

# THE BLUFFLANDS

*A PLAN FOR CONSERVATION AND RECREATION  
THROUGHOUT THE LA CROSSE - LA CRESCENT REGION*

MAY 26, 2016 DRAFT

**MSA**

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

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# 1

## Purpose, Vision & Brand

### PROLOGUE

It has been more than 100 years since Ellen Hixon led the acquisition of La Crosse's Grandad Bluff and the surrounding lands that would become Hixon Forest. It has been about 40 years since the Bicentennial Trail was established as the first formal recreational amenity in the bluffslands. Over the past 20 years, conservation and recreation leaders in the region have established a robust and diverse collection of conservation lands and recreational trails in the bluffslands around La Crosse, Onalaska, Holmen and La Crescent. What started as 750 acres around Grandad Bluff is, in 2016, more than 3,000 acres of public and public-access bluffslands.

### ABOUT THIS PLAN

This plan is an initiative of the La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC) to organize a regional approach to the conservation and recreational use of our bluffslands. The LAPC assembled for this planning effort a steering committee representing key City, County and Town communities, plus

the Seven Rivers Regions Outdoor Recreation Alliance and Mississippi Valley Conservancy.

This plan will be used by public and private stakeholders throughout the region to guide the acquisition of conservation land and easements, coordinate restoration activities and recreation access improvements such as trailheads and trails, and establish an organizational structure for continued regional coordination and action.

### OUR VISION

*The Bluffslands Coalition will establish an exceptional network of contiguous protected lands and recreational trails throughout the La Crosse-La Crescent region. Our cooperative efforts will enhance the health of residents, visitors, natural ecosystems and our local economy.*



## SIX BIG IDEAS

This plan can be boiled down to the following six big ideas:

### 1) *Commitment to Cooperation*

All Bluffland acquisition, restoration, recreation and promotion efforts coordinated by a regional entity - the Blufflands Coalition - with representation from all public bluffland property owners and key land trust and recreation groups.

### 2) *Land - Protected and Connected*

A network of connected blufflands around the region's cities and villages, protected from urban development and cooperatively managed.

### 3) *Trails, Trails, Trails*

A network of interconnected trails throughout the region will offer recreation options for every type of use and skill level and will become a defining feature of the region that attracts tourists and a competitive workforce. The centerpiece will be the "La Crosse Blufflands Trail" a shared use route extending unbroken from the south end of La Crosse to Onalaska, and eventually north of Holmen.

### 5) *Restoration*

Invasive species issues are common in blufflands throughout the region. Restoration initiatives to manage invasives and promote the success of native species are important to the health and value of these lands.

### 5) *Many Sites, One Brand*

Seamless, coordinated promotional efforts and signage to increase awareness and use throughout the region.

### 6) *Dedicated Funding*

A reliable source (or sources) of annual funding to support land acquisition, trail and amenity improvements, maintenance, habitat restoration, and promotion.

Details related to these Six Big Ideas follow in Chapters 3-6.

## BRAND IDENTITY

The region's existing collection of public-access bluffland sites is a patchwork quilt of ownership and management. Signage is currently inconsistent and inadequate, and only a small minority of residents are aware of the many sites and trails already accessible to the public.

This plan seeks to improve awareness and signage, maps and promotional efforts, enabling more people to learn about, find, and explore the blufflands' diverse access and recreation options. A common signage system is strongly recommended (see Chapter 5), and that system should utilize a common brand image, to enhance public knowledge of these diverse sites.

Based on feedback from stakeholders, and a review of the branding context, we recommend simply "**The Blufflands.**" This designation is consistent with how many residents already refer to these lands.

The brand should be supported with a logo that can be used on brochures and signs, and that logo should represent both conservation and recreation. A proposed logo is shown below.





# 2

# Organizational Structure: The Blufflands Coalition

## **PROPOSED ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The central objectives of this Blufflands Plan are to acquire and conserve more land, enhance public access and recreation opportunities through trail development, and standardize signage and mapping in a way that establishes The Blufflands as a seamless regional resource.

In order to achieve these objectives, this plan recommends the establishment of a formal, regional structure that will ensure coordination and successful implementation.

### *Name*

"The Blufflands Coalition"

### *Members*

A broad coalition is recommended, to ensure the continued engagement of all parties that have a stake in the success of The Blufflands. Two types of membership are suggested - Charter Members and Associate Members.

The designated Charter Members are mostly

essential to the creation and long-term success of The Coalition. They would likely have increased responsibility for funding and/or service to the Coalition.

The many public and private partners have been divided into three suggested groups - those that really must be members (Tier 1), those that could be either Charter Members or Associate Members, and those that would likely only be Associate Members.

### Tier 1 - Charter Members

City of La Crosse  
City of Onalaska  
Town of Shelby  
La Crosse County  
Mississippi Valley Conservancy  
Outdoor Recreation Alliance  
La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau

### Tier 2 - Either Charter or Associate Members

City of La Crescent  
Village of Holmen  
Winona County  
Town of Medary  
Minnesota Land Trust

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

### Tier 3 – Associate Members

Town of Onalaska

Town of Holland

Town of La Crescent

Houston County

Wiscorps

Coulee Region Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts

Coulee Region Audubon Society

Mayo Clinic Health System

Gundersen Health System

### *Method of Agreement*

There are several methods by which the various parties could indicate their commitment to collaborate, cooperate, and contribute to the success of The Blufflands. The most likely vehicle applicable to all parties is the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Given the large number of potential members, the MOU should begin with simple terms and a short timeframe of 1-2 years. It should be renewed and updated on a regular basis.

A central challenge of any agreement among parties is the question of funding commitments. It may be necessary to establish a separate agreement for and among funding partners, to reduce the number of parties attempting to agree to any funding commitments and to separate that issue from other important topics needing agreement.

### *Budget & Funding*

The scope and efficacy of the Bluffland Coalition will be dependent on the scale and reliability of the funding it is able to secure. The Coalition will be, at minimum, a venue for coordinating actions by the various members. In this capacity it will need only a basic budget, perhaps in the range of \$30,000, to cover the cost of a part-time staff member.

Alternatively, the Coalition could be directly funding certain management and activities and offering financial incentive programs to help member communities acquire land, improve trails and signage, and promote all of it. In this scenario, the members will need to be comfortable supporting projects in other jurisdictions with

the understanding that the goal is a truly regional system and everyone will get their turn to utilize Coalition funds. In this scenario the budget could be just about anything, but likely in the range \$100,000 to \$500,000 per year. The main source of funding would be direct member contributions by the public members, following a population-based formula.

Another potential source of funding for Blufflands improvement in Wisconsin is room tax dollars, at least 70% of which must be spent on tourism promotion and development. It is reasonable to expect, at minimum, that the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) will use its portion of the room tax funds to help promote the Blufflands as a tourist destination and recreational amenity. And it is plausible that a portion of these funds could be committed toward staffing assistance or capital improvements, especially signage improvements, geared toward facilitating visitor use of the Blufflands.

### *Fiscal Agent*

A fiscal agent is needed to ensure the proper handling of any income and expenses. La Crosse County is recommended.

### *Staffing*

It is the intent of this plan to coordinate Bluffland projects, but without the creation of a totally new and independent agency. Nevertheless, The Bluffland Coalition will require staffing assistance to enable it to fulfill its functions. This includes, at minimum, meeting coordination and facilitating communications among members. The staff role could expand with the scope of the Coalition to include assistance coordinating more complex initiatives such as land acquisitions, trail improvement projects, grant applications, etc.

*La Crosse Area Planning Committee (LAPC)* staff are recommended as the designated staff support for the Coalition. The LAPC is already the one regional entity that already serves the likely municipal members of the Coalition, including communities in both Wisconsin and Minnesota. Alternative options, if the LAPC isn't feasible, include use of the La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau or La Crosse County staff as



the convener and facilitator of the Blufflands Coalition. In any organization this new role may require an additional staff person.

### *Roles & Responsibilities*

The Bluffland Coalition will rely on the strengths of its member organizations to achieve its objectives, and it will facilitate the consolidation of common tasks in the interest of efficiency, consistency and quality. This section offers a vision for roles, responsibilities, and the assignment of tasks among member organizations to help the Coalition achieve its regional goals. These topics and suggestions may be the basis for the MOU or similar agreement among Coalition members.

- **Property and Easement Acquisition**

It is a central function of the Coalition to facilitate discussion among core stakeholders whenever a potential acquisition is to be considered. Core stakeholders include at least one land trust, the Outdoor Recreation Alliance, the local jurisdiction in which the property is located, and, if the site is in a township, the nearest city or village. The purposes of this discussion are to evaluate the importance of the land as suggested by this plan, to determine likely recreational uses (again with guidance from this plan), and to identify which entities should be involved in the acquisition process.

After the initial discussion about the parcel, a land trust may or may not be involved in the acquisition, depending upon the need to establish a conservation easement (as is the case for lands acquired with the more conservation-oriented funding sources) and whether the acquisition fits the mission, priorities and interest of a land trust. It is understood that in Wisconsin acquisitions, MVC's involvement will typically be tied to the use of WDNR "Natural Area" or "Habitat Area" Knowles Nelson Stewardship funds that require a conservation easement. As such, MVC would not be involved in the acquisition of parcels designated for new bike-priority trails or the regional La Crosse Bluffland Trail. There may be exceptions to this, such as the Mathy and Skemp acquisitions that already allow for the shared use regional trail. In most cases where a property is

intended for connection of the regional trail and/or new bike-priority trails, a city, town or county will acquire the property directly.

All parties understand that the acquisition process sometimes occurs without discussion among all of the core stakeholders because of property owner preferences. However, coalition members should agree to request and advocate for consultation with these core stakeholders. In cases where negotiations must proceed without stakeholder consultation, those parties involved in the negotiations will use this plan to identify those interests.

The costs of acquiring land, including grant match dollars, may come either from the local government in which the property resides, or from donations, or from the Coalition itself. If able to secure the necessary funding, the Coalition should create a property acquisition fund to supplement the local match. Any agreement among members to provide funds for this purpose should include terms and criteria to ensure a fair distribution of such support to sites in each funding-member community over a period of several years.

- **Property Ownership**

It is not an objective of the Coalition to change the ownership of current Bluffland properties. As new properties are acquired they will typically be owned either by the County or the local jurisdiction in which they are located. The Blufflands will likely always feature diverse ownership, though consolidation of ownership by a regional entity might eventually be feasible.

- **Conservation Easement Holding and Monitoring**

Conservation easements need to be held by a public agency or an accredited land trust. In La Crosse County most easements are held by MVC, and it is anticipated that MVC will typically be the holder of new conservation easements, though La Crosse County also has the capacity to hold conservation easements. In the La Crescent area, Minnesota Land Trust is and will typically be the holder of any conservation easements.

Easement-protected properties need to be monitored annually to verify the condition of the land and ensure continued compliance with the terms

of the easement. Monitoring is typically completed by the entity that holds the easement.

- **Conservation/Restoration Activities**

While each property owner will continue to bear primary responsibility for conservation activities such as prairie management and invasives removal, the Coalition should be used as a venue to prioritize and coordinate conservation activities. It is anticipated that all members will participate in a shared discussion or workshop focused on conservation/restoration efforts at least once per year.

- **Regional Planning**

The Coalition should be guided in its efforts by a regional plan that establishes priorities for land acquisition and recreation improvements. This is the first such plan, and it should be updated routinely to address and respond to changing conditions. A 5-year schedule is recommended.

- **Site Planning**

As sites are acquired, a basic management plan is often completed to satisfy grant funding requirements. For more heavily-used sites, especially those with multiple user groups such as Hixon Forest, a more comprehensive site master plan process is beneficial to help plan, budget for and complete projects. With both of these types of planning, key Coalition member stakeholders should be actively involved in the process, including any land trust involved and ORA.

- **Trail Planning, Design and Installation**

Trail planning should typically occur as part of a site master plan process that considers restoration and recreation interests at the same time. It is important to note that the owner of the property (typically a public entity) is the authority to plan, approve, fund and execute projects, and that trail development may be restricted in some way by existing covenants or easements on the property. Whenever trail planning does occur, property owners will consult with easement holders, ORA and recreation interests, independent contractors, or other interested groups for input on trail purposes, location and design.

- **Trail and Site Maintenance**

As the network of land and trails grows, so does the need to monitor and maintain the condition of various improvements. It is especially important to manage trail access at critical times, such as the spring thaw when trails are muddy – use at that time can severely damage a trail. These tasks can be conducted by the site owner, and/or ORA, and/or other entities such as the County. Consolidation and coordination of routine maintenance is encouraged, possible by equipping the County parks with the staff and funding to lead these efforts.

- **Signage**

Improved signage is a core objective of this plan, including directional signs to help people find parks and trailheads, entrances signs, site map kiosks and trail markers. To ensure consistency with the sign recommendations in Chapter 4, it is recommended that the Coalition identify a preferred vendor who understands the Blufflands signage system and can offer a preferred customer discount. It may also be helpful to designate a specific Coalition member as responsible for coordinating new signage orders and installations, so that the Coalition does not become entirely reliant on the vendor.

- **Promotion**

The scale and variety of the region's Blufflands trails remains unknown to many visitors, and to many residents also. The La Crosse Area Convention and Visitors' Bureau is best situated to develop and implement promotional strategies to raise awareness and encourage use of these resources across the region.

- **Wayfinding Mapping**

The City of La Crosse has been working with a local advertising firm to develop a web-based mobile mapping tool for all City parks. This tool will enable users to find desired amenity types, get directions to those amenities, and identify location within the park or site in case of confusion or a medical emergency. The Coalition should work with the City and its vendor to add other Bluffland sites and trail information to this system.

## EXISTING PARTNERS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships among various public and private entities have been central to most of the region's successes to protect and enhance access to The Blufflands. This section describes those entities and their roles and relationships.

### Public Partners

Public partners include State agencies, Counties, Cities, Villages and Towns. Approximately 90% of the roughly 3,000 acres of preserved land in the study area are owned by public entities.

#### Public Entities that own Blufflands in the region:

- *City of La Crosse (~1,770 acres)*
- *City of Onalaska (~132 acres)*
- *City of La Crescent (~100 acres)*
- *Village of Holmen (~85 acres)*
- *Town of Shelby (~85 acres)*
- *Town of Medary (~22 acres)*
- *La Crosse County (~372 acres)*
- *Winona County (~57 acres)*
- *Onalaska School District (~60 acres)*

See also the Bluffland Partners Capabilities tables in the Appendix.

One partner that has played an important role in land acquisition, restoration, and development of recreational facilities in Wisconsin is the **Wisconsin department of Natural Resources via the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program**. This program was created by the Legislature in 1989 to preserve valuable natural areas and protect habitat, water quality, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation in Wisconsin. The program distributes grant money annually through a competitive process for the acquisition of land and easements, development of recreational facilities, and restoration of wildlife habitat. A requirement of using Stewardship funds is that land must be open to the public. Grants are available to both local units of government and nonprofit conservation groups.

#### **Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund:**

*Created by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1989, this program preserves valuable natural areas, habitat and land for recreation. Program funding is allocated on an annual basis with separate allocations for both local governments and nonprofit entities. All land protected using Stewardship Funding have a permanent conservation easement on them and compliance with a property's management plan is required. One drawback to this funding source (especially in the region) is that the Stewardship fund cannot be used for biking trails.*

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund appropriation is dependent on the state budget. In 2015, the Joint Committee on Finance and the full legislature approved \$33 million in annual funding. To date, the Stewardship Fund has protected over 500,000 acres, including approximately 1,200 acres of La Crosse-area Blufflands.

### Private Partners

Private organizations have been essential to the successful acquisition, management and improvement of the region's Blufflands.

In terms of land acquisition and conservation, **land trusts** have served a vital role as a conduit for funding and as holder of conservation easements. Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC) and Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) are the key partners in the region. MVC holds only about 130 acres under direct ownership in the Bluffland study area, or about 4% of the protected lands.

There are a variety of other **non-profit organizations** that make important contributions to the protection and use of Blufflands, including the The Outdoor Recreation Alliance of the 7 Rivers Region (ORA), the Audubon Society, the Prairie Enthusiasts, the Wisconsin Youth Conservation Corp, and the La Crosse Area Convention & Visitor's Bureau. One organization that owns bluffland is the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which owns more than 300 acres of wooded bluffland at the south end of the metro area.



### Mississippi Valley Conservancy

<http://www.mississippivalleyconservancy.org/>



The Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC) is a land trust that works with private landowners and local communities to voluntarily conserve land in 9 counties along the

Mississippi: Buffalo, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Vernon, Crawford, Richland and Grant Counties. The land trust plays an important role in bluffland preservation. MVC is involved with acquisition, restoration, education and outreach programs.

### Minnesota Land Trust

<http://www.mnland.org/>



The purpose of the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) is to work with private land owners and local communities to voluntarily conserve land with a focus on protecting undeveloped shoreline, shallow lakes, undisturbed forest, prairies and other important areas. The role MLT plays in bluffland preservation is acquisition, restoration, education and outreach programming. MLT has helped the City of La Crescent acquire two bluffland parcels.

### Outdoor Recreation Alliance

<http://www.naturesplacetoplay.com/>



The Outdoor Recreation Alliance of the 7 Rivers Region (ORA) works with municipalities in the region to identify recreational assets with common mapping, signage and amenities. The group is primarily involved in recreation improvements in the Blufflands.

### Coulee Region Audubon Society

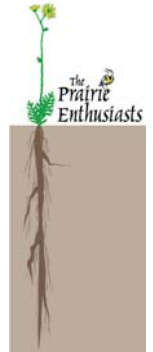
<http://www.couleeaudubon.org/>



The purpose of the Coulee Region Audubon Society is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitats. As it relates to bluffland preservation, the Society is involved in restoration and educational programming.

### Coulee Region Chapter of the Prairie Enthusiasts

<http://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/chapter/coulee/coulee.htm>



The Coulee Region chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) was created to protect prairie and related oak ecosystem remnants through acquisition, management and distribution of educational material. TPE has collaborated with the City of La Crosse to assist with management of prairies, including prescribed burns.

### Wisconsin Youth Conservation Corp

<http://wis Corps.org/>



The Wisconsin Youth Conservation Corp (WisCorps) exists to engage youth and young adults in direct conservation projects on public lands across the state of Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest. WisCorps is involved in restoration and recreation improvements and has installed trail signage in La Crosse Blufflands.

### UW-La Crosse Department of Recreation Management and Therapeutic Recreation

<https://www.uwlax.edu/rec-management-and-therapeutic-rec/>



The Department is dedicated to preparing students for careers in the recreation profession while simultaneously instilling an appreciation for the role of quality leisure in people's lives. Related to the Blufflands, the department is primarily involved in education programs and recreation improvements.

## La Crosse County Convention & Visitors Bureau

<http://www.explorelacrosse.com/>

The La Crosse County Convention and Visitors Bureau is involved in building outside visitor traffic to the area. As it relates to the bluffland preservation effort, the Bureau is involved in marketing, outreach and educational efforts.



## La Crosse Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.lacrossechamber.com/>

The purpose of the La Crosse Chamber of Commerce is to deliver educational programs, seminars, networking events, and opportunities for exposure, promotion and involvement. The Chamber is involved in marketing, outreach and educational programs as it relates to Blufflands preservation.



## Onalaska Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.discoveronalaska.com/>

The Onalaska Chamber of Commerce exists to raise awareness of the importance of name recognition in the community, to assist in bringing businesses and residents to Onalaska, to enhance tourism, and to improve the quality of life in the region. Related to bluffland preservation efforts the Chamber is involved in marketing and outreach efforts.



There are also **private, for profit corporations** involved in the conservation and recreational use of local Blufflands. Most notable are the two hospitals, Mayo Clinic and Gundersen Lutheran. Both hospitals have been involved in sponsoring land preservation efforts and also promoting recreation opportunities to their employees. For example, Mayo Clinic Health System has partnered with Mississippi Valley Conservancy to provide a "Linked to the Land" program which offers guided nature hikes, snowshoe outings, guided bird watching, sunset hikes and stargazing events for the public on MVC properties. Mayo owns about 135 acres of wooded bluffland property east of Highway 53 in the City of Onalaska.

## Gundersen Health System

<http://www.gundersenhealth.org/>

Gundersen Health is a health-care provider based in La Crosse whose mission is to provide excellent patient care, education, research and to improve health in communities it serves. Gundersen works to improve health in the region by doing outreach and providing recreation opportunities. This is primarily accomplished through MVC's 'Hike to Wellness' program, which Gundersen participates in. Hike to Wellness is an employee health and fitness program designed by MVC.



## Mayo Clinic Health Systems

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/>

Mayo Clinic is a healthcare provider based in Rochester, MN. It's mission is to inspire hope and contribute to health and well-being by providing the best care to every patient through integrated clinical practice, education and research. In the bluffland protection effort, Mayo Clinic is involved in funding and outreach efforts. One of Mayo Clinic's key bluffland preservation outreach efforts is it's 'Linked to the Land' program with MVC.



### *Private Landowners*

Willing landowners have been key to many of the land preservation efforts that have occurred in the region. Approximately 5% of the 3,000 acres identified as protected in this study are currently still owned by individuals and families, protected from development with conservation easements. Conservation easements are voluntary and help protect land by limiting some rights to develop, subdivide or harvest.

There are no terms or restrictions standard to all conservation easements, though they typically are created with an expectation of perpetual protection - easements stay with the land and are unaffected by ownership. Both the land owner and easement holder are responsible for enforcing the easement.

If individual land owners are not interested in creating a conservation easement, there are other options available to them. The table on the following page shows other options. It is important to remember that easements do not necessarily ensure public access, unless the landowner and easement holder agree to allow access in the easement agreement. Public access is typically required whenever public funding is involved, such as Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Funds.

Some tax incentives are available to individual landowners to make land preservation more enticing. Landowners in the United States who donate a "qualifying" conservation easement are eligible for a federal income tax deduction equal to the value of their donation. In order to qualify, the easement must last into perpetuity, be held by a government or non-profit organization and serve a valid conservation purpose. The easement cannot simply be land conservation for the sake of land conservation.

Locally, a landowner with a conservation easement may see reduced property taxes on the land. Local property tax assessors are required by law to consider the effect of a conservation easement when determining taxable value of a property.

### *Existing Partnerships*

There are many functional partnerships among the aforementioned groups. In some cases there is a history of successful collaboration and specific projects but no general agreement defining the relationship. The centerpiece of cooperation to protect and enhance the region's Blufflands is the Bluffland Protection Program, created in 2001 by the City of La Crosse and Mississippi Valley Conservancy.

The Bluffland Protection Program designated a project area from County Road B at its northern end to US Highway 14/61. Lands within this project area were eligible to be purchased from willing sellers by the Mississippi Valley Conservancy with funding from the City of La Crosse, grants from the WDNR's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and fundraising. The goal of the program was to "protect the community's Blufflands for natural, scenic, and recreational purposes."

Another formalized partnership is the Onalaska Natural Lands Protection Program, between MVC and the City of Onalaska. In 2009 MVC and the City of Onalaska formed an agreement where MVC acts on the City's behalf to protect land within Onalaska's Greenway Plan, similar to the agreement in place between the City of La Crosse and MVC.





# 3

## Bluffland Conservation

### HISTORY OF BLUFF PROTECTION EFFORTS

#### *Background*

The La Crosse-La Crescent region boasts a unique and beautiful landscape featuring dramatic stone bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. These lands and features are part of a larger area known as the Driftless Area or Coulee Region, spanning portions of 35 counties across southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin, northeast Iowa, and northwest Illinois. In the La Crosse area these bluffs and associated highlands are known by many as “Blufflands”.

The bluffs were formed by the erosion of the surrounding valleys over tens of thousands of years, and, unlike much of the surrounding region, they were not smoothed flat by glaciers during the most recent ice ages. This is the source of the “Driftless Area” name.

Geologically older and more varied than the glaciated areas, the bluffs host unique biodiversity. More than a quarter of Wisconsin’s endangered, threatened and special-concern species have been identified here.

#### *Conservation VS Protection*

*“Protection” is used in this plan to mean protecting Blufflands from development for housing or other urbanized uses. “Conservation” is used in this plan to mean the proper use and management of the Blufflands by humans. This plan is founded in an expectation of public recreation access to most of the protected lands.*

Scenic America (a national nonprofit dedicated to preserving bucolic vistas) labeled the Upper Mississippi Blufflands as “one of the 10 last chance landscapes”. This label was given because the Blufflands are a naturally occurring, beautiful phenomenon that faces harm, but has a “last chance” for preservation before it is lost or damaged. The primary “harm” facing the Blufflands is urban development that replaces open spaces and natural habitats with structures, roads and lawns.

The La Crosse-La Crescent region has grown in population by roughly 40,000 people over the past 40+ years. As the region continues to grow, at a rate of about 800 new residents per year, the

Blufflands face continued development pressure, especially for homes.

### Protection Efforts

Bluffland protection efforts in the region began with Grandad Bluff in the City of La Crosse. In 1909 Joseph and Irene Hixon acquired Grandad Bluff with the intent of protecting it from quarrying and eventually transferring ownership to the City. The funds to acquire the land were raised by Joseph's mother, Ellen Hixon, and it is Ellen who is generally credited as the driving force behind this early conservation effort.

In 1911, well-known landscape architect John Nolen created a park plan for the City of La Crosse and planned Hixon Forest (including Grandad Bluff) to be the largest park in the City. In 1912 the Hixons donated their land (Hixon Forest) to the City<sup>1</sup>. It was the intent that the land would be preserved as parkland for future generations to enjoy. Ellen Hixon is considered the pioneer of bluffland preservation in the region (as well as the first female conservationist in Wisconsin)<sup>2</sup>.

For much of the following decades bluffland preservation occurred not as one concerted effort, but through the various efforts of multiple individuals and groups, typically non-profit conservation organizations and individual landowners.

In 1995, a few like-minded, local conservationists met informally to discuss how to preserve the environmental assets in the region; this group became the Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC). In 1997, the group went public as a land trust, and in 1999 it announced its first project - the preservation of 353 acres of the La Crosse River Conservancy. This preserve was accomplished in partnership with Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, Western Technical College, and the Cities of La Crosse and Onalaska.

Mississippi Valley Conservancy works with interested private landowners and local communities to conserve land in nine counties along the



*Statue of Ellen Hixon unveiled in 2015 at Grandad Bluff. Hixon is considered the pioneer of bluffland preservation in the region, as well as the first female conservationist in Wisconsin.*

Mississippi: Buffalo, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Vernon, Crawford, Richland and Grant Counties.

In 2012, Mississippi Valley Conservancy became an accredited land trust. Land Trust Accreditation is awarded by the Land Trust Alliance (a national land conservation organization that works to strengthen land trusts) and signifies that a land trust meets national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever.

According to its 2015 Annual Report, since MVC's establishment, the land trust has conserved over

#### Conservation Easement

*A voluntary, legally-binding agreement between a landowner and a qualifying agency (public or private) that permanently restricts development on the site. Conservation Easements typically last into perpetuity. Benefits: permanently protects land from development, landowners receive tax benefits and land remains in private ownership and on tax rolls. Limitations: tax incentives are not substantial enough for landowners and it is difficult to preserve large pieces of contiguous land since easements are voluntary.*

1: [http://lacrossehistory.org/environment/Adopted\\_Hixon\\_Plan.pdf](http://lacrossehistory.org/environment/Adopted_Hixon_Plan.pdf)

2: <http://www.wxow.com/story/30070752/2015/09/19/new-statue-of-ellen-hixon-unveiled-at-grandad-bluff>

**Land Trust:**

*A land trust is a private, non-profit organization that works to conserve land through acquiring (economically, historically, environmentally or aesthetically) important parcels and entering into conservation agreements with individual landowners.*

*Land trusts work with landowners, donors, and federal, state and local agencies to identify, preserve and manage lands. The type of land that is most important to preserve in a community varies by location. In some communities the focus is on tourism and recreation, protecting working farmland, protecting habitat, water quality, scenic views, etc.*

17,000 acres, including hundreds of conservation easements and projects. Today, the Mississippi Valley Conservancy remains one of the key players in bluffland preservation in the region.

In Southeastern Minnesota in 1998, a Blufflands Design Manual was initiated by Architectural Environments of Dakota, the State of Minnesota, and the Winona County Planning Department. The manual addresses issues concerning growth and development within the Blufflands with a focus on returning to a traditional approach to development; avoiding isolated residential housing developments (urban sprawl) to preserve the region's identity and natural resources. The Manual recommends tools ranging from comprehensive newspaper coverage of regional land-use issues to zoning ordinance recommendations in order to preserve the bluffs.

In 2001 the City of La Crosse's Comprehensive Plan identified the creation of a new program to protect its Blufflands in collaboration with the MVC; the La Crosse Bluffland Protection Program (BPP).

In 2007 MVC and the City of La Crosse created a master plan to preserve Blufflands and prevent degradation from development. The Blufflands were identified as a priority due to their environmental, tourism, recreational and scenic value. Included in the master plan were plans for a conceptual bluffland trail which would link several existing trails and City roads. The primary goals are to preserve and protect natural resources, provide recreational opportunities, and provide public

education.

Under the BPP, the City provided funding to MVC to acquire land surrounding the Mississippi River Bluffs. This funding was leveraged with grants from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. The end goal was to have an eight-mile long park adjacent to the City which would protect natural resources, create recreational opportunities, provide space for educational opportunities and allow for restoration of the Blufflands.

This partnership has resulted in the protection of over 1,000 acres of land since 2001, and MVC continues to have an agreement with the City regarding the protection of natural areas.

## **EASEMENT MANAGEMENT & MONITORING**

The process for managing land is similar for both public and private entities; a land management plan is created for a property and the owner is tasked with carrying out the plan. If there is an easement on the property, the owner of the easement (not necessarily the same as the owner/manager) is tasked with ensuring the easement is being honored, typically through routine site visits.

### *Management Plan & Implementation*

Once a property is acquired, MVC creates a management plan and implements it. There are typically two main sections in MVC's management plans; background information and the plan for management itself. The first section describes the property, including its history and natural communities and species. The second section discusses goals for the land (e.g. education, recreation, nature preserve, hunting, etc.) and improvements that need to be made to achieve those goals. Planned improvements generally include restoration and maintenance, signage, parking, and fencing. This section also lays out any problems with the property, describes public access, and indicates how the plan will be implemented and the easement monitored. MVC has an overarching plan that prioritizes all of its management efforts annually.

3: [http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/area-officials-suggest-regional-bluffland-protection-program/article\\_d97409f6-e9d9-11e2-ba25-0019bb2963f4.html](http://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/area-officials-suggest-regional-bluffland-protection-program/article_d97409f6-e9d9-11e2-ba25-0019bb2963f4.html)



MVC has one employee whose job is land management. Staff, volunteers, school and other groups also assist with “active” land management and restoration work. This work typically includes seed collection, brush removal, pulling invasive plant species, sign posting, etc.

Once properties are transitioned to public ownership, MVC is no longer responsible for managing the property, however MVC still holds the easement on the land and will monitor it for compliance annually. At this time, management plans created by MVC are also transferred to the public owner; the City of La Crosse, for example.

One of the largest preserves in the area, Hixon Forest, is owned by the City and is not subject to a conservation easement because it was acquired by donation over 100 years ago. The City has a Comprehensive Plan which lays out management plans for the property. There are several categories included in the management recommendations: prairie management, forest management, invasive species management, and wildlife management. In general, management techniques most similar to natural processes (e.g. burns, selective cutting, etc.) are recommended to preserve existing conditions in the forest<sup>4</sup>.

### Monitoring

All easements MVC owns are monitored annually. MVC completes baseline documentation reports (completed before closing on an easement) for each property which includes a written report, maps and photographs of the property at a point in time. This report is updated annually to reflect current conditions and to ensure terms of the easement are being met. MVC has two separate monitoring report forms; one for land it owns and monitors and one for lands it does not own, but still monitors. Examples of both reports are found on the previous pages.

