

Keystone Woods WMA Focus Group Meeting

AGENDA

November 1, 2023 at 9:30 AM
Carlos Avery WMA Conference Room
5463 W Broadway Ave, Forest Lake MN 55025

DNR Representation: Laurinda Brown, Scott Noland, Kelly Pharis, TJ DeBates, Tom Popsun

Focus Group Members: Dann Adair, Nick Bancks, Rich Biske, Shayla Denaway, Gary Drotts, Greg Dziejewycznski, Tom Glines, David Guzzi, Mark Holsten, Eli Mansfield, Bob McGillivray, Alex McKinney, Katie Sickmann, Casey Sill, Nate Sparks, John Wachlarowicz, Keng Yang, John Zeman

Time	Item	Owner
9:30	Welcome	Laurinda Brown
9:45	Introductions	All
10:15	Project Overview	Scott Noland
10:45	Open Discussion	All
11:45	Next Steps	Laurinda Brown
12:00	Adjourn	

Keystone Woods Wildlife Management Area

Project Definition

Updated: 10/31/2023

Background

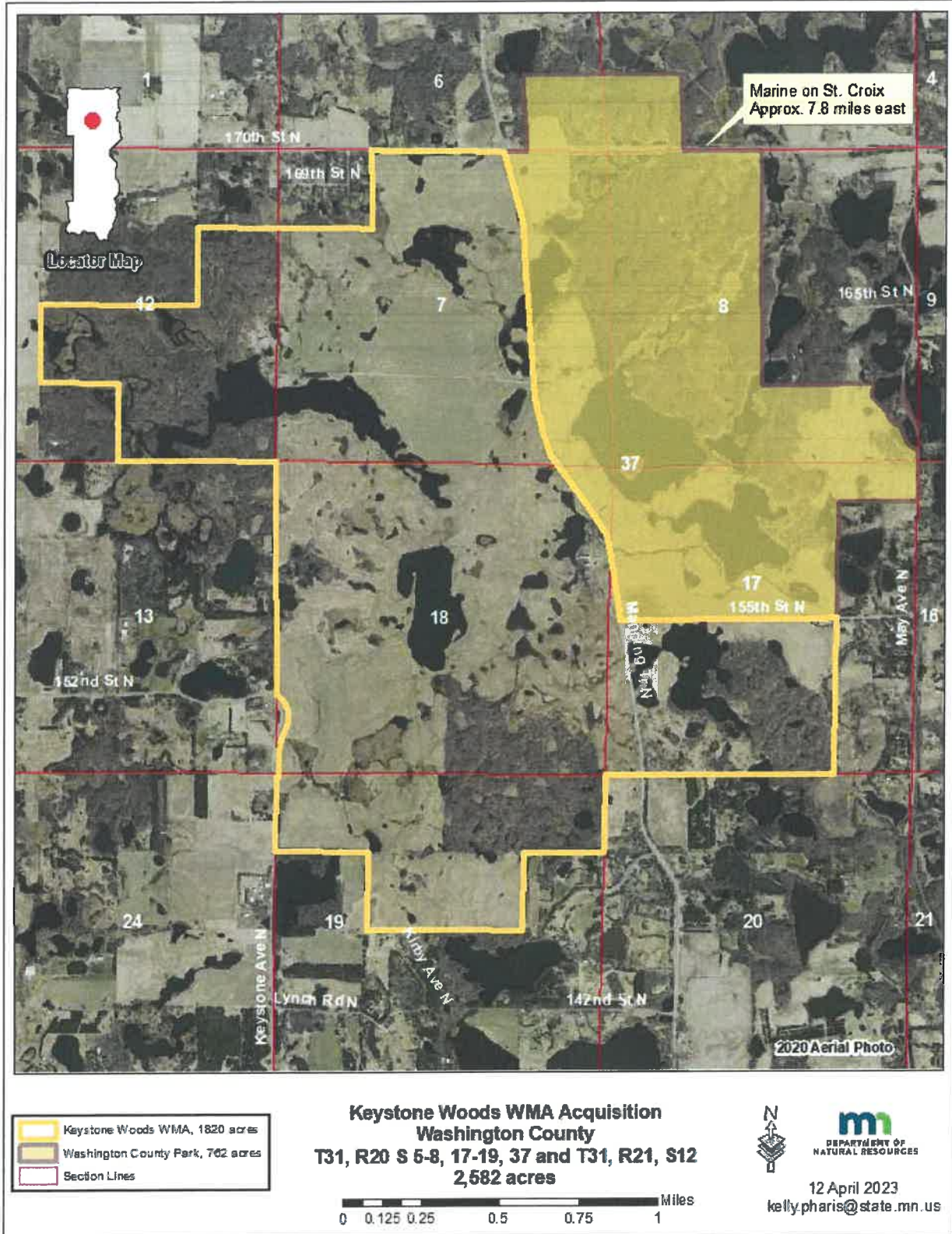
The Keystone Woods WMA project is an opportunity to design a WMA with previously under-recognized benefits to a broader number of Minnesota residents. The DNR's WMA system offers an opportunity to immerse Minnesotans in wildlife habitat by protecting public land and fostering connections to the outdoors. The timing is right for an initiative that creates an introductory WMA visitor experience that recognizes and adapts to changing social and demographic trends. This 1,820-acre WMA acquisition, located in northern Washington County, offers a unique opportunity to reach new user groups and try new development and infrastructure ideas near a large population center in the Twin Cities metro area (Figure 1).

