommended that much of the proposed greenway connection system be preserved through public interest ownership or through conservation easements. Carrying forward these recommendations from the MMSD Conservation Plan and the respective county park and open space plans, the greenway connection plan recommends the following:

1. That lands currently in public interest ownership—areas encompassing 19.5 square miles, or 32.0 percent of the greenway system area⁵—be retained in such ownership indefinitely, thereby ensuring their permanent preservation. These areas are shaded green on Map 11.
2. That most of the current privately held lands in the greenway system be acquired in the public interest or protected through conservation easements, thereby ensuring their permanent preservation. These areas are identified by horizontal, vertical, and diagonal line patterns on Map 11.
3. That other privately held lands in the greenway connection system—the areas shaded grey on Map 11 be considered for preservation in open space use in further detailed planning, taking into account local open space needs and objectives. Such preservation could be achieved through public

⁵This figure reflects lands held by Federal, State, and local agencies and units of government along with privately held lands that are in compatible outdoor recreation or open space use.

interest acquisition or the acquisition of conservation easements, or alternatively, through public land use regulation.

Implementation of the greenway connection plan depends upon the cooperative action of Federal, State, county, and local units and agencies of government, including the MMSD; nonprofit conservation organizations; and private interests. Recommended plan implementation responsibilities for Federal and State agencies, county and municipal governments, and nonprofit conservation organizations are set forth in the respective county park and open space plans, as summarized on Map 7. The recommendations which follow pertain to the plan implementation responsibilities of MMSD.

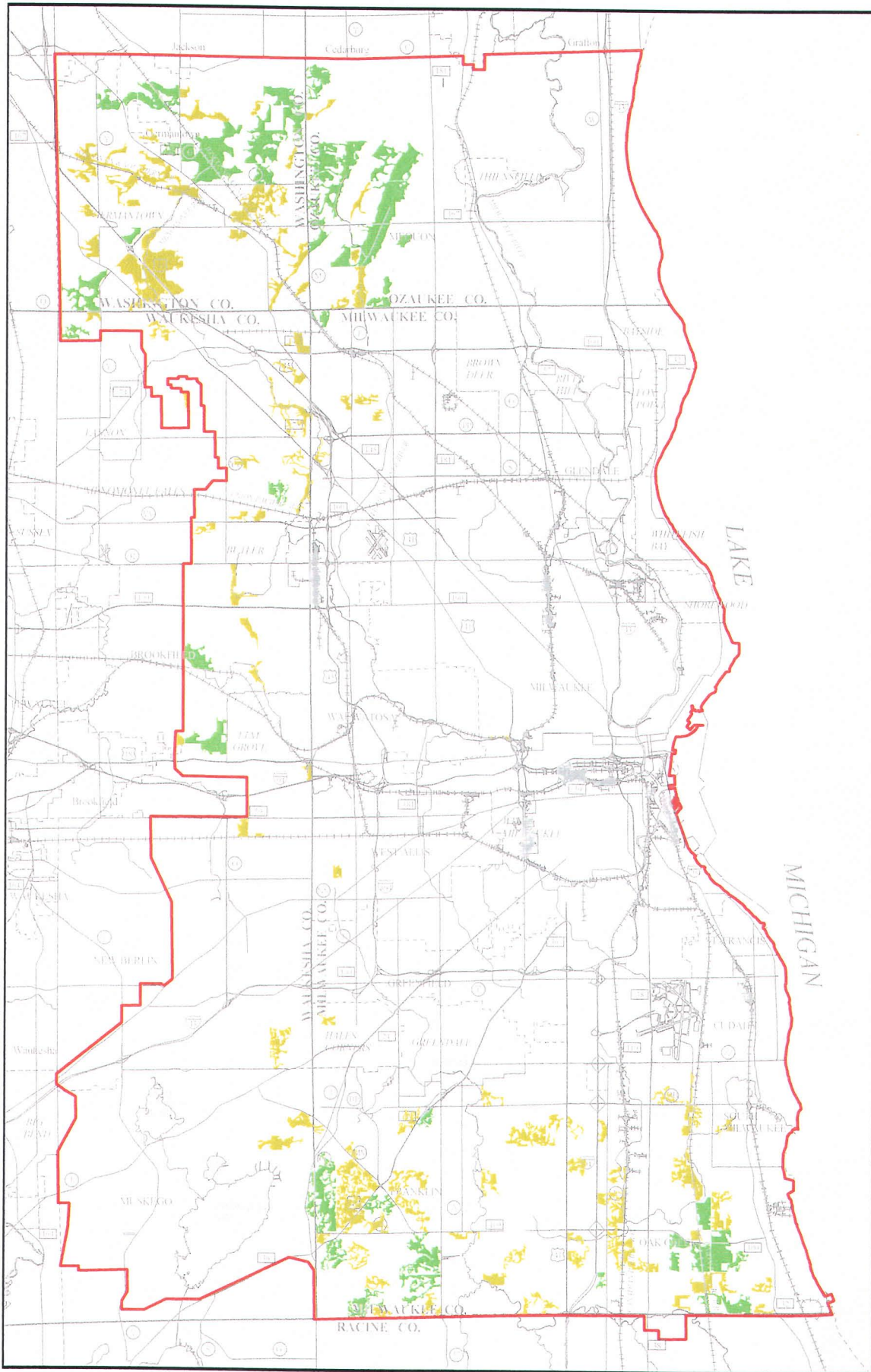
1. It is recommended that MMSD focus its efforts on the acquisition of sites (including acquisition of conservation easements) identified in its recently completed Conservation Plan. MMSD is currently prioritizing those sites for future acquisition.
2. It is further recommended that MMSD focus on those sites which have been identified as linkages between MMSD Conservation Plan sites (see Map 11). MMSD should develop priorities for efforts to protect these areas through acquisition or conservation easements. It is recommended that, in so doing, MMSD assign the highest priority to sites which are comprised of primary or secondary environmental corridors and which are also recommended for public acquisition in county park and open space plans. Cooperative efforts between MMSD and the concerned county or local units of government or nonprofit conservancy organizations may increase the prospects for funding assistance through the Wisconsin Stewardship program in support of land acquisition or the purchase of conservation easements. Additional priorities with respect to the acquisition of the proposed linkage areas are presented in Appendix A.
3. It is recommended that, while focusing on the areas noted above, the MMSD of its own accord, or in conjunction with other units and agencies of government or nonprofit conservation organizations, consider the protection of other portions of the greenway connection system through public acquisition or the acquisition of conservation easements.

