



RACINE COUNTY MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SUMMARY SHEET

Agricultural, Natural & Cultural Resources Element (Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan Preliminary Draft Chapter X)

One of the State's required nine elements, the agricultural, natural, and cultural resources element—together with the land use element—seeks to balance long term growth and development in Racine County with the County's environmental health, agricultural activities, and cultural history. The element must contain goals, objectives, policies and programs for the conservation and effective management of the following resources:

- groundwater
- forests
- productive agricultural areas
- environmentally sensitive areas
- threatened and endangered species
- stream corridors
- surface water
- floodplains
- wetlands
- wildlife habitat
- nonmetallic mineral resources
- parks, open spaces, and recreational resources
- historical and cultural resources
- and community design

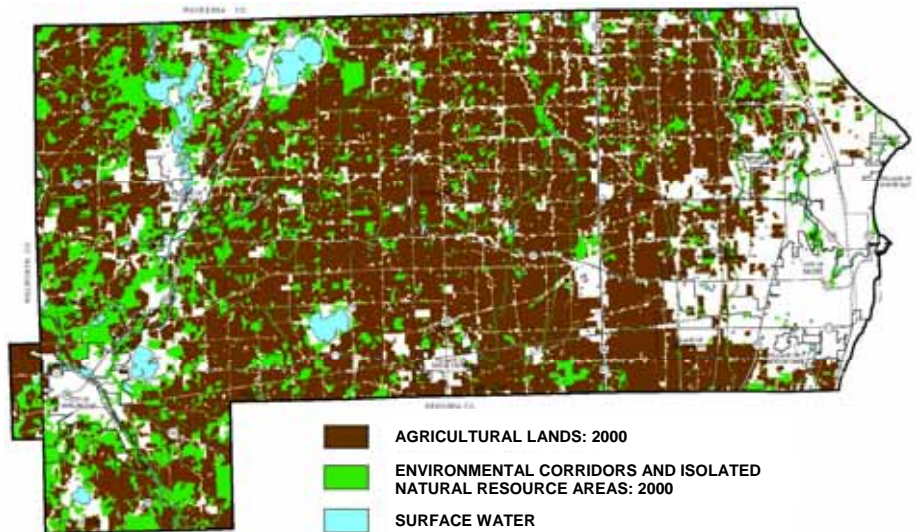
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A detailed description of Racine County's existing resources is presented in Multi-Jurisdictional Comprehensive Plan Chapter III, "Inventory of Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources."

Some of the key resources include:

- In 2000, approximately 57%, or 195.5 square miles, of Racine County land was in agricultural use.
- According to the US Natural Resources Conservation Service, the majority of the County's soils are well suited for farming.
- The Federal Census of Agriculture counted 631 farms in Racine County in 2002, and the total value of agricultural products sold in that same year was about \$73.2 million.
- Racine County contains significant nonmetallic mineral resources (crushed stone, building stone, sand, gravel, peat and clay). In 2000, there were 19 mining sites covering about 2,600 acres.
- In Racine County, there are about 101 miles of streams, 10 major lakes (i.e., lakes that are 50 acres or larger), about 42 square miles of floodplains, and about 25 square miles of wetlands.
- Primary environmental corridors (defined as areas that are rich in natural resource and are at least two miles long and 200 feet wide) encompass 10.4% of Racine County. An additional 3.2% of the County is secondary corridors (areas that at least 100 acres in size), and about 3.5% is in isolated natural resource areas.

AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CORRIDORS IN RACINE COUNTY



From Chapter III, "Inventory of Existing Agricultural, Natural & Cultural Resources"
Source: SEWRPC

PUBLIC INPUT

Based on the countywide public opinion survey, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analyses conducted in 2007, some of the agricultural, natural, and cultural resources issues identified by the community included:

- Strive preserve rural and small town character.
- Recognize the importance of balancing urban and rural land uses.
- Strive to preserve open space land.
- Strive to slow the loss of productive farmland and natural resources.
- Seek to enable the continuation of farming as an important part of the County's economy.
- Encourage the implementation of financial tools and incentives to preserve agricultural and open space lands.
- Seek to balance the preservation of open space land with property rights.
- Strive to protect surface water and groundwater quality and quantity.
- Recognize and take into consideration the impacts of new developments on agricultural and open space lands and uses.
- Strive to preserve cultural resources and historic sites and districts.



AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

The preservation of farmland, including prime agricultural land, remains a challenging issue in Racine County, as it strives to balance land use objectives with the economic realities faced by farmers. In addition to maintaining agricultural resources for future generations and the continued economic viability of working lands in Racine County, the preservation of farmland helps to prevent the creation of scattered, incomplete urban residential neighborhoods which are difficult to provide with basic public services and facilities. It also maintains the natural beauty and cultural heritage of the County.

As mapped in Chapter III, "Inventory of Agricultural, Natural, and Cultural Resources," about 57% of the County, or 196 square miles, was in agricultural use in 2000—the largest nonurban land use in the County. By the year 2035, SEWRPC anticipates that agricultural lands will decrease by about 6%—that is, a loss of approximately 11 square miles.

Some of the comprehensive plan's overall recommendations for agricultural lands include:

- Land that is designated as "prime agricultural land" by communities, and areas that contain the most productive soils, should remain in agricultural or rural residential uses. Of Racine County's 17 local units of government, only the Village of Mt. Pleasant and the Towns of Burlington and Waterford have identified lands as prime agricultural land.
- Farmland that is not identified as prime agricultural land should continue in agricultural uses, particularly in areas with the most productive soils.
- Nonprime farmland that is within planned sanitary sewer service areas is expected to convert to urban uses, as market demand dictates and opportunities arise for significant economic growth.
- Nonprime farmland that is outside the planned sewer service area should continue in agricultural uses, or may accommodate rural residential development.



The comprehensive plan recommends numerous policies and programs to help Racine County and its communities to preserve farmland and to enhance the agricultural economy, such as:

- study and develop a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) or Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program;
- encourage the use of conservation subdivision designs for new rural residential developments;
- continue to participate in the Wisconsin Farmland Preservation Program and other programs offered through the updated Working Lands Initiative, as appropriate;
- support economic initiatives to ensure farming remains viable in Racine County, including agri-tourism and direct marketing of farm products.

NATURAL RESOURCES

A few of the issues addressed in the natural resources section of the comprehensive plan include:

Environmental Corridors and Isolated Natural Resource Areas

Under Racine County's multi-jurisdictional comprehensive plan, primary environmental corridors would encompass about 36.9 square miles, or 11% percent of the planning area in 2035—a net increase of 1.4 square miles (4%) over the existing 2000 area. The plan also anticipates that secondary environmental corridors will encompass about 12 square miles, an 8% increase since 2000.

The comprehensive plan recommends that primary environmental corridors remain in natural, open use in order to maintain the overall environmental quality of the County. Since these lands are often unsuitable for urban development (due to soil limitations, steep slopes, flood potential, etc.), preserving them as open space will also help to avoid the creation of new environmental and development problems.

The plan also supports carefully planned efforts to restore farmland and other open space lands to more natural conditions, which will result in the re-establishment of wetlands, woodlands, prairies, and grasslands, and may expand the County's environmental corridor network.



Park and Open Space Sites

Racine County and several of its local communities have developed long-range plans for parks and open space sites; overall, the comprehensive plan recommends building on these efforts. The County's park and open space plan was last updated in July 2001, and includes recommendations for County park facilities, as well as for the preservation of environmentally sensitive lands and adjacent open space lands.