Intentions

Expected outcomes that will be used to judge the long-term success of this project.

1. Develop and pilot a new WMA located near population centers, with a focus on enhanced facilities, wildlife and habitat education, and connecting new users with information about the broader WMA system and associated recreational opportunities.
2. The WMA will be designed and administered in a manner that allows for public hunting (unless restricted by local conditions), wildlife observation, fishing, hiking, snowshoeing and other resource-related uses that are consistent with Minnesota Rules. Accessible public facilities and self-guided educational resources will enhance visitor experience and encourage system-wide WMA recreation.

Figure 1. Keystone Woods WMA Acquisition



Values

Principles and standards that will guide the project.

- **Emphasize working with partners:** coordinate with partners and share resources and expertise.
- **Build landowner/neighbor relations:** work proactively with the local community to build support and networks.
- **Develop standard educational resources:** create self-guided tours using interpretive signage, georeferenced map, and educational materials.
- **Social media presence/branding:** generate interactive media or standard hashtag and pursue opportunities for citizen science and wildlife reporting. Focus on communications about the spaces and their purpose to generate more users.
- **Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation programming:** host special hunts, youth hunts, volunteer mentored hunts, learn-to-hunt classes.
- **Funding sources:** identify initial development and maintenance/programming funds.
- **Regulations/Rules:** explore a variety of compatible uses in accordance with statewide regulations.