It is envisioned that the portions of the greenway connection system acquired by the MMSD would eventually be conveyed to a county or local unit of government or private nonprofit conservation organization, with MMSD retaining a conservation easement on such lands.

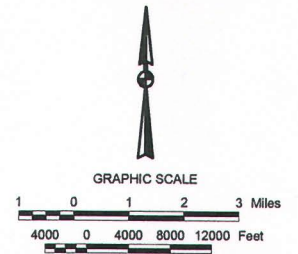
It is further envisioned that all land acquisitions or purchases of conservation easements by the MMSD or any other public agency in efforts to implement the greenway connection plan would be on a willing-seller basis.

Map 1

MMSD CONSERVATION PLAN



- HIGH PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREA
- LOW-MEDIUM PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREA
- MMSD GREENWAY PLANNING AREA BOUNDARY



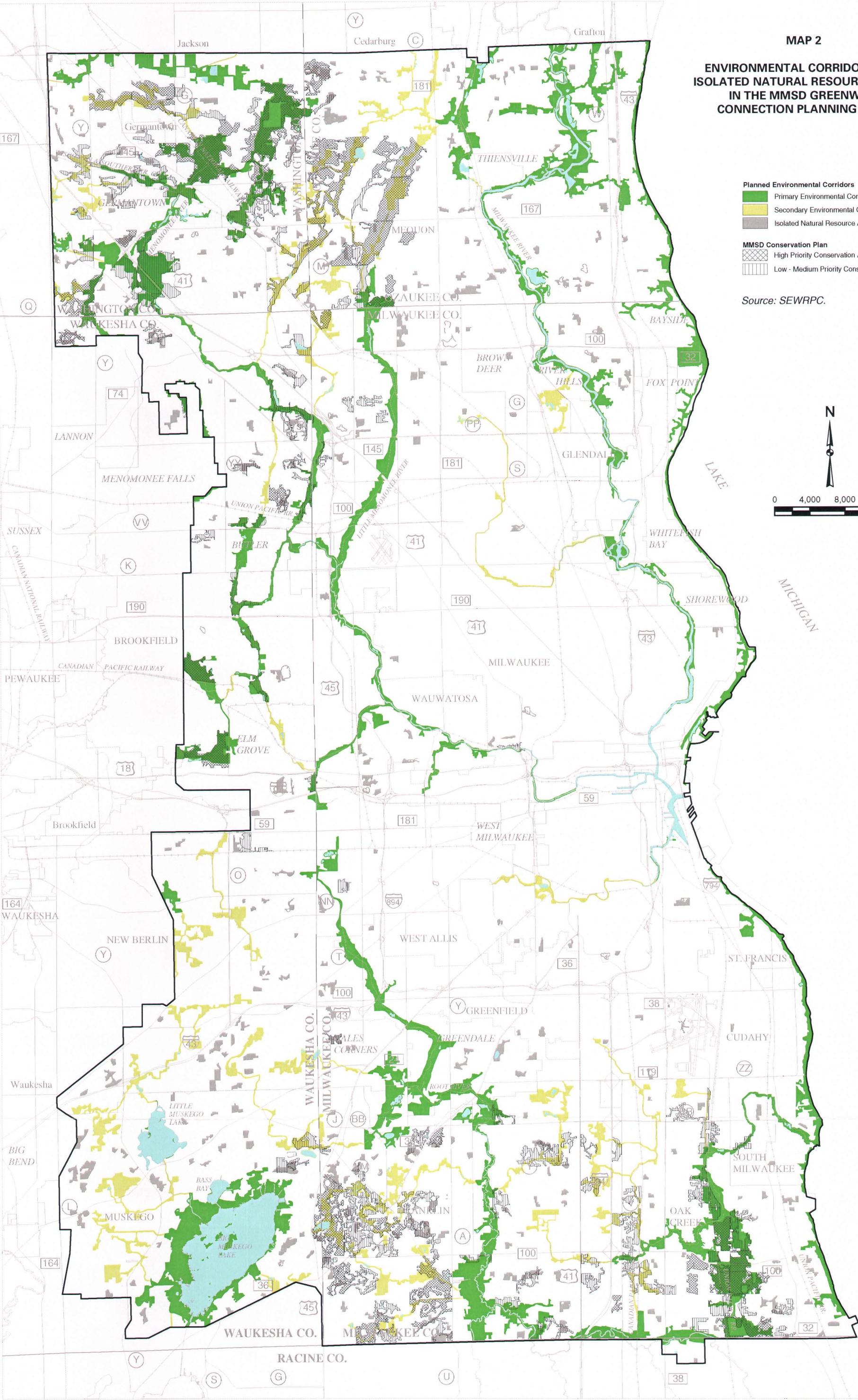
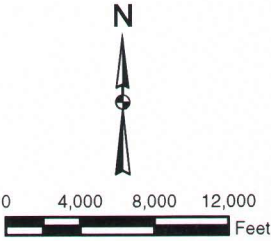
Source: The Conservation Fund and SEWRPC.

