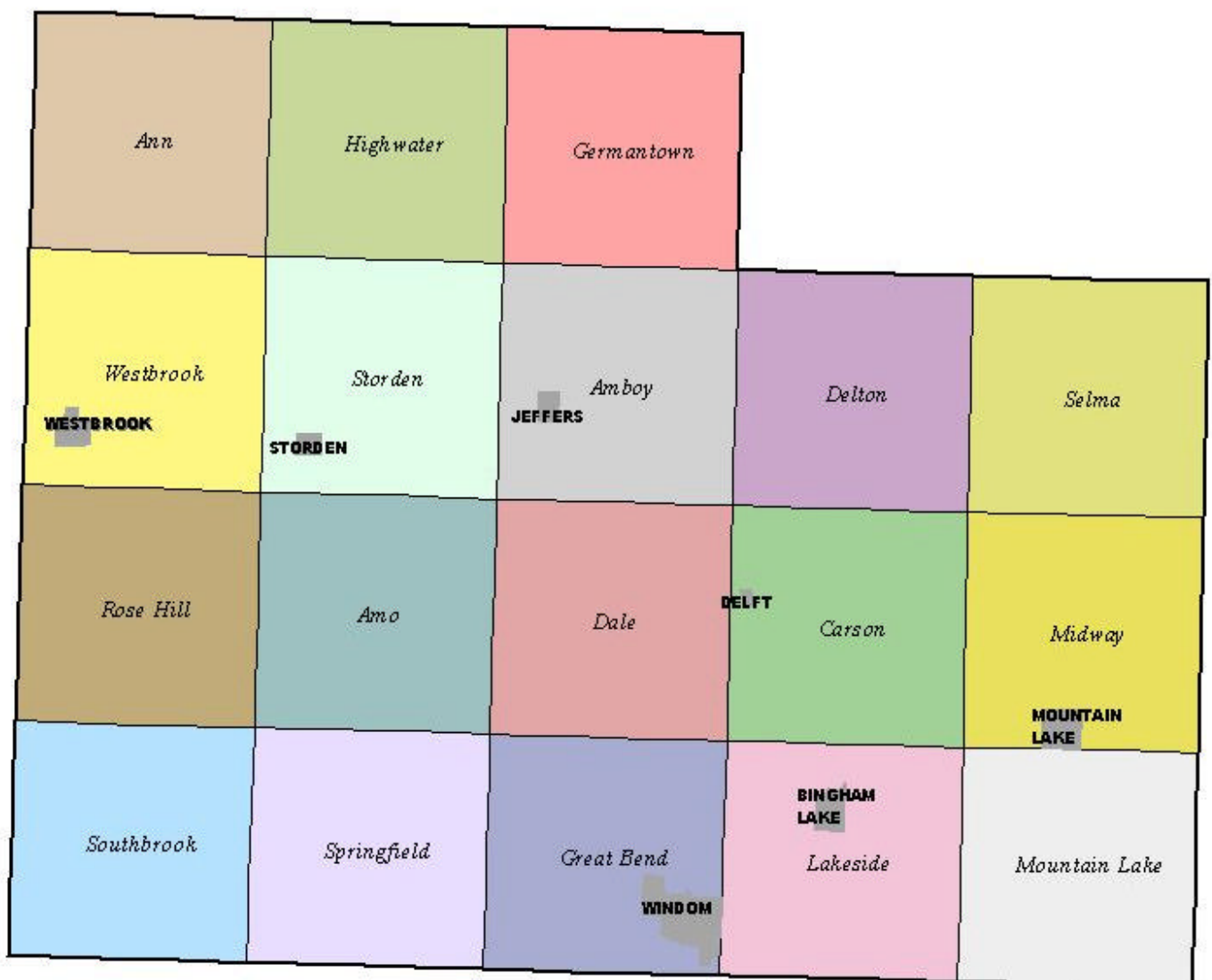


Cottonwood County

2005 Comprehensive Plan



COTTONWOOD COUNTY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Ordinance #35



Adopted September 27, 2005

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Vision for the Future

The communities of rural Minnesota share many similar challenges. Our demographic profile is aging, as the baby boomers grow older. Young people continue to look for new opportunities in the cities, with a few returning to raise their families. Yet through it all, Cottonwood County has a civic pride uncommon in urban areas, with good schools and a growing labor force.



The county's infrastructure and public facilities are strong, with good transportation and utility networks, and quality public services. The rural water system is expanding, and other important utilities are in place. The grid of state, county and township roads moves local and regional traffic efficiently, although it is important to complete the four-lane sections of State Highway 60. Pro-active planning and investment will assure that infrastructure keeps pace with future needs.