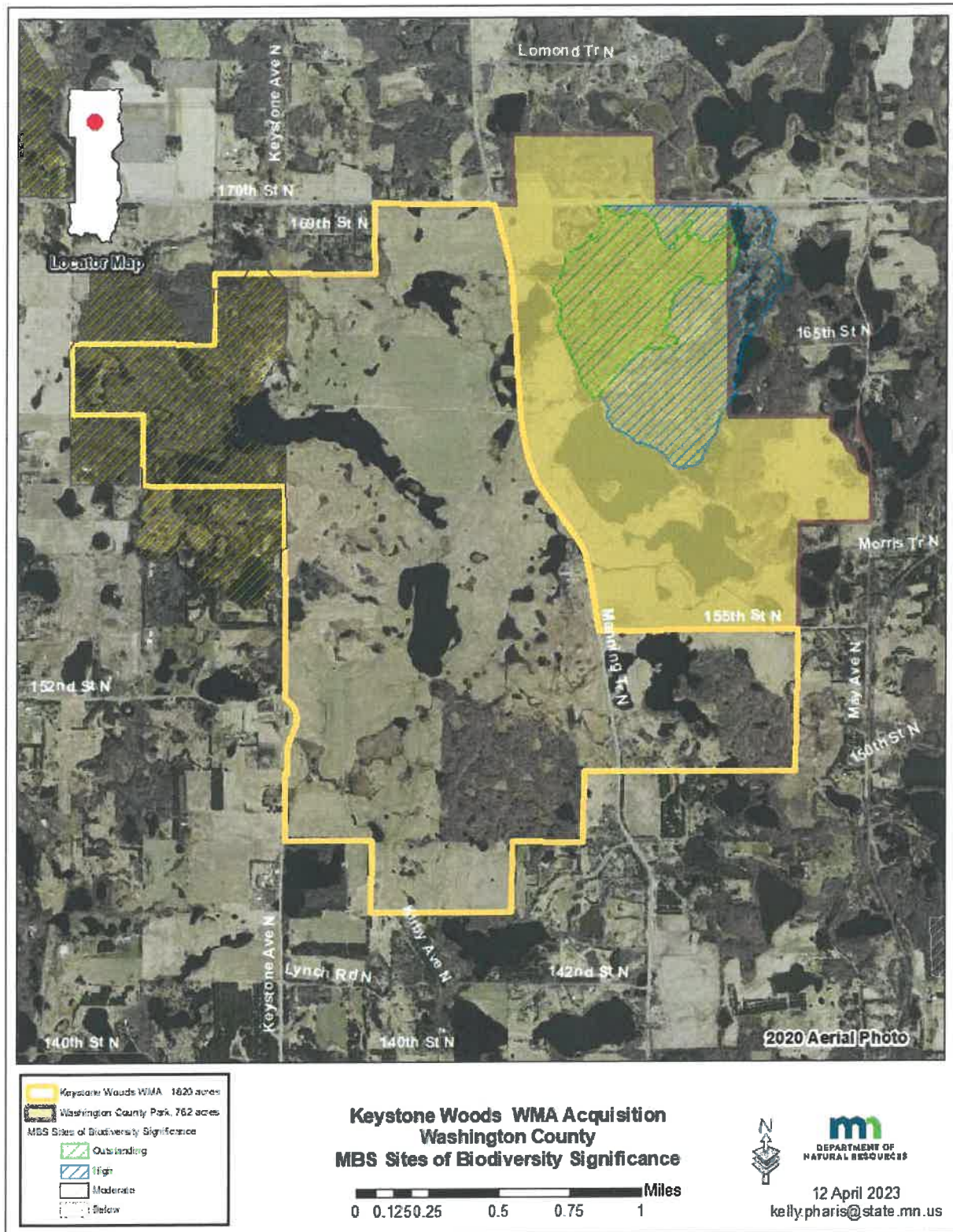
Focus and Potential Options

This project offers an excellent opportunity to protect large acreage near the Twin Cities metro area. The total property is 2,582 acres, with 1,820 acres slated for a WMA and the remaining 762 acres going to Washington County Parks. The park portion is on the east side of Manning Trail North and abuts their current landholdings for Big Marine Regional Park Preserve. There are existing access roads that could be used as natural trails. Areas for fishing piers, overlooks, parking facilities, and kiosks would make this an introductory WMA and a unique opportunity to highlight the WMA system statewide to pull in more users and support for the system (Figure 2). This area contains 2 of the top 10 conservation priority areas for Washington County: Keystone Woods and Carnelian Creek Corridor. Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) lists portions of the property as moderate biodiversity (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Design render of potential WMA parking lot layout and adjacent facility additions



Figure 3. MBS Sites of Biodiversity Significance



Includes:

This project includes land restoration and enhancement activities on 1,820 acres in Washington County over a 10-year period. Potential habitat work includes prairie restoration, direct hardwood seeding, and invasive tree removal (Figure.5). A list of potential facilities and features can be found in Table 1.

