

5. AGRICULTURAL, NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Introduction

The agricultural, natural and cultural resources of a community, in many ways act as its fingerprint. The historic sites, unique and scenic features along with natural resources are the elements which form a community's identity, establish its uniqueness and make it a desirable place to live. The identification and preservation of a community's agricultural, natural and cultural resources is crucial for retaining its identity, character and "sense of place".

Agricultural Resources

Agriculture plays a fairly small part in the overall current land use in the Town of Willard making up about 13% of the total land use. The bulk of the agricultural land in Willard is found in the less forested areas east of State Highway 27. Productive agricultural lands usually correlate with prime farmland soils. Prime farmland is land that is best suited for growing crops such as food for humans and animals. In the Town of Willard it may be cultivated land, woodland, or other land, but it is not existing developed land or water areas. The soil qualities, growing season and moisture supply are those needed for a well-managed soil to produce sustained high yield crops in an economic manner. Prime agricultural land is able to produce the highest yields with minimal input of energy and economic resources. Prime farmland is depicted on [Map 6 \(Appendix D\)](#)

Farmland Preservation

Local governments can develop farmland zoning districts to encourage landowners to use best management practices, thereby preserving lands suitable for agriculture and promoting practices that protect water quality. The current Rusk County Plan expired December 31, 2017. Rusk County's 2018 updated plan provides for a change in State tax credit for qualifying farmers. While this comprehensive plan seeks to preserve productive farmland for long-term agricultural uses, Farmland Zoning Districts may also need to be identified and certified to assist local landowners with qualifying for the updated plan.



Natural Resources

Geographic Location

The Town of Willard lies in the northern highland geographic province of Wisconsin, which covers approximately one third of northern Wisconsin. This expansive area is characterized by an upland area that stretches north into Canada and is a drift-less area not at all modified by glacial erosion and deposition, but shaped entirely by weathering and stream erosion.

Surface Water

Within its municipal boundaries, the Town of Willard's surface water includes parts of one lake, two rivers and two creeks/streams. The major water bodies are Holcombe Flowage and the Chippewa River. These two water bodies make up the majority (90) of the surface water in Willard. A very small portion of the Jump River protrudes into the Town near Lake Holcombe. Deer Tail Creek and Main Creek are the only other named water features in the Town.

See [Map 5, Appendix D](#).

Outstanding and Exceptional Waters

Wisconsin has classified many of the State's highest quality waters as Outstanding Resource Waters (ORWs) or Exceptional Resource Waters (ERWs). Waters designated as ORW or ERW are surface waters that provide outstanding recreational opportunities, support valuable fisheries, have unique hydrologic or geologic features, have unique environmental settings, and are not significantly impacted by human activities. The primary difference between the two is that ORW's typically do not have any direct point sources (e.g., industrial or municipal sewage treatment plant, etc.) discharging pollutants directly to the water. Rusk County has four ERW's: Flambeau River, Jump River, Main Creek, and Soft Maple Creek (from CR-F to Chippewa River), and four ORW's: Chippewa River, Soft Maple Creek (from origin to CRr), Swift Creek, and Thornapple River. Parts of Main Creek and the Chippewa River occur in the Town of Willard.

Groundwater

Groundwater is an important natural resource in Wisconsin and the Town of Willard. All homes in Willard receive their potable water through individual private wells. The depth to groundwater is the distance from the land surface to the water table. Depth to groundwater in Willard varies from 0 to 50 feet. See [Map 4, Appendix D](#).

Wetlands

Wetlands are areas in which water is at, near, or above the land surface and which are characterized by both hydric soils and by the hydrophilic plants such as sedges, cattails, and other vegetation that grow in a very wet environment. Wetlands are critical natural resources that function in several ways that are beneficial to both people and wildlife. The Wisconsin Wetland Inventory (WWI) maps wetlands five acres and larger utilizing aerial photographs and hydric soils data. Table 22 lists the different types of wetlands and their acreages in the Town of Willard and [Map 5 \(Appendix D\)](#) shows the distribution of wetlands in the Town.

Wetland Type	Acres
Aquatic bed	12.2
Aquatic bed, Open Water	11
Emergent/wet meadow	515.4
Emergent/wet meadow, Aquatic bed	22.2
Emergent/wet meadow, Open Water	35.4
Forested	423
Forested, Emergent/wet meadow	66.2
Forested, Open Water	17.4
Forested, Scrub/shrub	619.4
Open Water	41.3
Scrub/shrub	1,743.00
Scrub/shrub, Emergent/wet meadow	660.6
Scrub, shrub, Open Water	32.4
Upland	62.6
Total	4,262.10

Watersheds

A watershed is an extent of land where water from rain or snow melt drains downhill into a body of water, such as a river, lake, reservoir, or wetland. The watershed acts like a funnel, collecting all the water within the area covered by the basin and channeling it into a waterway. The Town of Willard encompasses five watersheds, which include Deer Tail Creek (9,830 acres), Holcombe Flowage (4,168 acres), Lower Flambeau River (1,704 acres), Lower Jump River (167 acres) and Main Creek (7,252 acres). See [Map 5, Appendix D](#) for watershed boundaries.