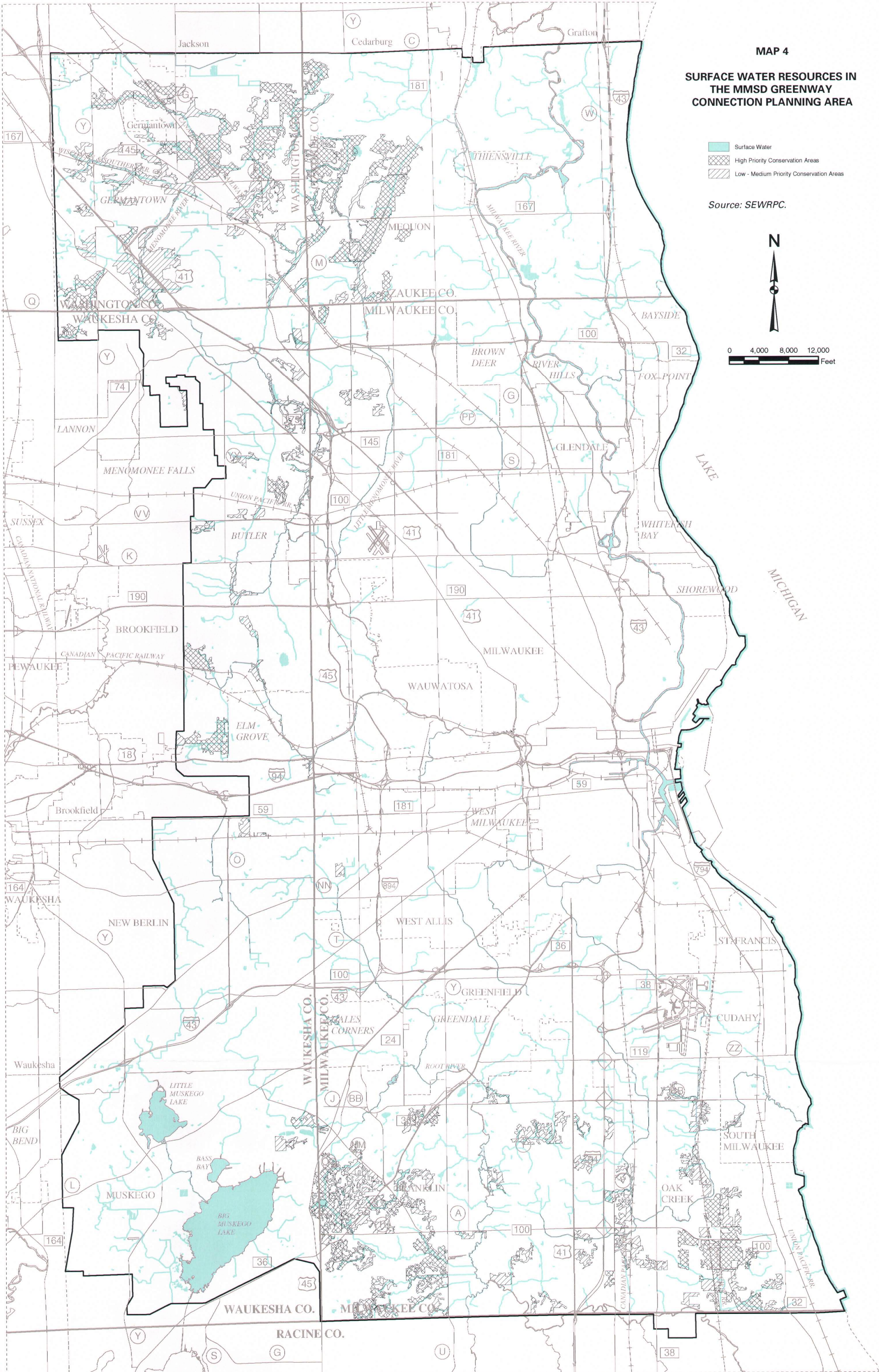
MAP 2

ENVIRONMENTAL CORRIDORS AND
ISOLATED NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS
IN THE MMSD GREENWAY
CONNECTION PLANNING AREA

- Planned Environmental Corridors**
- Primary Environmental Corridors
 - Secondary Environmental Corridors
 - Isolated Natural Resource Areas
- MMSD Conservation Plan**
- High Priority Conservation Areas
 - Low - Medium Priority Conservation Areas

Source: SEWRPC.