Figure 4. 1953 aerial photo of the Keystone Woods WMA acquisition

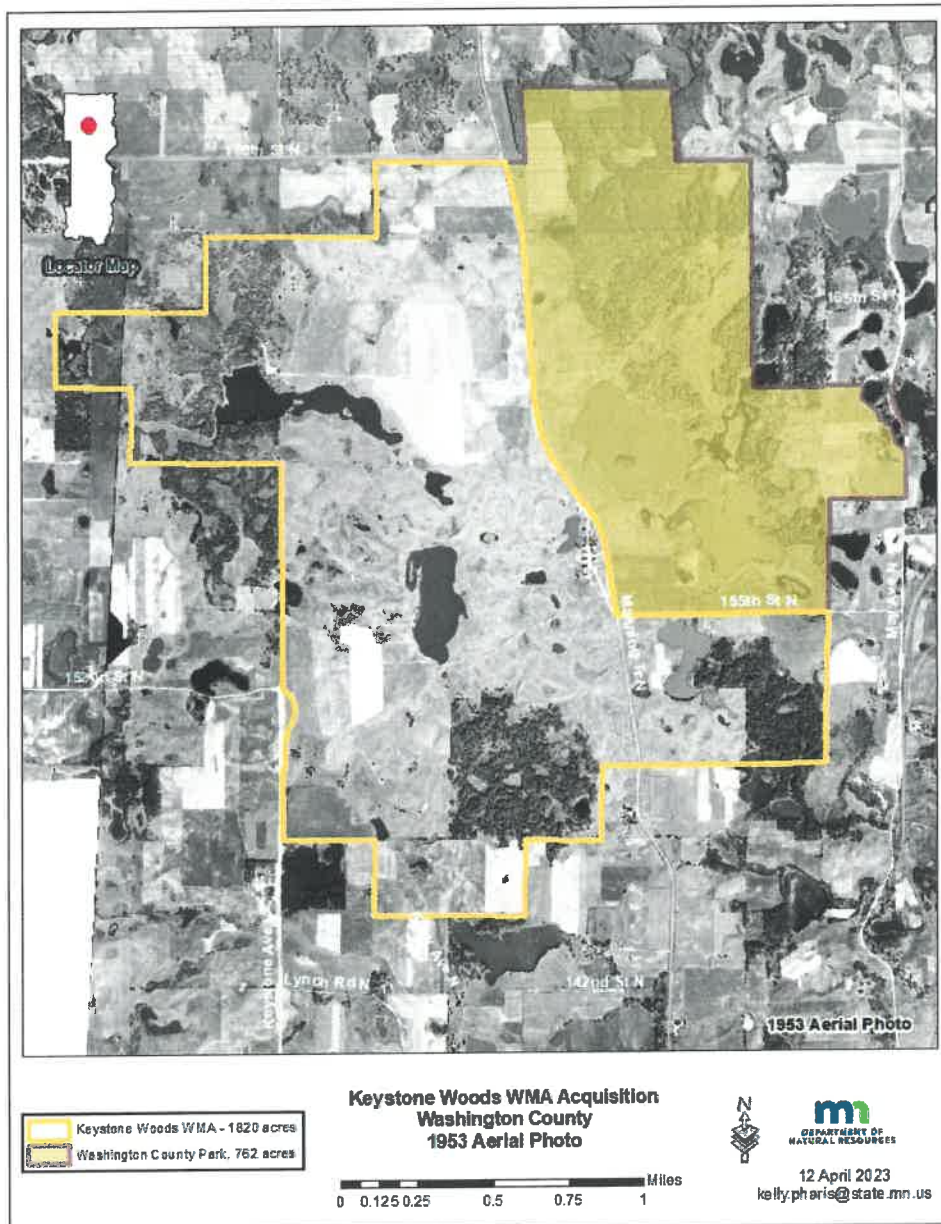


Figure 5. Potential habitat work at Keystone Woods WMA

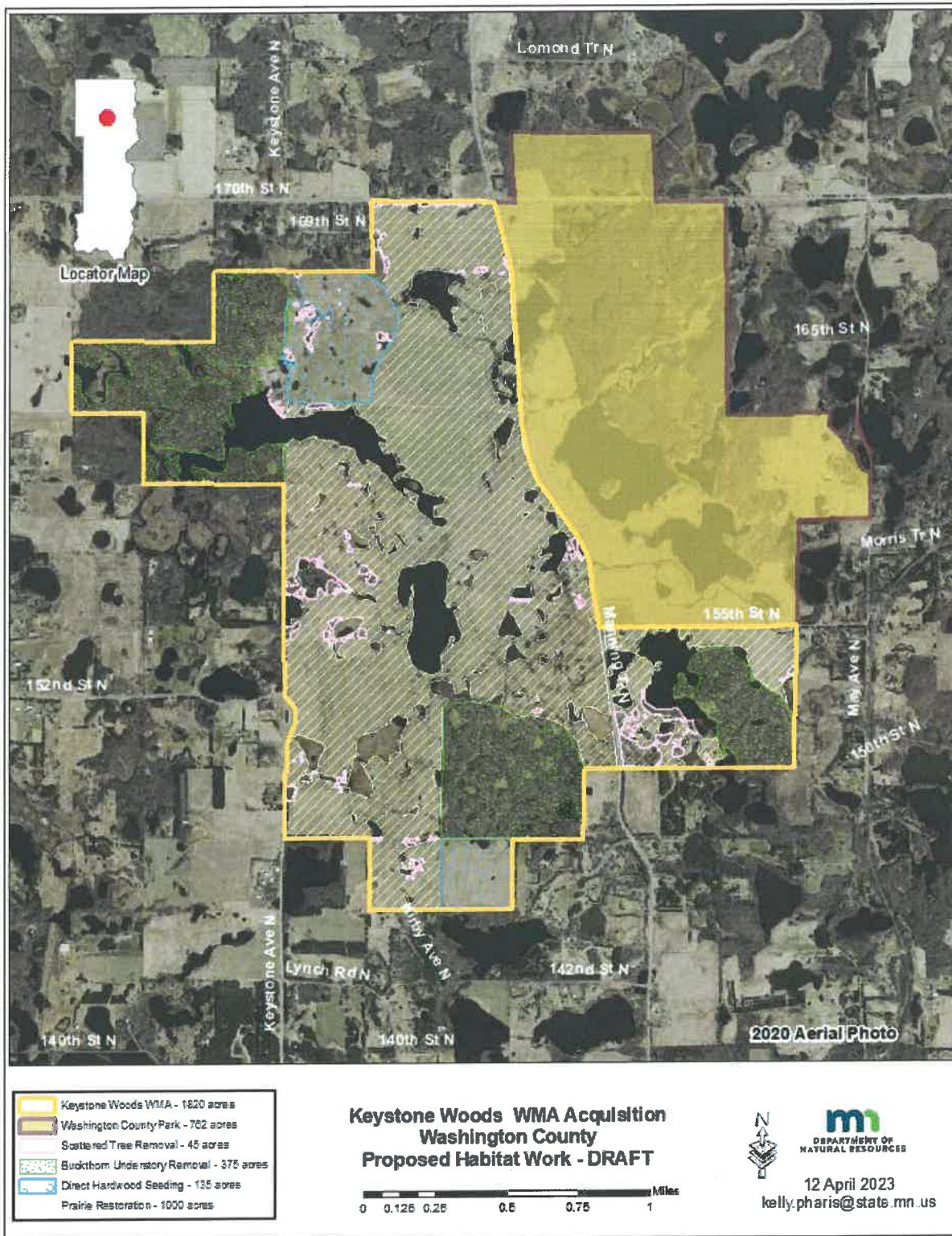


Table 1. Keystone Woods WMA potential options for facilities and features

Feature	Description
Welcoming entrance point/gathering place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cluster of seating, amphitheater, circle of benches or picnic tables, open air shelter to provide a focal point • set the tone for the user experience • provide a meeting point for fieldtrips, special programming
Standardized parking lot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide consistency in user experience across sites • use designated class of gravel for accessibility • create designated parking slips, control the number of users
Information kiosk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide informational signage, interpretive materials • easy access map, land cover map • QR code or webpage linking to unit information, information on programming/classes and other resources
Portable toilet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • address frequent requests from partners/school groups to meet base level needs • contract service (seasonal or annual)
Garbage containers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cleanliness and safety
Trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboratively designed with access, fire breaks, boundary delineation, or equipment access • ADA accessible for some portion (accessible blind(s) or observation area(s))
Opportunity for benches/seating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intentionally design spaces for new users and purposes (wildlife watching)
Dog training and trialing Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • areas to train and trial hunting and sport dogs
Fishing pier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barker Lake
Other facilities to consider as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation platform or wildlife viewing blind, archery range, interpretive signage, public art, boot-cleaning kiosk, DOT brown sign, signs directing users to local radio messages