It is important to remember that easements last into perpetuity. If MVC were to discontinue as an organization for whatever reason in the future, another land trust would pick up ownership, management and monitoring of the conservation

easement. All easements do have contingency plans. There is a land trust operating in almost every county in Wisconsin and land trusts that operate statewide.

## BLUFF PROTECTION ORDINANCES

Although bluffland preservation has primarily been accomplished through land and easement acquisitions, several public entities in the region have worked to protect the bluffs through regulatory tools, using ordinances to prevent development. It should be noted that La Crosse County does **not** have a bluff protection ordinance. A summary of the existing ordinances:

- **La Crosse County, WI:** *No bluffland protection ordinance. Development is regulated by slope - disturbance of slopes exceeding 30% is not permitted.*
- **Houston County, MN:** *Structures are prohibited in bluff impact zones (land located within 20 ft. from the top of a bluff). Structures must be set back 40 feet from the top of a bluff and 25 feet from the toe of a bluff. Intensive vegetation clearing is not allowed and roads/drives/parking areas are not recommended when other alternatives exist.*
- **Winona County, MN:** *Development is prohibited between the toe and top of a bluff. A 100 ft. setback needs to be observed from the top of the bluff if the bluff is 100 ft. or taller as measured from the toe to the top of the bluff. Intensive vegetation clearing is not allowed within the setback.*
- **City of Onalaska, WI:** *Within the Bluff Protection Overlay District, only public parks and trails, conservation areas, forestry and municipal reservoirs and utilities are allowed. These lands are primarily located in the northeast part of the City.*
- **Village of Holmen, WI:** *Within the Scenic Overlay (SO) District, all structures must be set back at least 75 ft. from STH 35 and USH 53 and be visually inconspicuous. A “no cut” vegetation strip of 75 ft. needs to be maintained along bluffs. Buildings must be set back at least 100 ft. above or below the sight line on areas visible*



from the center line of the highway. The district applies to all land within Village limits where slopes exceed 12% and all land visible from the center line of STH 35, USH 53, CTH HD, CTH D, CTH V, CTH SN, CTH MH and CTH DH and within all zoning districts.

## EXISTING PROTECTED BLUFFLANDS

The Blufflands are unique landforms that have a definitive bluff top and, typically, a less distinctive bluff toe (see image above). For the purposes of this plan, “bluffland” properties are those with terrain at or above 700 feet in elevation. As described in the prior section, there have been substantial efforts over the years to protect the bluffs in the La Crosse - La Crescent region. At the time of this report more than 3,000 acres and nearly 240 parcels of Blufflands have been protected (see table at right). Eighty percent of the Blufflands are owned by the region’s cities or counties with nearly sixty percent owned by the City of La Crosse (1,770 acres on 86 parcels). An additional 195 acres are under town and village ownership. Nearly 140 acres on six properties are protected by easement. MVC helps to manage most of these lands, while owning 130 acres of Blufflands themselves. See the maps on pages 19-25 for locations.

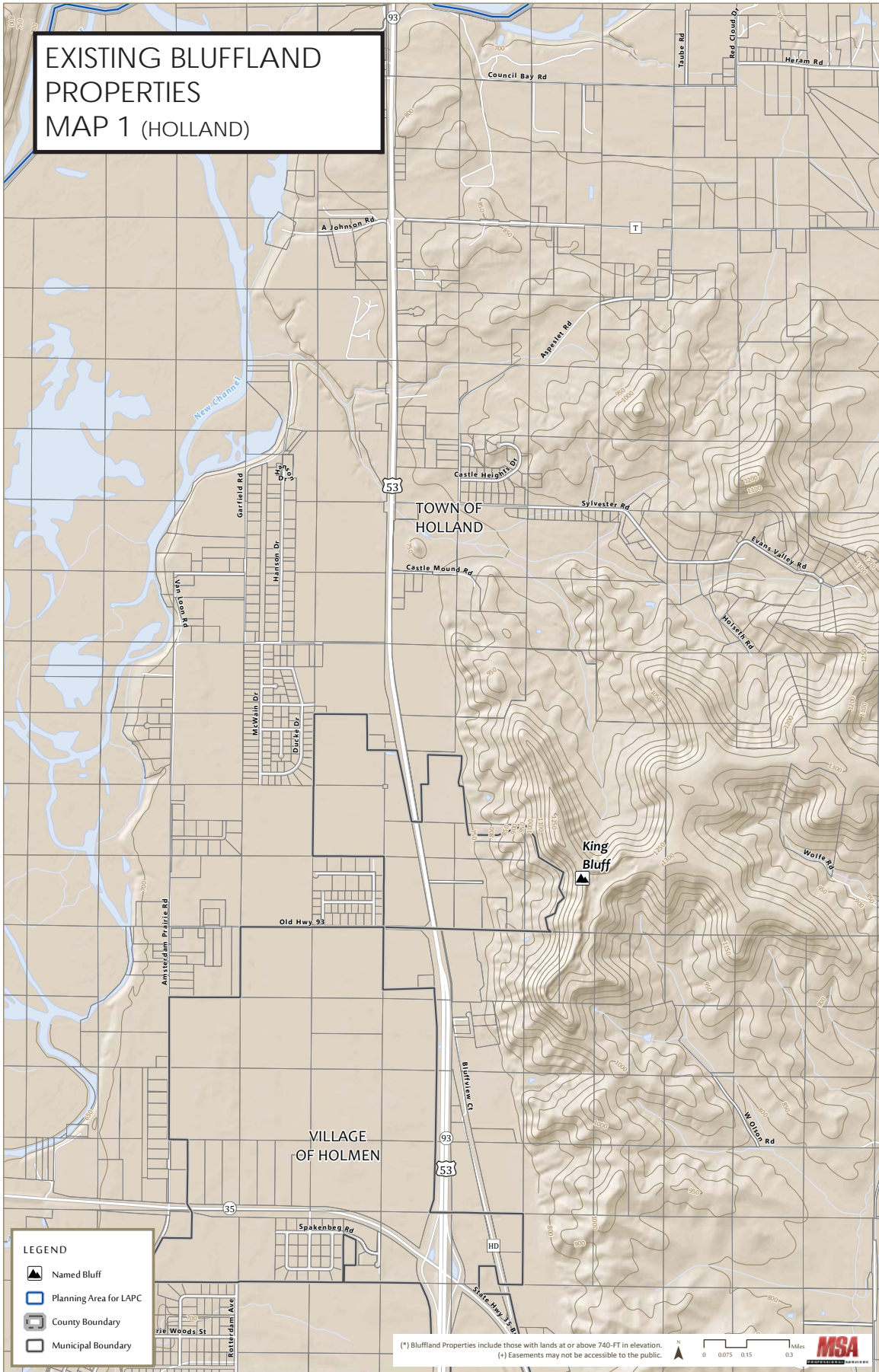
## La Crosse - La Crescent Blufflands

Source: MSA ARCGIS (data provided by County)

Ownership	Acres	Parcels
<b>City or County</b>	<b>2432.1</b>	<b>144</b>
CITY OF LA CRESCENT	99.9	5
CITY OF LACROSSE	1769.9	86
CITY OF ONALASKA	132.6	16
LACROSSE COUNTY	372.3	26
WINONA COUNTY	57.4	11
<b>Mississippi Valley Conservancy</b>	<b>130.6</b>	<b>9</b>
MISSISSIPPI VALLEY CONSERVANCY INC	130.6	9
<b>Other Preservation/Conservation/Tax</b>	<b>96.9</b>	<b>24</b>
Various	96.9	24
<b>School District</b>	<b>59.3</b>	<b>5</b>
SCHOOL DISTRICT OF ONALASKA	59.3	5
<b>Towns and Villages</b>	<b>194.7</b>	<b>47</b>
TOWN OF MEDARY	22.3	4
TOWN OF SHELBY	86.0	35
VILLAGE OF HOLMEN	86.4	8
<b>Easement</b>	<b>138.4</b>	<b>6</b>
BRENINGEN	10.5	1
GOLLNICK FARM LLC	70.4	2
KOHLMEIER	11.2	1
RICHARD T SR & L CHERRY LOMMEN TRUST	19.8	1
TERENCE D BAIER	26.3	1



# EXISTING BLUFFLAND PROPERTIES MAP 1 (HOLLAND)



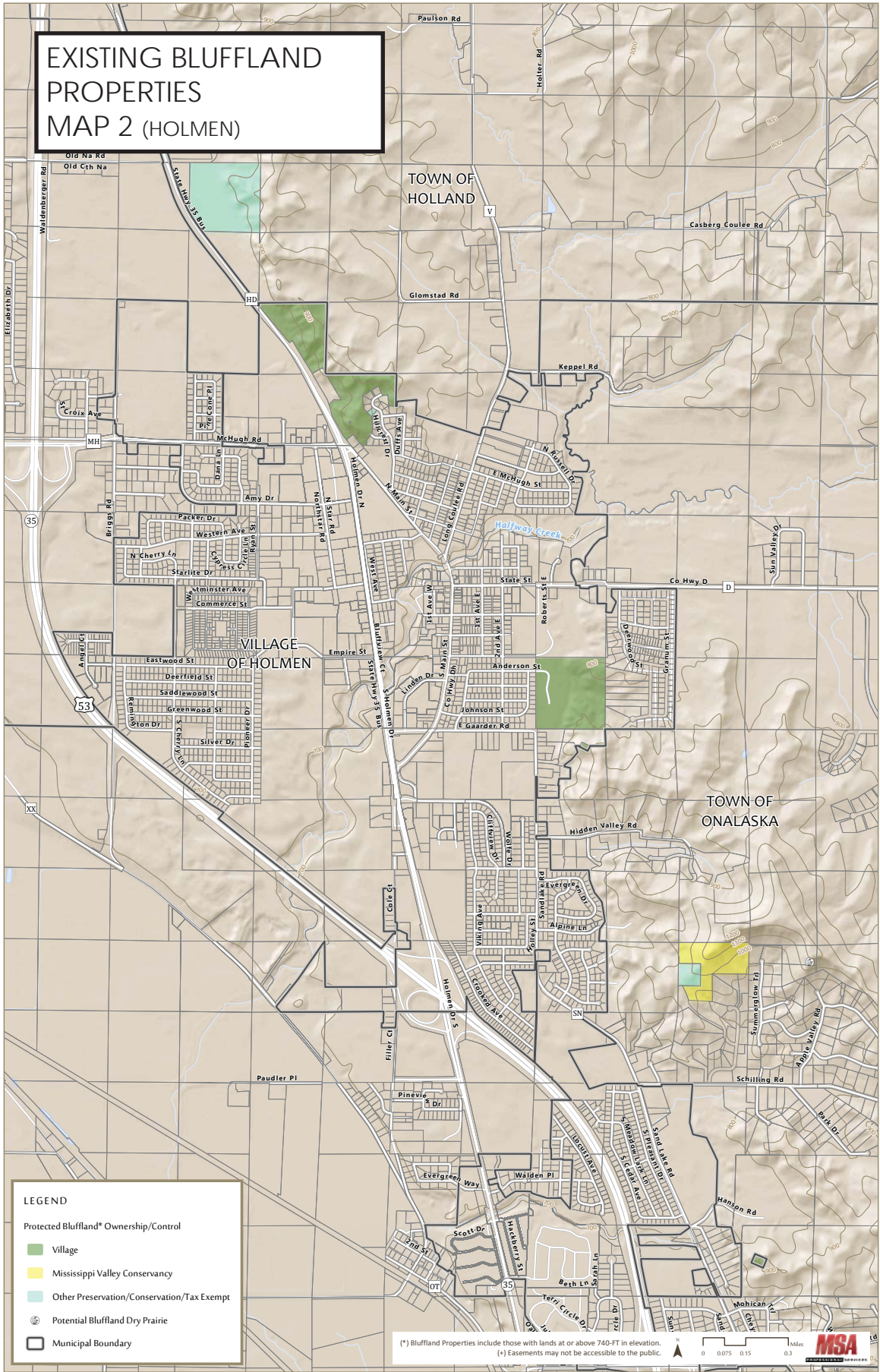
**LEGEND**

- Named Bluff
- Planning Area for LAPC
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundary

(\*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (\*\*) Easements may not be accessible to the public.

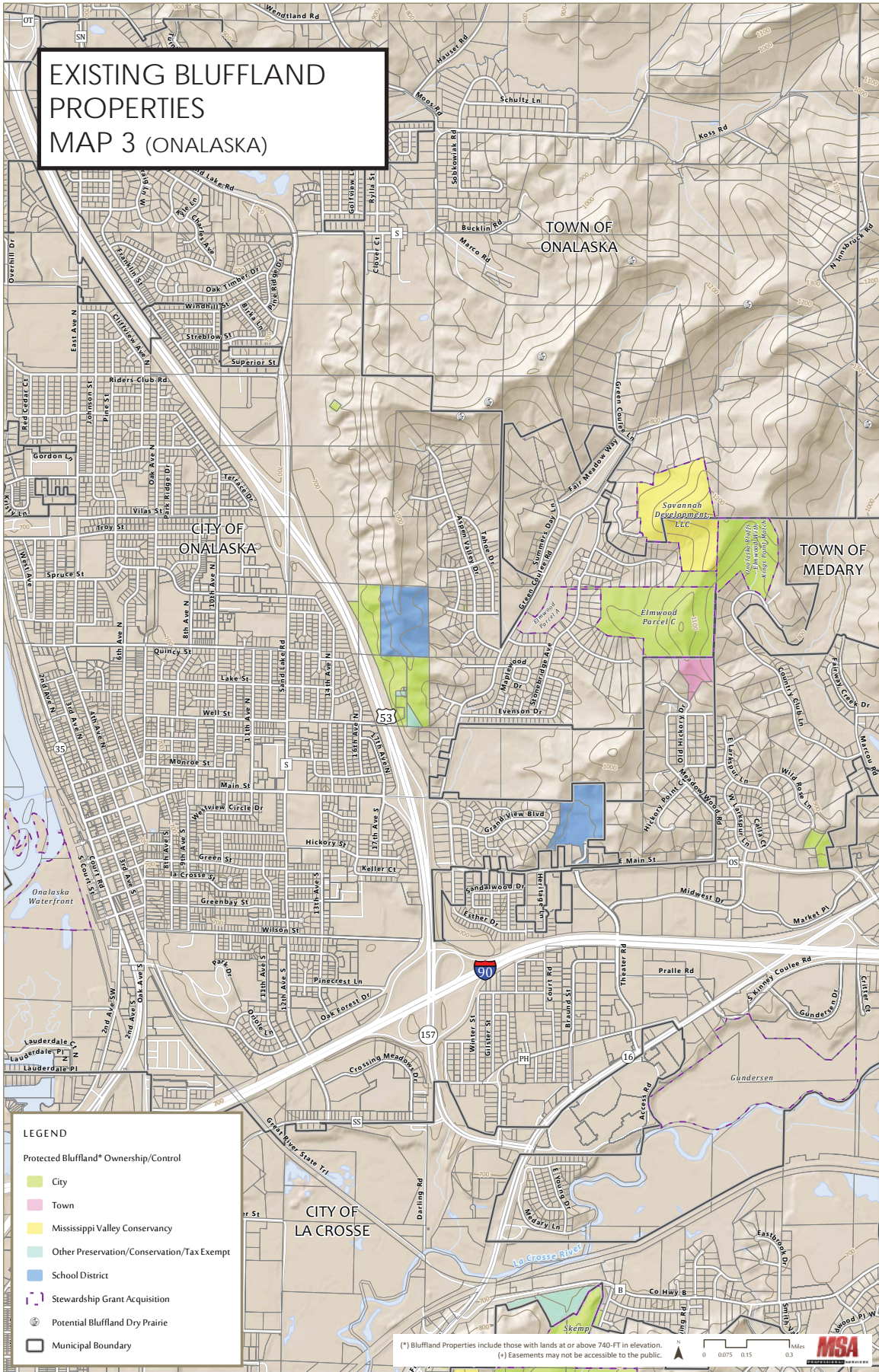
0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles **MSA**

# EXISTING BLUFFLAND PROPERTIES MAP 2 (HOLMEN)



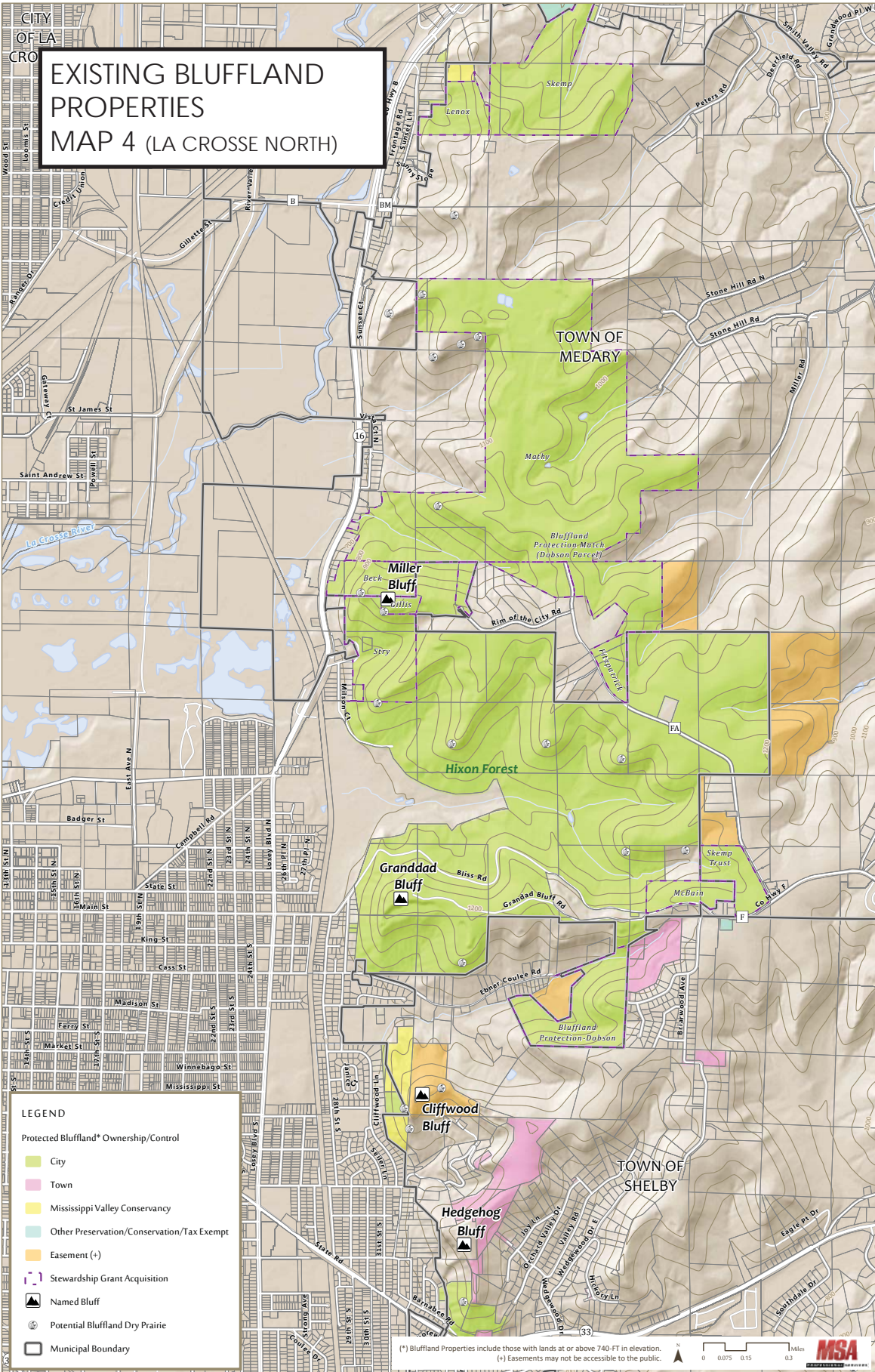


# EXISTING BLUFFLAND PROPERTIES MAP 3 (ONALASKA)



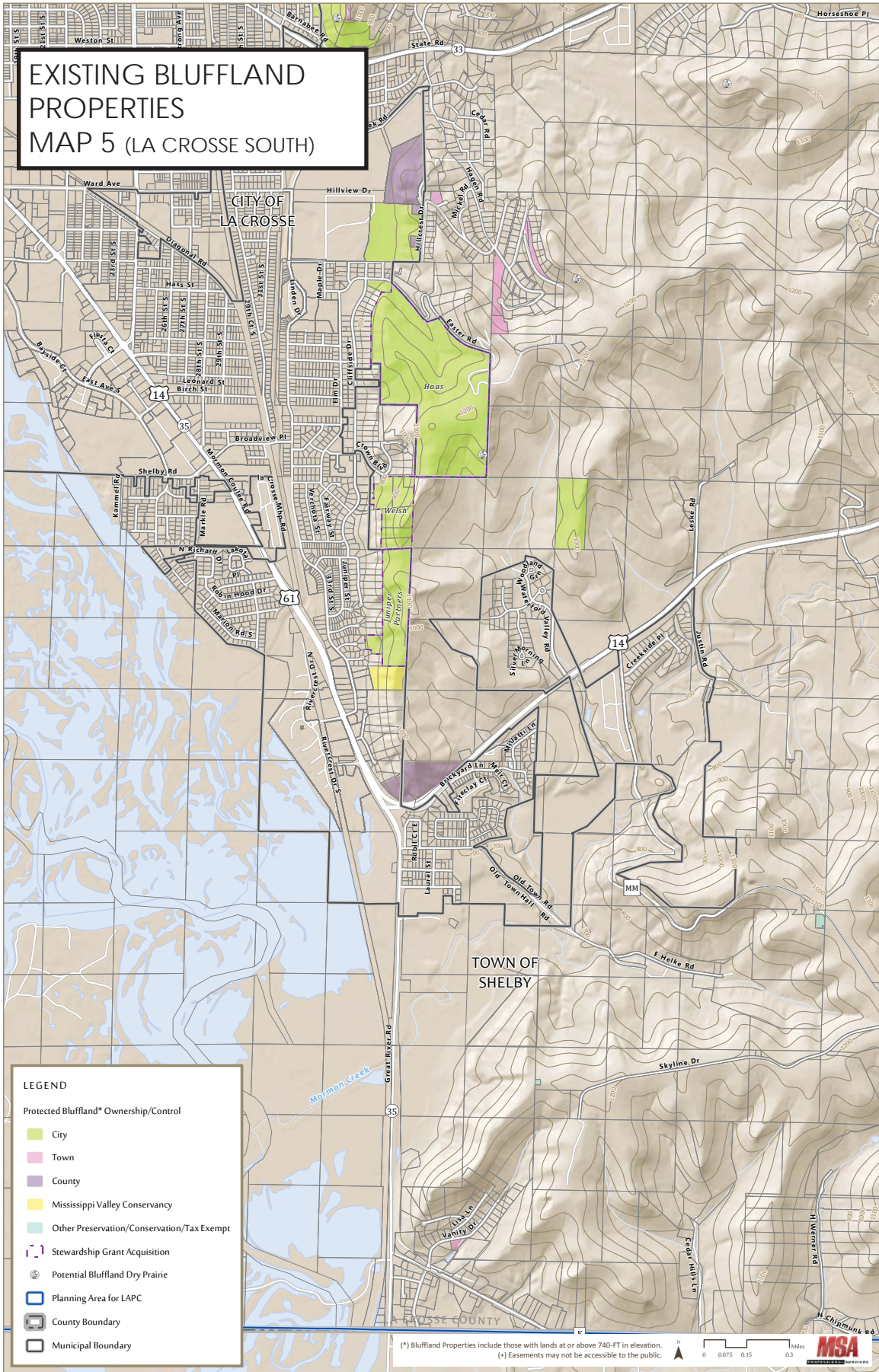
(\*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (\*\*) Easements may not be accessible to the public.







# EXISTING BLUFFLAND PROPERTIES MAP 5 (LA CROSSE SOUTH)



**LEGEND**

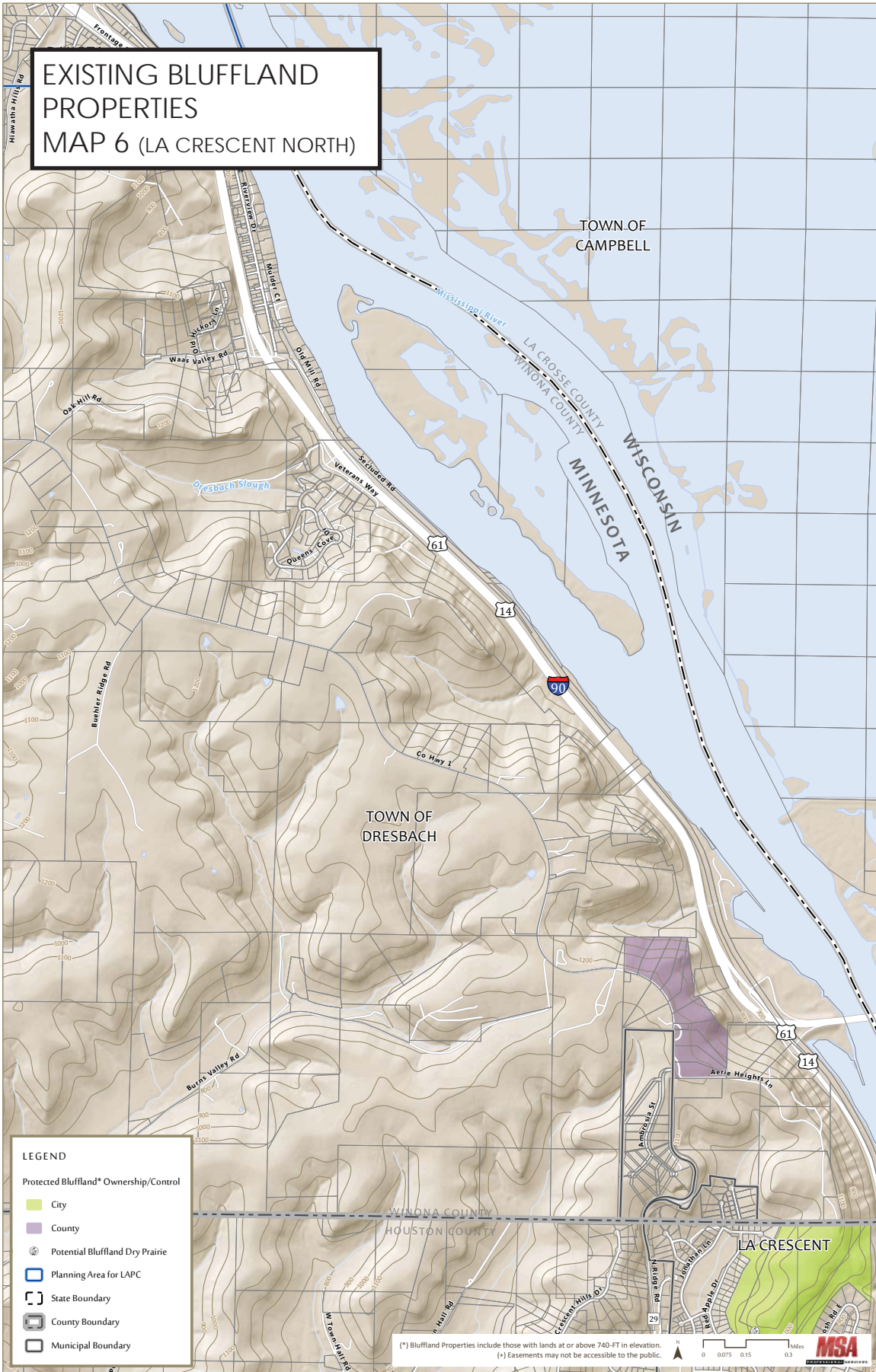
Protected Bluffland\* Ownership/Control

- City
- Town
- County
- Mississippi Valley Conservancy
- Other Preservation/Conservation/Tax Exempt
- Stewardship Grant Acquisition
- Potential Bluffland Dry Prairie
- Planning Area for LAPC
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundary

(\* Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (\*\*) Easements may not be accessible to the public.

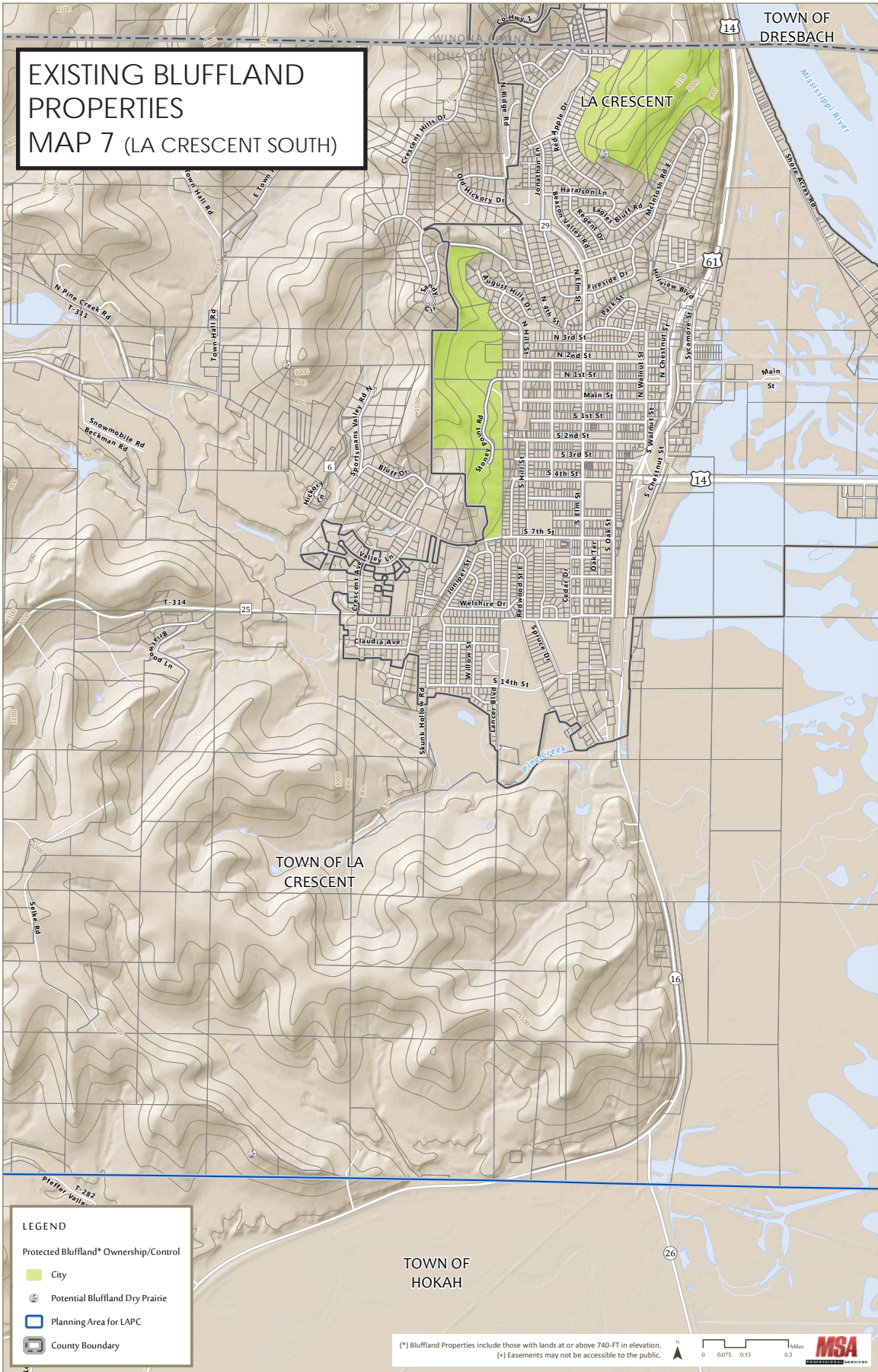
0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles **MSA**







# EXISTING BLUFFLAND PROPERTIES MAP 7 (LA CRESCENT SOUTH)



## WHICH BLUFFLANDS SHOULD BE PROTECTED NEXT?

This section offers guidelines for the protection of additional lands not currently part of the public access network of parcels.