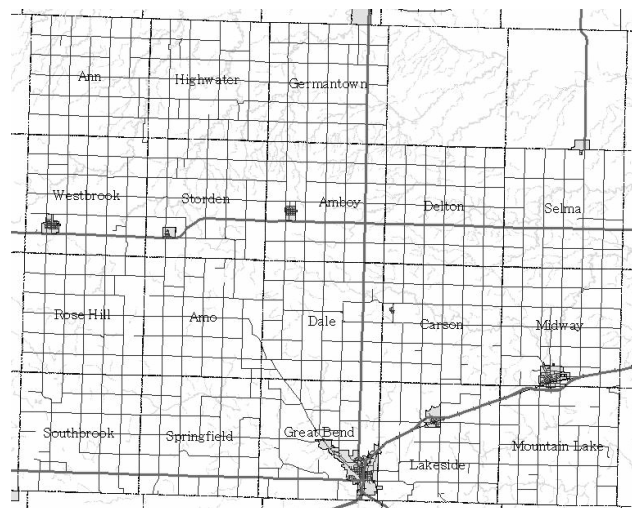
Cultural and recreational resources—festivals, cultural sites, natural areas and parks—add immeasurably to the rural quality of life. With increasing demands on volunteer time and limited budgets, cultural and historic resources must be carefully managed for future generations. Increasing demand for property in shoreland areas poses increasing challenges, while conservation of native grasslands and wildlife habitat also needs to be balanced to minimize land use conflicts.

Agriculture remains the mainstay of Cottonwood County's economic base. A strong local manufacturing sector, and affordable cost of living and a pro-growth attitude provide a springboard for future diversification. It is important to maintain rural space for agricultural expansion without crowding. Development in agricultural and natural areas can lead to sprawl and land use conflicts. For example, feedlot expansion has, at times, created conflicts with nearby residents. There are also concerns about the character of development along protected waters and wetlands.

A vital, growing community will work through conflicts to emerge a better place. This plan looks at how our community got to where it is today, where we want to go tomorrow, and how we can get the job done, working together.

The Comprehensive Plan

The comprehensive plan is an official document, composed by a community in a public process, which guides decisions about future development and re-development. It is also the legal basis for adopting official development controls, such as the zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations. A comprehensive plan typically looks out over a 20 year horizon, with updates every 5 years.



This *Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan* is the result of several years of effort, looking at the demography, infrastructure, resources, economy, housing and overall use of land in the county. In addition to providing background information for decision-making, the plan outlines goals and policies to implement the vision of the citizens of Cottonwood County for a better future. Finally, the plan details specific tasks that the County can undertake to move these ideals from vision into reality.

Goals & Policies

Goals are general statements that describe what the vision of the future looks like, or at least what we would like the future to look like. Each of these goals has specific policies (detailed in Chapter IX) which can be used to guide changes to zoning regulations and to direct future planning efforts. Applications for development review, such as conditional use permits or new subdivisions, should address how new projects contribute to meeting these goals and improving the quality of life in Cottonwood County.

Demographics

- ? Young people have opportunities to work and live in Cottonwood County.
- ? Residents return to rural Minnesota.
- ? The quality of life is maintained and improved for an increasing aging population.

Infrastructure & Public Facilities

- ? There is an adequate and safe water and wastewater system.
- ? There is a safe and efficient, multi-modal transportation system that meets local and regional needs.
- ? County's public buildings and facilities meet residents' needs.
- ? Public education is strong and innovative.
- ? Public safety services are provided to all residents.
- ? Adequate telecommunications and energy utilities are available to all residents.

Cultural & Recreational Resources

- ? Community cultural and historic points of interest are carefully managed for future generations.
- ? Peoples of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds are made welcome.
- ? Natural resources are preserved and protected.
- ? Development around lakes and streams is compatible with the natural environment.
- ? Parks and recreation areas provide a variety of opportunities for local residents.

Economic Development

- ? Agriculture will continue to be a significant economic activity.
- ? The local labor force will have the skills and education to compete for 21st century jobs.
- ? The existing economic base will become more diversified.
- ? New sources of renewable energy will be developed.

Housing

- ? Most housing will continue to be provided within cities where urban services are provided.
- ? Existing homes will be maintained and improved.
- ? There should be opportunities for limited rural housing where infrastructure is available.

Land Use

- ? Agriculture is a viable, permanent, productive land use.
- ? Commercial uses in rural areas are compatible with agricultural neighbors.
- ? Residential uses in rural areas are compatible with agricultural neighbors.
- ? Residential uses in rural areas are compatible with protected natural areas.
- ? Mining operations balance extraction with impacts to residential, agricultural and natural areas.
- ? Land Use Regulations are sensible, clear and easily available.
- ? The Development Review Process is fair, efficient and effective.

II. INTRODUCTION

A modern comprehensive plan is a useful tool to make the most of change in the places we know and love. This document, the *Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan*, includes the detailed demographic and economic analysis of a land use plan. It considers the history, culture and recreational pursuits of local residents and visitors. And it establishes a vision 10, 20 even 30 years into the future, with goals, policies and tasks to implement that vision.

A. Context for Planning

A Comprehensive Plan for Cottonwood County, Minnesota, was prepared by Minneapolis planning consultants Nason, Wherman, Knight and Champman, Inc. in April 1970, with funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The County Zoning Ordinance was initially adopted in 1968, with multiple revisions since that time. A Land Use Policy Plan, adopted by ordinance in 1981, currently guides the County.