Figure 6. Existing fenceline and building sites

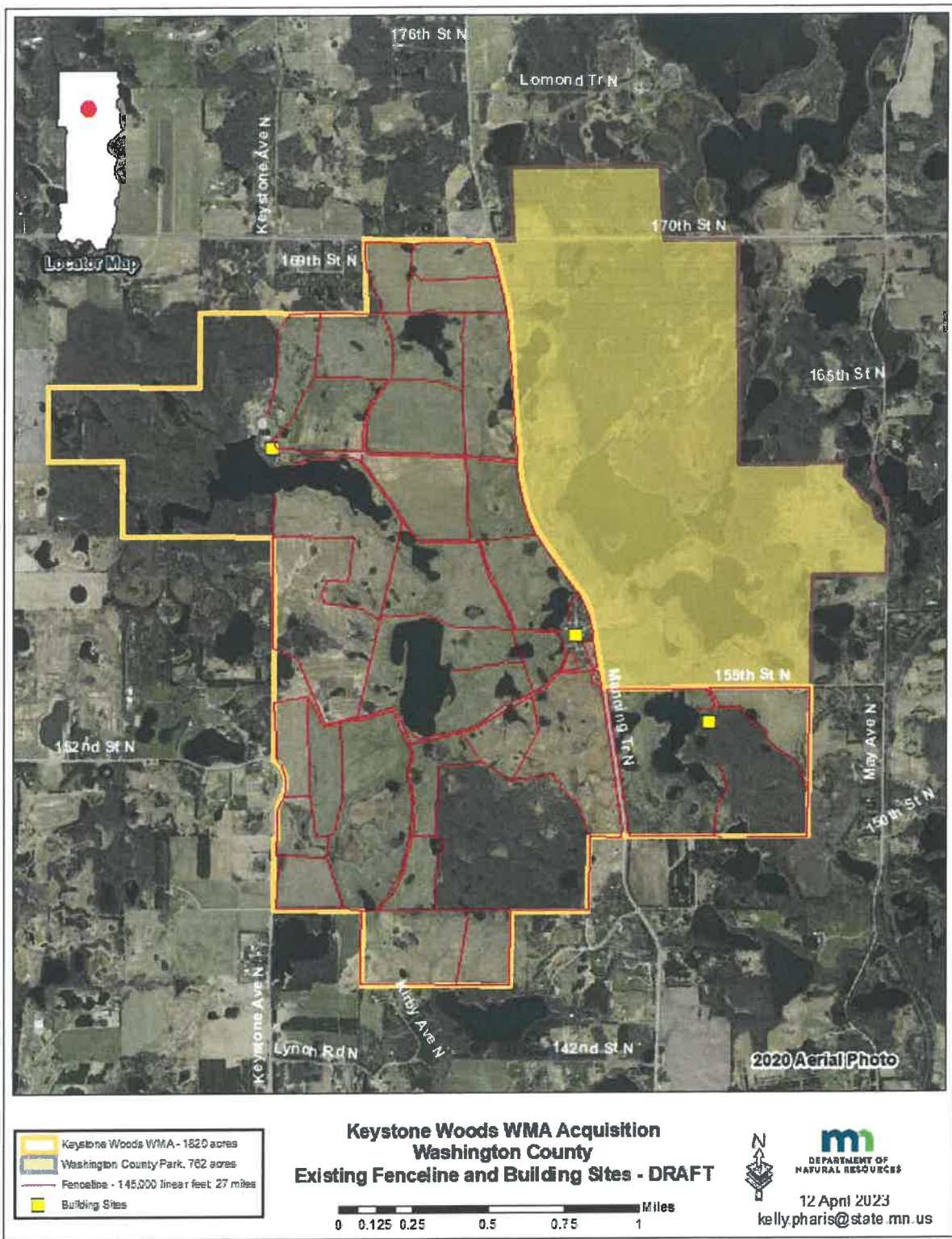


Figure 7. Potential