### *Deciding Who Acquires the Land*

As described in Chapter 2, the Blufflands Coalition will generally work together to decide which entity would be best to acquire a specific bluffland property opportunity. Considerations will be given to the property's ecological and ecosystem attributes, outdoor recreation potential, municipal jurisdiction and funding sources.

### *Priority Tiers*

There are, across the region, thousands of acres of land that could be added to The Blufflands system of protected lands. This plan proposes three general tiers of property to help all partner organizations focus limited acquisition resources.

- **Tier 1:** Lands that offer views of and are visible from the urban centers (i.e. La Crosse and Onalaska) and the Mississippi River, and/or provide direct access or linkages to these lands from the cities, and/or close a gap between protected lands, especially to facilitate connection of the La Crosse Bluffland Trail.
- **Tier 2:** Lands that are contiguous to protected parcels or Tier 1 targets and provide opportunities to expand trail systems and/or contiguous habitat protections, but may not have views to/from the cities and/or the Mississippi River and are not necessary to completion of the La Crosse Bluffland Trail.
- **Tier 3:** Lands that do not have views of or from the Mississippi River, but extend contiguous habitat and recreation lands, and/or have bluff faces visible from I-90.

### *Specific Parcel Recommendations*

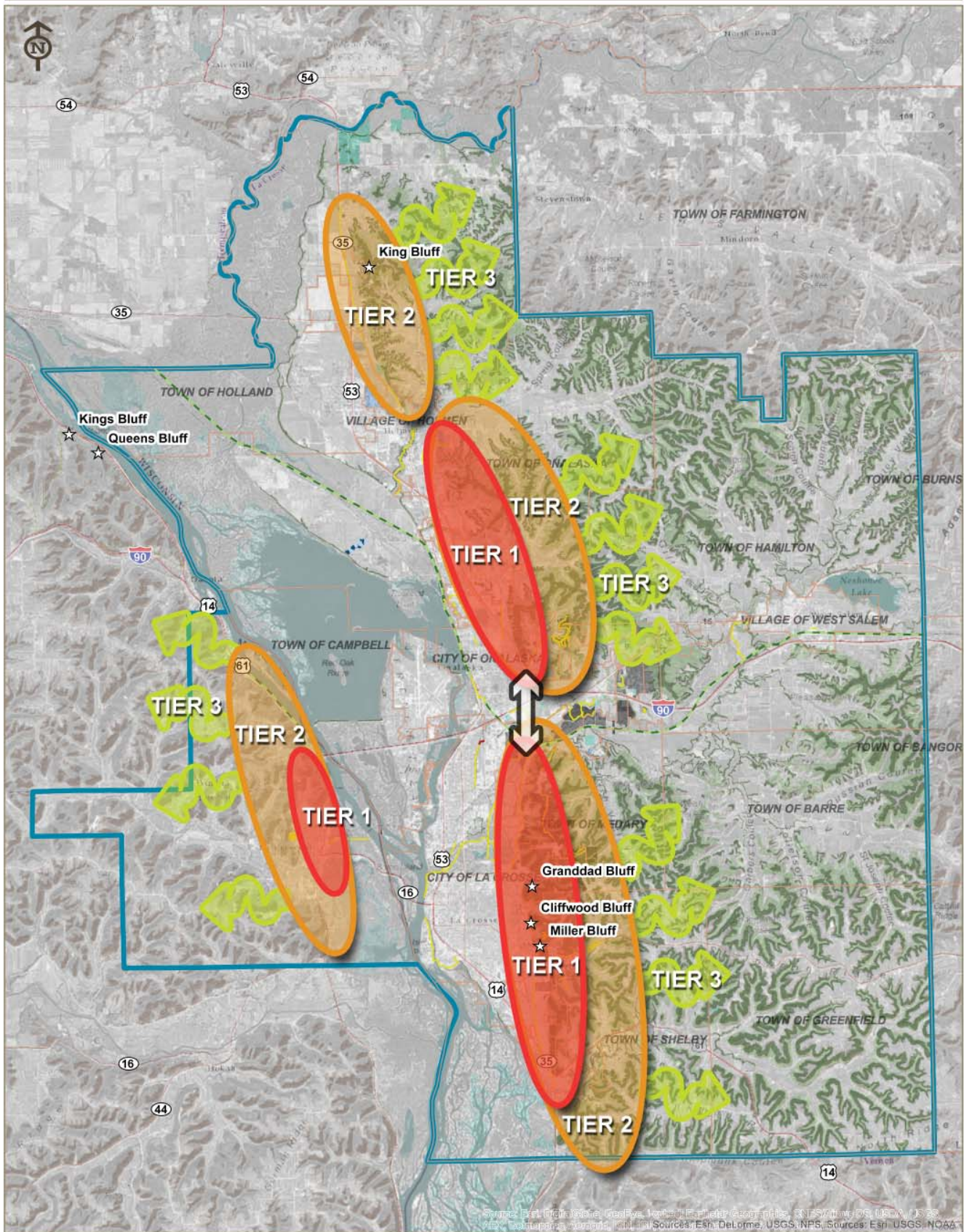
This plan also identifies specific parcels in the Tier 1 and Tier 2 areas recommended for ownership or easement acquisition. The proposed acquisition targets are featured in the maps on pages 27-34. Lands that meet any of the following criteria are identified as targets.

#### Target Criteria

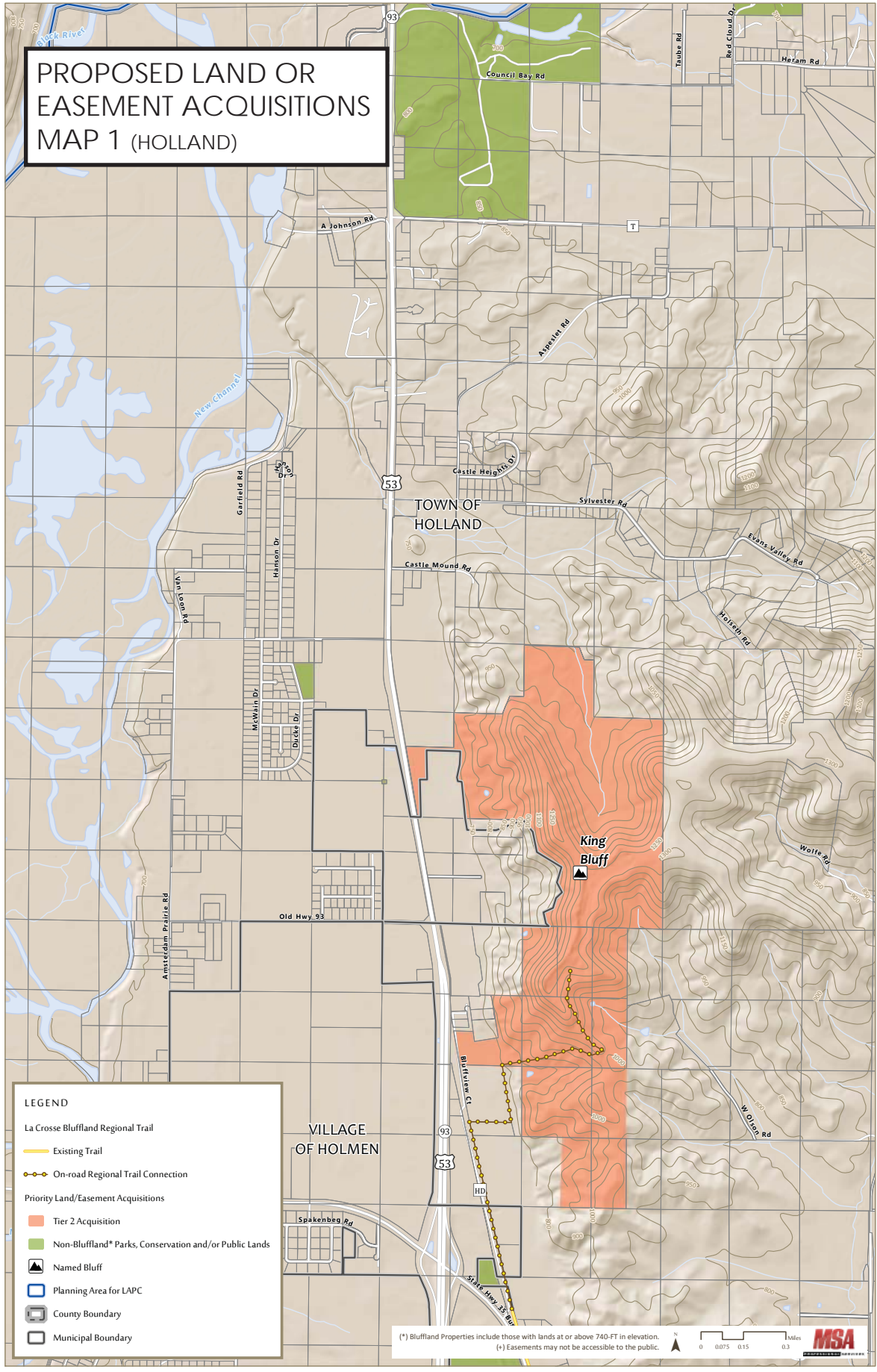
1. Lands with unique or important natural features, including rock outcroppings, dry bluff prairie remnants and/or endangered species.
2. Lands that close a gap in the proposed La Crosse Bluffland Trail.
3. Lands that improve connectivity among existing Blufflands properties, either for habitat protection or recreation trails.
4. Lands that improve pedestrian and/or vehicle access to existing Blufflands properties in the Tier 1 or Tier 2 areas.
5. Lands that are desirable for mountain biking (minimum 400-foot vertical elevation (500+ feet desired), vehicle access at both the top and base of the bluff, and includes sections with slopes of 25% to 50% or steeper.
6. Contiguous lands under common ownership with lands that meet one or more of the above criteria.



# La Crosse - La Crescent: Acquisition Tiers

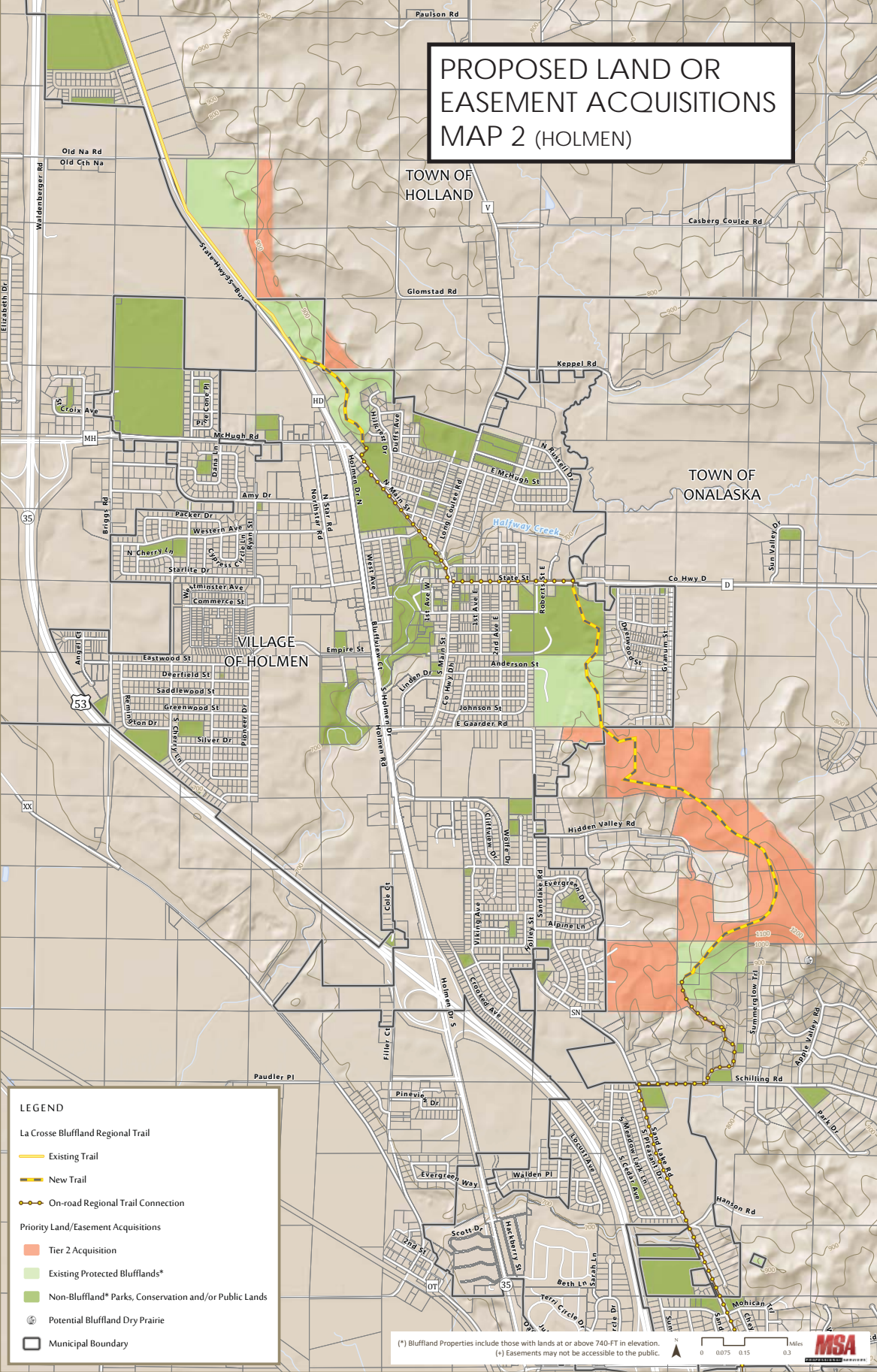




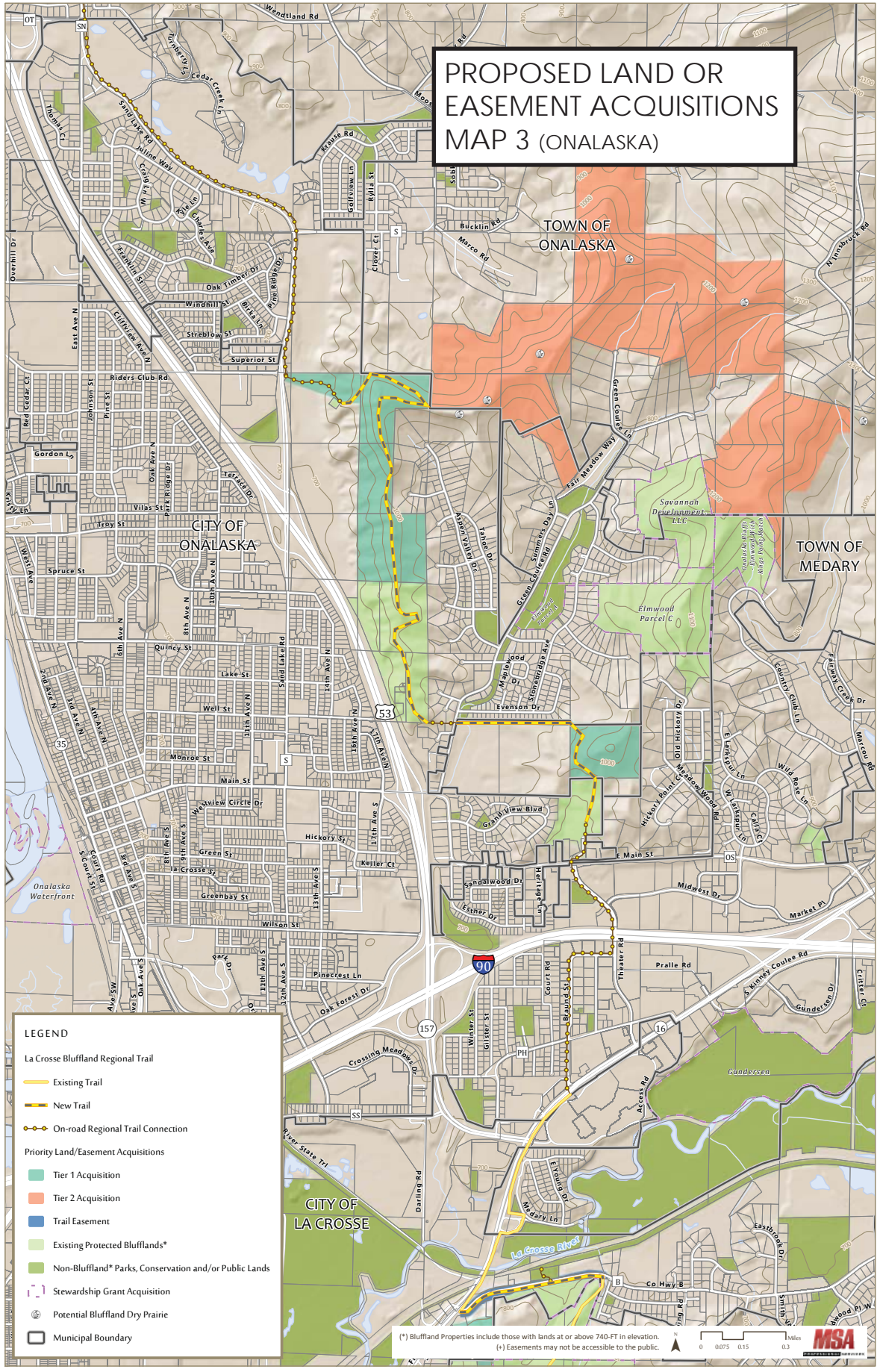




# PROPOSED LAND OR EASEMENT ACQUISITIONS MAP 2 (HOLMEN)







PROPOSED LAND OR EASEMENT ACQUISITIONS  
MAP 3 (ONALASKA)

**LEGEND**

- La Crosse Bluffland Regional Trail
  - Existing Trail
  - New Trail
  - On-road Regional Trail Connection
- Priority Land/Easement Acquisitions
  - Tier 1 Acquisition
  - Tier 2 Acquisition
  - Trail Easement
  - Existing Protected Blufflands\*
  - Non-Bluffland\* Parks, Conservation and/or Public Lands
  - Stewardship Grant Acquisition
  - Potential Bluffland Dry Prairie
  - Municipal Boundary

(\*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
(+) Easements may not be accessible to the public.

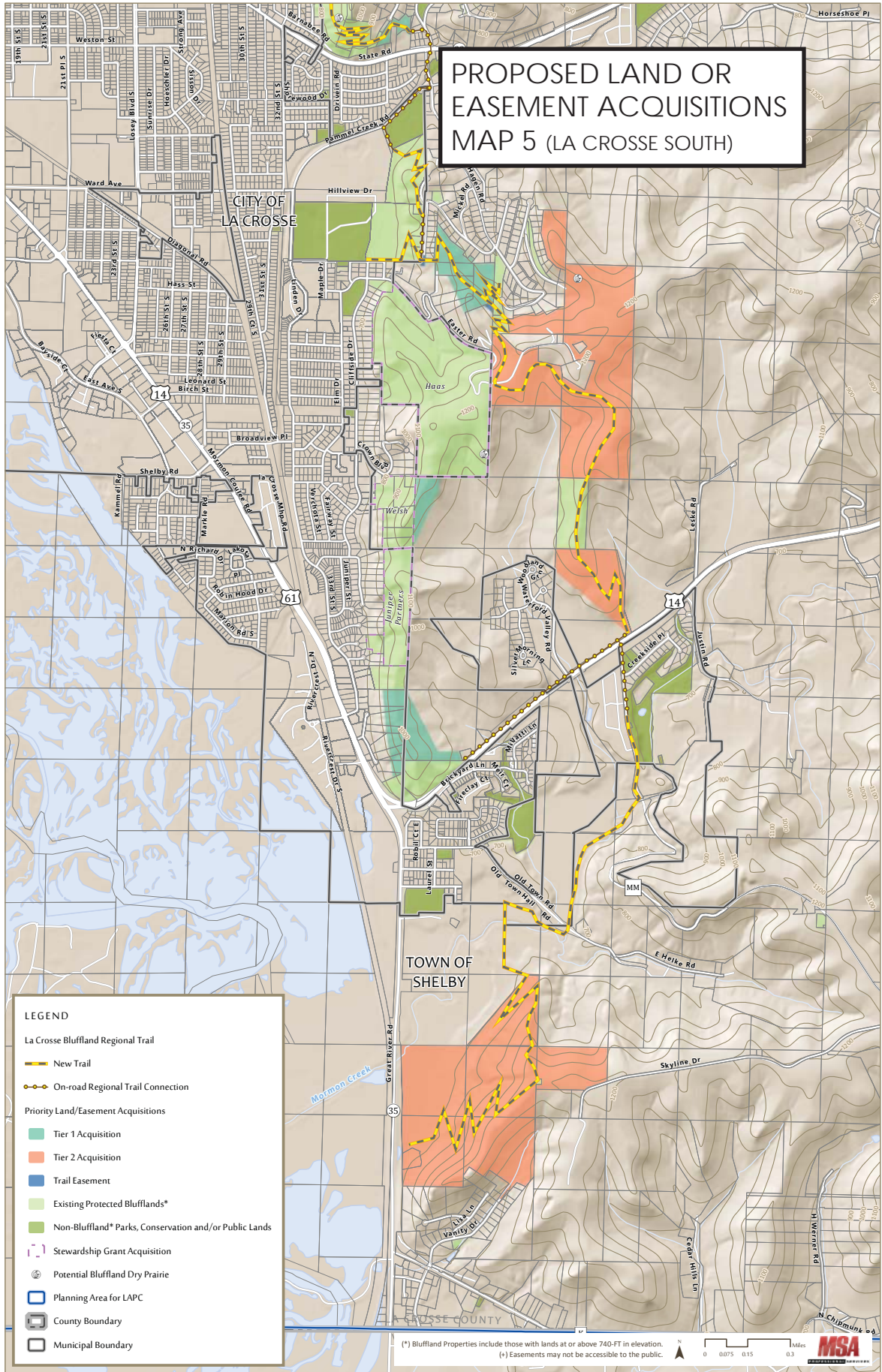
0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles

**MSA**









Blufflands Regional Plan



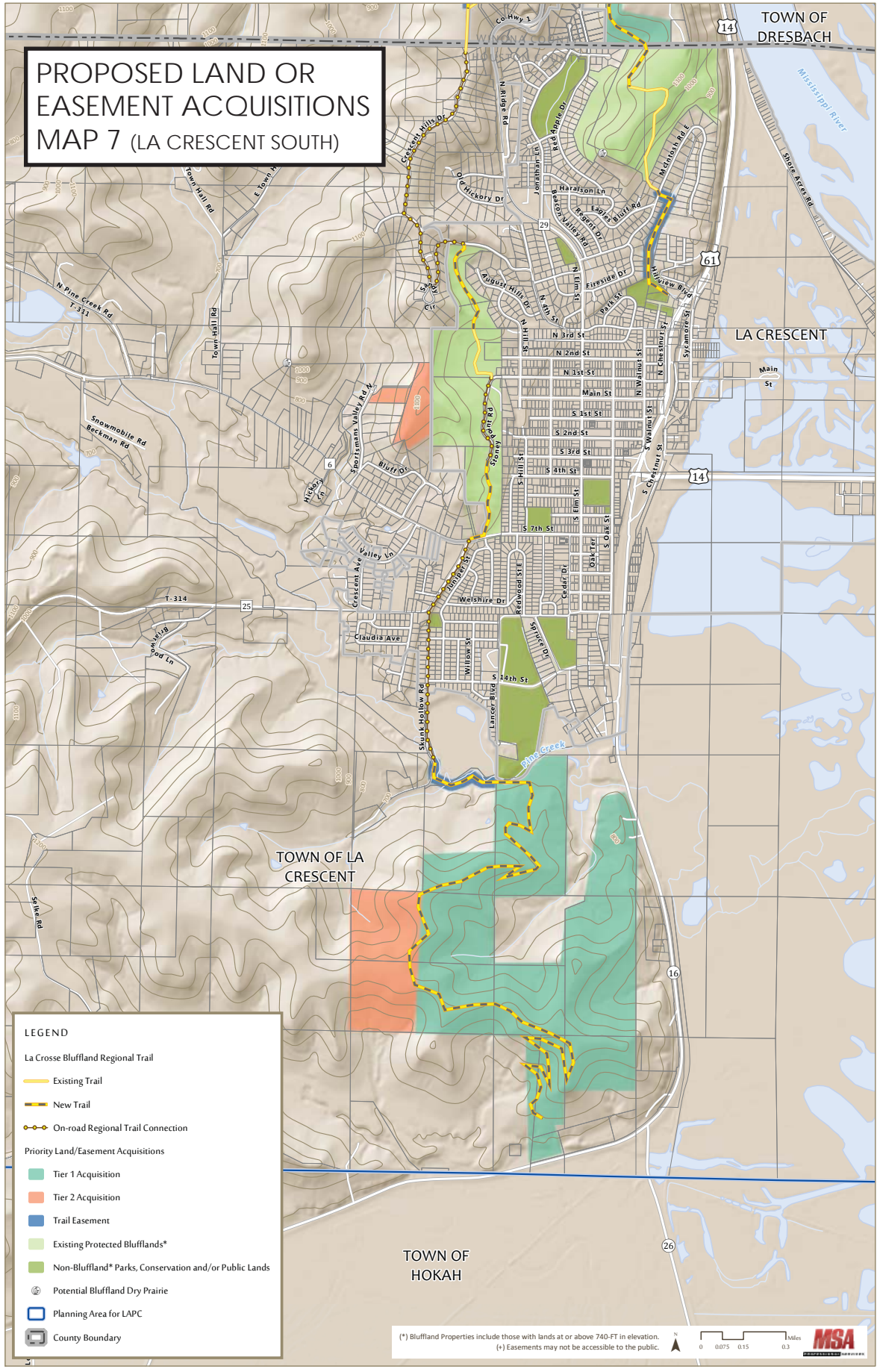
# PROPOSED LAND OR EASEMENT ACQUISITIONS MAP 6 (LA CRESCENT NORTH)



**LEGEND**

- La Crosse Bluffland Regional Trail
  - Existing Trail
  - New Trail
  - On-road Regional Trail Connection
- Priority Land/Easement Acquisitions
  - Tier 1 Acquisition
  - Trail Easement
  - Existing Protected Blufflands\*
  - Non-Bluffland\* Parks, Conservation and/or Public Lands
- Potential Bluffland Dry Prairie
- Planning Area for LRPC
- State Boundary
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundary

(\* Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (+) Easements may not be accessible to the public.





## NATURAL RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

The Blufflands are both ecologically unique and ecologically threatened. It is currently a high priority among the various property owners to restore natural habitats on existing properties. The following sections describe the resources in need of conservation/restoration and the strategies for managing invasive species.

### *Protected Species & Habitat*

The management plans for Bluffland tracts acquired over the past 10 years document a number of important ecological communities in the Blufflands. As described in the 2008 plan for the Frank Tract,

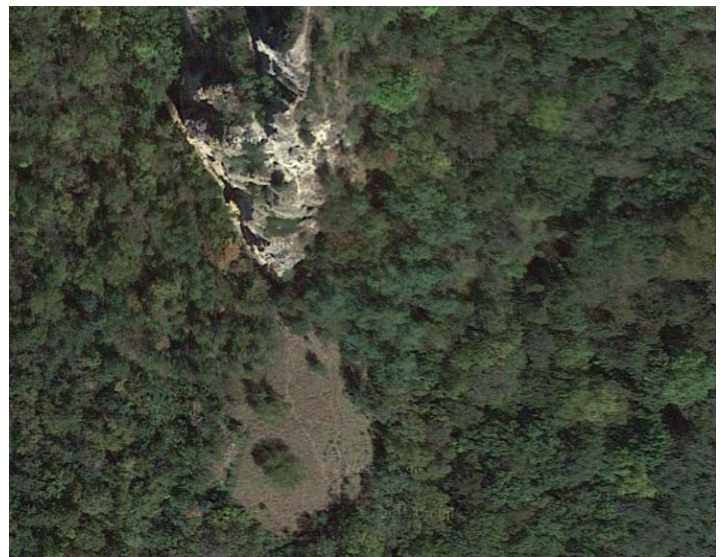
*Many bluff tops and slopes contain steep "goat prairies" and "oak savanna" communities. Dry bluff prairie and oak savanna are incredibly rare natural communities. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Wisconsin has less than 1/100th of 1% of its original oak savanna and less than 1% of its original dry bluff prairie. These remaining natural communities, although relatively small in area, are home to more than one quarter of Wisconsin's endangered, threatened, and special-concern species. The La Crosse Blufflands still harbor many of these dry prairie and oak savanna remnants.*

Specific endangered, threatened, and special-concern animal species found in these areas include:

- Wing Snaggletooth Snail (*Gastrocopta procera*)
- Bullsnake (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*)
- Blue Racer Snake (*Coluber constrictor foxii*)
- Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*)
- Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

As management and recreation plans are created for existing and new sites, it will be important to restore and protect these rare dry bluff prairie and oak savannah communities. Note that the maps on the preceding pages feature an indication of "Potential Dry Bluff Prairie" sites. These designations are not a Wisconsin DNR product - mapping of such resources does not exist at this level of detail for the entire region. These sites were identi-

fied, instead, by MSA Professional Services, based on advice from Armund Bartz, Driftless Area Ecologist-Natural Heritage Conservation with WDNR. In brief, the typical location for these dry bluff prairies is on bluff peaks and faces with primary exposure to the south and/or southwest. A visual scan of high-resolution aerial photography of the region reveals a series of sites across the region that are sparsely forested or exclusively grass-covered and which appear to dry out more quickly than other open spaces, as indicated by the color of the visible grass. These designations on the map are neither definitive for the presence of this valuable resource nor inclusive of all Bluffland habitat areas for protected species. They are simply a reminder of the presence of these important ecological sites across the region, and of the need to evaluate the ecology of each site case by case, prior to any trail planning or construction.



*A Google Maps image of Cliffwood Bluff, showing a remnant of dry bluffland prairie*

All natural communities in the Blufflands including the rare habitats are affected to some degree (from mild to severe), by invasive species. The next section describes those invasives and management strategies.

It is important to note that the Blufflands are an attractive habitat for whitetail deer, and there is concern about the damage to habitats and resources for protected and other species caused by the deer.



### *Invasive Species Identification*

Each time a property is newly acquired or protected, a management plan should be created that identifies possible invasive species and strategies for the restoration of the land.

A total of 16 species have been positively identified in the region's Blufflands; these are listed below.

- *Autumn Olive*
- *Birdsfoot Trefoil*
- *Black Locust*
- *Common Buckthorn*
- *Crown Vetch*
- *Garlic Mustard*
- *Japanese Barberry*
- *Japanese Knotweed*
- *Leafy Spurge*
- *Multiflora Rose*
- *Reed Canary Grass*
- *Spotted Knapweed*
- *Sweet Clover*
- *Tartarian Honeysuckle*
- *Wild Parsnip*

Appendix D provides information on several of these species, including prevention techniques, identification tools, and management/eradication.

The Wisconsin DNR has factsheets on each of the species including common name, scientific name, overview, identification, distribution, control, photos and other resources for each of listed invasive

species. For more information visit the WDNR Invasives website: (<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Invasives/>)

### *Invasive Species Prevention*

Those enjoying waterways and natural areas need to remain vigilant to prevent invasive species from spreading. Prevention is everyone's responsibility.