A.1. Legal Authority

Cottonwood County's legal authority to plan for and regulate the use of land is delegated by the Minnesota Legislature in statute. The state's former Local Planning Assistance Center explains that:

Minnesota Statutes § 394.21 specifically grants to all counties, except those in the defined seven county Metropolitan Area, the authority to "carry on county planning and zoning". Minnesota Statutes § 394.23 gives county boards the power and authority to prepare and adopt by ordinance, a comprehensive plan and "a comprehensive plan or plans when adopted by ordinance must be the basis for official controls adopted under the provisions of sections 394.21 to 394.37".

A.2. Planning Process

The current effort to compose a comprehensive plan for Cottonwood County began in 2001. This process has been led by the Cottonwood County Planning Commission and Environmental Office, involving citizens, community leaders, staff and public officials in countless hours of research, discussion, and consensus-building. The Southwest Regional Development Commission was brought on board in the fall of 2004 to facilitate composition of the final document.

The Cottonwood County Planning Commission recommended approval of the public review draft in the summer of 2005. The plan takes effect on official adoption by the Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners.

Changing conditions and preferences of the citizens of Cottonwood County may require amendments to the plan. The Planning Commission should review and update the document periodically, at the least every five years or sooner if necessary.

III. DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic data provides a framework to assist the County with decisions in regards to housing, business development, community facilities and services, environmental impacts, and transportation. This data provides valuable information about the facilities, services, and planning that will be required in the future.

A. Issues Summary

There are several factors and trends influencing the demographic structure of the county:

- ? Decreasing number of youth and adults of child bearing age.
- ? Transition of a large segment of the population (baby boomers) into the elderly category.
- ? Median age of County is growing older. In 1990 it was 39.2 and in 2004 it was 41.7.
- ? The County is experiencing a more diverse population base. In 1990, 1.1% of the County Population was non-white, and increased to 4.8% in 2000.
- ? More residents have at least a high school education than in previous years.
- ? Higher education degrees have increased, but are far below the state average.
- ? Household size has decreased from 2.51 in 1990 to 2.39 in 2000.

As the trend for young people leaving the County continues, the County's aging population continues to grow. As the residents of Cottonwood County continue to age, consideration must be taken as to how the County will provide necessary, adequate, and affordable services to the senior population.

A.1. Demographic Strengths, Challenges and Future Direction

The County Committee identified demographic issues in the County.

Demographic Strengths

- ? Civic pride
- ? Increase in diverse population base
- ? Existing labor force
- ? Good education system

Demographic Challenges

- ? Aging population
- ? Less Youth
- ? Median age growing older

The Future of Demographics

- ? Retain a good educational system
- ? Stabilize numbers of next generation
- ? Retirement population moving to shoreland properties.
- ? Maintain civic pride
- ? Encourage people to return to rural Minnesota.
- ? Prepare for and preserve the quality of life for the increasing aging population

B. Population Trends

In 1900, the U.S. Census reported Cottonwood County's population at 12,069 people. In 2000, the U.S. Census enumerated 12,167 people in Cottonwood County, with a 2004 estimate of 11,061. Over the past century, the County population rose to a peak in 1940 through 1960 of between 15,000 to 16,000. The County's population showed a decline after 1970; with the greatest decrease occurring from 1980 to 1990 at -13.0%, slowing considerably from 1990 to 2000.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 1995 that the population of Cottonwood County was 12,768. This number was used to create a population projection through the year 2025. According to this projection, which showed population decline of about 3% every ten years, Cottonwood County's population in the year 2000 should have been 12,440 (higher than the Census count). The Minnesota Land Management Information Center (LMIC) has developed revised population projections, based on Census 2000 counts, to the year 2030. These revised projections are shown in Figure 3-1.

The trend for the population distribution in Cottonwood County from 1950 to 2000 was from rural (non-communities) to the communities in the County (Figure 3-2). In 1950, 55% of the population resided in rural Cottonwood County, by 2000, 66% of the population resided in the communities. During this time, the countywide population decreased by 22.8%. The population in rural parts of the county decreased by 52.6%, in the rural communities by 8.7%, and increased in the City of Windom by 41.9%. The median age of the county population is 41.7 years, in 1990 it was 39.2, Figure I illustrates the median age by jurisdiction in the County.

Figure 3-1: Population Trend				
Census Year	Population	Percent Change	Revised projection	Percent Change
1900	12,069			
1910	12,651	4.8%		
1920	14,570	15.2%		
1930	14,782	1.5%		
1940	16,143	9.2%		
1950	15,763	-2.4%		
1960	16,166	2.6%		
1970	14,887	-7.9%		
1980	14,584	-2.0%		
1990	12,694	-13.0%		
2000	12,167	-4.2%		
2005	12,010	-1.3%	12,010	-1.3%
2010	11,650	-3.0%	11,920	-0.7%
2015	11,300	-3.0%	11,970	0.4%
2020	10,970	-2.9%	12,100	1.1%
2025	10,600	-3.4%	12,180	0.7%
2030			12,280	0.8%