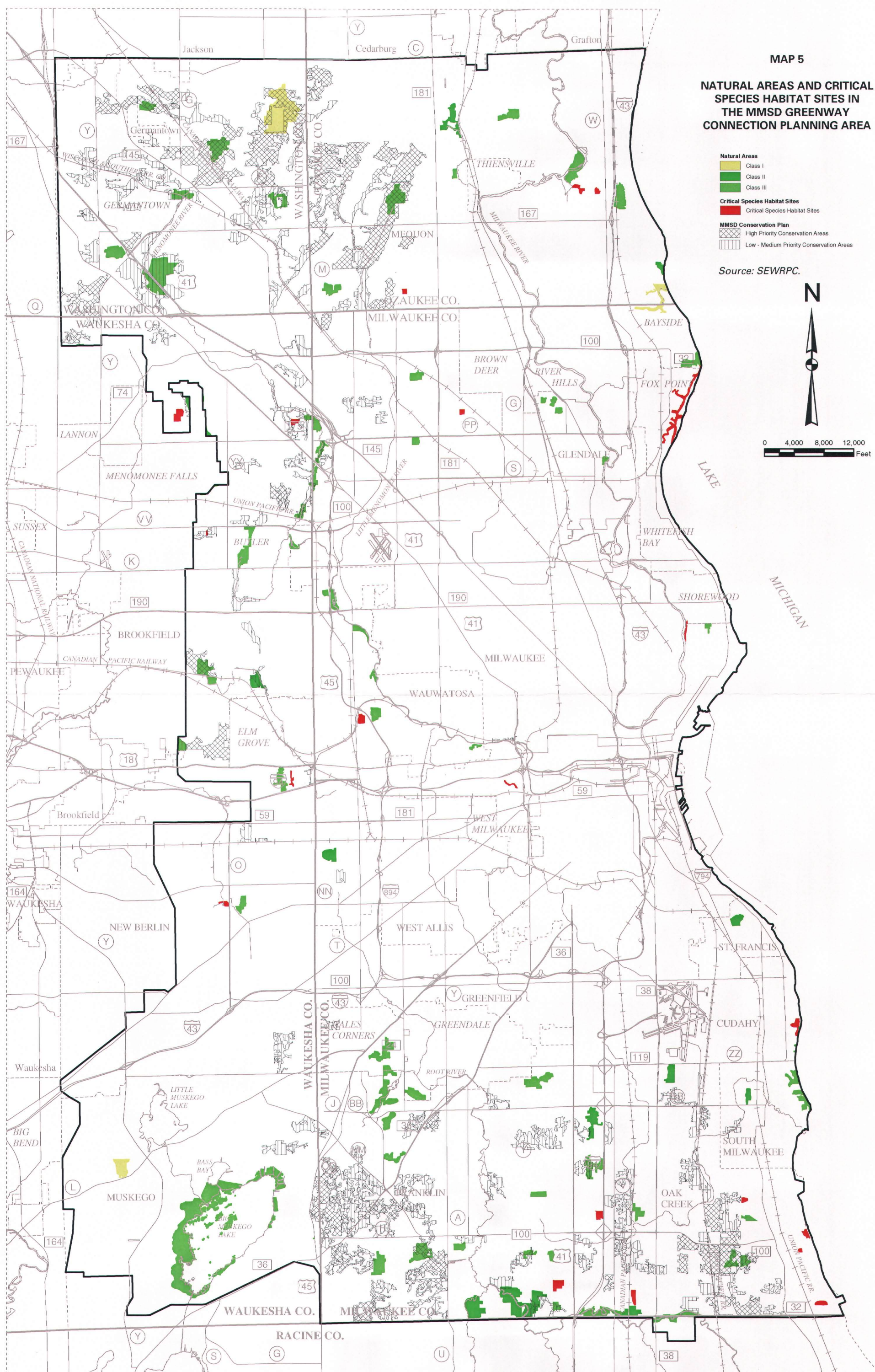
MAP 4
SURFACE WATER RESOURCES IN
THE MMSD GREENWAY
CONNECTION PLANNING AREA

- Surface Water
- High Priority Conservation Areas
- Low - Medium Priority Conservation Areas

Source: SEWRPC.



0 4,000 8,000 12,000
Feet



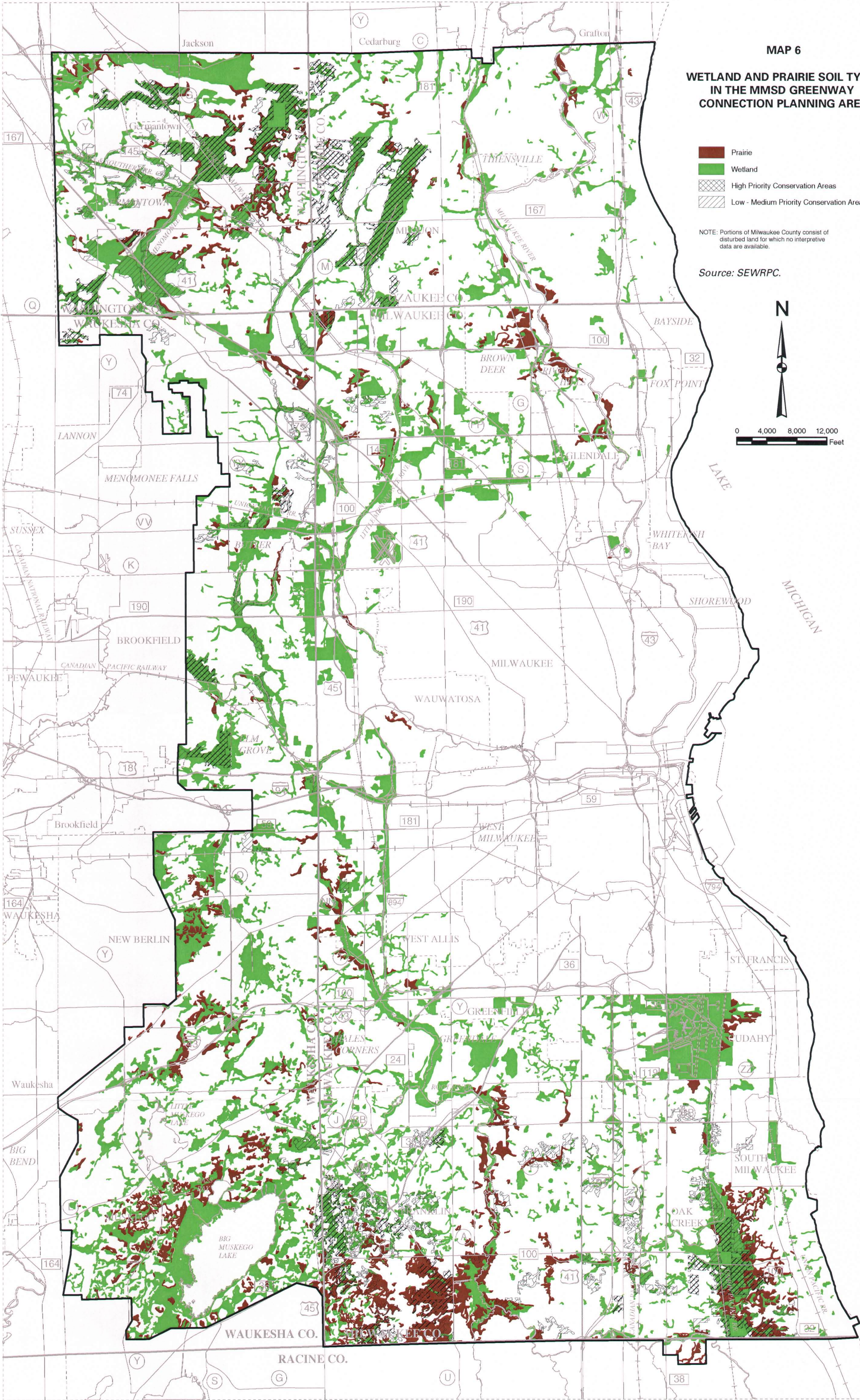
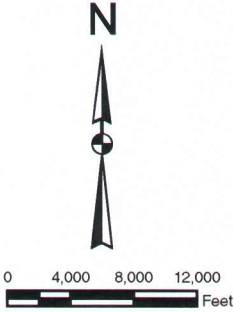
MAP 6