The WDNR provides helpful tips for a variety of user groups on how to prevent the spread of terrestrial (and aquatic) invasive species. For campers, hikers, bikers, ATV riders and other terrestrial recreational users, safe practices include buying firewood within 25 miles of the campsite and inspecting clothing and shoes for seeds and insects before leaving a site.

For landowners and gardeners prevention entails the use of native plant species whenever possible, disposing of seeds in the trash, being on the lookout for invasive species, responding aggressively to rid property of new invasives and leaving native trees and plants alone as they offer the best defense against invasive species.

The Wisconsin State Legislature has established administrative rule NR40 (Wis. Adm. Code Ch NR40) that makes it illegal to possess, transport, transfer or introduce certain invasive species in Wisconsin without a permit. Additional information on the species identified in the NR40 rule can be found within the code: ([http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin\\_code/nr/001/40/\\_5](http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code/nr/001/40/_5))

### *Invasive Species Management*

There are typically five different methods of invasive plant management; manual, prescribed fire, mechanical, biological and cultural.

Manual methods of invasive plant species include hand-pulling, digging, smothering and flooding.

Prescribed fire consists of a controlled, permitted burn that reduces invasive and woody plant density and competition, and stimulates the growth and return of nutrients to the soil. These burns are under specific weather and fuel conditions to



*Common Buckthorn*

ensure that the burn is safe for the crew and surrounding areas. In plant communities that evolved during fire these burns can kill or set back certain invasive species. Burning should only be conducted by trained professionals who have the knowledge and equipment to plan and coordinate the event. Spot treatment with fire via propane torch can be used when large scale burns aren't possible or nearby plant material may be vulnerable to fire. No matter what the technique, it is essential that a permit is obtained prior to performing a burn. It is also important to practice careful planning and execution, including by professionals.

Mechanical removal techniques include cutting, girdling, mowing, chopping and pulling. Mowing or cutting should be performed multiple times in the mowing season prior to flowering. Herbicide can be applied to cut stems or re-sprouts. Avoid mowing if seeds have developed; mowing can further disperse the seedlings, spreading the invasive.

Girdling entails removing the bark and cambium



*Mechanical removal of invasive species  
(courtesy of Mississippi Valley Conservancy)*

in a ring 1-2" wide on smaller trees and 6-8" on larger, around the trunk to interrupt the flow of sap. Apply herbicide to the wound. For additional information on girdling and herbicide applications

visit: <http://ohioline.osu.edu/for-fact/0045.html>

Chemical control of invasives requires the use of pesticides. There are many types of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides, however not all are appropriate in every application. Selection of the appropriate chemical depends on the target species, stage of growth, adjacent species, their desirability and ability to withstand the chemical, proximity of water resources and environmental conditions.

Any pesticide application must be applied in accordance with the label and all safety regulations. Use of some pesticides require a certification. For more information on training visit: <http://ipcm.wisc.edu/pat/Certification/>

Depending on the species the method for applying the chemical may vary. Options include basal bark, bundle and cut, cut-stump treatment and foliar spray. For more information on specific treatments and schedules visit:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Invasives/control.html>.

Biological management by using organisms such as animals, fungi or disease are effective in eradicating some invasive plants. Federal and state permits are required to use these methods, and they should be used only in close coordination with DNR staff.

Cultural controls include the manipulation of forest structure and composition to control invasive species or alteration of the stand so that effects will be limited if invasion occurs. This also includes canopy cover management. Controlling the amount of light that reaches the forest floor can impede shade tolerant invasive species before removing overstory.

Disposing of invasive species parts must be done with care as to reduce the possibility the seeds will be redistributed. Invasives should be disposed of in a clear bag, labeled "Invasive plants- approved by WI DNR for landfilling."





# Bluffland Recreation

*(photo courtesy of Outdoor Recreation Alliance/Riley Seebeck/Flow Photo)*

## THE VALUE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

It is a fundamental premise of this plan that the Blufflands are a valuable recreation resource, to be used for walking, running, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, birding and more. These activities benefit recreation users individually and the region as a whole.

### *Health Benefits*

The many physical activities possible in The Blufflands, from walking to biking, promote health simply by virtue of being physical activity. But there's more to the benefit than raised heart rates. Research has shown that exercise outdoors in a natural environment improves mood and self-esteem (Barton and Pretty, 2010) and is more restorative than exercise outdoors in an urban environment (Hartig et al., 2003). In another study, Coon et al. (2011) evaluated a series of completed studies that compared the effects on mental health of short-term outdoor (natural environment) physical activity compared with physical activity indoors. In more than half of the studies reviewed, participants' mood and attitude were significantly more positive following outdoor compared to indoor

activity. Participants reported greater revitalization, self-esteem, positive engagement, vitality, energy, pleasure, and delight, as well as lower frustration, worry, confusion, depression, tension, and tiredness.

Another recent meta-analysis assessed changes in mental health before and after short-term exposure to facilitated outdoor exercise (Barton and Pretty, 2010) and determined that exercise in green places improved both self-esteem and mood. The type of green environment experienced affected the mental health benefits and exercise associated with waterside habitats revealed the greatest positive change for both self-esteem and mood. In addition, green spaces in urban areas have the ability to temper other factors that negatively affect human health, such as poor air quality and heat stress effects (Brown and Grant, 2005)

### *Economic Benefits*

**The most important economic benefit of outdoor recreation is workforce attraction.** Enhancing access to outdoor recreation activities is a strategic advantage when attracting a workforce that can help the region compete in a global marketplace.



The competition for workforce, especially young, educated professionals, is widely recognized.

*Regions compete for talent, and the topic dominates strategic planning discussions for most chambers and economic development organizations (EDOs). Talented workers who possess the technical skills, education levels, and innovative capabilities sought by top employers are key to any well-reasoned economic development strategy. The good and bad news is that talent is more mobile than at any time in our history.*

-Regan and Tarleton, 2016<sup>1</sup>

A report prepared for the Mellon Foundation, Eichenthal, Windeknecht (2008), described the rise of the “new” economy. “In the new economy, regions develop a competitive advantage by being able to quickly attract and mobilize talented individuals, resources, and capabilities to turn innovations into business ideas and commercial products.” This attraction of talent creates a deep pool of talent, which in turn attracts industry location and further growth. Key findings from this study were that amenities and the environment, particularly: natural, recreational, and lifestyle amenities, are absolutely vital in attracting knowledge workers and leading-edge high technology firms and industry.

“As populations become more urbanized and parks and green space become increasingly important to urban quality of life, these strategies may be the path to future opportunity ~ Florida (2010).”

Luis and Associates (2009) found that economic opportunity has historically taken precedence over lifestyle or quality of life in developed countries. However, labor mobility is a now product of two main factors: economic opportunity and quality of life.

The region has the opportunity to differentiate itself in the “new” economy by celebrating and enhancing its natural beauty and access to natural areas for recreation.

**Another economic benefit of outdoor recreation amenities is tourism spending.** According to research completed by the Outdoor Industry Association, at least 69% of Minnesota residents and 60% of Wisconsin residents participate in outdoor recreation each year. In each state, outdoor recreation is credited for nearly \$12 billion in consumer spending, about \$3.5 billion in wages and salaries, and more than \$800 million in state and local tax revenue.

Consider these case studies: Chattanooga, Tennessee and Duluth, Minnesota. Both communities have made extensive investments in outdoor recreation sites, amenities and programs, and each is seeing economic benefits.

Chattanooga (population 174,000), which began investing in outdoor recreation in the 1990’s, now boasts an overall tourism economic impact of \$1 billion, and it cites the outdoor recreation resources as a key component of its tourism industry. Chattanooga has promoted its outdoor resources heavily and hosts many competitive events, especially on-road and off-road biking.

Duluth (population 86,000) has been investing in outdoor recreation amenities since the 1970’s, when the City created a downhill ski area known as Spirit Mountain. Since then, the City has been accumulating and linking lands along its main bluff and improving those lands with trails for hiking and biking. A centerpiece is an ongoing project to create a single track bike trail spanning 26 miles of bluffland within the City, known as the Duluth Traverse. When combined with water-based recreation on Lake Superior and the St. Louis River, Duluth’s outdoor recreation amenities are extensive. The estimated direct annual economic impact of local tourism in 2015 was \$780 million.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.acce.org/clientuploads/directory/magazine\\_archive/winter2016/Winter16\\_CompetingWorkforce.pdf](http://www.acce.org/clientuploads/directory/magazine_archive/winter2016/Winter16_CompetingWorkforce.pdf)

## RELEVANT PLANS & TRENDS

Many of the local and overlying jurisdictions have Outdoor Recreation Plans. A sampling of relevant plans and plan content follows.

### City of La Crosse City of La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Strategic Plan 2016-2020 (DRAFT)

- Goal D: Update Trails Strategic Plans
  - o *Objective 1: By 2017 the City of La Crosse will update the strategic plans for each trail system (e.g. Hixon, Upper Hixon, Marsh, and Riverfront Trails)*
- Goal E: Continue to Provide and Enhance Public Access to La Crosse's Recreational Lands and Waters
  - o *Objective 1: Continue to develop a regional interactive mapping system showing all public lands and water access points within the city lands available by a free app for data phones and devices*
  - o *Objective 2: Promote awareness of the location of existing recreation lands, facilities, and opportunities available within the La Crosse Area*
  - o *Objective 3: Continue to meet Americans with the Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for accessibility throughout parks, programs, facilities, and recreation*
- Goal F: Conserve Wetlands, Urban Forests, Bluff lands, Rural Landscapes and Forests through Partnerships and Incentives
  - o *Objective 1: Encourage large-scale land conservation partnership projects*
  - o *Objective 2: Continue to support the Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative for habitat conservation and protection*

The City's plan also proposes a series of projects to be completed by 2020, including:

- Vista 2 Trail Construction in 2016 (\$50,000)
- Comprehensive Management Plan for Hixon Forest in 2016 (\$40,000)
- Upper Hixon 40 acre Pollinator Garden in 2016 (\$200,000)
- Upper Hixon Trail Head Facility in 2017

(Phase2) (\$400,000)

- Hixon and bluffland trail maintenance, repair, and construction in 2018 and 2019 (\$150,000)
- Prairie Improvement in 2018 (\$10,000)
- Bluffland Restoration (\$160,000)

### City of Onalaska Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2010)

*The city should work closely with neighboring communities, local conservancy groups, state and federal agencies and private landowners to promote and foster a community wide system of pathways that will enhance the livability of the community.*

The plan envisions a trail system to allow users to enjoy the ridge tops and bluffs, and identifies a number of improvements to Greens Coulee Park, including trails improvements, bike parking, a natural areas management plan, and possible expansion.

### City of La Crescent Park and Recreation Plan (2012)

La Crescent's primary Bluffland park is Eagles Bluff Park. The plan identifies the need for trails and scenic overlooks in this park.



## State of Minnesota Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014-2018

## State of Wisconsin Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2011-2016

The state plans are perhaps most valuable for their documentation of user preferences and trends.

The State of Minnesota last collected survey data on outdoor recreation in 2004, and reported it in the 2008-2012 SCORP. In that survey, fifty-seven percent (57%) of Minnesota residents felt outdoor recreation was very important and another 25% felt it was moderately important. Fifty-four percent (54%) of residents reported participation in walking and 29% participate in biking. Based on that survey, the SCORP concluded that non-traditional activities like skateboarding, in-line skating, off road-biking, geocaching and disc golf were becoming increasingly popular.

The 2011-2016 Wisconsin SCORP also looks at uses and trends, based on an ongoing survey reporting 5-year average findings as of 2009. That survey found that more than 87% of residents enjoy some form of outdoor recreation.

According to the Wisconsin SCORP, the most popular outdoor activities for Wisconsin residents were: walking for pleasure, gardening for pleasure, viewing/photographing natural scenery, attending outdoor sports event, family gatherings, and visiting nature centers. The least popular activities were surfing, windsurfing, scuba diving, orienteering, inline skating and caving.

Although walking was the most popular outdoor recreation activity in Wisconsin, according to the SCORP, it is estimated that over 70% of Wisconsin residents do not live within a 1/2-mile walk of a public park or trail. Connecting trails can increase residents' accessibility to outdoor recreation.

Some of the projected trends in Wisconsin's outdoor recreation activities include an increasing demand in adventure racing, driving for pleasure, RV camping, kayaking, dog parks, outdoor soccer,

BMX biking, climbing, paddleboarding, triathlon, off-highway vehicle driving and gardening.

Another trend in Wisconsin and Minnesota (and nationwide) is the growing, aging, baby boomer demographic. According to Wisconsin's SCORP, baby boomers have a tendency to be active older adults which will increase the demand for low-impact activities such as walking, gardening and birding.

5: [http://lacrossehistory.org/environment/Adopted\\_Hixon\\_Plan.pdf](http://lacrossehistory.org/environment/Adopted_Hixon_Plan.pdf)

## PUBLIC INPUT

This plan has been prepared with the guidance of a Regional Bluffland Plan Steering Committee, which brings together all of the groups in the region involved in bluffland conservation and recreation access. The process also included a community survey, stakeholder interviews, and several public meetings. Summaries of feedback from those outreach methods follow.

### Community Survey

To help shape the future of the community and maintain the natural beauty that surrounds the La Crosse - La Crescent region, a "La Crosse Area Bluffland Protection Survey" was implemented. The survey was available online at [surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com) during November 2015. It was promoted through press releases and reporting articles in the La Crosse Tribune and on local television news.

In total, 634 individuals completed the survey. Ninety-five percent (95%) of those who completed the survey live in the region (zip code beginning with '546' for Wisconsin or '559' for Minnesota). Ninety percent (90%) of respondents work within the region. Since nearly all of respondents live and/or work in the region, responses are representative of those living and working in the region.

This section summarizes recreation interests that were expressed in the survey results. A comprehensive summary of survey responses can be found in Appendix C.

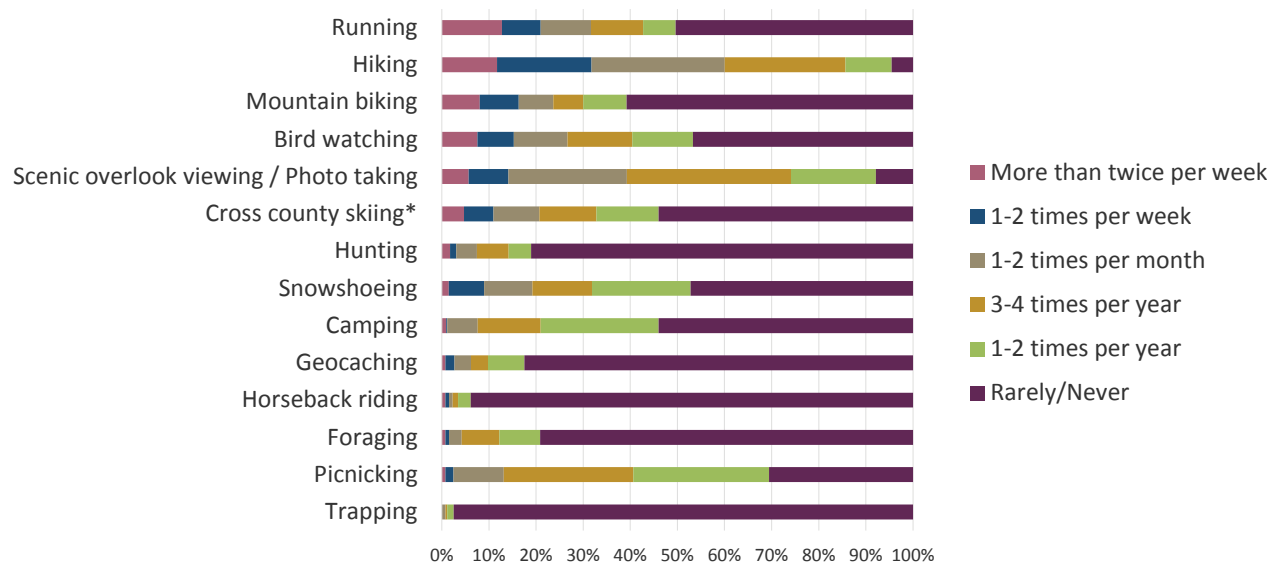
Just over half of survey respondents noted that their favorite recreation site in the region is Hixon Forest (57%). The second most popular site was Grandad Bluff Park (18%), which is part of Hixon Forest. Respondents chose these locations due to their opportunities for hiking, ease of access and beautiful views. Approximately 90% of respondents have been to Hixon Forest and/or Grandad Bluff within the last 12 months.

Recreation activities currently allowed in Hixon Forest include hiking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and some mountain biking (activities not allowed in Hixon Forest include motorized recreational vehicles, overnight camping, paintball, rock climbing, and other activities that "increase threats to personal safety or potential for negative impacts on habitat, promote erosion, reduce tranquility, etc<sup>5</sup>").

According to survey respondents, the most popular types of recreation (based on the reported frequency of the activity) are hiking, running, mountain biking and bird watching. Activities that

### How often respondents do the following activities in the region

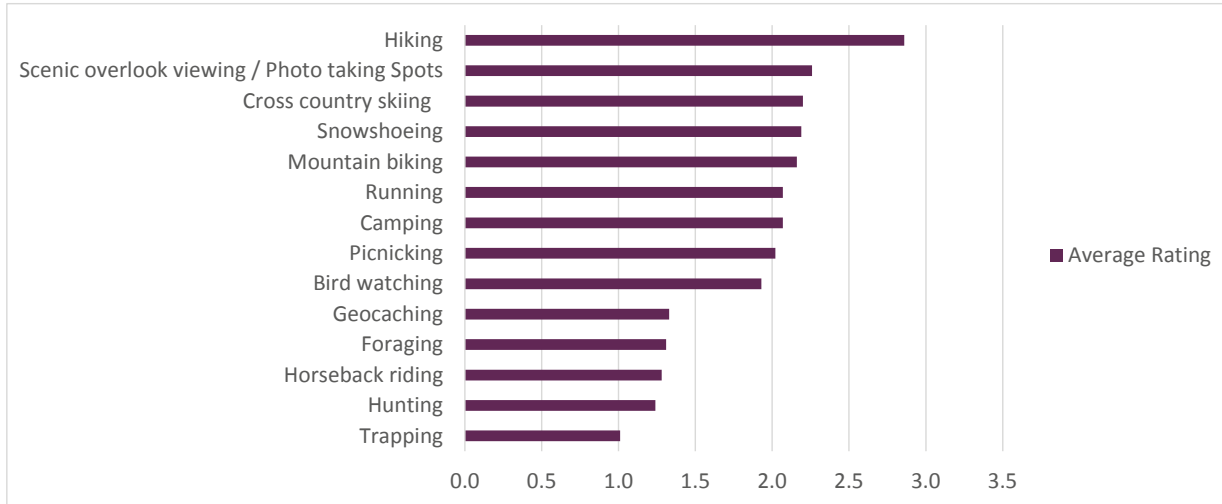
Source: La Crosse Area Bluffland Protection Survey





## Recreation opportunities the region needs more of

Source: La Crosse Area Bluffland Protection Survey



respondents rarely/never engage in include trapping, horseback riding, geocaching and hunting, among others.

When asked what type of recreational opportunities there should be *more* of in the blufflands, the top response was hiking. Other popular responses included scenic overlooks/photo taking spots, mountain biking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing. Respondents preferred both active (hiking, mountain biking, etc.) and passive recreational activities (bird watching, scenic overlooks, etc.).

### Interviews

The project team used stakeholder interviews as one method to learn from stakeholders. Jason Valerius (MSA) and Charlie Handy (La Crosse County) interviewed more than 20 people with knowledge and perspectives relevant to this project.

Most of the interviews started with a set of standard questions about the blufflands and their use, protection, enhancement, identity, etc., and each conversation followed its own course. The following notes and observations are an abbreviated version of the full summary, which is in the appendix. These notes represent a synthesis of relevant findings across the interviews, organized by topic. It is important to note that the perspectives

described here are anecdotal and particular to the people we interviewed - they do not necessarily represent the region as a whole and they do not represent the views of the steering committee for this project.

### *How and why are the blufflands important?*

We heard diverse responses about scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, groundwater protection, and opportunities for recreation, exercise, and education. We heard about the value of these attributes in attracting people to visit, live and work in the area.

### *What has the region done well with regard to bluffland protection and access?*

Many of the interviewees cited the acquisition and protection of lands by MVC and the City of La Crosse as the core success thus far, including not only the amount of land, but the fact that there are many contiguous parcels. The existing trails came up multiple times as a noteworthy success – they are high quality, conveniently close to where people live and well-used.

### *What are some of the challenges and opportunities ahead?*

Based on these interviews, most of the important challenges and opportunities relate to the use of the blufflands – encouraging, facilitating,

managing and balancing a wide variety of uses and users. We heard multiple strategies to address trail user conflicts, including good trail design and good signage.

Proactive, timely trail management was noted to be important, especially through seasonal changes. The interviewees reinforced a desire heard in multiple settings – for a continuous trail running the length of the La Crosse Bluffs, and beyond. People want the ability to hike along the top of the bluffs, at least from Hwy 61 at the south to County Highway B on the north.

Most of the public-access bluffland properties in the region have been acquired with funding from the Wisconsin DNR Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Local leaders involved in the process of acquiring and programming these lands have learned some important lessons about the restrictions on certain uses when land is acquired through the Stewardship Program. Moving forward, it will be important to use this plan for guidance during new land acquisitions, to ensure that any property desired for recreation uses is acquired with a funding source – Stewardship or otherwise – that allows the desired uses.

***How can the various stakeholder organizations have roles in the protection, improvement and use of the blufflands?***

Our discussions with organizations both central and peripheral to the blufflands revealed opportunities for coordination and collaboration. Organizations noted as assets for Bluffland conservation included:

- *Mississippi Valley Conservancy*
- *Outdoor Recreation Alliance of the Seven Rivers Region, Inc.*
- *WisCorps*
- *The hospitals (Gundersen and Mayo)*
- *The La Crosse Area Convention and Visitors Bureau*

***How can or should the blufflands be branded to enhance awareness of this regional network.***

There was summary variety of opinion about branding among the interviewees, though everyone who discussed it seemed to like “The Blufflands”.

Blufflands Regional Plan

## *Public Meetings*

**An initial public information meeting was held on November 12, 2015** at Black River Beach Neighborhood Center to share the purpose of the plan and process and gather stakeholder opinions about bluffland protection and use.

One meeting activity invited everyone to share their thoughts on two topics by posting their ideas on a blue “sticky wall”. A summary of the responses follows.



*Sticky wall activity at public meeting on November 12, 2015.*

***1. The bluffs and surrounding lands are important to me because...***

The vast majority of attendees thought the blufflands are important because of the opportunities for recreation that they offer. Activities that were mentioned included hiking, mountain biking, cross country skiing, running, bird watching, nature study and snow shoeing,

Another reason attendees thought the blufflands are important, mentioned several times, was the natural beauty of the bluffs and surrounding lands. Comments reflected an understanding that the blufflands are a unique natural resource that could be lost unless there are active efforts to



preserve these lands and features.

***2. The #1 thing that I would like to see happen to enhance or protect the blufflands as a regional amenity is...***

One of the most common responses to this topic was a desire to protect natural features and resources from development. The community would like to see a prioritization for preservation of lands based on certain criteria.

Another common response to this topic was that people would like more trail connectivity. People would like to see existing trails connected to one another and also connected to other places within the community, such as downtown. Along the same lines of cohesiveness, people would like to see cohesive branding efforts and wayfinding and signage. Attendees were also enthusiastic about having more trails available for hiking and biking.

This meeting also offered participants the opportunity to review maps of bluffland sites across the region and join a discussion about the relationships between various recreational uses in the blufflands.

**A second public information meeting was hosted on June \_\_\_\_, 2016 to share and seek feedback on the draft plan.**

## TRAIL USE AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

Recreational use of The Blufflands is entirely about trails. This section offers guidelines on trail use and design to assist in site selection and recreational use programming.

### Trail Use Compatibility

The Blufflands host many different types of recreational activity. An understanding of the compatibility of those uses is the foundation for trail de-

sign decisions and the effective distribution of uses across the region.

As explained in Wisconsin's 2005-2010 Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), conflict occurs when the goals of one recreation participant interfere with the goals of another recreation participant in the same location. For example, the goal of a mountain biker to ride fast through a forest may conflict with a day hiker's goal of a tranquil stroll through the same

## Spectrum of Interaction Types and Their Recreational Outcomes

Source: WI DNR 2005-2010 SCORP

Interaction Type	Key Characteristics	Outcome	Example
Complementary	Increasing compatibility with increased use	No conflict	Hiking and camping
Supplementary	Neutral interaction - no impact on compatibility	Minor conflict	Hiking and birding
Competitive	Decreasing compatibility with increased use	Conflict	Hiking and mountain biking
Antagonistic	Activities completely incompatible	Strong Conflict	Hiking and ATV riding

## Average Recreation Activity Compatibility Ratings

Source: WI DNR 2005-2010 SCORP

PRIMARY USE:	INTERACTS:										Average Compatibility
	ATV Riding	Hunting	Snow-mobiling	Horseback Riding	Mountain Biking	Cross-Country Skiing	Linear Trail Biking	Hiking	Wildlife Watching	Camping	
ATV Riding	X	5.3	6.5	5.1	5.5	4.9	5.5	6.1	6.9	7.5	6.0
Hunting	3.3	X	3.7	4.7	4.3	5.3	5.7	5.4	6.0	6.3	5.0
Snowmobiling	4.3	4.0	X	4.0	4.8	4.3	5.8	5.3	6.3	7.2	5.1
Horseback Riding	2.2	3.5	3.0	X	3.8	4.9	4.5	6.3	7.3	7.7	4.8
Mountain Biking	3.1	3.6	4.7	4.8	X	5.7	8.1	6.1	7.4	8.0	5.7
Cross-Country Skiing	1.8	3.6	2.6	3.3	4.2	X	5.6	4.9	8.1	8.5	4.7
Linear Trail Biking	2.6	3.9	5.5	5.3	8.2	7.1	X	7.4	8.0	8.7	6.3
Hiking	2.4	3.5	3.5	5.7	4.7	6.1	6.5	X	8.9	9.2	5.6
Wildlife Watching	2.2	3.2	2.9	6.4	5.2	7.6	6.8	8.6	X	8.3	5.7
Camping	3.9	4.1	5.0	7.5	7.8	8.2	8.2	8.9	8.5	X	6.9
Average Compatibility	2.9	3.9	4.2	5.2	5.4	6	6.3	6.6	7.5	7.9	

- a. Compatibility ratings are for how column activity interacts with the row activity. Ratings should therefore be read horizontally across rows.
- b. Ratings below 4.0 (highly competitive or antagonistic) are highlighted in red, ratings between 4.0 and below 7.0 are highlighted in yellow (moderately to mildly competitive), and ratings 7.0 (supplementary or complementary) and above are highlighted in green. Results are based on responses from 23 Wisconsin recreation professionals.



forest. The actual amount of conflict that occurs when the hiker and mountain biker encounter one another is dependent on a host of factors, including each user's experience level, previous experience with similar situations, feeling of attachment to the trail they are riding, design of the trail, proximity to one another, duration of their meeting, and tolerance of the other person's behavior.

Recreation activities interact in a variety of ways. Some activities positively impact one another and are called complementary. For example, camping increases hiking activity on nearby trails. Other recreation activities are merely compatible, having a neutral impact on the pursuit of another recreation activity. These activities are called supplementary. Most activities, however, result in some form of conflict when encountering other activities. Users from these different groups may experience conflicts over competition for space, trail infrastructure, views, and soundscapes. In minor cases, these conflicts are called competitive interactions. In more extreme cases, two activities may be completely incompatible and interactions between them are described as antagonistic.

The Wisconsin DNR investigated compatibility of recreation activities during the 2005-2010 SCORP planning process through a series of focus groups with recreational use experts, including Wisconsin recreation managers. The Compatibility Ratings table (previous page) summarizes the perceived level of conflict from the perspective of users based on this review process. Green shading represents generally complementary recreation interactions, while red shading represents generally antagonistic interactions. The primary take-away is that motorized recreational uses are not very compatible with non-motorized recreational uses. Since there are no plans for allowing motorized recreational uses in the Bluffland network, these conflicts are easily avoided.

The 2005-2010 SCORP notes that successful management must seek to understand and mitigate conflict, and focus on compatibility. Those uses that fall in the "somewhat compatible" (with ratings of 4.0-7.0 for both uses), such as mountain biking and hiking, have the greatest potential for im-



(photo courtesy of Outdoor Recreation Alliance/  
Riley Seebeck/Flow Photo)

proved compatibility. For those activity pairs that fall below the compatibility level (which are those below 4.0) it may be most appropriate to segregate uses and aggressively manage interactions through regulation, interpretation and voluntary restrictions.

It is a general recommendation of this plan that the most challenging bike trails, including freeride and downhill single-track trails (typically "black diamond" routes) are not compatible with other uses and should be located away from the most heavily-used trailheads to minimize conflicts with other uses.

### **Trail Specifications**

Trail design parameters (e.g. width, material, maximum slope, etc.) are offered here to guide decisions on which lands to add to the Blufflands network, how to fund those acquisitions, and how to improve them for recreational use.

### **Best Practices - All Trail Types**

In general, all trails should be constructed as loops rather than out and back, except for those connecting trails or following a linear greenway or existing path. As trails are developed and improved, the most convenient and accessible trails should

## Trail Specifications by Recreation Use Summary

Source: Trail Design Specialists

SUMMER	Width	Height	Length	Material	Grade	Potential Shared Uses
<b>Foot Traffic</b>						
Walking	6.0+	9.0	1.0-5.0	Paved / Compact Gravel	Flat - Shallow	bicycle, hiking, skateboards, roller blades, runners, wildlife viewing
Hiking (day use)						
urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	0.25-10.0	Natural Surface	Flat - Shallow	runners, cross country cyclists
less urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	0.25-10.0	Natural Surface	Flat - Very Steep	runners, cross country cyclists
Running						
urban	6-10	9.0	1.8; 3.1; 6.2	Natural / Compact Gravel	Flat - Shallow	walkers, cross country cyclists
less urban	> 1.5	9.0	1.8; 3.1; 6.3	Natural Surface	Flat - Steep	walkers, wildlife viewing, cross country cyclists
Wildlife Viewing (including Birding)	2.5-4.0	9.0	0.25-1.0	Natural Surface (paved / compact gravel)	Flat - Moderate	none
<b>Bicycle Traffic</b>						
Urban	7.0	9.0	1.0-5.0	Paved / Compact Gravel	Flat - Shallow	bicycle, skateboards, roller blades, runners
Cross Country						
urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	>5; >15; 30-50	Natural Surface	Flat - Shallow	walkers, hikers, runners, birding/nature viewing
less urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	>5; >15; 30-50	Natural Surface	Moderate - Steep	walkers, hikers, runners, birding/nature viewing
Freeride	> 2.0	9.0	0.5-2.0	Natural Surface	Moderate - Very Steep	downhill cyclists
Downhill	> 3.0	9.0	0.06-0.5	Natural Surface	Steep - Very Steep	free ride cyclists

WINTER	Width	Height	Length	Material	Grade	Potential Shared Uses
Snowshoeing	2.5-4.0	9.0	0.5-5.0	Natural Surface	Flat - Moderate	
Cross Country Skiing (groomed trails)	6.0-12.0 (4.0 / track)	9.0-15.0	0.5-3.0 (typ); > 15.0	Natural Surface (Compact Gravel)	Flat - Moderate	cross country skiing
Skate Skiing	6.0	9.0-15.0	10.0-30.0	Packed Snow Surface	Flat - Moderate	cross country skiing
Snow Biking						
urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	0.5-3.0	Natural Surface	Flat - Shallow	walkers, hikers, runners, snowshoe/skate skiers
less urban	1.5-4.0	9.0	10-15	Natural Surface	Moderate - Steep	walkers, hikers, runners, snowshoe/skate skiers



typically be the easiest ones, meaning flat to shallow slopes and short loops (“green circle” routes). More challenging trails, in slope and length, can be located anywhere – popular trailheads should offer access to a range of difficulties.

