

Dodge County Conservation Subdivision Ordinance

Project Profile: Dodge County

Guide to Using

Natural Resource Information

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2003



SUMMARY

Dodge County passed an innovative conservation subdivision ordinance. The ordinance's purpose is to address growth pressures and maintain the rural character of Dodge County. A science-based model was used to identify ecologically significant natural areas. The ordinance provides a mechanism to protect these valuable sites.

Guide to Using Natural Resource Information

This Project Profile is part of the Guide, which is a useful resource to learn how to create and use natural resource information

The Guide illustrates:

- why natural resources are important
- how your community benefits from natural resources
- how to collect natural resource information, and
- how to use natural resource information to make environmentally sensitive and fiscally responsible local land use decisions

Contact the DNR at the numbers at the back of this Profile to order the Quick Guide Brochure or the whole Guide on CD

Rural Character Worth Preserving

Residents of Dodge County sent local elected officials a clear message during the citizen input phase of the County's community-based comprehensive planning effort. They value the rural character - farmland, forests, wooded rivers - of their home landscape and they don't want it overtaken by encroaching development. No one sent this message more emphatically than the county's high school students.

And, elected officials listened. In December, 2002, the County board of Commissioners passed an innovative conservation subdivision ordinance. The ordinance strives to address growth issues and maintain the rural character of Dodge County. Key components of the ordinance deal with open space and natural resource protection, rural residential development, and urban expansion.

Natural Resource Inventory

Existing natural resource Geographic Information System (GIS) data were used to conduct the natural resource inventory. Dodge County partnered with the DNR and used the ArcView GIS with statewide data (available from the DNR Data Deli - <http://deli.dnr.state.mn.us>).

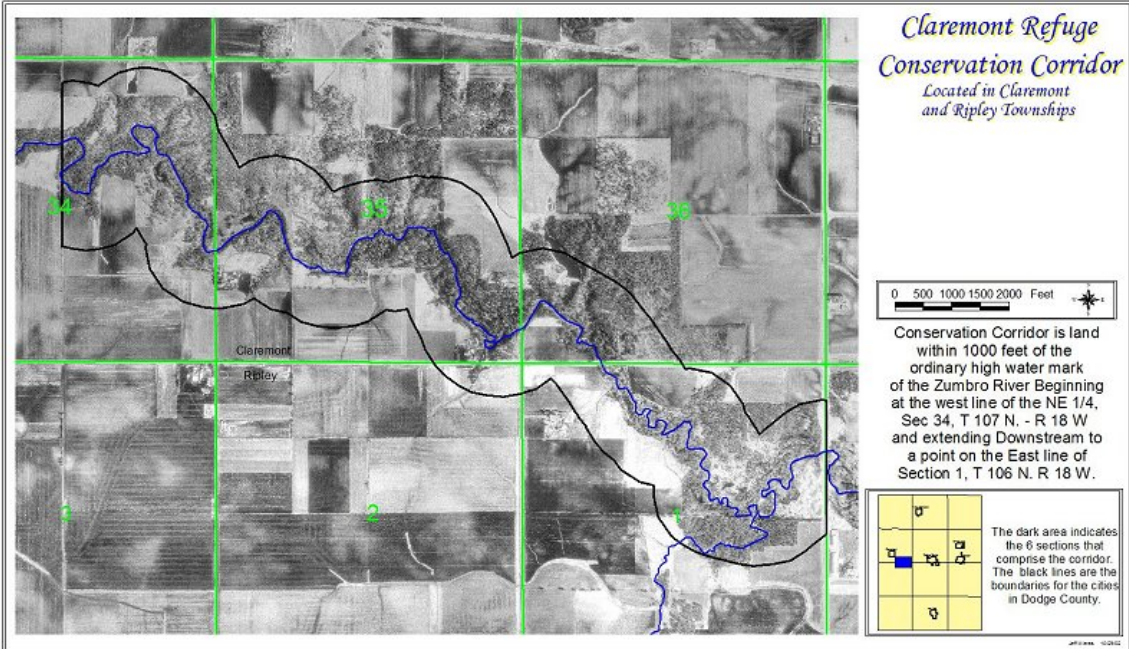
Natural Resource Assessment

A GIS model was developed to assist in the identification and prioritization of significant natural areas. Eight land factors were evaluated. Thirty-meter square units of land (with some exceptions due to data limitations) were scored for each of the 8 factors. The total score was categorized and mapped. Areas with the highest final scores are priority lands for conservation.



The Land Factors Used in the GIS Model

- Natural area size
- Natural area shape
- Natural area density
- Ground water susceptibility
- Undeveloped shoreland
- Designated trout stream
- Conservation easement
- Protected lands



One of the Three Conservation Corridors in Dodge County

Implementation - Key Components of the Conservation Ordinance

Growing Towns Urban Expansion Districts were established around each municipality to define preferred growth locations. The county's zoning ordinance provides incentives for developers to build in the Expansion District rather than in the Conservation Corridors or the Agriculture District.

Rezoning Criteria People like to live in the "country". In Dodge County, "country" means bluffs on river valleys and in agricultural areas. Traditionally, a developer could request to zone land as "residential" in any part of the Agricultural District. The new ordinance now sets limits on where rural residential housing can occur. This rezoning criterion significantly reduces the non-farm housing pressures in the Agricultural District.

Open Space and Conservation Design Developers are required to follow conservation design principles. Dedicated open space is required on all plats. In Urban Expansion Zones, the open space requirement is 10% of the total platted area. In Rural Residential Zones the open space requirement is 40% of the total platted area.

Conservation Corridors Three "Conservation Corridors" are established in the rural parts of the county and

include the best natural areas based on the Assessment. The Corridors are typically 2 to 3 miles long and 1/2 mile wide, following the course of a river. Small-lot residential developments are prohibited in the Corridor. Financial incentives are available for landowners in the Conservation Corridor to establish permanent conservation easements. Basically, landowners can sell "open space easements" so developments in growth areas can reduce the open space requirement and increase housing densities.

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Project Profiles are produced by the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District with help from the profiled communities

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