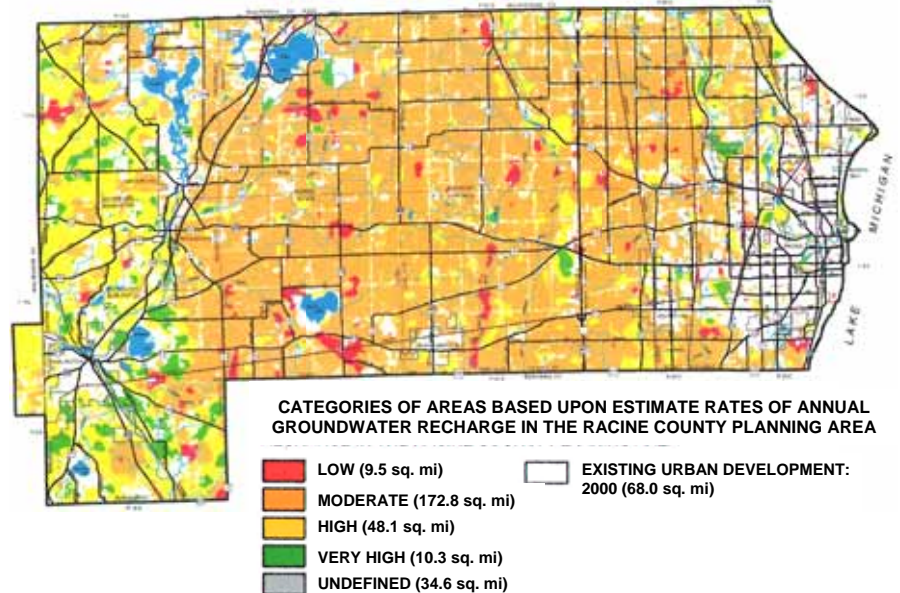
Groundwater Resources

Like surface water, groundwater is susceptible to depletion in quantity and deterioration in quality due to contamination and over-usage. Racine County's aquifers are recharged primarily through precipitation, and the protection of areas that provide high recharge potential is particularly important to the long-term preservation of groundwater.

Responsible land use planning must take into consideration how urban development may change how recharge enters the groundwater system, and the extent to which and where it may impact the demand for water.

This section also contains specific recommendations to address stormwater drainage and nonmetallic mineral mining, as well as numerous objectives, policies and programs to guide the County's efforts to protect and improve the quantity and quality of its natural resources.

AREAS OF GROUNDWATER RECHARGE IN THE RACINE COUNTY PLANNING AREA



Source: Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey and SEWRPC

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cultural resources—such as historic buildings, structures, sites and districts—help to provide communities with a sense of heritage, identity and civic pride. The protection, development and enhancement of cultural opportunities and activities are important to Racine County, not only as a source of tourism revenue, but also as a way to improve the County's overall quality of life.

Some of the policies recommended to help preserve and enhance cultural resources in Racine County include:

- Encourage new development and redevelopment that is compatible with the existing historic and cultural character of neighborhoods and downtowns.
- Encourage the development of site and architectural design guidelines that preserve the aesthetics that contribute to the County's rural and small town character.
- Encourage the preservation and reuse of older structures that reflect the historic rural character of Racine County, such as farmsteads, barns, silos, fences, rock walls, and similar structures.
- Consider the development of model archaeological and historic preservation ordinances to help guide the County and its communities in their efforts to protect and preserve such areas.
- As appropriate, Racine County, local units of government, chambers of commerce, local historical societies, and private organizations should work cooperatively to promote archaeological, historic, and cultural resources with respect to tourism and educational opportunities.



Learn more about local cultural activities and opportunities through the Racine County Convention and Visitors Bureau:
<http://www.racine.org/>

OVERALL ELEMENT GOALS

- Goal X-1: Maintain the agricultural base, preserving productive farmland and environmentally sensitive areas.
- Goal X-2: Maintain the environmental assets of the community and develop methods to protect and preserve valuable natural features, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, lakes, woodlands, open spaces, groundwater resources, and floodplains.
- Goal X-3: Preserve open space to enhance the total quality of the environment, maximize essential natural resource availability, give form and structure to urban development, and provide opportunities for a full range of outdoor recreation activities.
- Goal X-4: Protect and enhance cultural structures, historic sites and districts, and archaeological sites.
- Goal X-5: Encourage a public participation process that provides equity and fairness to landowners and other stakeholders, balanced with responsible land use.
- Goal X-6: Guide future growth in a manner that preserves and enhances the quality of life and character of urban and rural communities.