The standard vertical clearance for any trail is at least 9 feet, and those trails requiring grooming (such as cross country skiing) needing up to 15 feet vertical clearance (depending on grooming equipment). Even though the criteria below are listed by individual trail types, it is more efficient to allow for multiple user groups on individual trails. Therefore, the more restrictive recreation trail standards should apply to shared use trails.

The ideal trail grades vary depending on recreational user group, as well as trail type/material. For the purposes of this review, trail grades will be described as:

- *Flat (< 5.0% slope),*
- *Shallow (5.1%-10.0% slope),*
- *Moderate (10.1%-25.0% slope),*
- *Steep (25.1%-40.0% slope), and*
- *Very Steep (Over 40% slope).*

Trail construction on grades over 75% is difficult and expensive to build and maintain, and thus, are not recommended for trail construction. Soil composition is also important to trail construction with sandy soils being very poor trail base and clay soils being the best and most sustainable. The general rule is the fewer the amount of binders (clay) in the soil the lower compaction rate, resulting in higher maintenance needs. Binders can be added to soils to make them more sustainable, but the majority of the time most binder applications will not work on trails with grades over five percent.

Trailhead amenities, specifically bathroom facilities, are largely dictated by cost of construction and maintenance. The general rule of thumb is the higher the expected use, the more need there will be for restroom facilities at a trailhead. For example, restroom facilities with flush toilets are recommended at any trailhead that is both

easily accessible (i.e. at the edge of an urban neighborhood) and providing access to multiple trails. Conversely, a constructed natural surface trail on the top of the bluff designated for cross country biking, hiking or birding might only need a porta-potty. Those trails with low use and minimal parking often have no facilities.

### Summer Trails – Foot Traffic

- **Walking trails** are wide, typically 6+ feet in width, and are usually paved but can also be compacted gravel. Distance can range from 1 to 5 miles. The preferred terrain is typically flat to shallow grades. These types of trails or pathways are frequently shared by people on foot, bicycle, skate boards, roller blades and people with different types of accessibility issues. These are ideal trails for educational/informative walks, especially for school children.
- **Hiking trails** are design for those seeking a natural experience generally on a single track. These are generally natural surface trails with 1.5- to 4-feet in width. Trail distance can range from 0.25 mile to 10 miles (assuming day use only). This type of trail is commonly shared with runners and off road cyclists. The preferred terrain for this type of trail varies quite a bit, but the general rule is the closer the trail is to an urban area flatter or shallower grades are preferred. As the trail gets further out then the preferred terrain can range from moderate grades to very steep.
- **Running trails** should always be constructed of natural surface or compacted gravel. Many runners will complain about suffering from joint problems associated with running on paved trails and pathways. Preferred width will vary based on proximity to an urban area. Trails close to an urban setting should be between 6- to 12-feet wide, while trails located further away can be as narrow as 1.5-feet wide. Preferred terrain is also dictated by proximity to urban areas. Flatter or shallower grades are found closer to an urban setting, while moderate to steep grades are found further out. Distance can vary greatly. Often property size and terrain dictate distance; however, all run-

ning trails should be set at popular distances for runners (3K, 5K, 10K, etc.). This is especially true if collegiate events are to be held on the trail. These trails are commonly shared with walkers and off road cyclists.

- **Wildlife Viewing, including birding, trails** should be located near areas where birds or animals are most active (wetlands, bluff areas, prairies). Users of this type prefer the trails not be shared with any other user. The typical width for this trail is 2.5-to 4-feet. The trail should be constructed natural surface, but in some cases may be paved or compacted gravel. The terrain is generally flat to moderate; however, steeper grades may be found as long as good ground cover is present. Viewing stands should be considered near nesting sites. Trail length is usually 0.25-1.0 mile.

### Summer Trails – Bicycle Traffic

- **Urban cyclists** prefer trails or paths that are paved or use compacted gravel. Usual widths are 6+ feet and located on flat to shallow terrain. Distance can range from 1 -5 miles. These types of trails or pathways are frequently shared by people on foot, skate boards, roller blades and people with different types of accessibility issues.
- **Cross country cycling** is also known as mountain biking or linear trail biking. This user prefers trails of constructed natural surface with widths ranging from 1.5- to 4-feet. Preferred terrain is dictated by proximity to urban areas. Flatter or shallower grades close to an urban setting and moderate or steep grades further out. Rocky challenging terrain is also commonly preferred with experienced riders. These trails are often shared with walker and runners. Length of trail is dictated by challenge level. Easier trails are often less than 5 miles, while moderate trails are up to 15 miles and advanced trails up to as much as 30-50 miles. However, it is not uncommon to have short (less than a mile) of advanced trail interspersed with moderate trails. This works well to challenge more skilled riders in areas with limited distance opportunities.
- **Freeride cycling** is an evolution of cross coun-

try cycling, incorporating steep terrain both up and down with challenging obstacles (such as rocks and logs) with banked turns and some jumps. Preferred tread width is typically less than two feet wide and are constructed of natural surface. Length can vary, but is often 0.5 mile to 2 miles. Terrain is often moderate through very steep. These trails are discouraged for shared uses due to the challenging nature of the trail type, as well as they often directional –only allow for one-way movement.

- **Downhill cycling** trails are designed to allow riders to negotiate obstacles and rugged terrain while using gravity to supply speed and momentum. This type of trail is always constructed of natural surface with steep to very steep terrain. Trail width varies by challenge and obstacle type. Trails averaging less than three feet in wide are preferred. Typical trail lengths are 100 yards to 0.5 mile. These trails area often shared with free ride cyclists and are directional in nature.

### Winter Trails

In most cases winter use can utilize some of the same trails that are popular for summer use. Those will be outlined below. The most popular of the silent winter pursuits are snowshoeing, cross country skiing and fat tire /snow biking.

- **Snowshoeing** while not as popular as skiing is a valid winter activity enjoyed by many who hike trails in the summer. Bird and animal watchers often use this method to continue their activities year round. While generally using summer hiking trails, many users continue beyond the trails and explore cross country. The trail is shared by those that use it in the summer, including people hiking, cross country biking and birding/animal watching. Distance is limited by the depth and pack of the snow, but trails generally range from 0.5 mile to 5 miles. Preferred terrain is flat to moderate.
- **Cross-country skiing** is primarily made up of traditional kick and glide skiing and skate skiing. Traditional skiing can also be split into groomed trail skiing and back country skiing. Since back country skiing can go pretty much anywhere

we'll focus on groomed trail skiing. These trails are typically constructed using natural surface or on occasion with compacted gravel. In order to be maintained by grooming equipment, trail widths generally range from 6- to 12-feet. Yet, a single trail is generally four feet wide. If there are multiple, parallel tracks there should be a 2-foot separation between tracks. Trail distance varies by challenge level with beginner trails being 0.5-3.0 miles and more challenging trails being as long as 10-15 miles. Terrain can vary from flat to moderate. These types of trails don't allow any other types of use as the track is set by the skiers guides, which would be impacted by other uses. However, summer use can include walking, biking and running.

- **Skate skiing** often takes place on the same trails as traditional skiing. Skate skiing requires a packed surface so modern skate ski trails are always groomed. Often there will be a track-set for traditional skiing at the sides and groomed for skate skiing in the center. Trail width for skating is the same as traditional skiing –typically a six-foot corridor. Terrain for this activity is generally flat to moderate. Skate skiers move much faster than traditional skiers and as such distances can range from 10-30 miles. It should be noted most cross country ski trails regardless of type are typically measured in Kilometers. Preferred terrain is flat to moderate. Summer use can include walking, biking and running.
- **Fat tire/Snow biking** is relatively new, but has gained immensely in popularity and should be considered a legitimate winter activity. This type of cycling is typically done on existing cross country bike trails, but can be on walking, running or groomed skate skiing trails. Most riders prefer groomed trails while others prefer un-groomed trails. Regardless both preferences happen on constructed trails typically 1.5- to 4-feet wide. Trail distance is dictated by the summer trail type, but generally range from 0.5-3.0 miles near urban areas and more challenging trails of 10-15 miles long in less urban areas. Terrain is very similar to cross country biking with the snow pack increasing the challenge levels. These trails are often shared with walkers, runners, snow shoe and skate skiers.



## IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS - TRAILS AND ACCESS POINTS

### *The La Crosse Bluffland Trail*

The highest priority recreation improvement in the Blufflands is establishment of the La Crosse Bluffland Trail - a regional trail that traverses the bluffs from north to south. The maps on pages 56-62 show an approximate proposed route for this trail. While it would eventually run almost the entire length of the County, Phase 1 would be that portion that connects Hwy 14/61 to County Highway B. This segment traverses the greatest concentration of lands already protected in some way, requiring relatively few additional acquisitions to make the trail feasible. The additional land acquisitions needed to complete the trail are outlined in red (Tier one, highest priority) or orange (Tier 2, second priority).

It is a long term goal to establish this regional trail as a shared use trail across its entire length, meaning it can be used by both hikers and bikers, and to provide some form of access and connection to/from all public-access parcels in the region with this regional trail. Because some of the Bluffland parcels have easements that prohibit biking (see the blue-outlined parcels on pages 30-32), it is necessary to route the shared use trail around these parcels. The proposed routing of the La Crosse Blufflands Trail includes a contiguous route from Shelby to Holland that can accommodate bikes.

A traversing trail route is also recommended in and around the City of La Crescent, extending from Veteran's park up to Apple Blossom Overlook, running west and south through various roads and City lands on the bluffs, and then traversing the bluff south of the City.

Note that the trail routes as shown on the maps are conceptual only, and mostly serve to identify those parcels that the trail would most likely cross. Detailed trail alignments will be worked out parcel by parcel as lands are acquired and improved, taking care to avoid endangered species and rare habitat areas. Trail alignment, design

and construction should use strategies to prevent the development of rogue trails, for example by avoiding obvious shortcuts.

This trail is intended to be accessible to most people. Except where conditions and conservation needs require otherwise, this trail should generally have a "shallow" slope and be wide enough (at least 6 feet) to allow users to pass comfortably.

It will be important to establish and reinforce good trail etiquette by all users, both through recreational clubs and groups like ORA, and with signage.

### *New Biking-Oriented Trails*

It is apparent, from the various public input sources and a review of current Blufflands resources, that the supply of trails that allow biking use is inadequate as compared to the demand for such use. While conflicts between bikers and hikers on shared use trails such as Vista have been minimal, The current concentration of bike-permitted trails in Hixon Forest and Upper Hixon is increasing the likelihood of such conflicts on those sites. As recreational trail use increases with the implementation of this plan, it will be important to establish new biking trails that expand and disperse that use.

Whereas the La Crosse Bluffland trail is proposed as a shared-use trail that allows bikers in a touring mode, other new trails dedicated primarily to biking use would be a valuable addition to The Blufflands, especially downhill and freeride trails. The maps on the following pages show (with a brown diagonal hatch) four properties that should be considered candidates for future bike trail development. The future acquisition of any of these



*(photo courtesy of Outdoor Recreation Alliance/  
Riley Seebeck/Flow Photo)*

parcels should include ORA in some way and should not occur with Stewardship funding that would prevent biking use.

One of the proposed new sites for biking trails is a parcel that adjoins the Hixon Forest property south of Grandad Bluff Road. When updating its master plan for the Forest, the City of La Crosse should consider new shared-use trails on the adjacent portion of the existing park.

**Focus on User Experience**

As the Blufflands are gradually transformed into a renowned recreation destination, it will be important to make improvements to the overall user experience, especially for occasional or first-time users. The following techniques should be applied throughout the region.

**Loops, Loops, Loops**

Most trail users prefer loop routes rather than two trips on the same route. Loop routes should be a priority of site planning and trail improvements.

**Options for all Users**

The Blufflands should be a recreation resource for anyone and everyone in the region. The most popular sites and trailheads should offer easy routes with short loops, minimal slopes and wide paths. This should include, on some sites, a limited amount of paved or well-maintained gravel paths that are wheelchair-accessible. At the other end of the difficulty spectrum, there should be more challenging and technical routes for experienced hikers and bikers.

**Difficulty Ratings and Trail Signage**

All users, and especially new users, want to know what they're getting into before setting off on a hike. Trails should be graded for difficulty in a uniform way across the region (green circle, blue square, black diamond). Trailhead signage should communicate those ratings, as well as trail length, total elevation change, and permitted uses. Trail marker posts along the way should be used on most trails to give people the confidence that they're on the right trail and information about their distance to or from the trailhead. See also the section about signage at the end of this chapter.



*A trail marker on the Rotary Vista Trail showing trail name, distance to the trailhead, permitted uses, and difficulty rating*

**Maintenance and Access Control**

Popular trails can be damaged quickly by users when conditions change, especially during seasonal warm-ups when the trail is soft. Likewise, treefalls or washouts can lead people to find alternate routes, forging rogue trails. These risks can be minimized with a routine of frequent trail inspections and repair, and with access control gates at the trailhead with signs that clearly communicate the reason for the closure.



*The Rotary Vista Trail was damaged in early 2016 during a January thaw that attracted hikers and resulted in deep footprints in the trail surface. The trail surface was still pockmarked and uneven in late April 2016.*



## Trail Access Improvements

The region's trails are often accessed via improved trailheads - sites with parking, trail maps, and sometimes a toilet facility of some sort. Two types of trailhead are recommended. A "Level 1" trailhead at major Bluffland access points that accommodates higher visitor volumes and multiple use types. A "Level 2" trailhead is recommended for more remote sites with low to moderate traffic. A third category of trail access is also identified, allowing pedestrian or bike access from a connecting roadway but lacking any vehicle parking, major signage or other improvements. See the maps on pages 56-62 for existing and proposed trail access locations. All trailheads and access points should be named by the street location (e.g. "Easter Road Access").

### Level 1 Trailhead

Level 1 Trailheads are those that are likely to attract the most users due to their location and/or the number of trails and uses they provide access to. These trailheads should have the following amenities:

- Gateway ID sign
- Regional Blufflands Map
- Site Map
- Trail Rules and Etiquette sign
- Parking for at least ten vehicles
- Convenient access to a short, easy trail
- Permanent or temporary toilet
- Rest area with benches, picnic tables, and/or flat rocks
- Consider a shelter with drinking water and bathrooms in a few places, such as Hixon Forest and Upper Hixon

The following Level 1 trailheads are recommended. **Entirely new locations are bolded.** Some new locations are for existing protected lands, but most are for sites not yet acquired.

1. **Bluffview Court / King's Bluff (T. Holland)**
2. **Marco Road (C. Onalaska)**
3. **Eagle Bluff Elementary School (C. Onalaska)**
4. Great River State Park Trail Trailhead (C. Onalaska)
5. National Weather Service Center (C. La Crosse)
6. Milson Court (C. La Crosse)

7. Granddad Bluff (C. La Crosse)
8. Chad Erickson Memorial Park (C. La Crosse)
9. **US 14/61 (T. Shelby) – either location near Brickyard Ln (west) or near CTH MM (east)**
10. **Great River Rd / WIS 35 (T. Shelby) – Near South County limits**
11. Apple Blossom Overlook Park (T. Campbell, MN)
12. Veteran's Park (C. La Crescent, MN)
13. **HWY 16 (T. La Crescent, MN)**



*The current Level 1 Trailhead for Hixon Forest at the base of the Vista Trail. This would become known as the Milson Court Access*

### Level 2 Trailhead

Level 2 Trailheads are recommended for lower-volume access points and should include the following amenities:

- Gateway ID sign
- Site Map
- Trail Rules and Etiquette sign
- Parking for at least five vehicles
- Temporary toilet
- Rest area with natural seating (e.g. flat rocks)

The following Level 1 trailheads are recommended. **Entirely new locations are bolded.** Some new locations are for existing protected lands, but most are for sites not yet acquired.

1. Timberwood Lane (V. Holmen)
2. **Raptor Road (T. Onalaska)**
3. **Riders Club Road (C. Onalaska)**
4. Stonebridge Avenue (C. Onalaska)
5. Old Hickory Drive (T. Medary)



6. Humming Bird Road (C. Onalaska)
7. CTH FA - Cul-de-sac (T. Medary)
8. Bliss Road (C. La Crosse)
9. CTH F (C. La Crosse)
- 10. Tristledown Dr (C. La Crosse)**
- 11. Apple Orchard Lane (T. Shelby)**
- 12. Hagen Road / ?? Park (T. Shelby)**
13. Easter Road (C. La Crosse)
14. Skyline Drive (T. Shelby)
15. Vetsch Park (C. La Crescent, MN)
- 16. Skunk Hollow Road (T. La Crescent, MN)**

### *Trash Collection*

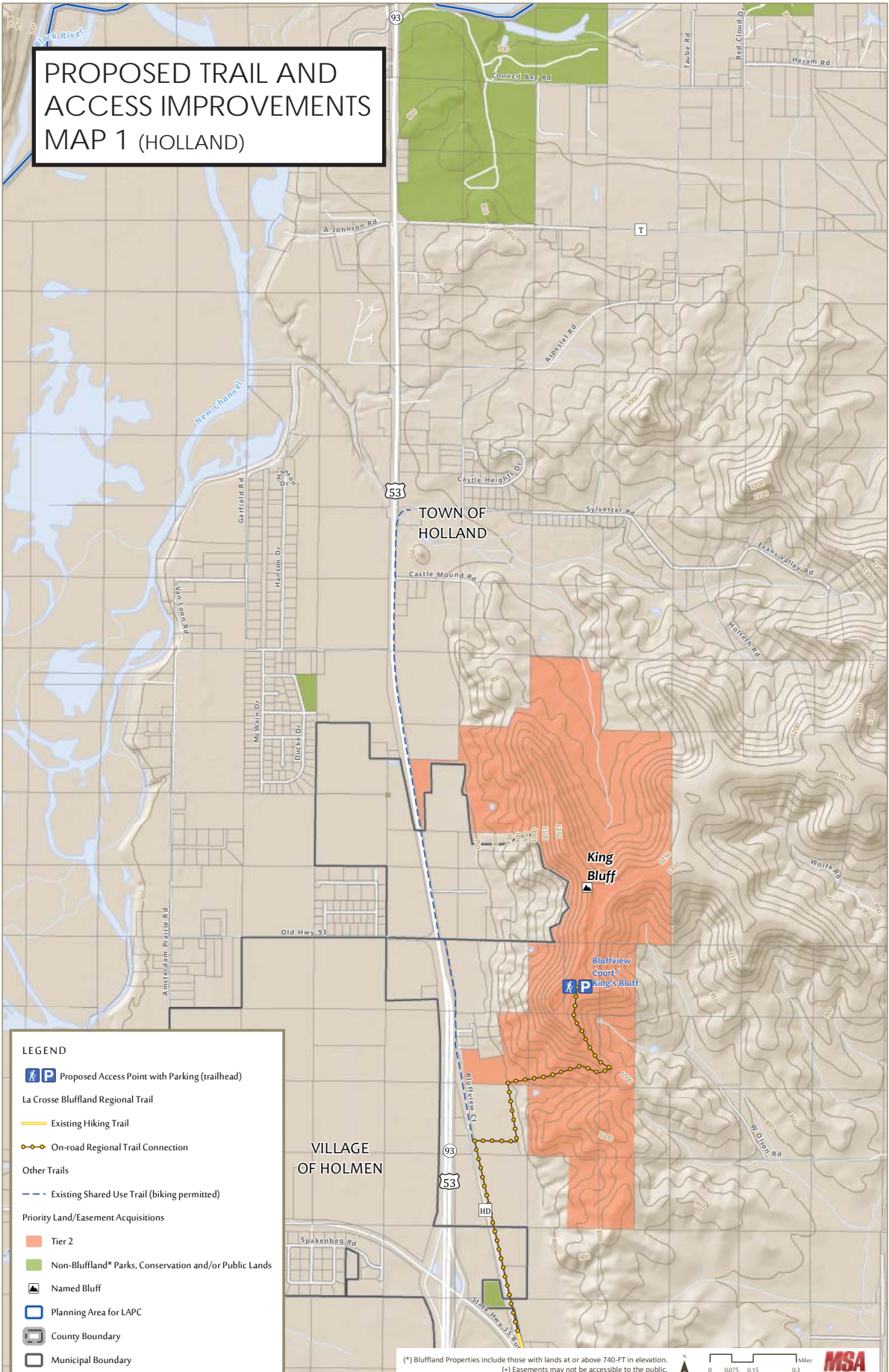
Trash receptacles are generally not advised at any locations that do not also have on-site staff. They tend to become a maintenance headache, even in some cases attracting illegal dumping. All users at all trailheads should be encouraged to “pack it in, pack it out”.

### Other Access Points

Trails sometimes cross existing roads or utilize a segment of existing road, sidewalk, or off-street path in the public right-of-way as part of a designated trail route. In these cases, there is access to the trail for hikers and bikers from that public road. These locations should have signs to identify the trail, at minimum. If there is access to multiple trails from or near the access point, a small map kiosk sign post (Type A) is recommended. If parking is not permitted on the adjacent roadway, that restriction should be clearly signed near the trail entrance. The following access points are recommended. **Entirely new locations are bolded.**

1. **Curt Road (V. Holmen)**
2. **State Street (V. Holmen)**
3. CTH S (T. Onalaska)
4. **Green Coulee Lane (T. Onalaska)**
5. **Innsbruck Road (T. Onalaska)**
6. **Aspenwood Trail (T. Onalaska)**
7. **Fair Meadow Way (C. Onalaska)**
8. **Country Club Lane (C. Onalaska)**
9. **Meadow Wood Road (T. Medary)**
10. **Green Coulee Road (C. Onalaska)**
11. Rim of the City Road (C. La Crosse)
12. Ebner Coulee Road (T. Shelby)
13. Old Vineyard Road (T. Shelby)
14. State Road Elementary School (C. La Crosse)
15. Mormon Creek Trail (C. La Crosse)
- 16. Royal Court (C. La Crescent, MN)**
- 17. Aerie Heights Lane (T. Campbell, MN)**
18. Crescent Hills Drive – Cul-de-sac (C. La Crescent, MN)
- 19. McIntosh Road (C. La Crescent, MN)**
- 20. Crescent Hills Drive – Cul-de-sac (C. La Crescent, MN)**

# PROPOSED TRAIL AND ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS MAP 1 (HOLLAND)



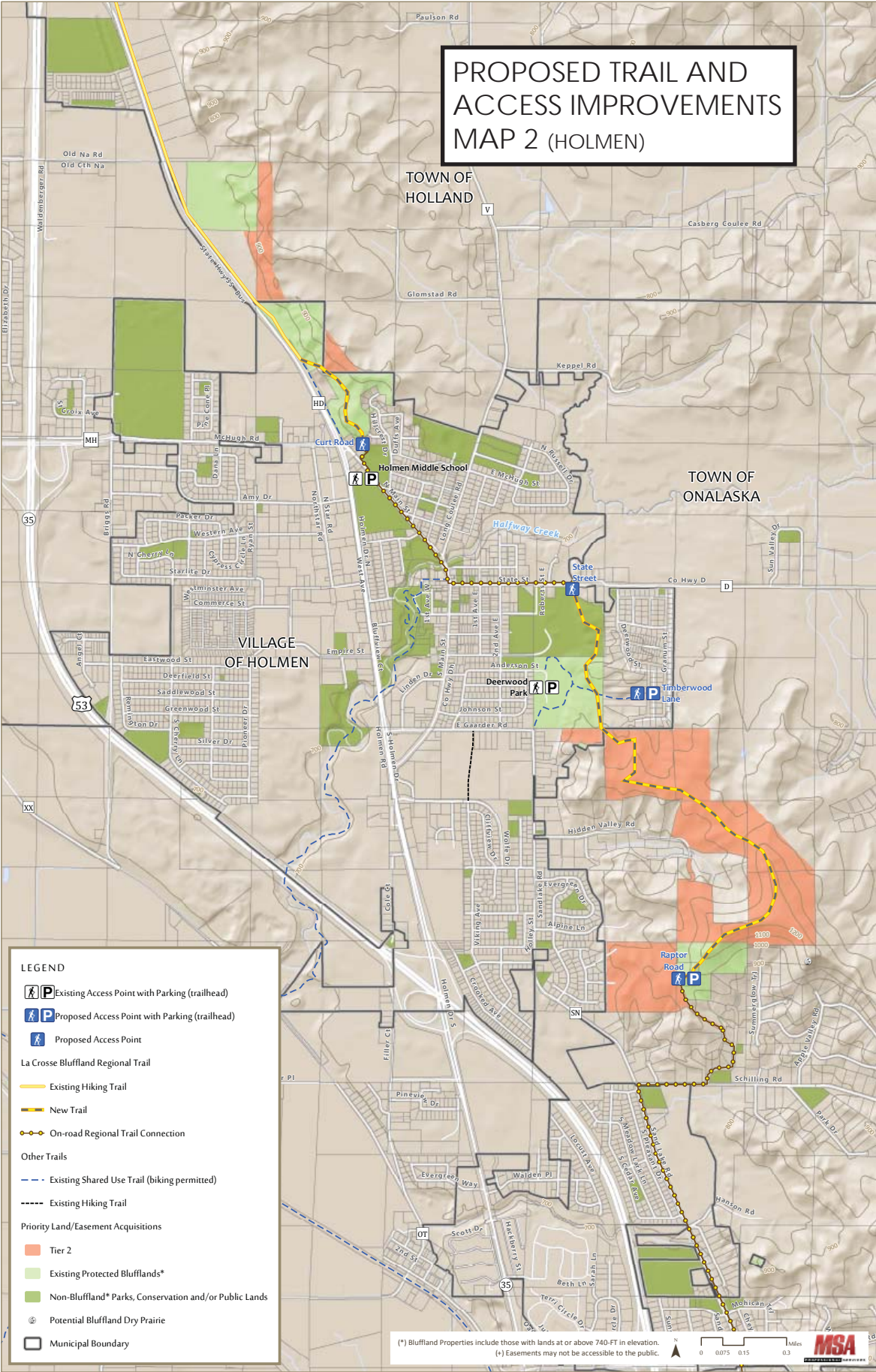
**LEGEND**

- Proposed Access Point with Parking (trailhead)
- La Crosse Bluffland Regional Trail
- Existing Hiking Trail
- On-road Regional Trail Connection
- Other Trails**
- Existing Shared Use Trail (biking permitted)
- Priority Land/Easement Acquisitions**
- Tier 2
- Non-Bluffland\* Parks, Conservation and/or Public Lands
- Named Bluff
- Planning Area for LACP
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundary

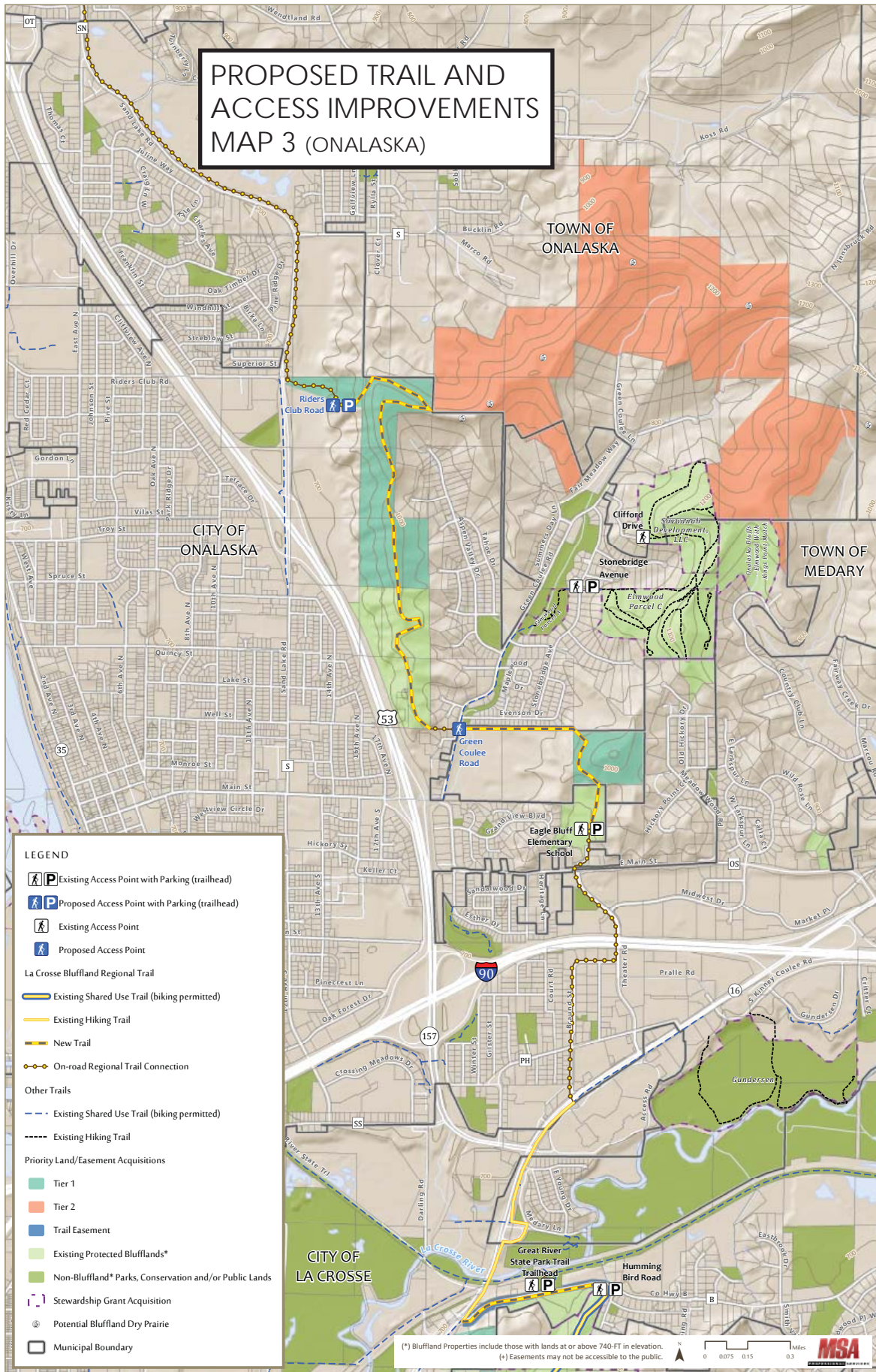
(\*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (†) Easements may not be accessible to the public.