Source: US Bureau of Census, Minnesota Planning, LMIC

Figure 3-2: Cottonwood County Population, Comparison of City and Rural, 1950 to 2000												
	1950		1960		1970		1980		1990		2000	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
County Total	15,763		16,166		14,887		14,854		12,684		12,167	
Rural Farm	8,031	51%	7,100	44%	5,468	37%	5,893	40%	2,493	20%	1,441	12%
Rural Non-farm	674	4%	1,287	8%	1,609	11%	2,018	14%	2,278	18%	2,682	22%
Rural Community	3,893	25%	4,088	25%	3,990	27%	2,277	15%	3,640	29%	3,345	29%
Urban 2500+	3,165	20%	3,691	23%	3,820	26%	4,666	31%	4,283	34%	4,490	37%

Source: US Census Bureau

The rural population is also counted by farm and non-farm occupation. The trend has been a decreasing farm population. The Census of Agriculture data show there were 970 operators in 1987 and 784 in 1997; the 2002 data indicates an increase in the number of operators to 832. There is however an increasing number of operators who list another occupation as their principal occupation.

Figure 3-3: Cottonwood County Median Age 2000

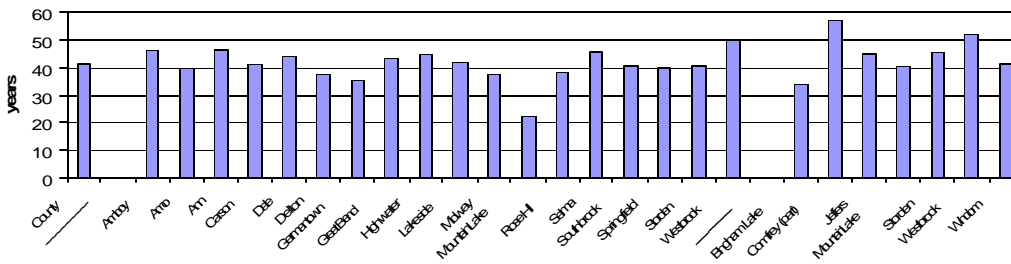
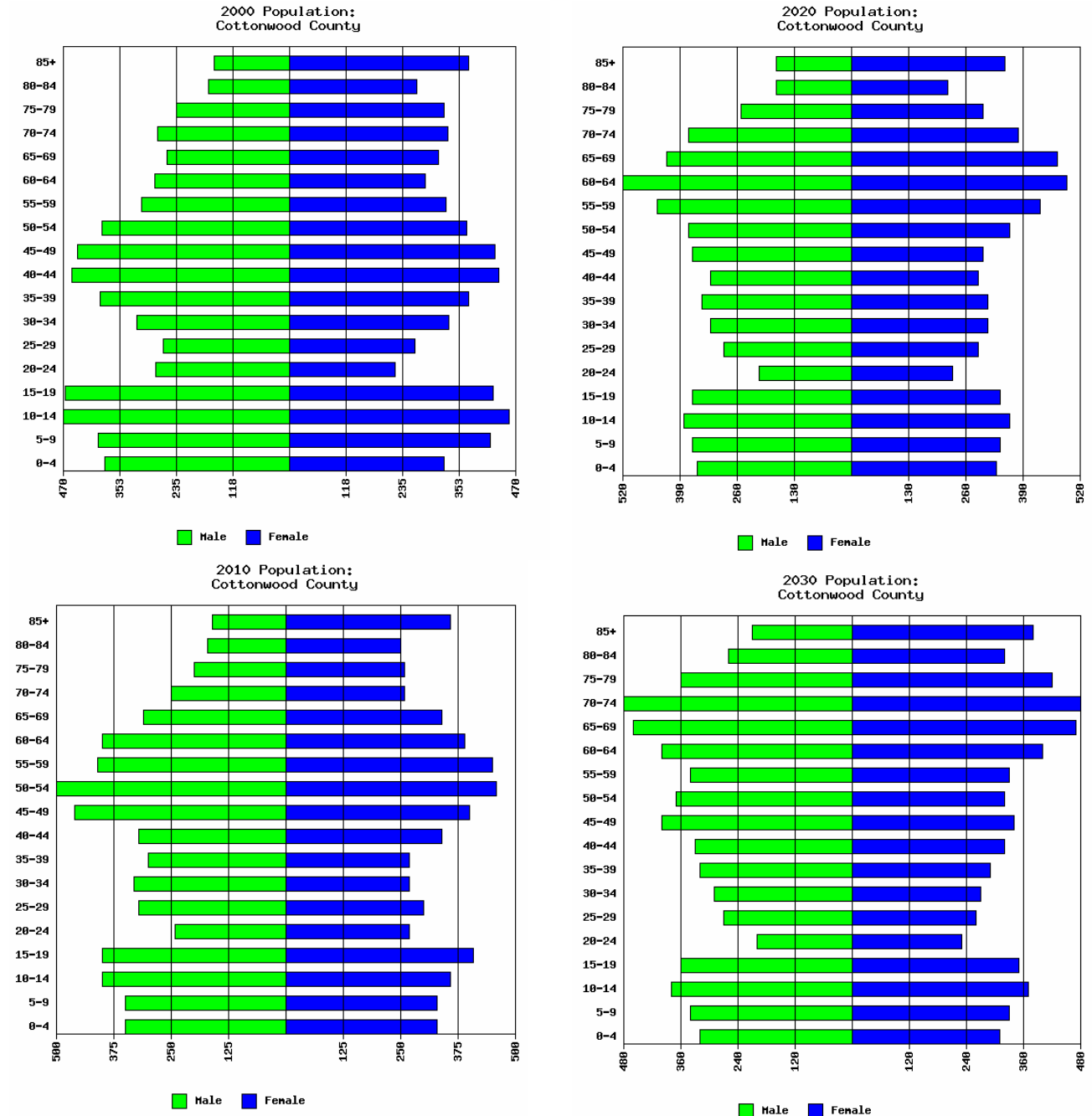