WETLAND AND PRAIRIE SOIL TYPES
IN THE MMSD GREENWAY
CONNECTION PLANNING AREA

- Prairie
- Wetland
- High Priority Conservation Areas
- Low - Medium Priority Conservation Areas

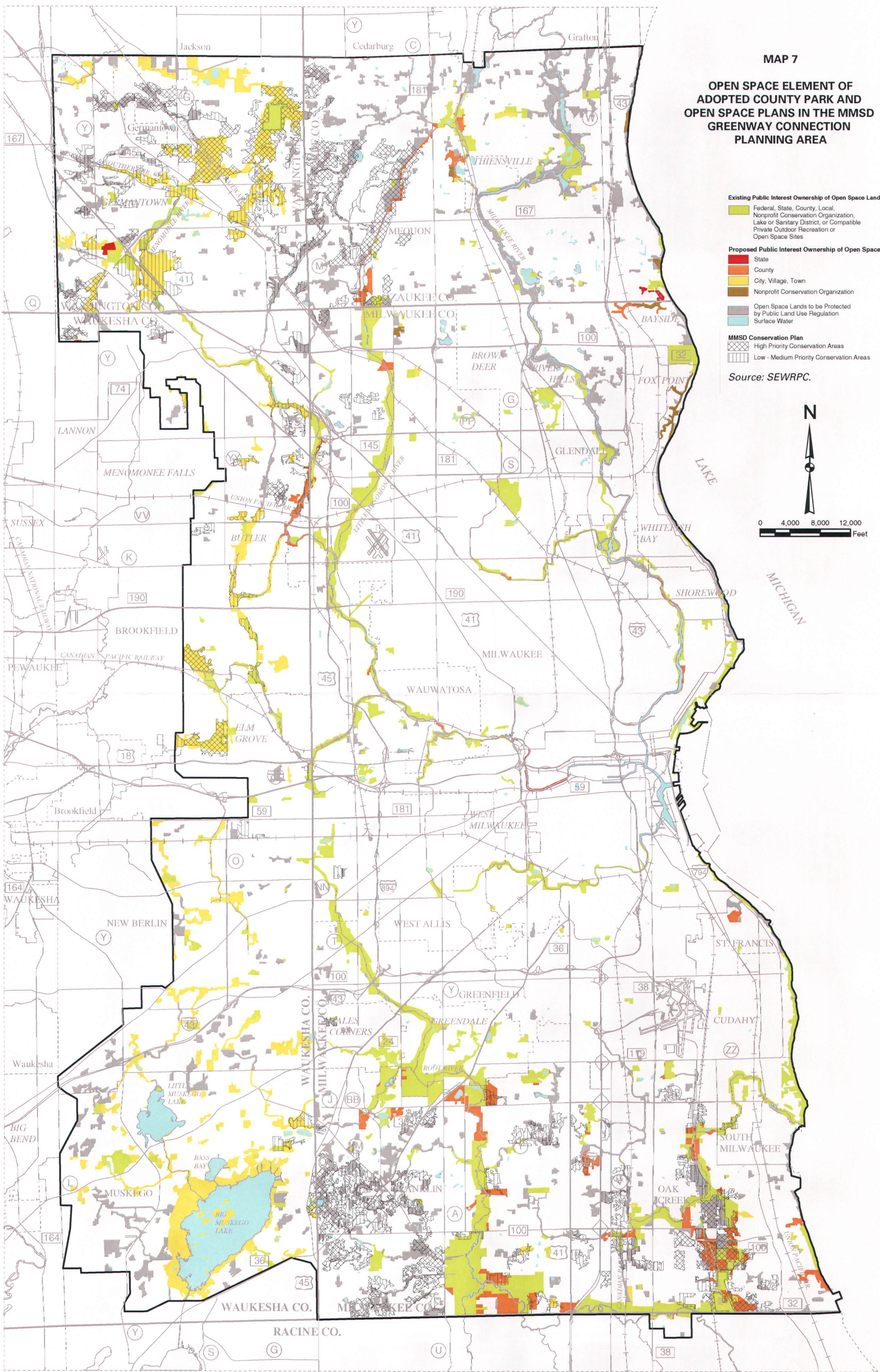
NOTE: Portions of Milwaukee County consist of disturbed land for which no interpretive data are available.