# PROPOSED TRAIL AND ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS MAP 2 (HOLMEN)

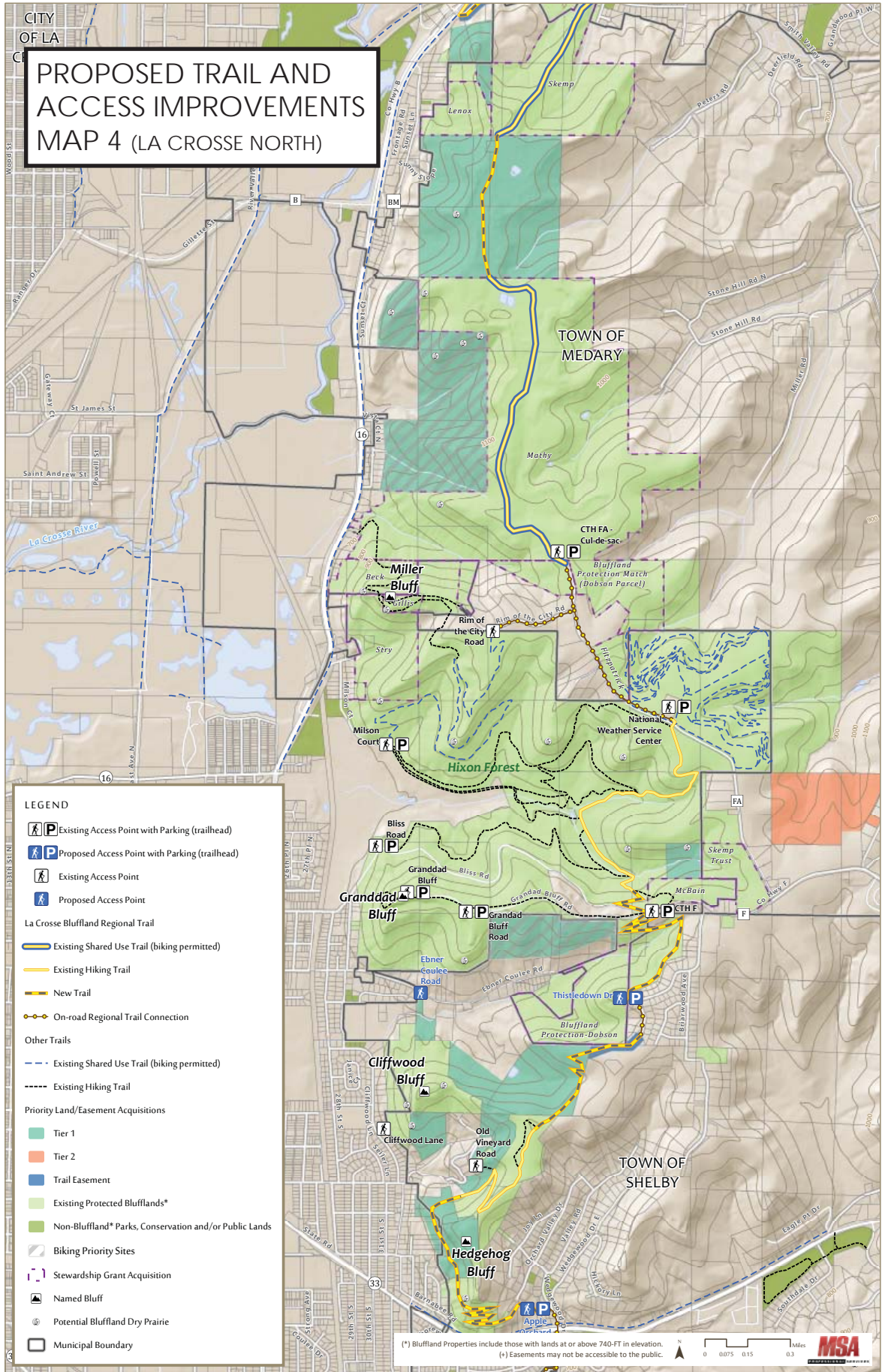








# PROPOSED TRAIL AND ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS MAP 4 (LA CROSSE NORTH)

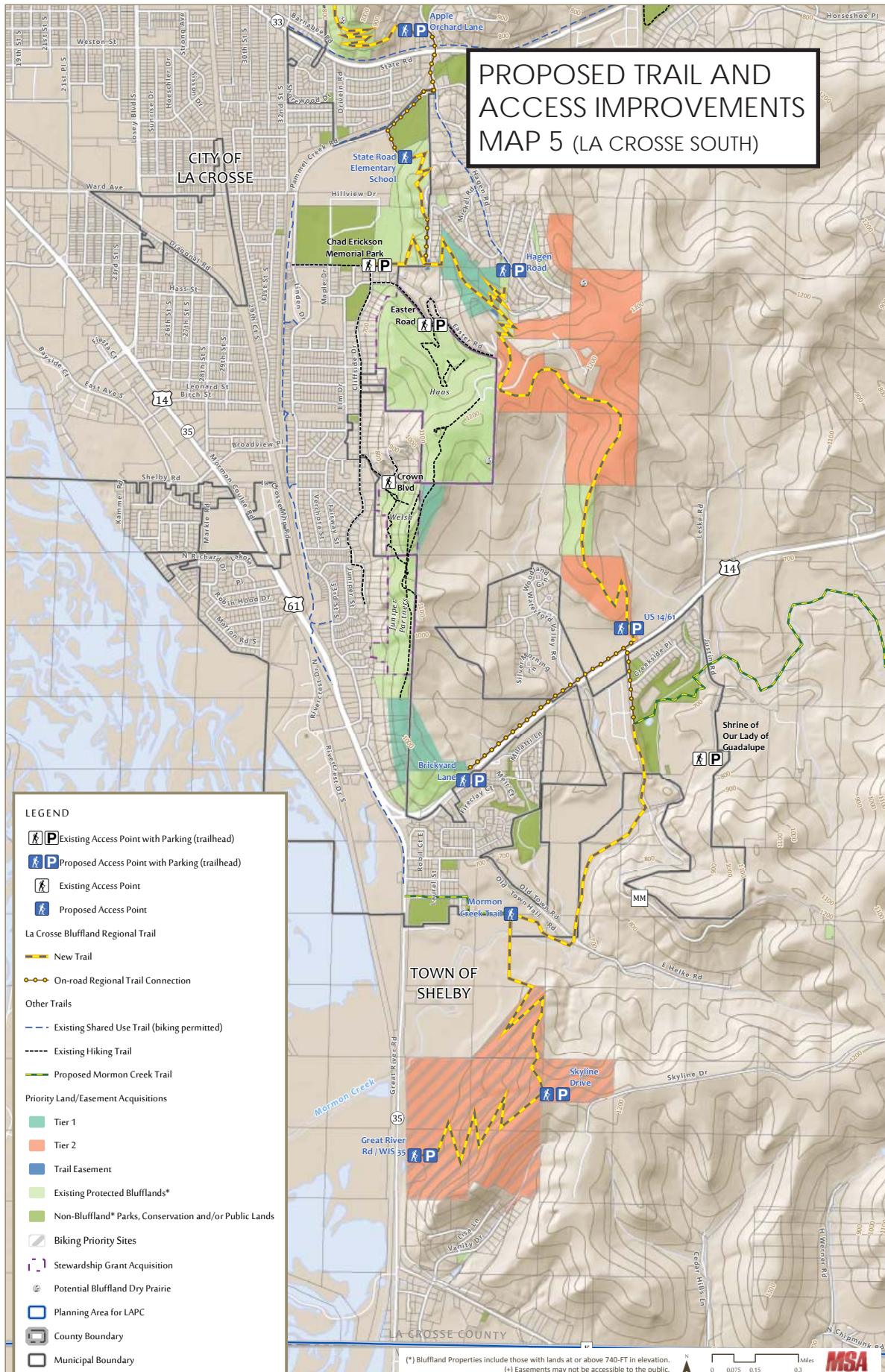


**LEGEND**

- Existing Access Point with Parking (trailhead)
- Proposed Access Point with Parking (trailhead)
- Existing Access Point
- Proposed Access Point
- La Crosse Bluffland Regional Trail**
- Existing Shared Use Trail (biking permitted)
- Existing Hiking Trail
- New Trail
- On-road Regional Trail Connection
- Other Trails**
- Existing Shared Use Trail (biking permitted)
- Existing Hiking Trail
- Priority Land/Easement Acquisitions**
- Tier 1
- Tier 2
- Trail Easement
- Existing Protected Blufflands\*
- Non-Bluffland\* Parks, Conservation and/or Public Lands
- Biking Priority Sites
- Stewardship Grant Acquisition
- Named Bluff
- Potential Bluffland Dry Prairie
- Municipal Boundary

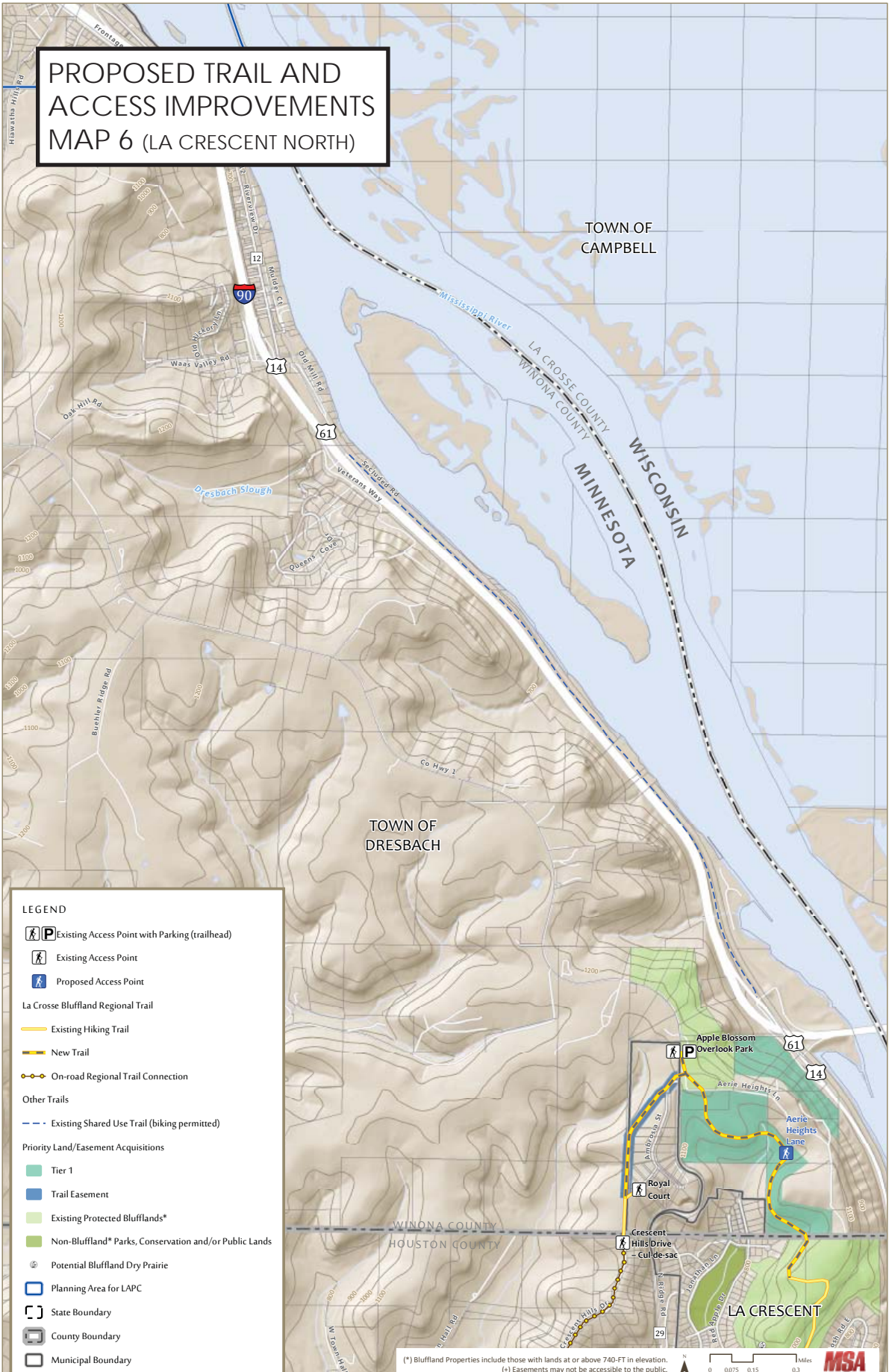
(\*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (+) Easements may not be accessible to the public.







# PROPOSED TRAIL AND ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS MAP 6 (LA CRESCENT NORTH)



**LEGEND**

- Existing Access Point with Parking (trailhead)
- Existing Access Point
- Proposed Access Point
- La Crosse Bluffland Regional Trail**
- Existing Hiking Trail
- New Trail
- On-road Regional Trail Connection
- Other Trails**
- Existing Shared Use Trail (biking permitted)
- Priority Land/Easement Acquisitions**
- Tier 1
- Trail Easement
- Existing Protected Blufflands\*
- Non-Bluffland\* Parks, Conservation and/or Public Lands
- Potential Bluffland Dry Prairie
- Planning Area for LRPC
- State Boundary
- County Boundary
- Municipal Boundary

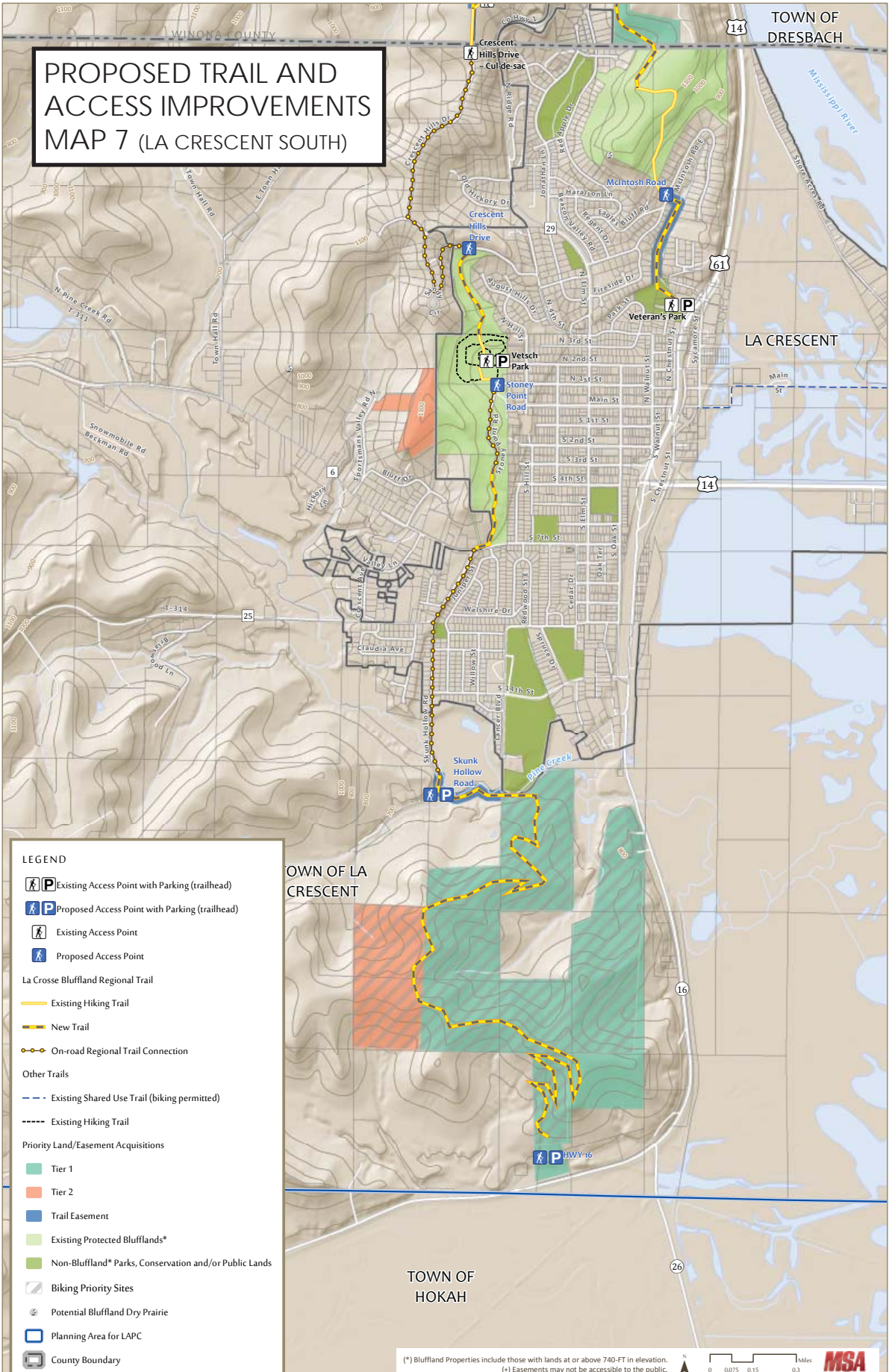
(\*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (†) Easements may not be accessible to the public.

Scale: 0 0.075 0.15 0.3 Miles

**MSA**



# PROPOSED TRAIL AND ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS MAP 7 (LA CRESCENT SOUTH)



- LEGEND**
- Existing Access Point with Parking (trailhead)
  - Proposed Access Point with Parking (trailhead)
  - Existing Access Point
  - Proposed Access Point
  - La Crosse Bluffland Regional Trail**
  - Existing Hiking Trail
  - New Trail
  - On-road Regional Trail Connection
  - Other Trails**
  - Existing Shared Use Trail (biking permitted)
  - Existing Hiking Trail
  - Priority Land/Easement Acquisitions**
  - Tier 1
  - Tier 2
  - Trail Easement
  - Existing Protected Blufflands\*
  - Non-Bluffland\* Parks, Conservation and/or Public Lands
  - Biking Priority Sites
  - Potential Bluffland Dry Prairie
  - Planning Area for LAPC
  - County Boundary

(\*) Bluffland Properties include those with lands at or above 740-FT in elevation.  
 (†) Easements may not be accessible to the public.



## PROPOSED SIGNAGE IMPROVEMENTS

A successful park signage system performs multiple functions—it provides effective information and direction for people to navigate around the park; encourages learning experiences; helps maintain the image of the park; and communicates park rules. Below describes the sign types that should be incorporated in the Blufflands network. See pages 63-64 for a proposed design and layout for this signage system.

### *Sign Types and Locations*

Improved signage will be a key feature of the transition from scattered bluffland sites to a seamless, regional network of lands and trails known as The Blufflands. This section, including the illustrations on the following pages, describes the recommended sign types to help people find trailheads, select trails, learn about the Blufflands, and use those lands and trails in a sustainable way.

#### **Identification / Gateway Signs**

Gateways, entry features or identity signs are located at the entry points of parks, to identify the site and mark arrival into a park or unique area. A gateway sign should be provided at the entrance to all Level 1 and Level 2 trailheads. The sign should include the name and logo of The Blufflands, as well as the name of the access point (i.e., the road name from which the trail/trailhead will be accessed from). Pedestrian-only access points shall provide an identification sign (in lieu of a gateway sign) that includes the bluffland name and logo, as well as identifying the location as “Trail Access” location.

#### **Vehicular Directional**

These signs are intended to direct vehicular traffic to a desired destination or activity. These signs can be added to existing light poles or attached to a standalone 4x4 square post. The sign content should include the name and logo of the Blufflands network, as well as a directional arrow below the stated feature (such as “Trail Access”).

#### **Pedestrian Directional**

This sign is intended to direct pedestrians and cyclists on a trail or sidewalk towards adjacent facilities/amenities by communicating through graph-

ic icons, text and arrows. Generally, this can be achieved on a 4x4 pole, but may be the size of the map kiosk type 1.

#### **Park Rules Sign**

The rules sign displays information about site specific rules, county ordinances, and any prohibited uses. This sign can be designed to a scale appropriate for both pedestrian walk-up traffic and vehicular traffic. The sign content is fixed and communicates the rules that are standard to all facilities.

#### **Interpretive Signs**

These signs provides information about cultural, historic, geological or ecological attributes of a site. The artwork and content of this sign should be engaging and creative so that visitors are encouraged to learn. A successful educational sign has 75% graphics and 25% text. Text should be limited to less than 200 words.

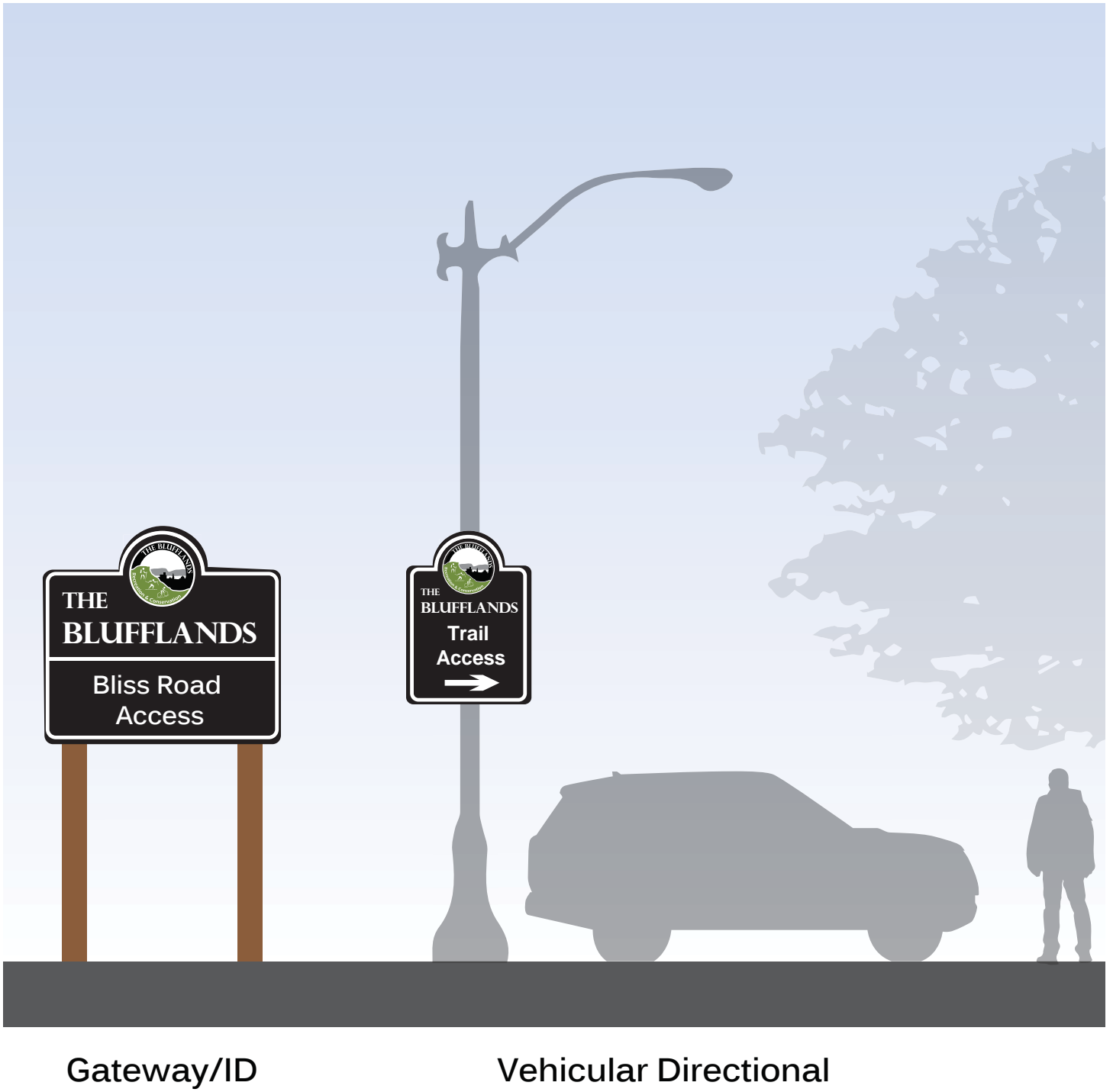
#### **Mile Marker and Trail Crossing**

The mile marker sign provides visual navigation to trail users by communicating trail mileage, acceptable trail activities, and trail name. The mile markers are double sided.

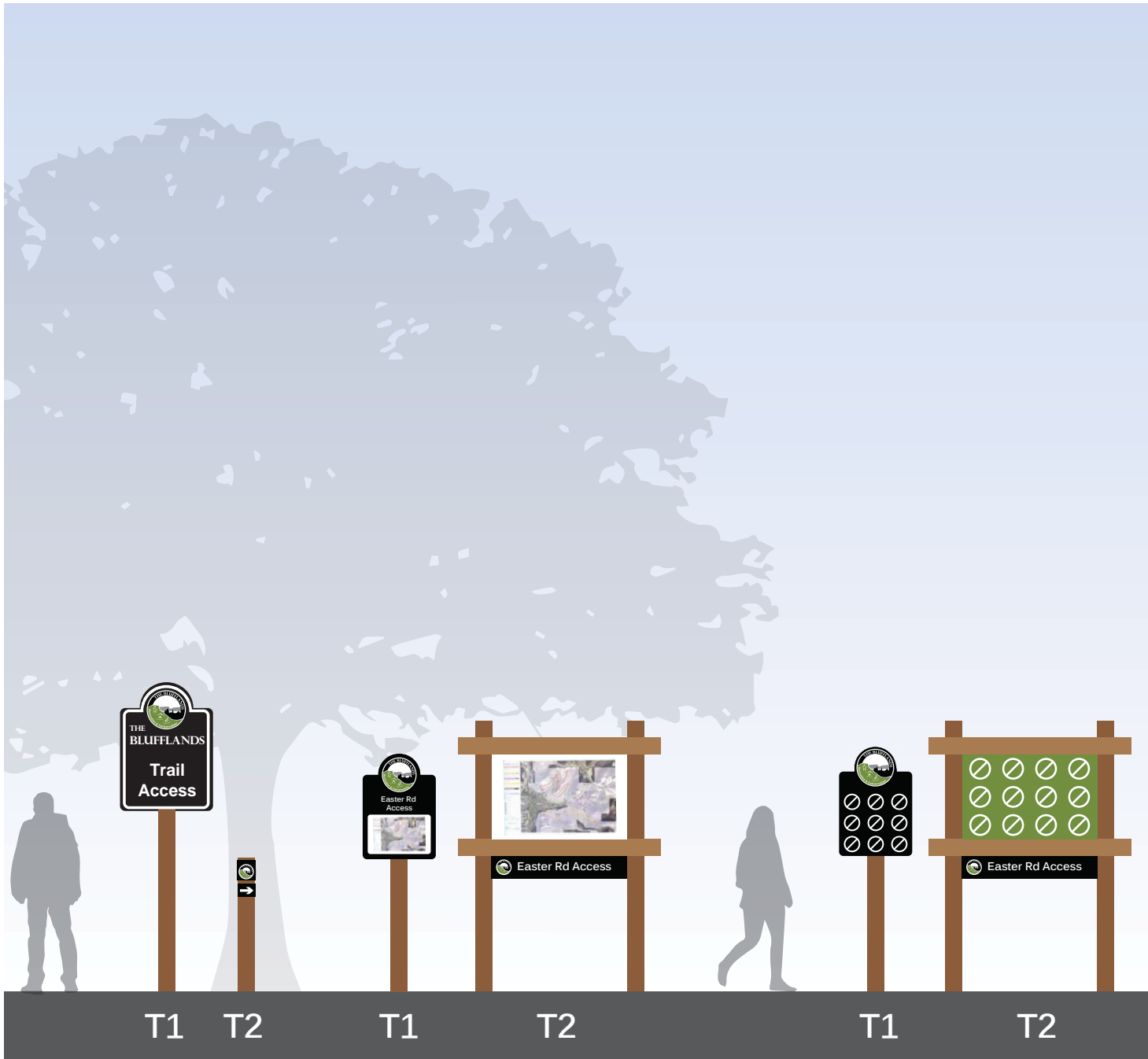
#### **Kiosk Map**

The site map kiosk helps visitors orient themselves within a site and plan their visit. This map should at a minimum display the specific park map, plus the surrounding conservation lands (with or without recreation facilities). At larger sites consider a map that shows the entire Bluffland network, including those in the other state.

### The Blufflands Signage System







Identity Sign (T1) /  
Ped. Directional (T2)

Map Kiosk

Park Rules



# 5

## Implementation

### FUNDING

A critical issue in the successful implementation of this plan, including the creation of the Bluffland Coalition, is the establishment of a reliable funding strategy.

#### *Case Studies*

One commonly cited case study in outdoor recreation and tourism development is the City of Duluth. Duluth has utilized tourism taxes, as enabled by state statute and city ordinance, to pay for public improvement to parks. All food and beverage establishments with annual sales of \$100,000 or more and all lodging establishments are required to collect and file Tourism Taxes with the city of Duluth. All food and beverage establishments must collect 2.25% of total annual sales. Lodging establishments with less than 30 units must collect 3% for the lodging excise tax, while establishments with over 30 units must collect an additional 2.5% lodging tax.

These funds are designated for tourism related uses to promote and support the City of Duluth

as a tourist and convention destination. This includes the Duluth Entertainment and convention center, Spirit Mountain and tourism related public improvements and activities. Duluth's tourism tax collections exceeded \$9 million in 2015.

Another case study in regional recreation improvements is Three Rivers Park District in the western suburban Minneapolis /St. Paul Metro area. The District, which now manages about 27,000 acres of reserves, parks, trails and facilities, offer many different types of outdoor recreation for residents, including mountain biking, snowboarding and cross country skiing.

Three Rivers Park District was created by the Minnesota State Legislature in 1957 and is an independent taxing authority. The 2016 budget shows tax revenue of about \$28 million, accounting for roughly 80% of total revenue.

A third case study for regional outdoor recreation enhancements is the City of Chattanooga, TN, and its Outdoor Chattanooga program. Outdoor Chattanooga is an initiative of the City, funded by about \$500,000 from the City's General Fund.



Recreation lands and facilities and their maintenance are also funded by general taxes.

So, what is the relevance of these case studies to The Blufflands? Unlike Duluth or Chattanooga, The Blufflands is intended to be an explicitly regional initiative, involving multiple cities, villages, towns and counties in the interest of a better network of lands and trails. Unlike Three Rivers Park District, Wisconsin statutes do not currently allow the creation of a taxing district to buy, own and operate parks. Wisconsin does not allow cities to levy a sales tax on food and beverage like Duluth. It does allow a Room Tax, and this should be considered as one source of funding to help operate the Bluffland Coalition. The City of La Crosse currently collects about \$1.6 million through this tax, with projections for \$2.4 million in revenue by 2017 when a batch of new hotels has been open for the full year.

### *Recommendations*

This plan recommends two primary funding sources for the Bluffland Coalition and its initiatives: room tax revenue and local general fund property tax revenue committed by Charter Members of the Coalition.

Room Tax funds could be used primarily to promote knowledge and use of Blufflands recreation amenities, including the coordination of special events.

The larger source of revenue would be general fund property tax revenues committed by Charter Members. It is recommended that each local government member, including La Crosse County, commit to a certain level of minimum funding, on a per capita basis, with the understanding that 90% of the funding would be retained by the contributing member for projects within their jurisdiction and 10% would be pooled for regional initiatives within the control of the Coalition.

## **ACTION PLAN**

The Blufflands Vision and Six Big Ideas articulated in this plan will be realized only through coordinated effort of many stakeholders. The table on the next pages offers a basic road map of actions over the next five years to establish The Blufflands as a truly regional conservation and recreation system.