Figure 3-4: Population Pyramids 2000 to 2030



LMIC projections also break out population by age cohort. Figure 3-4 (above) illustrates the population by age cohort in a population pyramid for the years 2000, 2010, 2020, and 2030. Figure 3-5 shows population projections by age cohort from 2000 to 2030.

The current population projection by LMIC to 2030 shows a one percent increase from 2000 counts. As a figure by itself, it appears the population of the county will remain stable. However, when reviewing the age cohort data, the projections provide indicators that must be planned for, primarily the baby boomers. The baby boomers were born from 1946 to 1964. In the year 2000, they were in the 35 to 39 age category to the 55 to 59 category; by 2030 the baby boomers will all be in the 65+ age category. Not only will this large segment of the population rely on more services, it is projected that the County will have a larger number of frail elderly (age 85+), and smaller number of working and child bearing age citizens.

Figure 3-5: Population Projection 2000 to 2030 by Age Cohort								
Age Group	2000*	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2000 - 2030 % Change
0-4	705	680	680	690	680	650	630	-10.6
5-9	815	710	680	690	700	690	670	-17.8
9-14	928	870	760	740	740	760	750	-19.2
15-19	889	860	810	720	700	700	710	-20.1
20-24	498	530	510	480	440	420	430	-13.7
25-29	524	580	620	610	580	530	530	1.1
30-34	648	550	600	640	630	610	560	-13.6
35-39	766	660	570	600	650	630	610	-20.4
40-44	887	770	660	580	610	650	650	-26.7
45-49	866	980	860	740	660	690	740	-14.5
50-54	758	860	960	860	730	650	690	-9
55-59	633	770	860	960	870	760	670	5.8
60-64	561	660	790	900	1,010	930	800	42.6
65-69	565	540	650	790	890	1,000	930	64.6
70-74	603	520	510	610	750	850	960	59.2
75-79	558	530	460	450	550	680	780	39.8
80-84	434	440	420	380	390	460	580	33.6
85+	529	500	520	530	520	520	590	11.5
Total	12,167	12,010	11,920	11,970	12,100	12,180	12,280	0.9

? 2000 population is from Census 2000. Note: County data is rounded to 10's.

Source: Minnesota Land Management Information Center

B.1. Migration and Tenure

Several elements of the Census data can be utilized to look at the dynamics of a population: migration, birth and death records, and tenure of housing. The population estimates from the US Census provide information about the total change of population from April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2003. While there was a natural increase in population (22 persons) there was an overall decrease of 148 people, primarily due to out migration. Data from the Minnesota Demographer's Office also indicates that an average of 73% of the annual deaths in Cottonwood County is in the age category of 75 and older or a decrease of approximately 7% of the population in that age category (from 2000 to 2002). Under the current population projection scenario, there will be a natural population decrease (more deaths than births). Given the rate of natural decrease, the age structure is also important. Older people are unlikely to move, but more likely to die. About 17.5% of population 2000 was 65 and over - or about 1.5 times as many as the state average. While the rate of population decrease has slowed, it has been a pattern in Cottonwood County since at least 1970.

Figure 3-6: Total population Change from April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2003							
Geographic Area	Total Population change *	Natural Increase			Migration		
		Total	Births	Deaths	Total	Net International Migration	Net Internal Migration
Minnesota	139,890	93,341	216,100	122,759	46,271	47,425	-1154
Cottonwood County	-148	22	483	461	-161	10	-171
Region 8 Total	-2,422	353	4,697	4,344	-2,753	563	-3,316

* Total population change includes residual

Source: State Data Center

The 2000 Census identified 4917 occupied housing units in Cottonwood County (3464 in communities and 1453 in the rural areas of the County). The Census 2000 data indicates that 48% of the householders moved into their homes between 1990 and 2000. Separated into more specific categories, 18.3% of the Householders have resided in the same homes since 1969 or earlier (13.4% community and 30.2% rural), 16.3% moved to their homes between 1970 and 1979, 17.7% between 1980 and 1989, 14.5% between 1990 and 1994, and 33.1% between 1995 and 2000. The data indicates that while there is a significant number of rural residents that have resided in their homes, about 1/2 of the County population have moved into their residences from 1990 to 2000.

B.2 Education.

The US Census identifies education level for persons 25 and older. Cottonwood County has increased the percentage of population with a high school degree or higher from 1990 to 2000 from 71.7% to 80.4%, an 8.7% increase. While behind the Minnesota percentage, Cottonwood County decreased the margin of difference. The percentage of population with a bachelors degree or higher increased from 12.3 percent to 14.2 percent, but lagged behind the state percentages. This data indicates that more of the population base is obtaining a high school education, but while the County retains a similar level of population with a bachelors degree or higher, the difference between the state percentage and county has increased. An anomaly in the educational attainment level is in Mountain Lake Township where a large number of residents (age 25 and older) are without a high school degree. This most likely is impacted by the population in the two Hutterite Colonies, within the township and their sustainable agrarian life style.