parking lots, gates, trails, and fishing pier

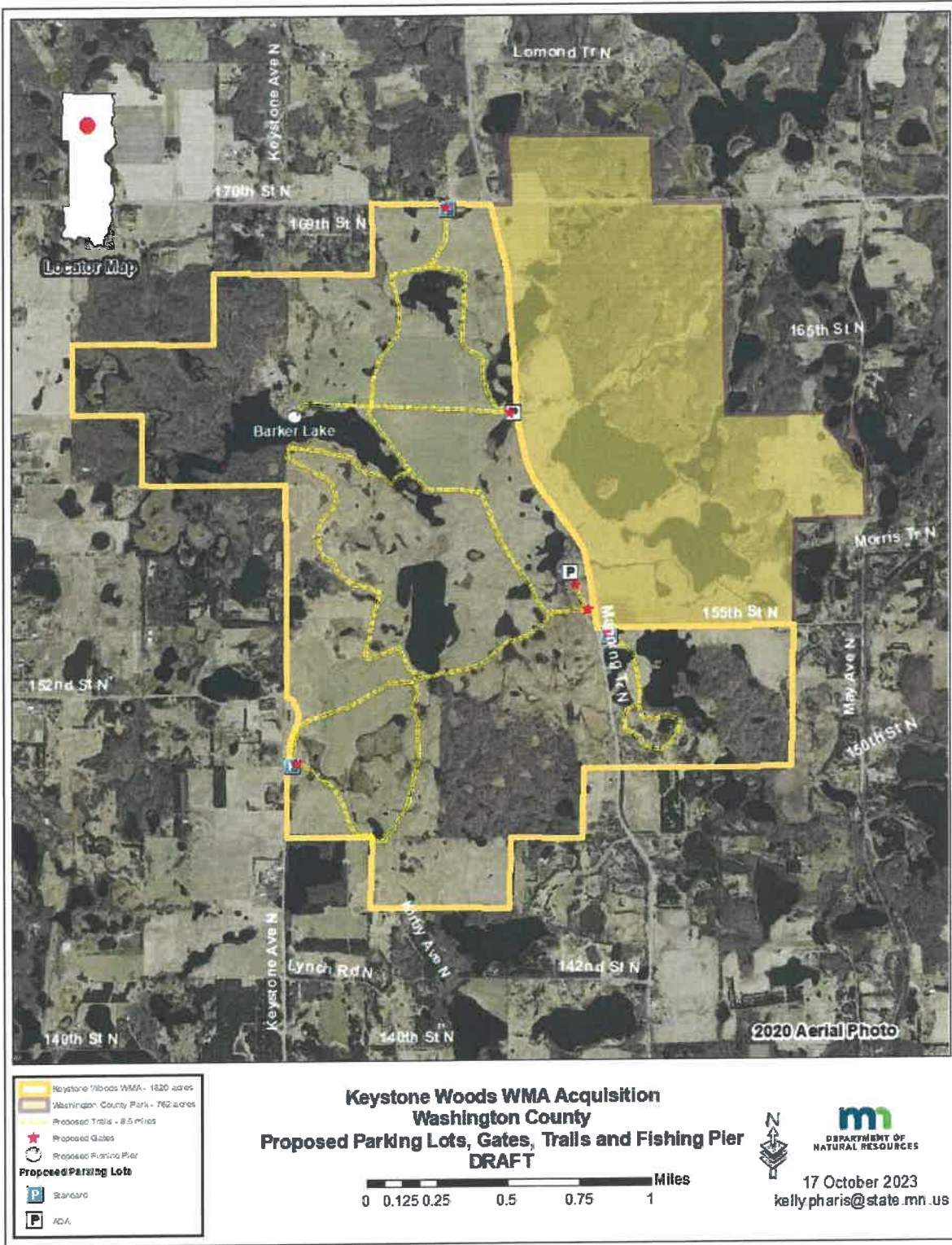