## Action Plan by Year

Year	Action	Lead Responsible Party	Other Participants	Timing
<b>2016</b>				
	Approval of Blufflands Plan	LAPC Policy Board		July 2016
	Endorsement/Approval of Blufflands Plan	LAPC Member Communities		August to September 2016
	Discussions about any new Bluffland acquisitions to include all stakeholders	Initiating Partner	Town, nearest City, County, ORA, MVC	July, ongoing
	Municipalities utilize Blufflands Plan to inform 2017 Budget	Municipal participants		July to December
	Enhancement of regional promotional materials to highlight The Blufflands	La Crosse Area CVB		July, ongoing
	Convene a work group and create a work plan to craft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will establish The Blufflands Coalition	La Crosse County Planning	All Tier 1 and Tier 2 Coalition Partners	First meeting in August
	Finalize sign standards	La Crosse County	All Tier 1 and Tier 2 Coalition Partners	August to October
<b>2017</b>				
	Complete MOU and secure Partner approvals for a 2-year period (public entities approve by resolution)	La Crosse County Planning	All Tier 1 and Tier 2 Coalition Partners	Completion in April, Approvals by June
	Group convenes for first time officially as The Bluffland Coalition	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff	All member partners	July
	Expand City of La Crosse mapping app to include Bluffland sites in other municipalities	City of La Crosse Park and Rec	Metre Advertising, City of Onalaska, MVC	Begin adding sites in January
	LAPC or CVB creates a work plan for 2018 that includes staff support for the Coalition	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff		July to December
	Public Partners approve funding for Coalition	Each public partner		December
<b>2018</b>				
	Create an incentive program that offers partial funding to encourage signage improvements per Coalition standards	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff	All member partners	January to May
	Select a preferred sign vendor and negotiate member rates	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff	All member partners	March to May



## Action Plan by Year

Year	Action	Lead Responsible Party	Other Participants	Timing
	Consider creation of subcommittees to work on specific tasks, including Land Acquisition, Trail Development, Signage and Promotion, Conservation	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff	All member partners	July
<b>2019</b>				
	Prepare a Blufflands Annual Report for distribution to all Coalition members describing accomplishments over the prior calendar year	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff		March
	Renew the Memorandum of Understanding for a three-year period	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff	All member partners	January to May
<b>2020</b>				
	Prepare a Blufflands Annual Report for distribution to all Coalition members describing accomplishments over the prior calendar year	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff		March
<b>2021</b>				
	Blufflands Annual Report	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff		March
	Complete the La Crosse Blufflands Trail between US 14/61 and County Road B	Property Owners		October
	Update the Bluffland Plan, including a summary of completed activities, identification and prioritization of land and recreation improvement needs, and a new 5-year plan	LAPC/CVB/LC County staff	All member Partners, planning consultant	July

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# Appendix A: Branding Study





### Brand

As frequently noted by residents and recreational users across the region, the signs and maps that facilitate access to public blufflands are inconsistent and inadequate. This plan seeks to improve signage, maps and promotional efforts, enabling more people to learn about, find, and explore the blufflands' diverse recreational amenities.

The region faces a challenge, however, in the diversity of site ownership and management, distributed among various public and non-profit entities. Without some effort toward consistency, each owner will continue to make independent decisions about the design and placement of signs. However, if the site owners across the region agree to use a common signage system, users will have less difficulty finding and exploring different

sites because they will have familiar wayfinding cues. To make this work, the network should have a common name and graphic that can be applied everywhere – a brand identity.

When establishing a new brand identity it is important to understand the branding context, in order to avoid duplication or confusion. The following communities and non-profit organizations are, or could be, directly involved in bluffland site ownership and/or stewardship, and their existing brands and logos form the context for an identity for the region's blufflands.

### Name

There are a variety of words that could be used to represent in some fashion the unique features of the region and their protection. Here are some of



the more common ones:

- Highlands
- Bluffs
- Blufflands
- Ridges
- Driftless
- Unglaciated
- River
- 7 Rivers
- Valley
- Coulee
- Conservancy
- Conservation
- Park
- Protected

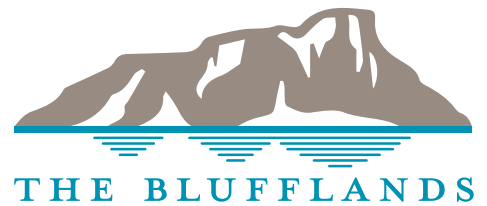
Based on feedback from stakeholders, and a review of the branding context, we recommend simply **"The Blufflands"**. This designation is consistent with how many residents already refer to these lands (at least while talking about more than a single property). Blufflands it is not a commonly-used term in other parts of the country – it seems to be unique to the Mississippi River driftless area. This is an advantage, because it makes it easier to find online. The primary use of this term by another entity is the Upper Mississippi River Blufflands Alliance, which works to protect land from development across the four-state driftless area, from the Twin Cities to the Quad Cities. The Blufflands Alliance supports the efforts of six land trusts in the region, including the Mississippi Valley Conservancy. Because this organization does not own land itself in the La Crosse area, there is little risk of confusion by using this term as part of a brand identity for lands in the area.

Initial draft ideas are shown below.

CONCEPT 1 – TYPOGRAPHIC



CONCEPT 1 – ILLUSTRATIVE



CONCEPT 2 – ICON



The final recommended logo.



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# Appendix B: Interview Feedback

# B

## Interviews

The project team used stakeholder interviews as one method to learn from stakeholders. Jason Valerius (MSA) and Charlie Handy (La Crosse County) interviewed a series of people with knowledge and perspectives relevant to this project. The interviewees included (in no particular order):

- *Pat Wilson (past MVC Board Member, birding enthusiast)*
- *Laurie Harmon (UW-La Crosse Assistant Professor of Recreation Management and Therapeutic Recreation)*
- *Mike Richards (Gunderson Lutheran Health System, Executive Director of Government Relations and External Affairs)*
- *Dave Clements (La Crosse Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Executive Director)*
- *Keith Martin (Property Owner)*
- *Karen Blodgett (Wisconsin DNR, Stewardship Program Nonprofit Conservation Organization Contact)*
- *Pamela Foster-Feldt (Wisconsin DNR, Nonprofit Grant Manager)*
- *Marvin Wanders (ORA Board Member)*
- *Ralph Heath (ORA Board Member)*
- *Kurt Schroeder (ORA President)*
- *Gabe Berendes (ORA member, mountain biking enthusiast)*
- *Scott Cooper (ORA Secretary, trail running and cross country skiing enthusiast)*
- *Robbie Young (ORA member, mountain biking enthusiast and trail building crew leader)*
- *Joe Kruse (Mayo Clinic, Chief Administrative Officer)*
- *Matt Brantner (Wisconsin Youth Conservation Corp, Executive Director)*
- *Vicki Markussen (Greater La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce, Executive Director)*
- *Abbie Church (MVC, Conservation Director)*
- *Levi Plath (MVC, Land Management Specialist)*
- *Steve Carlon (City of La Crosse Director of Parks and Recreation)*
- *Kris Larson (Minnesota Land Trust Executive Director)*
- *Bill Waller (City of La Crescent Administrator)*

Most of the interviews started with a set of stan-

dard questions about the blufflands and their use, protection, enhancement, identity, etc., and each conversation followed its own course. The following notes and observations represent a synthesis of relevant findings across the interviews, organized by topic.

### How and why are the blufflands important?

The answers to this question were as diverse as the people interviewed, emphasizing the richness and complexity of these lands. We heard that the blufflands provide scenic beauty, wildlife habitat, groundwater protection, and opportunities for recreation, exercise, and education. We heard about the value of these attributes in attracting people to visit, live and work in the area. From a tourism perspective, the blufflands are one of many attractions to the area, and it is the diversity that makes the region's tourism market successful and sustainable. From a resident/employee perspective, the message we heard most clearly was the importance of the lands as a recreation resource. This aspect, including the quality and convenient location of unique public-access lands, sets La Crosse apart from many peer communities in the Midwest and improves the region's ability to attract and retain high-demand professionals.

### What has the region done well with regard to bluffland protection and access?

Many of the interviewees cited the acquisition and protection of lands by MVC and the City of La Crosse as the core success thus far, including not only the amount of land, but the fact that there are many contiguous parcels. At least one person noted the variety of property types and uses as a strength, as it ensures that there are different spaces for different users, and something for every interest.

The existing trails came up multiple times as a noteworthy success – they are high quality, conveniently close to where people live and well-used. Also noted several times was the important relationship between use and conservation – people are much more likely to care about these lands and support their protection with time,

money and political support if they have been on the land in some way.

### What are some of the challenges and opportunities ahead?

Based on these interviews, most of the important challenges and opportunities relate to the use of the blufflands – encouraging, facilitating, managing and balancing a wide variety of uses and users.

The interviews reinforced a key finding from other sources of public input – most people know and use Hixon Forest but have limited knowledge of other bluffland sites. It is possible to enable increased public use of these lands without adverse impacts if we can distribute the use north and south of the Hixon Forest. Distributing users across more land will require some improvements, including more signage and likely more trails. It will also help to do public outreach, both to residents and visitors, that highlight other good sites and trails besides Hixon. The Convention and Visitors Bureau can do more than it does now to serve as a “concierge” to the region’s varied trails, to highlight more than simply Granddad Bluff.

Many of the recreational enthusiasts are aware of and sensitive to the issue of conflicting recreational uses, including both real and perceived conflicts. We heard multiple strategies to address this issue, including:

- *Good trail design for shared-use trails, especially high-use trails, featuring adequate width and good sightlines at all points (no blind corners)*
- *Good signage is important, to help users find the trail most appropriate to their interests, to provide information about trail use etiquette, and to manage expectations about the length, difficulty and allowed uses of a trail.*
- *Providing trails that fit users’ needs is important. For examples, walkers and runners often prefer either loops that end where they began without backtracking, and/or a trail that takes the most direct route up to an overlook. The heavily-used Vista Trail is neither*

*of these things, leading some frustrated hikers to find more direct routes that cut across switchbacks and increase erosion and the risk of collisions.*

Hixon Forest is widely known to have a network of “rogue”, unplanned trails. These ad-hoc trails are a challenge for habitat protection and separation of users/users. Several people noted the importance of providing good trails in order to prevent the creation and use of bad trails.

Proactive, timely trail management was noted to be important, especially through seasonal changes. For example, all users, and especially bikers, need to stay off the trails during the spring thaw, when use can seriously damage the trail. In the winter there are some groomed trails for cross country use. While fat tire bikes can generally use these trails without damaging them, runners and conventional bikes create ruts and holes that damage the trail for skiing. It will be important to continue educating users in a timely way with temporary signs and social media outreach.

The interviewees reinforced a desire heard in multiple settings – for a continuous trail running the length of the La Crosse Bluffs, and beyond. People want the ability to hike along the top of the bluffs, at least from Hwy 61 at the south the County Highway B on the north.

Most of the public-access bluffland properties in the region have been acquired with funding from the Wisconsin DNR Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Local leaders involved in the process of acquiring and programming these lands have learned some important lessons about the restrictions on certain uses when land is acquired through the Stewardship Program. Stewardship is really a family of related grant programs, and there are three basic “flavors” of Stewardship funding and subsequent land designation that could be used to acquire blufflands – funding for recreation areas, habitat areas, and natural areas. Of those three, the program that explicitly enables recreation uses is the least restrictive, while the program that protects natural areas is the most restrictive. All lands must allow, per



statute, five “Nature-Based Outdoor Activities”: hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking and cross-country skiing. But, on lands acquired as habitat and/or natural areas, DNR has determined that certain other uses are not allowed, including horseback riding and biking. This restriction has been most problematic with the Mathy property, which is a key connector in the network between the Hixon Forest and County Highway B and which includes a former mine site that bike enthusiasts had hoped to use. Through work with DNR after the acquisition was complete, bikers have been granted access to the old mining road, so that they can at least travel through the site. Moving forward, it will be important to use this plan for guidance during new land acquisitions, to ensure that any property desired for recreation uses is acquired with a funding source – Stewardship or otherwise – that allows the desired uses.

### **How can the various stakeholder organizations have roles in the protection, improvement and use of the blufflands?**

Our discussions with organizations both central and peripheral to the blufflands revealed opportunities for coordination and collaboration. Mississippi Valley Conservancy and the Outdoor Recreation Alliance of the Seven Rivers Region, Inc. are the two most important private organizations involved in the blufflands, with one focused on land acquisition and protection, and the other focused on facilitating the sustainable recreational use of public-access lands. Beginning with these two organizations, which expect to continue in these respective roles, there is opportunity to increase communication and coordination between them, possibly by aligning some of their meetings to enable shared work sessions. This would be especially useful during the land acquisition process.

WisCorps is a valuable local asset. It engages youth and young adults in conservation projects on public lands across Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest, and it happens to be based in La Crosse because of the rich supply and variety of those lands here. WisCorps can provide work crews to help with trail construction and restoration and invasive species management.

The business community is an important partner in efforts to protect lands and enhance access to the bluffs, especially the hospitals (Gundersen and Mayo). The blufflands are a valuable amenity that supports workforce attraction and retention, and most employers are acting in their own interest when they contribute money or services in some way. The hospitals have additional incentive to promote the use of the bluffs for recreation purposes, both as part of their efforts to encourage exercise and healthy living, and as another option for out-of-town visitors looking for something to do while in town. The Chamber of Commerce and the hospitals can all help with public messaging and fundraising.

The La Crosse Area Convention and Visitors Bureau is a partner that is explicitly regional and can support regional branding and marketing. The LACVB may also be able to support mapping tasks, especially user-oriented mapping that highlights trails and access points.

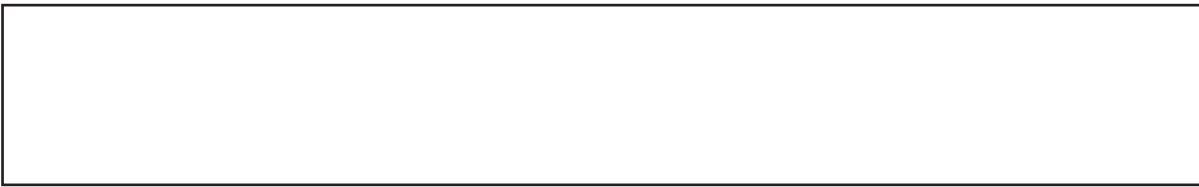
All local educational institutions should be seen as partners. The blufflands are a valuable amenity for K-12 school field trips. They have some challenges and specific needs with regard to programming, amenities and field trip timing. For the college and universities, the blufflands are useful both as a teaching resource and as a subject of academic research.

### **How can or should the blufflands be branded to enhance awareness of this regional network?**

There was summary variety of opinion about branding among the interviewees, though everyone who discussed it seemed to like “The Blufflands”. There was some discussion about “7 Rivers”, though acknowledgment that most people can’t name the rivers and this doesn’t say anything about the bluffs. There were mixed feelings about incorporating “driftless area”, with some concern that too few people understand what that means. The regional draw and identity, in terms of both scenic beauty and recreational opportunities, definitely includes the rivers and associated lowlands and wetlands, and most of the interviewed stakeholders have interest in both aspects of the region.

# Appendix C: Survey Results





## COMMUNITY SURVEY

To solicit public involvement in the La Crosse Area Regional Bluffland Plan, the project team created an on-line public opinion survey. The survey was hosted on Survey Monkey and posted on the LAPC website. It was promoted via the following methods:

- Links to the survey on the LAPC website
- Email promotion by participating communities and organizations
- Local television and print news stories about the planning process

In total, 634 individuals completed the survey. Ninety-five percent (95%) of those who completed the survey live in the region (zip code beginning with '546' for Wisconsin or '559' for Minnesota). Ninety percent (90%) of respondents work within the region.

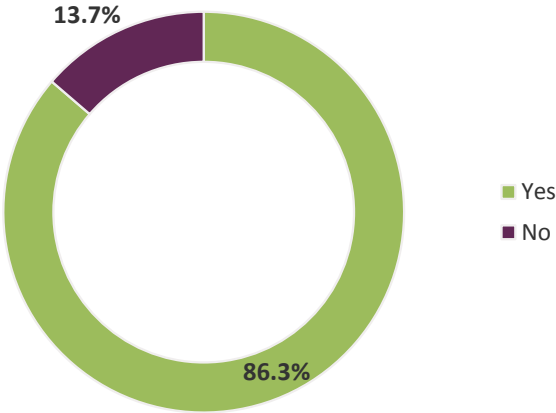
The survey represents a diverse group demographically, though certain groups were under- and over-represented. Survey respondents under the age of 18 made up 0.2% of responses while this group makes up 22% of the demographic in the La Crosse metro Area (La Crosse County and Houston County, MN) according to the 2010 United States Census. Survey respondents age 35-44 were the most over-represented; this demographic accounted for 21% of survey results but according to the Census, makes up 11% of the metroarea's total population. The figure depicting respondents' answers to their corresponding age group compared to Census data is shown as the response to Question 19 on page A-11.

*\*A comprehensive list of open-ended questions and comments is found at the end of this appendix. Questions with additional comments/responses will be marked with an asterisk (e.g. Q2\*).*



# BLUFFLAND KNOWLEDGE

**Q1** HAVE YOU HEARD THE TERM “BLUFFLANDS” BEFORE TAKING THIS SURVEY?



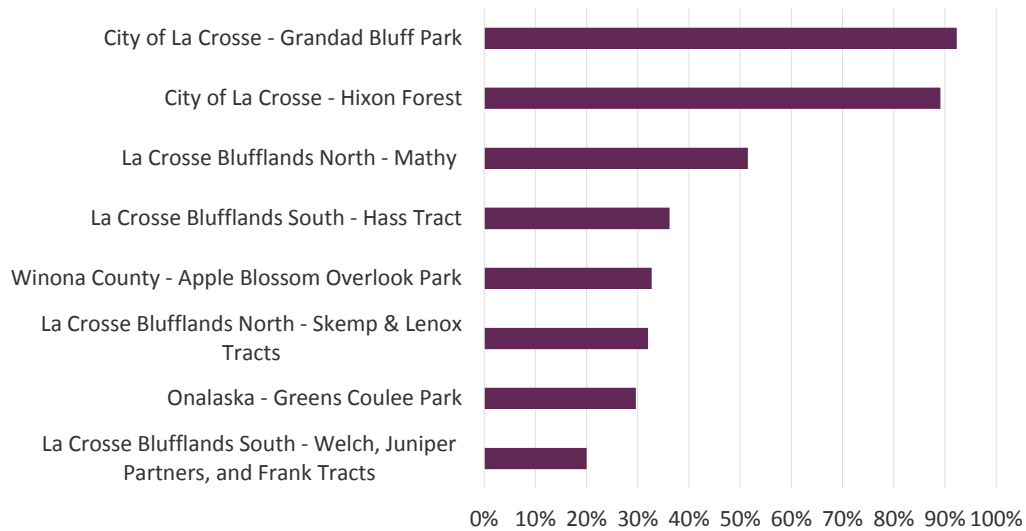
**Q2\*** PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR OWN BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF “THE BLUFFLANDS”.

**TOP RESPONSES**

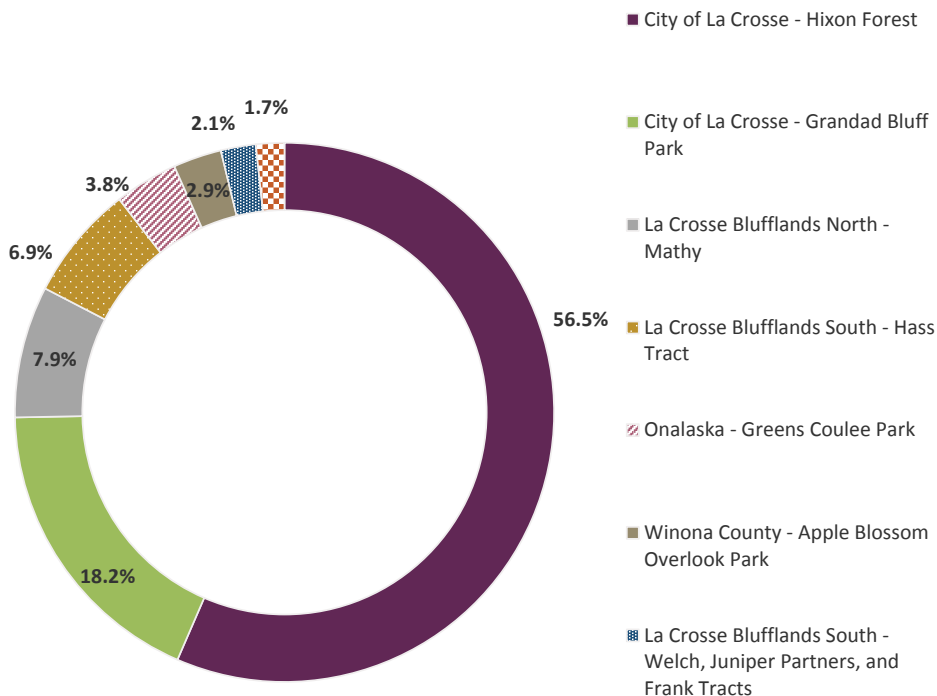
- + HILLS SURROUNDING LA CROSSE
- + HILLS THAT LINE THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER
- + PART OF THE DRIFTLESS REGION
- + BEAUTIFUL
- + NATURAL TOPOGRAPHY



### Q3 HAVE YOU BEEN TO ANY OF THE FOLLOWING PUBLIC LANDS IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

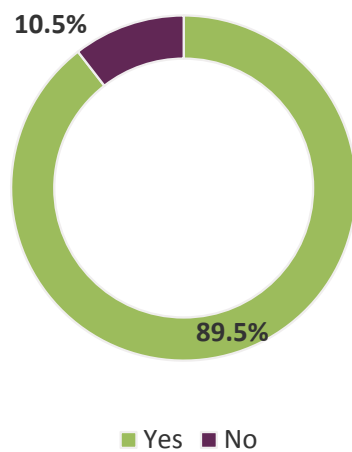


### Q4\* WHICH OF THESE SITES IS YOUR FAVORITE, AND WHY?

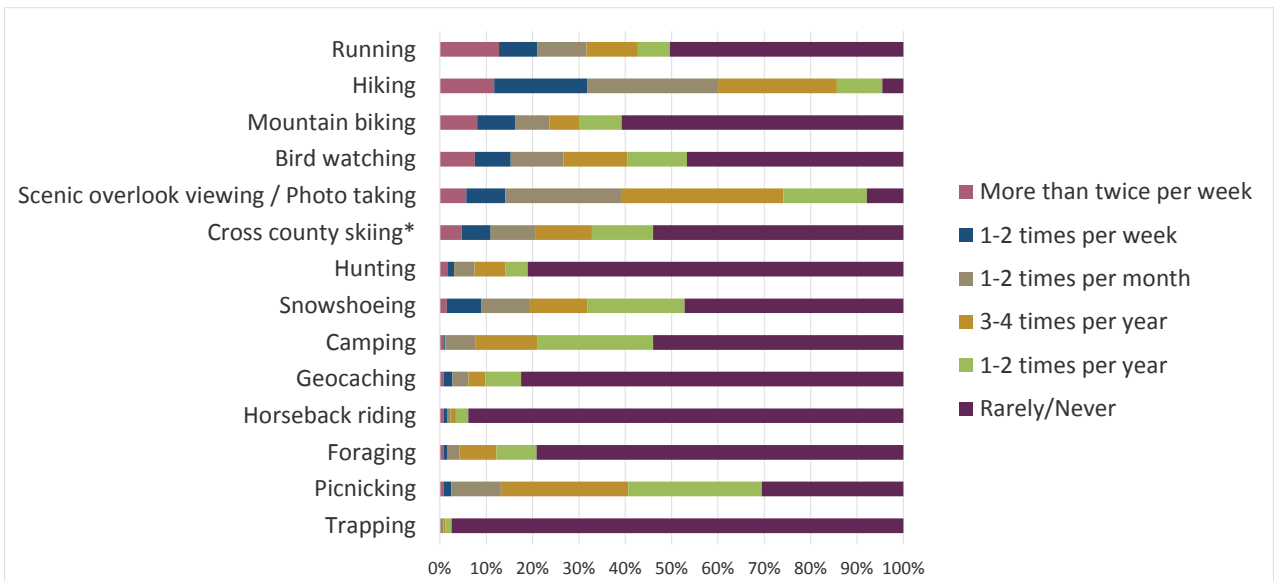


# RECREATION

**Q5\*** IF A VISITOR ASKED YOU TO RECOMMEND A PLACE TO HIKE ON OR NEAR THE BLUFFS, WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO DIRECT THEM TO A TRAIL? IF “YES”, PLEASE INDICATE WHICH TRAILHEAD OR PROPERTY YOU WOULD DIRECT PEOPLE TOO.



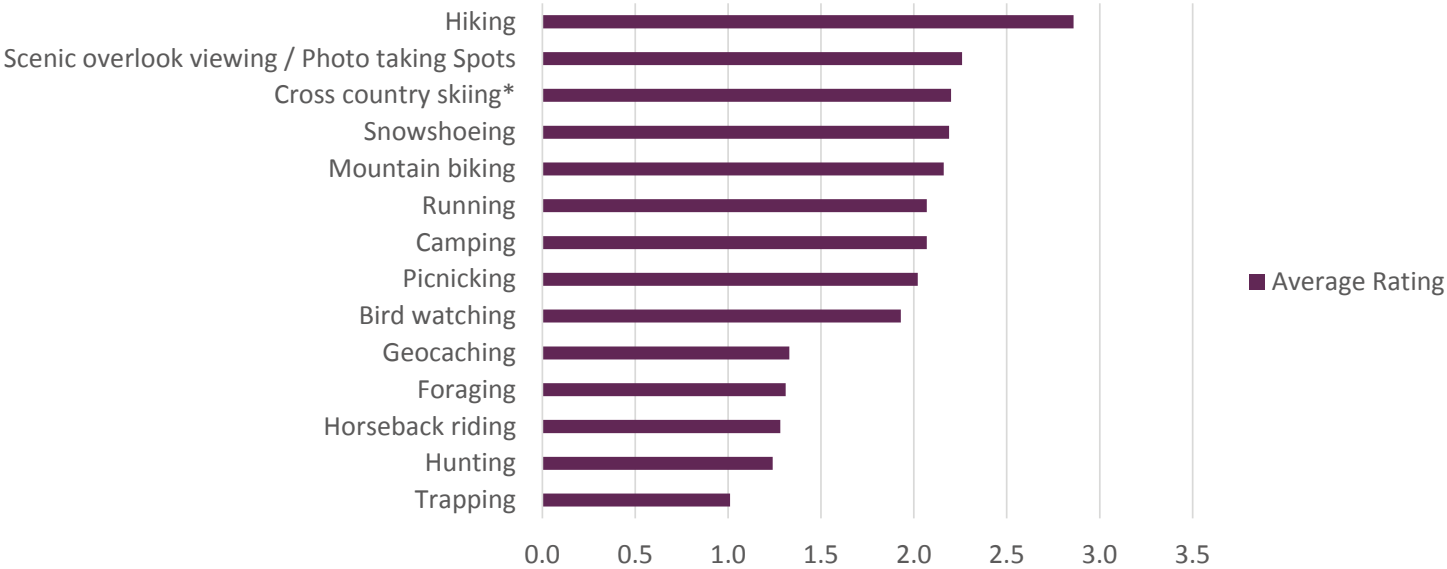
**Q6\*** ABOUT HOW OFTEN DO YOU DO THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES SOMEWHERE IN THE LA CROSSE - LA CRESCENT REGION? (FOR SEASONAL ACTIVITIES, INDICATE YOUR FREQUENCY WITHIN THAT SEASON)





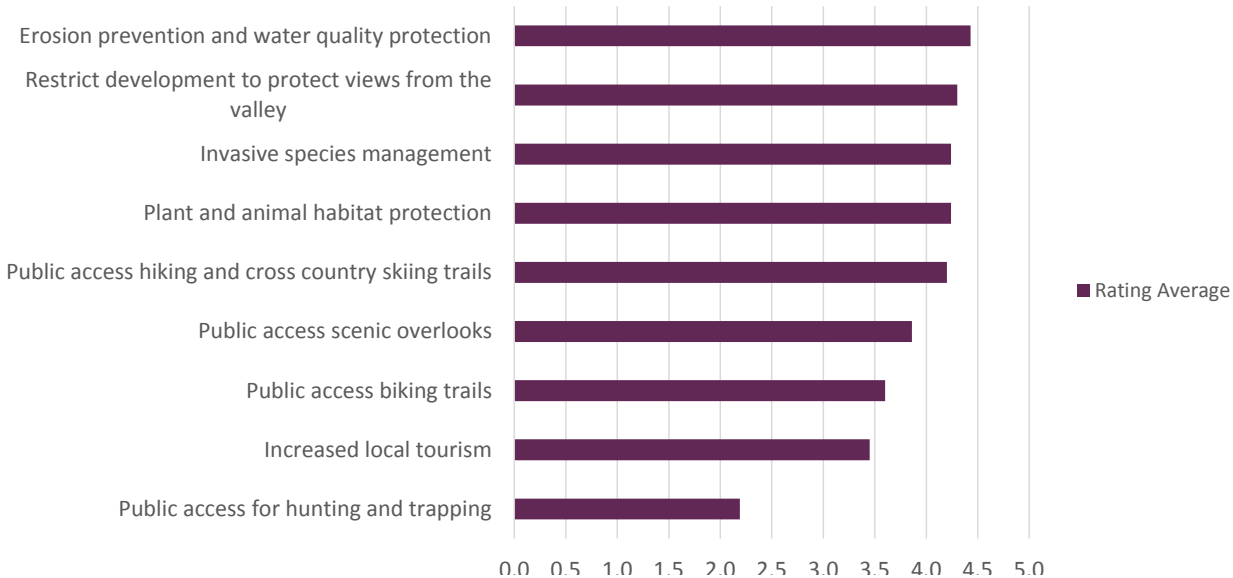


**Q7\*** IN YOUR OPINION, DOES THE REGION NEED MORE OF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE BLUFFLANDS?



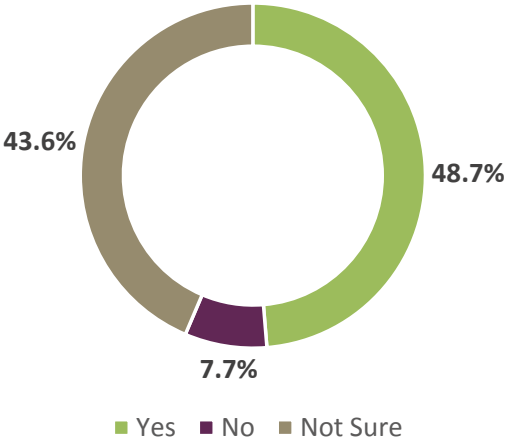
\*NOTE: CROSS COUNTRY SKIING APPEARED TWICE IN THIS SURVEY QUESTION, THEREFORE RESPONSES TO BOTH OCCURANCES WERE AVERAGED IN RESULTS.

**Q8\*** IN YOUR OPINION, HOW IMPORTANT ARE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES OF BLUFFLAND PROTECTION?



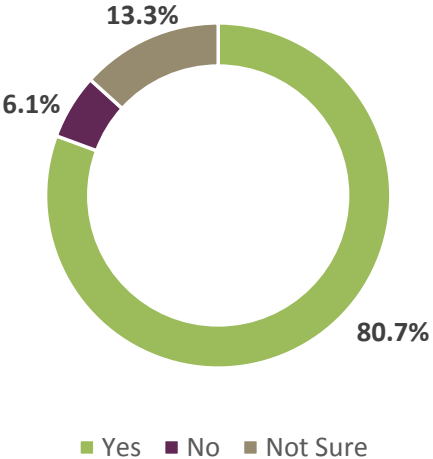
# PROTECTION EFFORTS

**Q9\*** DO YOU SUPPORT CREATION OF A COMMON BRAND IDENTITY FOR BLUFFLAND SITES THROUGHOUT THE REGION?



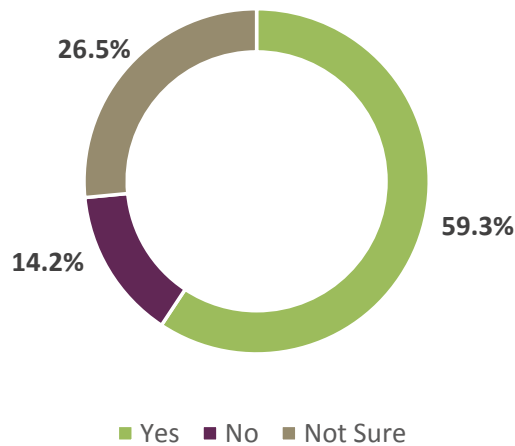
- SAMPLE RESPONSES**
- + PLEASE DON'T OVERDO THE TOURISM
  - + IT COULD HELP RESIDENTS TAKE PRIDE IN THE BLUFFS THAT DEFINE OUR REGION
  - + SOME KIND OF LOGO WITH THE FACE OF THE MORE WELL-KNOWN GRANDAD BLUFF
  - + I'M NOT SURE WHAT A "COMMON BRAND IDENTITY" IS
  - + RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA

**Q10\*** MANY OF THE BLUFFLAND SITES ACROSS THE REGION HAVE SIGNS TO HELP PEOPLE FIND AND NAVIGATE THE SITE, BUT THERE IS NO CONSISTENCY IN DESIGN, QUALITY, NUMBER OR PLACEMENT OF THOSE SIGNS. DO YOU SUPPORT A MORE CONSISTENT WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE SYSTEM FOR BLUFFLAND SITES THROUGHOUT THE REGION?