Figure 3-7: Education	Population 25 & older	High School or higher	Co %	MN %	Bachelors degree or higher	Co %	MN %
Cottonwood County (2000 data)	8344	6712	80.4	87.9	1189	14.2	27.4
Cottonwood County (1990 data)	8644	6198	71.7	82.4	1063	12.3	21.6

Source: 1990 and 2000 US Census

B.3. Ethnicity and Race

Data results on ethnicity and race from the 1990 and 2000 Census differ because questions for the 2000 Census were modified and race-by-race comparison would not be accurate. The comparisons that can be made are as follows: The percentage of white population decreased from 98.0% to 95.2%. Individuals of any race, including of Hispanic origin of any race, increased to 2.2%. While the race categories below are for one race, we will make the assumption that there was an increase in the minority population categories of Asian or Pacific Islander, other race, as well as individual reporting mixed races (Figure 3-8).

Figure 3-8: Population by Race	1990	% of 1990	2000	% of 2000
Total Population	12,694		12,167	
White	12,563	98.9%	11,587	95.2%
Black/Black one-race	12	<1%	41	<1%
American Indian / Am Indian one-race	10	<1%	28	<1%
Asian or Pacific Islander / API one-race	88	<1%	208	1.7%
Other race	21	<1%	164	1.3%
Two or more races		NA	139	1.1%
Hispanic Origin (of any race)	63	<1%	267	2.2%

Source: US Census, 1990 and 2000

NA – Census Data Categories Changed

C. Household Trends

From 1990 to 2000, the number of households in Minnesota grew by 15%; during the same time, households in Cottonwood County decreased by 3% or -143 households. In Minnesota, the trend for most counties is toward smaller household size, but larger numbers of total households. The average household size varies greatly from one county to another.

Figure 3-9: Population and Household Estimates, 1990 to 2000						
	1990 Population	2000 Population	Percent Change	1990 Households	2000 Households	Percent Change
Minnesota	4,375,665	4,919,479	12%	1,647,853	1,895,127	15%
Cottonwood Co	12,694	12,167	-4.2%	5,060	4,917	-3%

Source: US Census 1990, 2000

C.1 Housing.

Chapter VII provides more information on housing in Cottonwood County. In sum, there has been a decrease in the total number of housing units; a slight increase in the number of owner-occupied housing units and decrease in the number of renter-occupied housing units.

IV. INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

In this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, background information is provided on those public and semi-public facilities which provide various services to County residents. These services include parks and recreation areas, water and sewer service, educational facilities, medical facilities, transportation infrastructure, power, communication, and county owned buildings. Infrastructure provides the essential components for residential and commercial health of an area. Locations that have a higher degree of infrastructure and its related amenities tend to also be areas that enjoy growth.

A. Issues Summary

- ? The Rural Water System is interconnected to an adjacent rural water system and several community water systems both in Cottonwood County and in surrounding counties. Many of the Communities have their own water supply, the remainder of the county is served by private wells.
- ? Wellhead protection plans are being developed and can be used by the County to identify sensitive areas for development.
- ? Wastewater treatment facilities are in place for industry and concentrations of population.
- ? Transportation
 - o TH 60 Corridor and Access Management
 - o County Access Management – potentially along CSAH 13, and County Policy of ½ mile access appears to work for majority of the county
 - o 5-year County Road and Bridge CIP's
 - o Ten ton County road network initiative
 - o Transit – Public transit is available
 - o Rail – potential for increased rail traffic which may affect safety.
 - o Aeronautics – local airport is within County
- ? County Facilities
 - o Landfill – sufficient space is available, fees may need to be adjusted
 - o Buildings and Facilities
- ? Telecommunication
 - o Services are not available county wide
- ? Power
 - o Transmission of power and interconnection to the transmission grid.
- ? Educational Facilities
- ? Medical Facilities / Health Care
 - o Timely access to major medical facilities
- ? 911 Emergency System

A.1. Infrastructure Strengths, Challenges and Future Direction

The County Committee identified issues with Infrastructure and Public Facilities in the County.

Infrastructure Strengths

- ? Good transportation network with access to roads, railroads, air and transit.
- ? Water supply service. Rural Water available in the majority of the County.
- ? Educational and medical facilities
- ? Value added processing coupled with availability of water, energy, and raw resources
- ? Within a good distance from large communities and the highway network has made it closer.
- ? Good 911 Emergency System (Law Enforcement, Ambulance, Fire Protection)

Infrastructure Challenges

- ? Rural area access to T-1 line
- ? Wireless service is limited and has reliability issues
- ? Distance from Large Municipalities
- ? Timely access to major medical facilities
- ? Aging infrastructure
- ?