Source: SEWRPC.



MAP 7

OPEN SPACE ELEMENT OF
ADOPTED COUNTY PARK AND
OPEN SPACE PLANS IN THE MMSD
GREENWAY CONNECTION
PLANNING AREA



Existing Public Interest Ownership of Open Space Lands

- Federal, State, County, Local, Nonprofit Conservation Organization, Lake or Sanitary District, or Compatible Private Outdoor Recreation or Open Space Sites

Proposed Public Interest Ownership of Open Space Lands

- State
- County
- City, Village, Town
- Nonprofit Conservation Organization

Open Space Lands to be Protected by Public Land Use Regulation

- Surface Water

MMSD Conservation Plan

- High Priority Conservation Areas
- Low - Medium Priority Conservation Areas

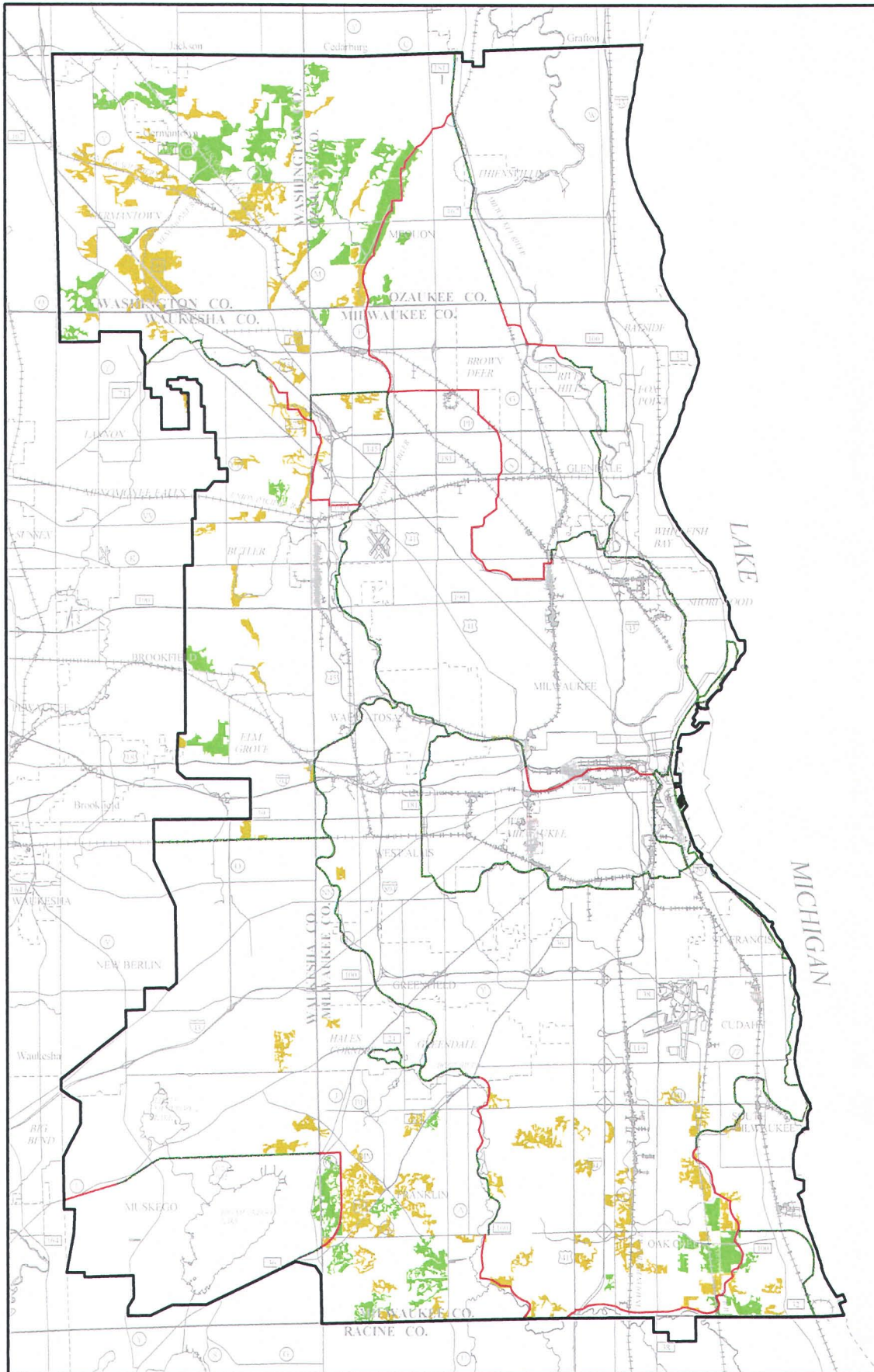
Source: SEWRPC.