Figure 8. Potential dog training areas

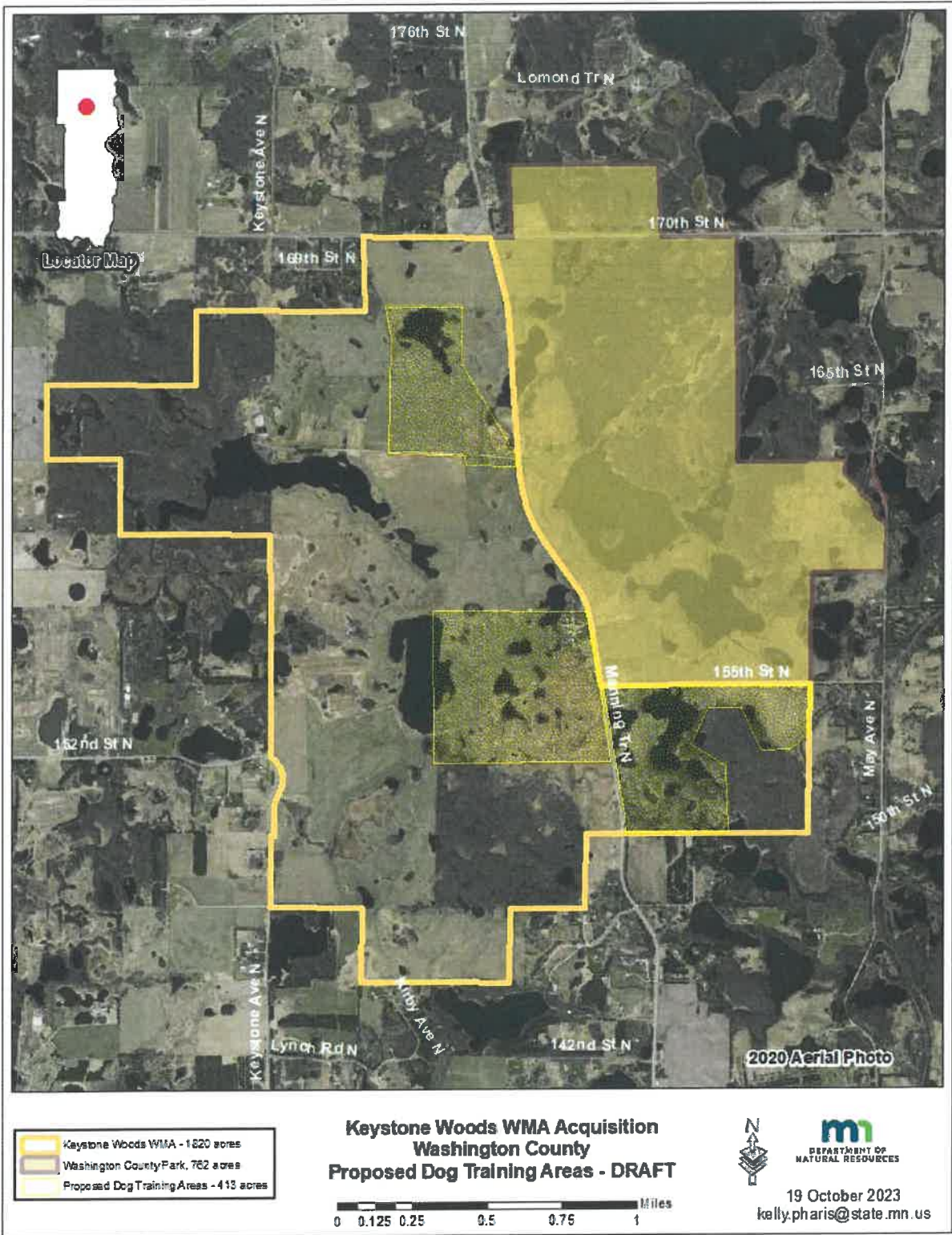
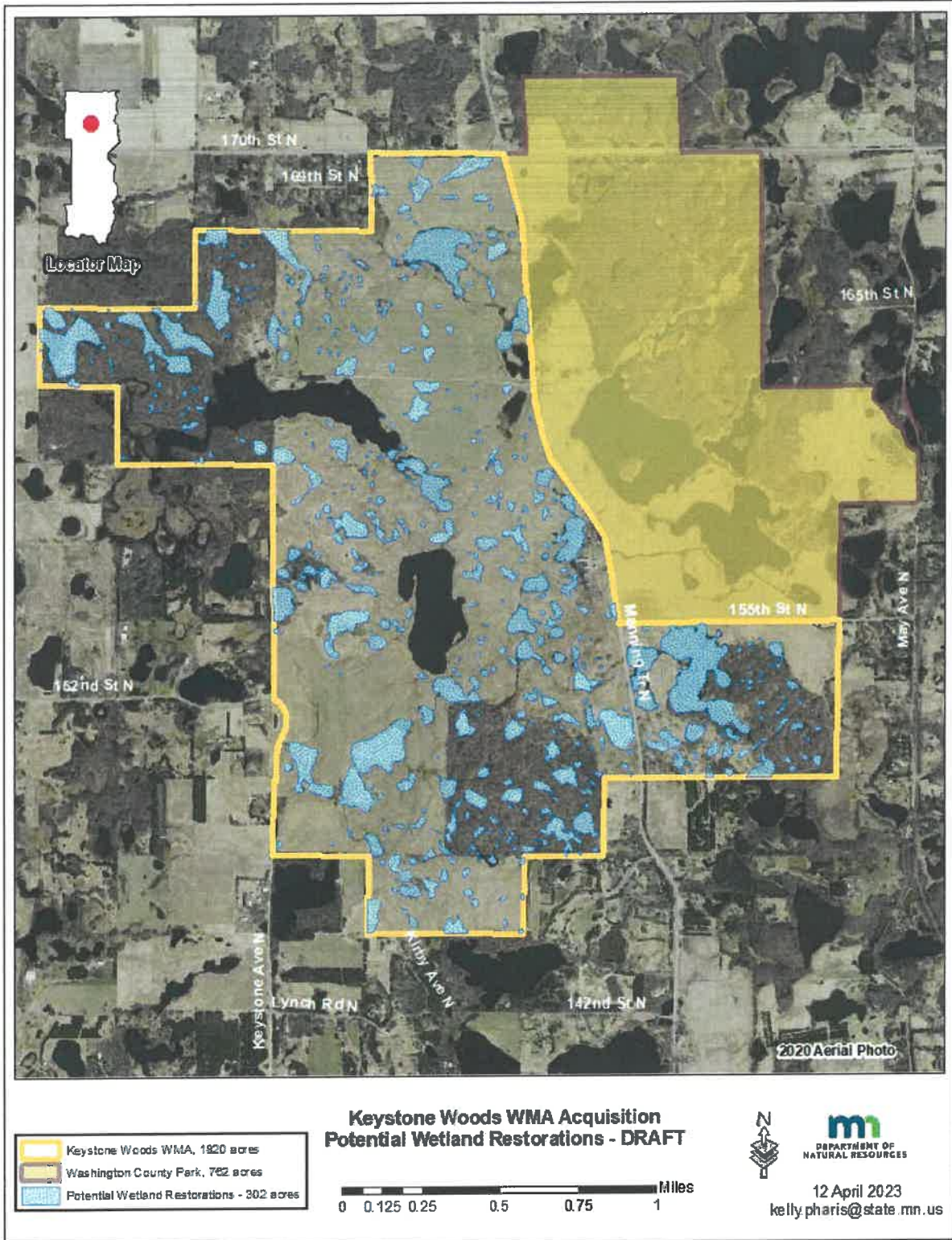