Future of Infrastructure and Public Facilities

- ? A strong education system which also means access the required resources.
- ? Wireless and T-1 access to equalize the economic playing field
- ? Highway 60 as a Four-lane highway corridor
- ? Hospitals and medical facilities in the County with state of the art technology.
- ? Ensure facilities needed for an aging population are adequate, such as long term care facilities.
- ? Infrastructure improvements to maintain and to reflect new or emerging technology and development, renewable energy development and value added products.
- ? A strong 911 Emergency System

B. Water

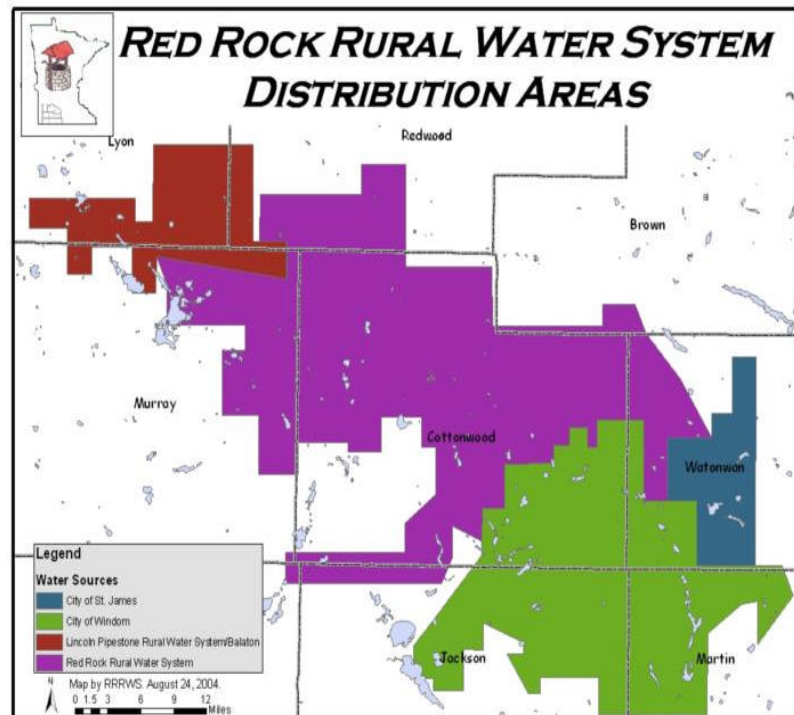
There are six municipalities in Cottonwood County. Water is supplied for rural residents by their private wells, or through the Red Rock Rural Water System. The municipalities of Jeffers, Mountain Lake, Storden, Westbrook, and Windom have their own wells. Both the Windom municipal wells and the Jeffers municipal well work with Red Rock Rural Water for back up supply. Windom supplies Bingham Lake and Ethanol 2000 with water and Red Rock Rural Water supplies the unincorporated community of Delft.

Providers of public water rely on wellhead protection plans to safeguard areas that are recharge water supplies. Land use activities appropriate for these sensitive areas should be considered when land use decisions are made. Wellhead protection is a means of protecting public water supply wells by preventing contaminants from entering the area that contributes water to the well or well field over a period of time (the Drinking Water Supply Management Area or DWSMA). The wellhead protection area is determined by using geologic and hydrologic criteria, such as the physical characteristics of the aquifer and the effects which pumping has on the rate and direction of groundwater movement. A management plan is developed for the wellhead protection area that includes inventorying potential sources of groundwater contamination, monitoring for the presence of specific contaminants, and managing existing and future land and water uses that pose a threat to groundwater quality.

Red Rock Rural Water System (RRWS) and the interconnecting communities wells (Windom, Jeffers), Mountain Lake, Storden, Neuhoof Hutterian Brethren, and Westbrook are in the process of developing plans or are identified for future plan development.

B.1. Red Rock Rural Water

RRWS has taken measures to diversify the water system by interconnects into Lincoln Pipestone Rural Water and with several cities. They are currently working with the Minnesota Department of Health in the development of their wellhead protection plan for the wells. The anticipated completion date is March 2006. There are 593 hook ups to the Water system in Cottonwood County.



B.2. Windom.

The Windom Water Treatment Facility was built in 1998 and has a design capacity of 3.3 million gallons of water per day. The total storage capacity in the two elevated towers is 1,500,000 gallons.

B.3. Mountain Lake.

The City has municipal wells and provides service to residents and businesses in the city and to some homes outside the City Limits. Mountain Lake is not interconnected to the Rural Water System. Protient, a large value-added business at Mountain Lake also has their own water supply.

C. Wastewater Facilities and State Discharge System permits.

The communities of Windom, Mountain Lake, Storden, Jeffers and Westbrook have State Discharge System permits to discharge wastewater. In addition, the unincorporated community of Delft includes a Sanitary Sewer District which is managing wastewater through a newly constructed wetland. The wastewater from Bingham Lake is managed and treated at the Windom plant.

Other significant wastewater discharge permits in Cottonwood County include Protient in Midway Township near Mountain Lake, and Ethanol 2000 by Bingham Lake. The Neuhoof Hutterian Brethem Colony also has a wastewater treatment facility located in Mountain Lake Township. Residents not served by wastewater treatment facilities have individual sewage treatment systems (ISTS), which require periodic maintenance and upgrade. When these systems fail, they pose a pollution hazard to water. Care must be taken in development where septic systems are needed to ensure the soils are capable of supporting an ISTS.