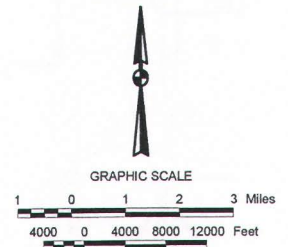
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Map 8

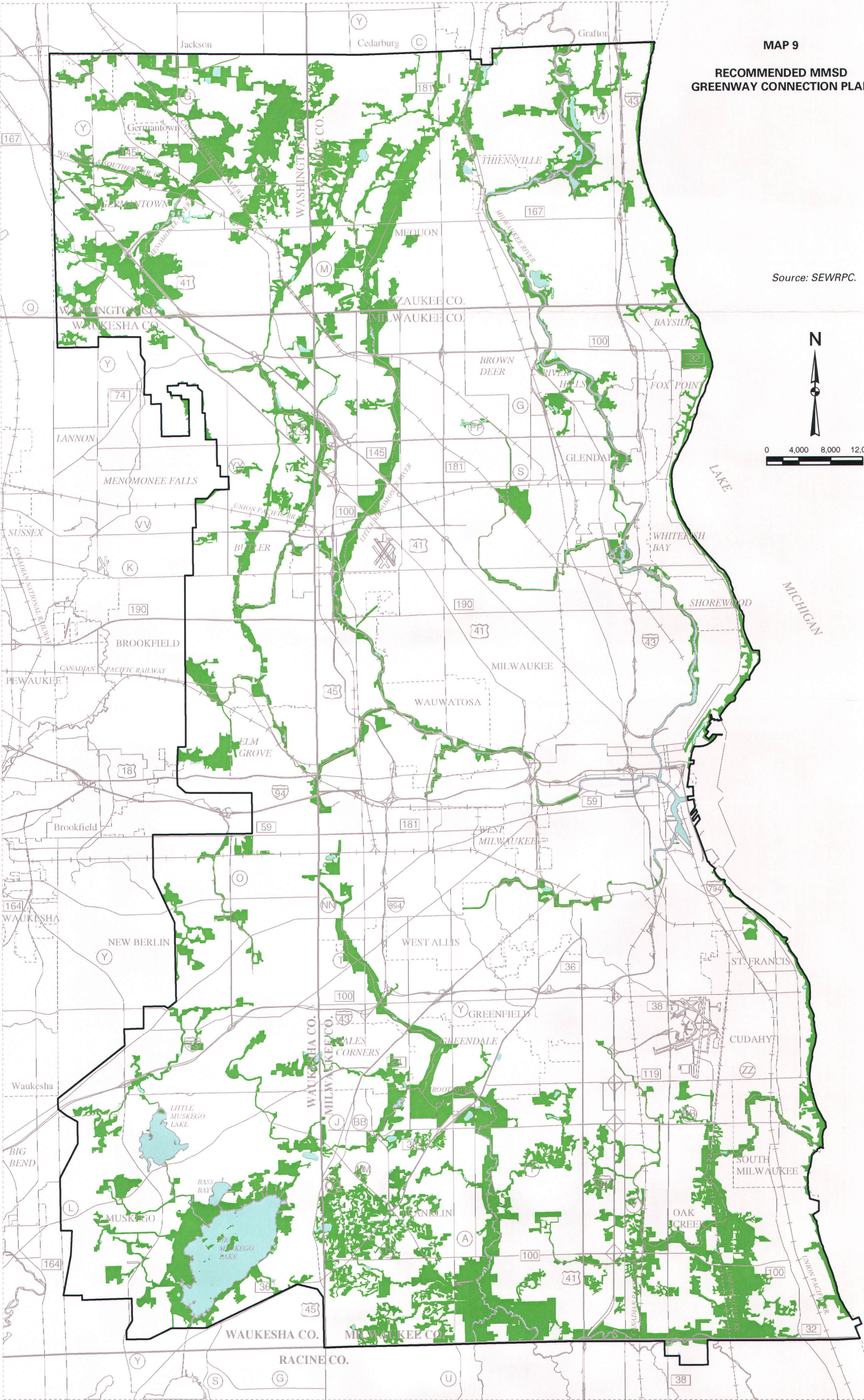
RECREATION CORRIDOR TRAILS WITHIN MMSD GREENWAY CONNECTION PLANNING AREA



- Existing Trail
- Proposed Trail
- High Priority Conservation Area
- Low-Medium Priority Conservation Area



Source: The Conservation Fund and SEWRPC Amendment to the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities System for Southeastern Wisconsin: 2020, December 2001.