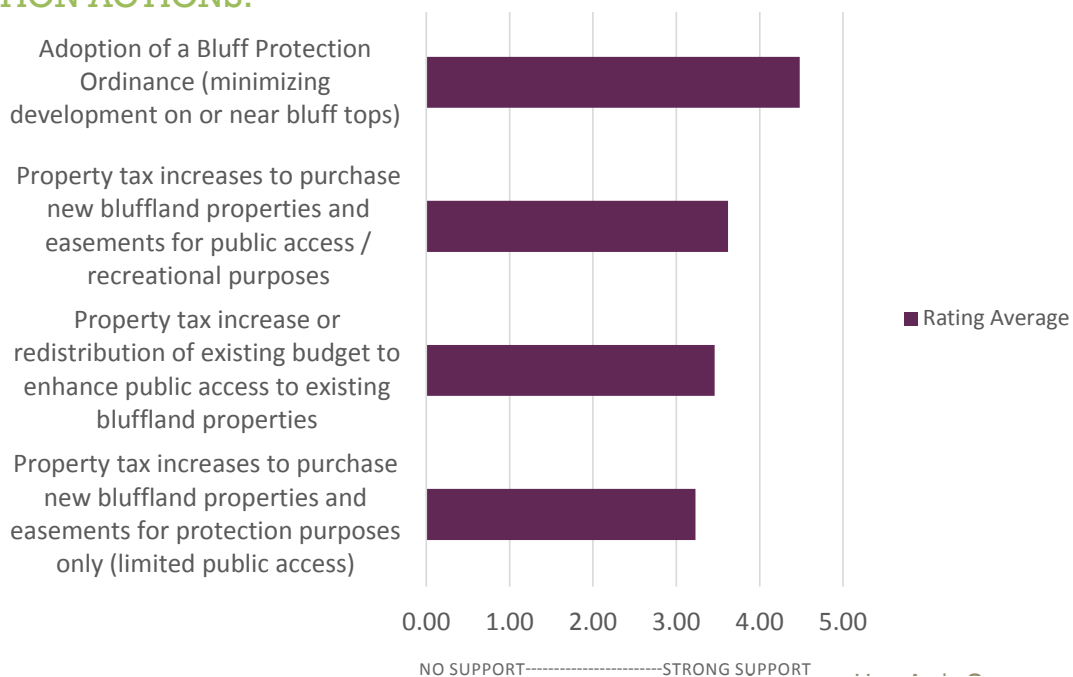




**Q11\*** LA CROSSE COUNTY CURRENTLY ALLOWS DISTURBANCE OF SLOPES UP TO 30% (3 FEET OF RISE ACROSS 10 FEET OF DISTANCE) DURING LAND DEVELOPMENT, WHILE THE LIMIT IS 20% IN MOST WISCONSIN COUNTIES. WOULD YOU SUPPORT AN ORDINANCE CHANGE TO LIMIT DEVELOPMENT ON SLOPES STEEPER THAN 20%?



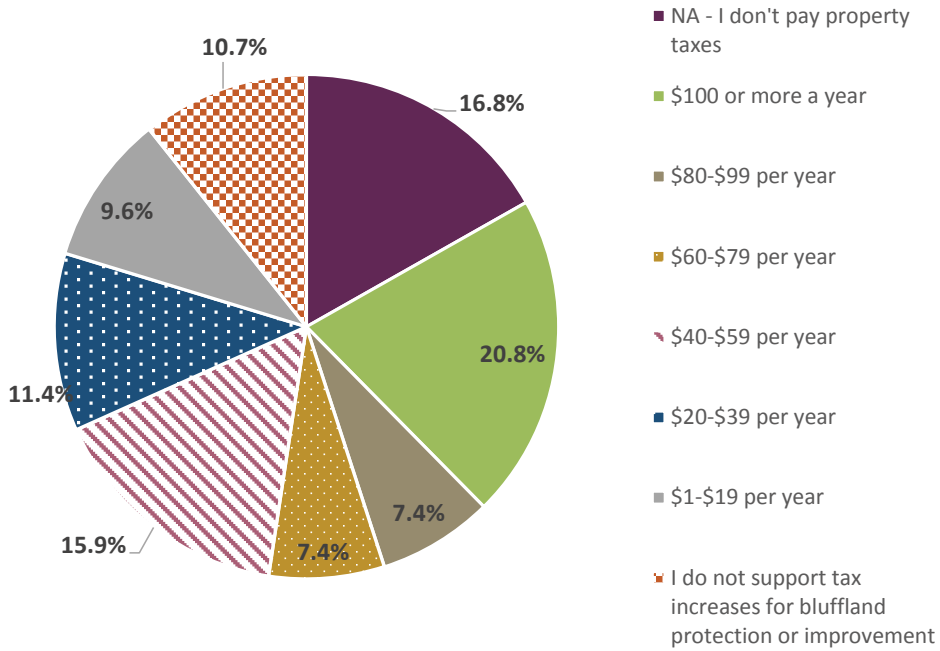
**Q12\*** PLEASE INDICATE YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE FOLLOWING BLUFFLAND PROTECTION ACTIONS.





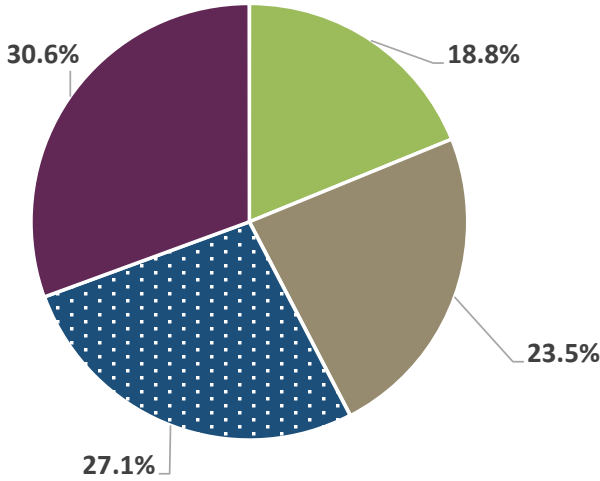
# PROTECTION EFFORTS

**Q13\*** IF YOU SUPPORT A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE TO FUND BLUFFLAND PROTECTION AND IMPROVEMENTS, WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF ADDITIONAL PROPERTY TAXES YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO PAY?





# Q14\* IF YOU OWN LAND ON OR NEAR THE BLUFFS, WOULD YOU CONSIDER DOING ANY OF THE FOLLOWING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE REGION’S BLUFFLANDS PROTECTION EFFORTS?



- I would consider selling or donating property to a local government (city, town, or county) or non-profit land conservancy for permanent protection and public access.
- I would consider selling a permanent conservation easement to a local government (city, town, or county), or non-profit land conservancy, with the expectation that public access will be allowed.
- I would consider donating a permanent conservation easement to a local government (city, town, or county), or non-profit land conservancy, with the option to restrict public access.
- Not Sure

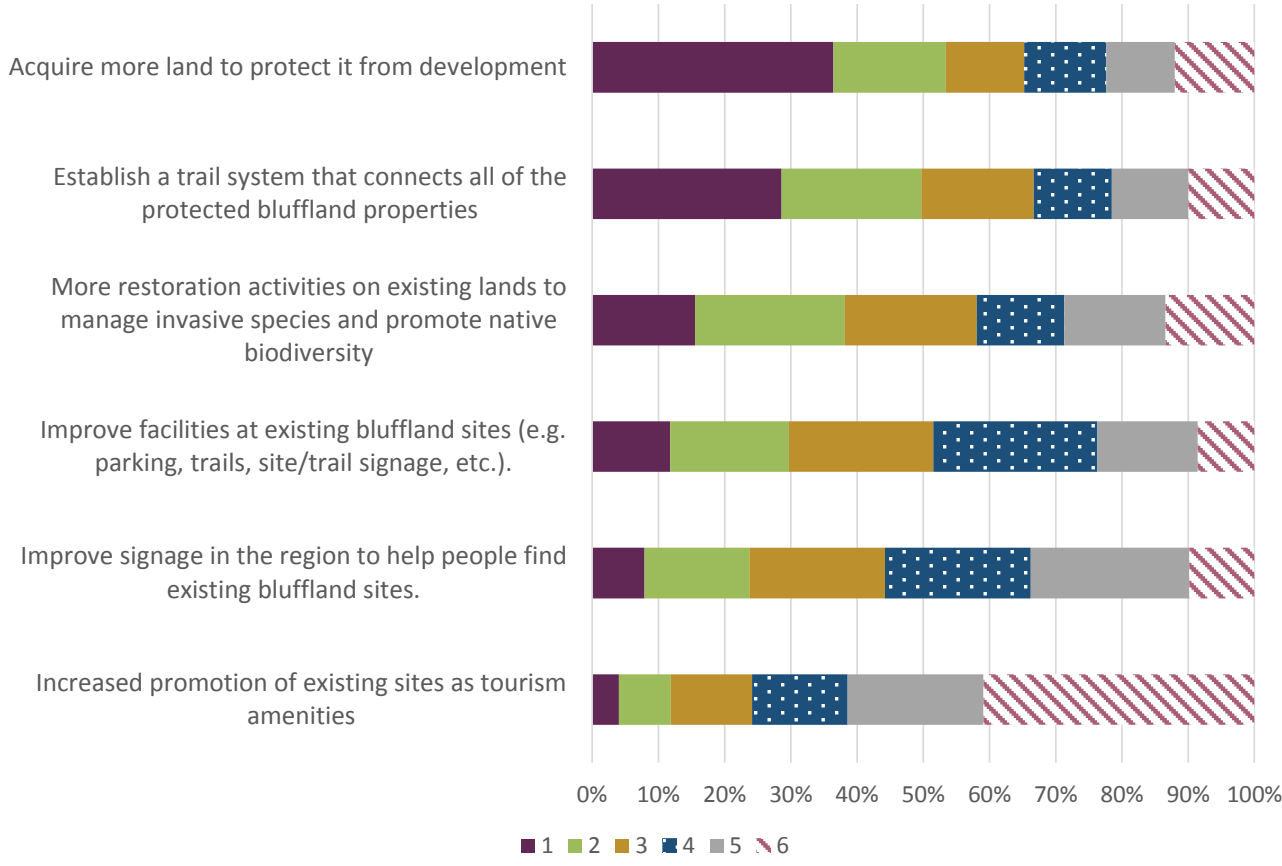
## SAMPLE RESPONSES

- + I HAVE BLUFF LAND AND WOULD NOT SELL IT UNLESS THERE WAS A PROMISE OF MOUNTAIN BIKING TRAILS
- + I HAVE PLACED MY 33 ACRES NEAR GENOA IN CONSERVANCY WITH MVC
- + WE LIVE ON THE BLUFFS, BUT I DON'T SEE HOW ANY OF THE LOT COULD BE PUT IN EASEMENT
- + I WISH I HAD MORE THAN 2.5 ACRES. I WOULD DEFINITELY CONSIDER PUTTING IT INTO PROTECTION
- + I DO HAVE ACREAGE ALONG BLUFFS, WILLING TO CONSIDER OPTIONS

**NOTE:** For this question we removed 88% of respondents that don't own land.

# PROTECTION EFFORTS

**Q15** PLEASE RANK THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES IN ORDER OF PREFERRED PRIORITY WITH “1” AS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY.



**Q16\*** HOW ELSE CAN THE REGION UTILIZE THE BLUFFLANDS TO ATTRACT RESIDENTS AND SUPPORT ECONOMIC GROWTH?

**TOP RESPONSES**

- + **TRAILS:** Build more shard-use, improve existing, build a network of trails and offer year-round use.
- + **PROMOTION:** Promote natural resources, biking, recreational opportunities and area as a regional tourist destination. Create uniform promotional materials. Partner with organizations, counties, and municipalities to promote.



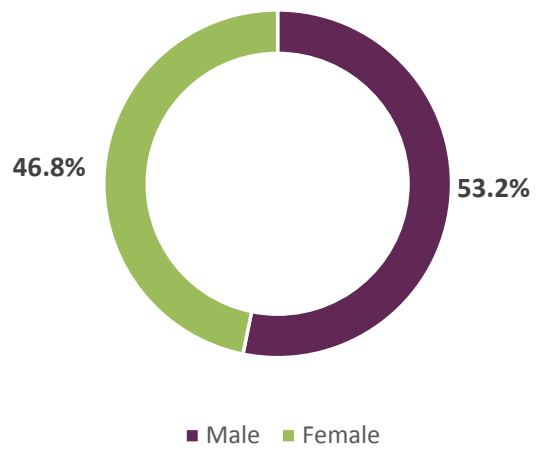


**Q17\*** PLEASE USE THIS SPACE TO PROVIDE ANY OTHER COMMENTS RELATING TO BLUFFLAND PROTECTION IN THE LA CROSSE - LA CRESCENT REGION.

**TOP RESPONSES**

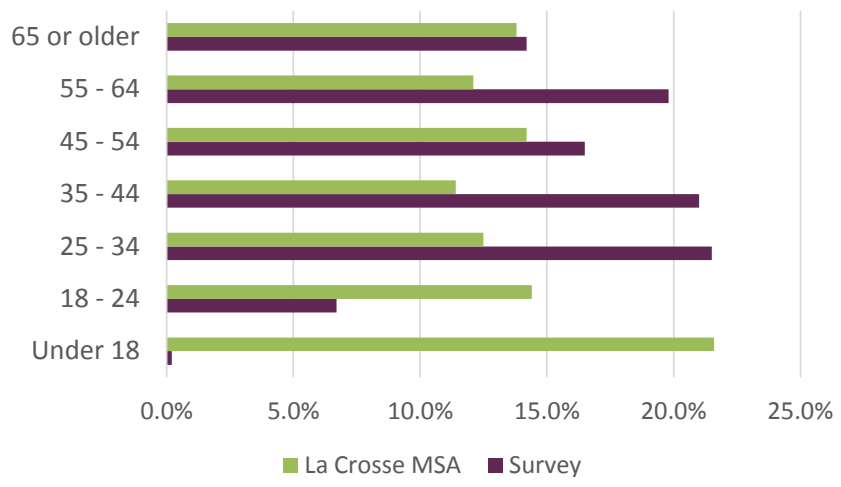
- + PROTECTING THE BLUFFS AND BEAUTIFUL VIEWS IS IMPORTANT.
- + TRAILS ARE IMPORTANT TO THE REGION: maintain existing, engage in trail system planning, encourage safety on trails and create signage.

**Q18** WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?

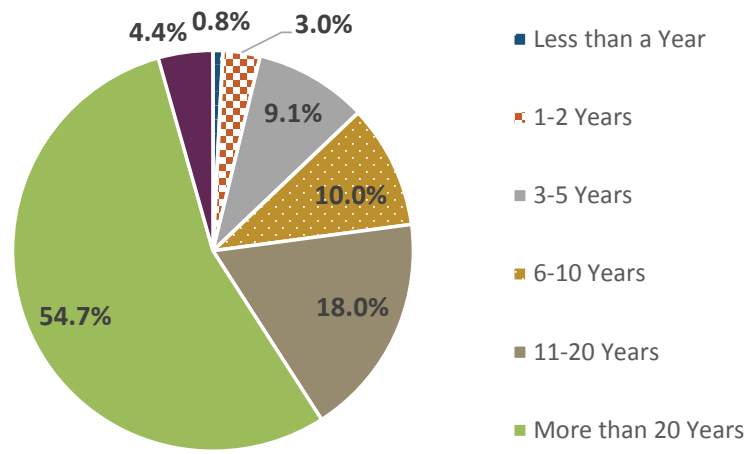


# DEMOGRAPHICS

## Q19 WHAT IS YOUR AGE?



## Q20 HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN THE LA CROSSE-LA CRESCENT REGION?

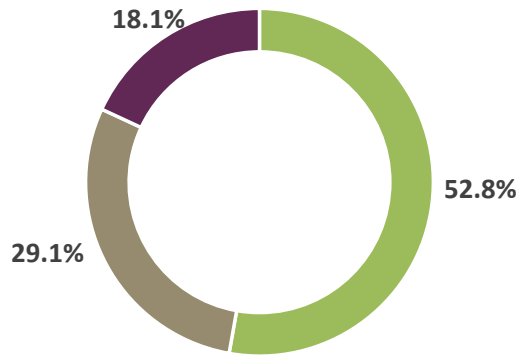


## Q21\* PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR HOME ZIP CODE.

+95% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS LIVE WITHIN THE REGION (ZIP CODE IS 546XX FOR WISCONSIN OR 559XX FOR MINNESOTA)

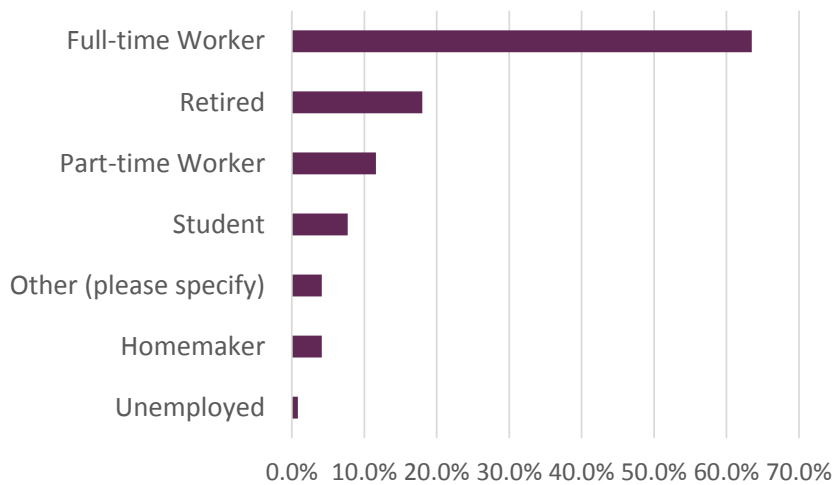


## Q22\* WERE THE BLUFFS A FACTOR IN YOUR DECISION TO MOVE TO (OR STAY IN) THIS AREA?



■ Yes, a strong factor. ■ Yes, at least a minor factor ■ No, not a factor

## Q23\* WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)



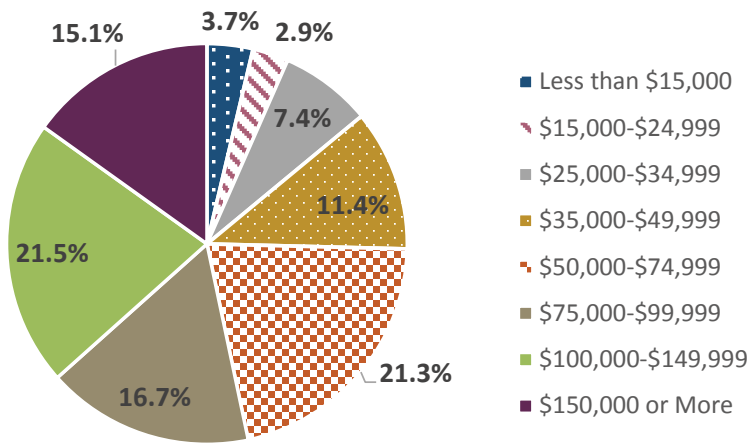


# DEMOGRAPHICS

## Q24\* PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR PLACE OF WORK ZIP CODE.

+90% OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS WORK WITHIN THE REGION (ZIP CODE IS 546XX FOR WISCONSIN OR 559XX FOR MINNESOTA)

## Q25 WHAT IS YOUR HOUSEHOLD'S ANNUAL INCOME?



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# Appendix D: Invasive Species Factsheets





# Plant Facts

## Rhamnus cathartica



<b>Common Name</b>	Common Buckthorn
<b>Scientific Name</b>	<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i>
<b>Mature Spread</b>	30'
<b>Mature Height</b>	30'
<b>Bloom Period</b>	Spring
<b>Type</b>	Deciduous Tree
<b>Form</b>	Thicket/Clump
<b>Identifying Traits</b>	

### Leaves, Stems & Bark

Ovate or elliptic, prominent veins curving towards tip. Mostly opposite leaves with tiny teeth. Gray to brown bark with light lenticels. Thorny.

### Flowers

Inconspicuous, greenish-yellow, 4-petals.

### Fruits and Seeds

Abundant clusters of round, black, pea-sized fruit. Dispersed by birds or mammals. Fruits remain on plants into winter after all leaves have fallen.

### Roots

Extensive, black fibrous root system.

### Management

Apply herbicide to newly cut stumps. Repeated monitoring and long-term monitoring is required. Propane weed torches for killing seedlings. Mechanical control methods may be more environmental friendly but are more costly and recommended for trunks under a half an inch or less than nine feet tall.

### Management Difficulty

High, Sprouts vigorously and repeatedly from root collar following cutting, girdling or burning. Seeds remain viable in soils for years.

### Other

Seeds and leaves are considered toxic to humans and animals. Thorny.



# Plant Facts

## Alliaria petiolata



**Common Name** Garlic Mustard  
**Scientific Name** *Alliaria petiolata*  
**Mature Spread** n/a  
**Mature Height** 2'  
**Bloom Period** Throughout Spring  
**Type** Herbaceous biennial  
**Form** Spreading  
**Identifying Traits**

**Leaves** First year; basal leaves are dark green, heart or kidney shaped with scalloped edges and wrinkled appearance. Second year: stem leaves are alternate, triangular with large teeth up to 2-3" across. Smell like garlic when crushed.

**Flowers** Small, white, 4-petaled and abundant.

**Fruits and Seeds** Seed pods are long, slender and green, turning to pale brown. Seeds inside are small, shiny black and in a single row. Seeds remain viable for 7 years.

**Roots** White, slender taproot, "S" shaped at the top. Will re-sprout from the root crown if only the top of the plant is removed.

### Management

**Difficulty** Medium, Reintroduce native herbaceous cover. Hand pull in early spring before seeds set. If plants are flowering place in a trash bag for disposal or burn. Cut plants at base prior to flowering, dispose or burn. Foliar applications of glyphosate in early spring or late fall when native plants are dormant.

**Other** Garlic mustard exudes anti-fungal chemicals into the soil that disrupts associations between mycorrhizal fungi and native plants, suppressing native growth.



# Plant Facts



## Fallopia japonica (Polygonum cupidatum)

<b>Common Name</b>	Japanese Knotweed (Giant Knotweed)
<b>Scientific Name</b>	<i>Fallopia japonica</i> ( <i>Polygonum cuspidatum</i> )
<b>Mature Spread</b>	23' - 65'
<b>Mature Height</b>	up to 10'
<b>Bloom Period</b>	August and September
<b>Type</b>	Perennial & Herbaceous Shrub
<b>Form</b>	Bamboo-like

### Identifying Traits

<b>Leaves</b>	Simple, alternate, 3-4" by 4-6" long. Dark green, spade shaped, young shoots are heart shaped. Pale green underside.
<b>Flowers</b>	Creamy white or green, tiny, plume like clusters on upper lead.
<b>Fruits and Seeds</b>	Small, triangular, shiny, black by female plants (rare). Seeds germinate readily.
<b>Roots</b>	White and present along the rhizome. Roots deep, creating a dense impenetrable mat.



### Management

#### Management Difficulty

High, Sprouts vigorously and repeatedly from root fragments, producing new infestations. Rhizomes not completely killed off may send up shoots for as many as three years following treatment.

#### Other

Spreads through a network of Rhizomes that may extend up to 65'. It has hollow stalks that resemble bamboo. Plants contain allelopathic compounds (chemicals that are toxic to surrounding vegetation).





# Plant Facts



## Elaeagnus umbellata

**Common Name** Autumn Olive  
**Scientific Name** *Elaeagnus umbellata*  
**Mature Spread** 20'  
**Mature Height** 20'  
**Bloom Period** Late Spring  
**Type** Deciduous Shrub  
**Form** Thicket/Clump  
**Identifying Traits**

**Leaves** Simple, alternate. Dark green with silver-gray spots on underside, lance shaped with wavy margins. Gray-green hue as seen from a distance.

**Flowers** White/Creamy tube/bell-shaped, fragrant.

**Fruits and Seeds** Small, fleshy, egg-shaped, pink to red covered in silver scales.

**Roots** Nitrogen-fixing bacteria. Damaged/cut causes suckering

**Management** Pull seedlings. Cutting, mowing and burning are NOT recommended because plants will re-sprout unless followed by chemical control. Treat foliage, cut surface or stem with glyphosate, triclopyr, ester or metsulfuron methyl with a surfactant. Basal bark of triclopyr ester. Treat foliage with liquid spray during active growing season. Treat stump or girdled bark with liquid herbicide by painting, dripping or sponging onto surface.

**Management Difficulty** Medium

**Other**

# Plant Facts



## Tatarian honeysuckle

**Common Name**

Tatarian honeysuckle

**Scientific Name**

*Lonicera tartarica*

**Mature Spread**

6' to 12'

**Mature Height**

6' to 12'

**Bloom Period**

Mid to late spring

**Type**

Deciduous Shrub

**Form**

Thicket/Clump

**Identifying Traits**

**Leaves**

Opposite, oval or oblong and untoothed. Leaves are hairless to downy and green or bluegreen. Leaf bases are slightly heart-shaped to nearly straight. Leaves emerge 1 to 2 weeks earlier in spring and stay on later in fall as compared to native trees and shrubs.

**Flowers**

Fragrant, tubular and arranged in pairs at leaf axils. Reddish pink or white, turning yellow with age.

**Fruits and Seeds**

Red to orange berries occurring in pairs at leaf axils and contain many seeds. Dispersed by birds.

**Roots**

Fibrous and shallow.

**Management**

Small to medium sized plants can be dug or pulled by hand or with a leverage tool. Prescribed burns in spring kill seedlings and top kill other plants. Treat cut stump or basal bark with glyphosate in early spring prior to leaf out of native species.

**Management Difficulty**

Medium

**Other**

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# Appendix E: Partner Capabilities



Table 2.1 Existing & Proposed *Public* Partners' Capabilities

Entity	Ability to Purchase Land	Ability to Manage Land	Funding Capacity	Volunteers	Education & Outreach	Restoration	Recreation Improvements
<b>PUBLIC</b>							
City of La Crescent	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
City of La Crosse	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
City of Onalaska	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Departments of Natural Resources (MN and WI)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Department of Transportation (WI)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Houston County La Crosse Area Planning Committee	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
La Crosse County	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
La Crosse School District	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	N
Onalaska Board of Education	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Town of Barre	?	?	?	N	N	?	?
Town of Dresbach	?	?	?	N	N	?	?
Town of La Crescent	?	?	?	N	N	?	?
Town of Hamilton	?	?	?	N	N	?	?
Town of Holland	?	?	?	N	N	?	?
Town of Medary	?	?	?	N	N	?	?
Town of Onalaska	?	?	?	N	N	?	?
Town of Shelby	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
US Geological Survey	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
US Fish and Wildlife	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Village of Holmen	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Winona County	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y

Table 2.2 Existing & Proposed *Private Partners' Capabilities*

Entity	Ability to Purchase Land	Ability to Manage Land	Funding Capacity	Volunteers	Education & Outreach	Restoration	Recreation Improvements
<b>PRIVATE</b>							
Coulee Region Audubon Society	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Gundersen Health System	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N
La Crosse Area Convention & Visitor's Bureau	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
La Crosse Chamber of Commerce	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
La Crosse Freeride MTB Group	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Land Trust Alliance	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Mayo Clinic	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N
McKnight Foundation	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Minnesota Land Trust	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Miss. Valley Archaeological Center	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Mississippi Valley Conservancy	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Upper Miss. River Blufflands Alliance	N	N	N	N	N	N	N



# Appendix F: MVC Monitoring Reports



MVC Property Monitoring Form (MVC owned/managed properties)



MVC Property Monitoring Report

1. Date: 9/4/15

2. Property Name: LBPP  
Tract Names: Gilbertson

Property Location:  
2228 Sunset Ln,

3. Property Uses (select all that apply):  
 hiking  birding/nature photography  hunting  fishing  
 trapping  bicycling  horseback riding

4. Property Conditions:

a. Is there evidence of abuse by the public (i.e. litter, graffiti, off-road vehicle use, fire pits, etc)? Yes \_\_\_ No

List evidence:

b. Is there any natural environmental damage (i.e. erosion, flooding, etc)? Yes \_\_\_ No

c. Is there evidence of property boundary encroachment? Yes \_\_\_ No

Describe:

d. Are there any other issues threatening the natural resources of the site?

Invasive species - Buckthorn, honeysuckle, black locust

5. Property needs (check if needed):

Trail maintenance  
 Boundary Signs

Invasive species Control  
 Kiosk, Sign

a. Other:

6. Follow up Needed:

Find volunteers to cut + treat invasive species

Monitor's name:

Levi Plath

Signature

Date:

9/4/15

MVC Easement Monitoring Form (non-MVC owned/managed properties)

APPENDIX C: CONSERVATION EASEMENT MONITORING FORM



Conservation Easement Monitoring Report

1. Date: 12/10/15
2. Project Name & Location: LBPP
3. Current Owners: MAZITY COMPLEX - MAZHY QUARRY PROPERTY
Address: CITY OF LACROSSE DEPT OF PARKS, RECREATION AND FORESTRY
Phone:

4. Has the Property been transferred since the last monitoring report? Yes \_\_\_ No X

Deed Information:

5. Was owner contacted prior to visit? Yes X No \_\_\_

6. Did owner or owner's representative accompany the monitor? Yes \_\_\_ No X

If yes, who accompanied? - I WAS TOLD TO DO IT ANYTIME AND DID NOT NEED TO CALL THEM BEFORE I DID IT.

7. How is the land currently being used? OWNED BY CITY - OPEN TO PUBLIC - HIKING PEOPLE - BIKING CYCLING, NATURAL STAY - WATCHDOG PROTECTION - SCENIC VIEW

8. Area Monitored (i.e. entire property, east boundary, etc) & nature of observation (i.e. visual & on foot, from \_\_\_ road by car, etc). PARK IN LOT BY KIOSK AT END OF CTH A - WALK TO NORTH END OF PROPERTY VIA OLD QUARRY ROAD - 3 BICYCLISTS SEEN ON OLD ROAD HEADING NORTH - THEY NEVER RETURNED - PRESUMABLY CROSSED OVER PRIVATE LAND TO CITY LAND TO GO DOWNHILL TO CTR (3)

9. Monitor's best assessment of whether the terms of the conservation easement are being observed: Yes X No \_\_\_ If no, explain on attached sheet. ONE "PRIVATE LAND" SIGN SHOULD BE REPLACED BETWEEN WEED CONTROL AROUND KIOSK NEEDS

10. Did you note any possible violations of the terms of the conservation easement? YES \_\_\_ NO X If yes, explain on attached sheet. DEER CALLERS HAS BEEN REMOVED FROM SUMMER

11. Other Remarks: EARLIER IN SUMMER THERE WAS HEAVY WEED GROWTH AROUND KIOSK - DEAD DEER IN ROAD

Monitor's name: Signature: [Signature]
Time Monitoring Prep: 1/2 hr Date: 12/10/15
Time On Site: 4 1/2 hrs
Drive Time: 10 min 1x Mileage: 10 1x
Weather Conditions: (ground snow-covered, foggy, etc)