Figure 9. Potential wetland restoration areas



Excludes:

- This is not a statewide initiative to change current WMA landholdings system wide. This is a pilot WMA project to try something new and engage users near large population centers.
- The project will not include any land surrounding the WMA that is not currently in state ownership.

Context

Assumptions, risks, constraints, and other elements required to understand the project.

- It is recommended to fund this WMA project with a large percentage of general tax dollars (e.g., General Fund appropriation or Outdoor Heritage Fund grant) to target an audience that includes all Minnesotans. This is consistent with the initiative to recruit and engage with new and non-traditional audiences.
- Need to seek a balance of pursuing new infrastructure initiatives with existing budget and staff constraints and look for ways to bolster local staffing plans. Establishing partnerships with neighbors, conservation volunteer groups, county and township staff are all options to pursue. Coordination efforts and R3 programming also needs to be addressed.
- Proposed placement of infrastructure is contingent on field survey results and public feedback.

Strategic Considerations

- **Staffing:** NR Specialist Sr. (11L) – Assistant Area Wildlife Manager – Full-Time Hire
 - Position to facilitate contractor coordination for Individual Development Plan (IDP) activities to restore land cover types, remove fence lines, install trail system, building demolition, parking lot installation, and other needs accordingly.
 - Assist with and coordinate field surveys for non-game species, rare plants, and fishery resources.
 - Coordinate and develop interpretative kiosks, walking tours, podcasts.
 - Budget: \$134,000/annually (includes fringe benefits)
- **Ongoing Funding Needs:**
 - IDP Funds: Infrastructure, Building Demo, Land Restoration and Enhancements, SHPO Review
 - Priority funds and 2-year work plan to make the WMA safe and open to the public
 - Fence line removal, Building Demo, Parking Lot Installation, Boundary Posting, SHPO Review, Fishing Pier, Trail System Development
 - Budget: \$1.6 million
 - Native Plant Community Restoration and Enhancement 10-year work plan
 - Prairie Restoration, Invasive Tree Removal, Direct Hardwood Tree Seeding, Wetland and Water Basin Restoration
 - Budget: \$3.5 million
 - Operations and Maintenance: Facility Needs, Programing Updates, Trash, Service Contracts
 - Budget: \$10,000/annually