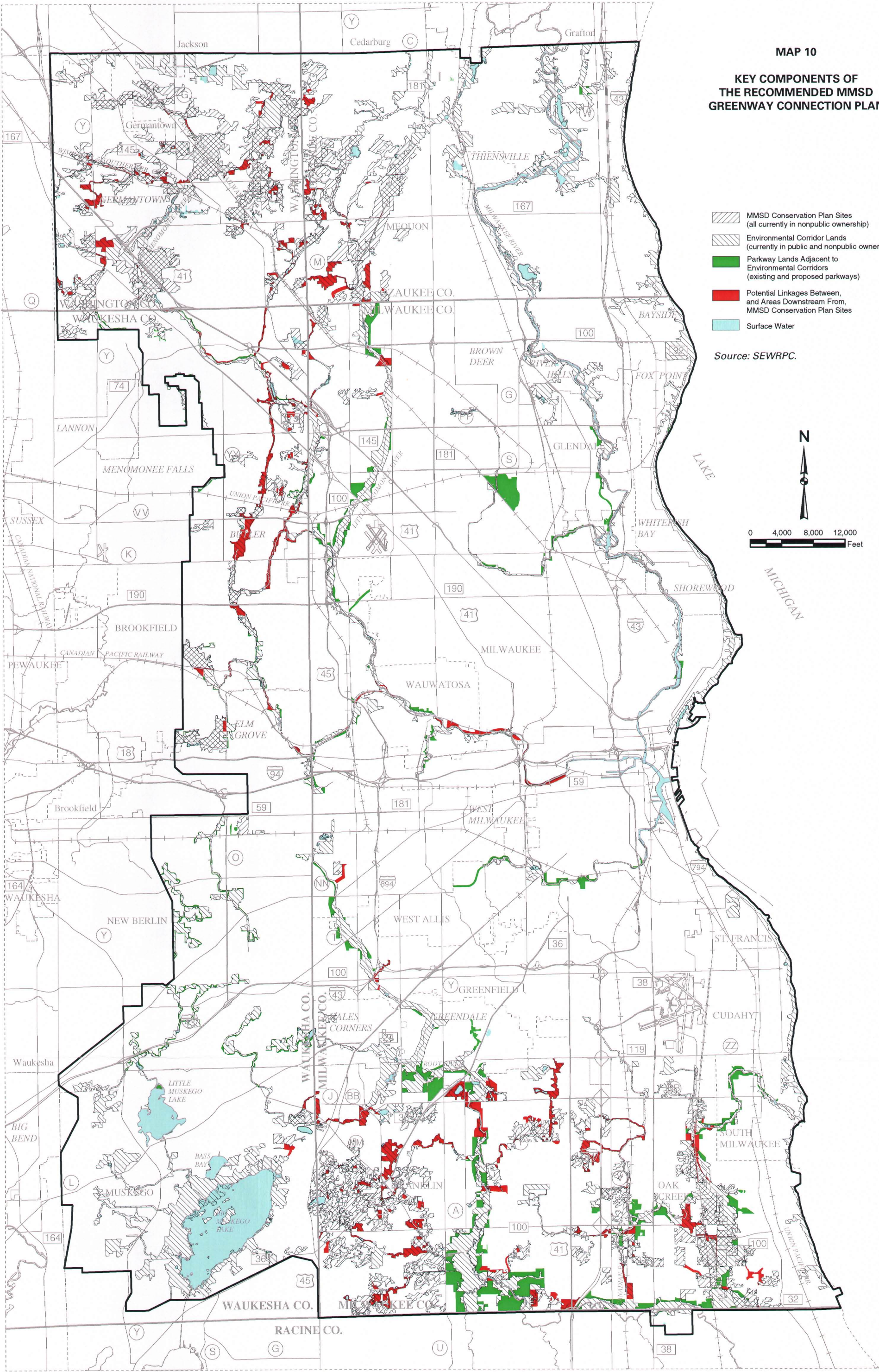
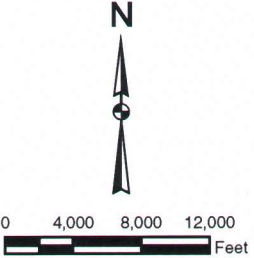


MAP 10

KEY COMPONENTS OF
THE RECOMMENDED MMSD
GREENWAY CONNECTION PLAN

- MMSD Conservation Plan Sites
(all currently in nonpublic ownership)
- Environmental Corridor Lands
(currently in public and nonpublic ownership)
- Parkway Lands Adjacent to
Environmental Corridors
(existing and proposed parkways)
- Potential Linkages Between,
and Areas Downstream From,
MMSD Conservation Plan Sites
- Surface Water

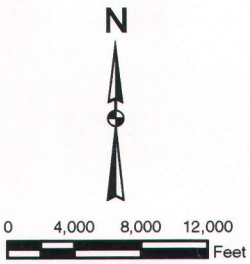
Source: SEWRPC.



MAP 11
IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE MMSD GREENWAY
CONNECTION PLAN

- Existing Public Interest Ownership:**
Federal, State, County, Local, Nonprofit Conservation Organization, Lake or Sanitary District, or Compatible Private Outdoor Recreation or Open Space Sites
- Proposed Public Interest Ownership:**
Recommended in County Park and Open Space Plan
Recommended in MMSD Conservation Plan
Recommended Linkage Between MMSD Conservation Plan Sites
- Other Areas to be Preserved:**
Recommended to be Protected Through Public Interest Acquisition or Through Public Land Use Regulations, As Determined in More Detailed Planning
Surface Water

Source: SEWRPC.



APPENDIX

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Appendix A

SUGGESTED PRIORITIES FOR MMSD ACQUISITION OF PROPOSED LINKAGES TO THE CONSERVATION PLAN SITES

Under the greenway connection plan presented in this report, MMSD would be responsible for acquisition of areas which would serve to link the open space sites identified in the MMSD Conservation Plan. The linkage areas are identified on Map 11. As an initial step in plan implementation, MMSD should prioritize the proposed linkage sites for future acquisition efforts. A suggested prioritization is presented in Table A-1 and Map A-1.

As indicated in Table A-1, in addition to the physical site characteristics, an important consideration in the suggested prioritization is the potential for partnering with other units of government or with nonprofit conservation organizations in efforts to acquire the proposed linkage areas. Such partnering may increase the prospects for funding assistance through the Wisconsin Stewardship program.

Table A-1

SUGGESTED PRIORITIES FOR MMSD ACQUISITION OF PROPOSED LINKAGES TO THE CONSERVATION PLAN SITES

Priority	Required Components
IA	Floodplain and related open space restoration areas
IB	Primary and secondary environmental corridors (including floodlands and wetland and prairie soil types which potentially impact floodflows) proposed for public acquisition in county park and open space plans which link MMSD conservation plan sites
II	Primary and secondary environmental corridors (including floodlands and wetland and prairie soil types which potentially impact floodflows) not proposed for public ownership in county park and open space plans which link MMSD conservation plan sites
III	Other drainage ways with floodlands or wetland or prairie soil types not located within a primary or secondary environmental corridor which link MMSD conservation plan sites
IV	Primary and secondary environmental corridors (not currently in public interest ownership) which do not link MMSD conservation plan sites