Floodplains

Floodplains serve many important functions related to flood and erosion control, which are not conducive to development. Floods are Wisconsin's most common natural disaster and

therefore require sound land use plans to minimize their effects. All of the Town of Willard's floodplains flank Deer Tail Creek, Main Creek, the Chippewa River and Holcombe Flowage. For more information see FEMA's Flood Insurance Rate Maps for Rusk County - Panels 235/275 and 245/275 (Effective Date: January 2, 1987), or view the FEMA Floodplain Maps online at msc.fema.gov (Effective Date: 2014).

Woodlands

Forests provide many vital functions, which are diverse in nature. Forested lands provide for economic productivity (timber products), scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat among other things. Based on the existing land use in the Town of Willard, approximately 17,611 acres are currently forested. Some woodlands in the Town are being maintained through the Managed Forest Law (MFL) program. This tax assessment program is available to landowners willing to manage their forests according to sound forestry practices as outlined by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species

Wisconsin law prohibits the "taking" of any plant or animal listed as endangered or threatened, regardless of where it occurs. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) provides information on endangered and threatened species online through the Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI). The NHI Working List is updated regularly when there is a status change for sensitive species. As of July 18, 2017 the wood turtle is on the Threatened list, and the large-flowered ground cherry is sensitive to collection. The WDNR should be consulted regarding current, project-specific NHI Working List data.

Non-Metallic Mineral Resources

Non-metallic minerals include all mined materials other than those mined as a source of metals (such as lead, copper, gold, etc.). Economically important non-metallic minerals include building stone, lime, sand, gravel and crushed stone used in construction of buildings and roads. Currently, one extraction pit is in operation in Willard located off of Range Line Road. See [Map 7, Appendix D](#).

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include historic buildings and structures as well as ancient and historic archeological sites. Preservation of cultural resources provides community residents a connection to the history of their neighborhoods, towns and region as well as a sense of continuity and meaning. Because cultural resources provide an important window to the past, many Wisconsin Communities preserve and retain culturally significant resources to distinguish their communities.

Architecture Sites Inventory

According to the Architecture and Historic Inventory (AHI), maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society, there are five records identified in the Town of Willard. These sites are listed in Table 23.

AHI#	Section	Historic Name	Location	Resource Type
19258	1	Wilson State Graded	CTH I at Blueberry Rd	School
19263	4	N/A	Dead end road off STH 27	House
19264	15	Center School	STH 27	Town Hall
19268	34	Roy Schoolhouse	STH 27	Church
19269	36	Fred Yager Farmhouse (1916-49)	CTH D	House

Source: Wisconsin Historical Society

Archeological Sites Inventory

The Wisconsin Historical Society maintains a list of archeological sites known as the Archeological Site Inventory (ASI) database. These sites cover an extended period of time and include campsites, villages, communities, cabins, homesteads, sugar maple sites, cemetery, burial grounds and mounds, trading posts, fur posts, mills, sawmills, and kilns. The exact location of each site is not made public in order to protect the rights of private landowners and to eliminate excavation by artifact hunters or other non-professional archeologists not associated with the State Historical Society. No archeological sites have been reported to the Wisconsin Historical Society for the Town of Willard.

Goals
1. Protect natural areas, including wetlands, wildlife habitats, ponds, woodlands, open spaces and groundwater resources.
2. Protection of economically productive areas, including farmland and forests.
Objectives
1. New development in the Town should not negatively impact natural resources.
2. Minimize impacts to natural resources in the Town from non-metallic mineral mining.
3. Encourage and support the preservation of natural open spaces that minimize flooding such as wetlands and floodplains.
4. Promote development that minimizes groundwater impacts from on-site septic systems and other sources.
5. Discourage the draining or filling of wetlands.
Policies
New development should be discouraged from areas shown to be unsafe or unsuitable for development due to flood hazard, potential groundwater contamination, loss of farmland, highway access problems, incompatibility with neighboring uses, etc.
Expansion of existing non-metallic mining operations or development of new sites should be allowed only on lands where the expansion will not conflict with preexisting development.
Reclamation of non-metallic mining sites should conform to the land use plan map in regard to the reclaimed use.

Agricultural Resources	
Goals	
1. Protect economically productive areas that are farmlands and commercial forests.	
2. Respect farms by allowing farming to continue without residential intrusion nearby.	
Objectives	
1. Support diversification of farming types and practices to maintain agriculture as a viable economic activity.	
2. Existing agricultural uses and buildings should be taken into consideration when locating new development to avoid conflicts.	
3. Preserve productive farmland for long-term agricultural uses.	
Policies	
Non-farm development, particularly subdivisions, will be encouraged in areas away from intensive agricultural activities, in order to minimize farm and non-farm conflicts due to noise, odors, nitrates in well water, pesticides, farm/vehicle conflicts on roadways, late night plowing, etc.	
Consider the use of such tools to protect sensitive areas, such transfer of development rights (TDR) or purchase of development rights (PDR).	
Encourage landowners to develop forest management plans and enroll in the managed forest law program. Inconveniences, such as aerial spraying, irrigation, dust, noise, odors and vehicle traffic etc. that result from agricultural operations that are not a major threat to public health, should not be considered a nuisance.	
Identify and map all current farms operating in the Town.	
Cultural Resources	
Goal	
Preserve cultural, historic and architectural sites	
Objectives	
Work with Rusk County Historical Society and others to provide guidance in the identification and protection of historic and cultural resources.	
Policies	
Development proposals should be reviewed relative to the potential impacts to the historical and cultural resources of the Town.	