Figure 4-1. Permitted Wastewater Treatment Facilities and State Discharge Permits in and near Cottonwood County					
Facility Name	SDS Permit #	Location	Ponds	Average annual flow / day design	Discharge
Jeffers Wastewater Treatment Facility	0039756, Class D	NW 1/4 , SW 1/4 Sec 21, Amboy Twp	two-cell stabilization pond system	70,000, with 223 day storage	controlled dis. to Judicial Ditch #9
Delft Sanitary District (2004 construction)	0066541 Class C	NE 1/4 of NW 1/4 Sec 27, Carson Twp	Constructed westland	5,700 gpd wet weather flow design	continuous dis. to Watonwan River
Mountain Lake Municipal Wastewater Treatment Facility	0021466 Class D	NW 1/4 of Sec 28, Midway Twp.	Three-cell stabilization system	350,000 gpd	Discharge to unnamed creek.
Neuhof Hutterian Brethern Wastewater Treatment Facility	0062588	Section 16 of Mountain Lake Twp	two-cell stabilization pond system	4250 gpd	Controlled periods to unnamed creek to Judicial Ditch 31
Storden Wastewater Treatment Facility (2003 proposed)	0052248 Class B		Three cell stabilization pond system	52,500 wet weather gpd design, 180 detention time	Controlled discharge to County ditch # 38
Westbrook	0025232 Class D	N 1/2 , SW 1/3 Sec 33 Westbrook Twp	Two-cell stabilization pond	150,000 wet weather gpd design, 267 day detention time	Controlled discharge to county tile to JD 18 to Highwater Creek
Windom wastewater Treatment Facility	0022217 Class B	Windom	digester	1,830,000 wet weather gpd flow design	Continuous discharge to the Des Moines River.
Comfrey – < 1/2 mile North of County	0021687 Class C	E 1/2 of SE 1/4 of Sec 32, Bashaw Twp,	digester	50,600 gpd wet weather flow design	continuous dis. to drain tile to Altermatt's Creek
Ethanol 2000, Bingham Lake	0063118	Discharge consists of cooling tower blowdown rate of 44,000 gpd & reverse osmosis reject water at rate of 76,000 gpd discharged to on-site detention pond, tested and controlled discharge to unnamed creek via Co ditch 23			
PM Windom,	0067482	Waste water pre-treatment facility, including ponds, with treated effluent discharged to City of Windom; permit also covers land application of by-product waste streams, storm water management, & ground water monitoring.			
Protient, Mtn Lake (Sec 34 Midway Twp)	0066036	Year-round discharge of reject water from the reverse osmosis system at a maximum rate of 72,000 gpd to a tile to JD 21, then to JD 1			
Windom Coop Association	0064645	A carbon absorption system designed to treat up to 40 gallons per minute flow. Facility is designed to treat pesticide contaminated groundwater from the facility.			
Northern Natural Gas Company	0050041	Northern Natural Gas is responsible for periodic testing of the structural integrity of pipelines used to transport natural gas and / or liquids .			
Northern Boarder Pipeline company	0052329	Northern Border Pipeline Company is responsible for periodic testing of new and existing pipelines used to transport natural gas.			

D. Transportation

A multi-modal transportation system that sufficiently moves people and goods into and out of the county is essential to the economic stability of the county. The transportation system not only allows for easy access to and from areas of interest by the residents of the county, but it also provides a means by which agricultural, industrial, and commercial products can be transported or effectively marketed.

Incorporating the different types of transportation modes is an important part of the transportation plan. The County and its residents depend on the transportation system to reach regional, state, national, and international markets. Not only does the County's transportation system support the movement of vehicles across the county and between cities and points of interest, but it also supplies trucks engaged in local and regional commerce with the ability to efficiently move their goods. Pedestrians, snowmobile riders, and bicyclists are supported with a system of recreational off-road trails paralleling county roads and paved shoulders as well as by a separate system of trails (See Chapter V. Cultural and Recreational Resources for more information on trails).

Changes to the transportation system can have both positive and negative effects. Poor road conditions can negatively effect nearby communities. The economic well being of Cottonwood County lies with its ability to produce, market, and transport basic agricultural products, manufacture goods, as well as with its ability to generate tourism. Potential economic activities or developments may choose to avoid an area with an inadequate transportation network, which would mean loss of business and ultimately the loss of tax base. Alternatively, the expansion or reconstruction of a transportation system could help to improve the economic stability of a nearby community by providing an attractive site for economic development.

D.1. Existing Highway System

The existing highway system within Cottonwood County is a gridiron pattern, and generally follows the basic land survey section lines, with the exceptions where physical characteristics such as lakes and terrain or other considerations provide obstacles and cause deviations in the pattern. Overlaying the basic gridiron pattern is State Trunk Highway 60, which transects the southeast corner of the county and passes through Windom, Bingham Lake and Mountain Lake.

D.2. Road Jurisdiction

The jurisdiction of roads entails determining who is responsible for the construction and maintenance of roads. During the days of early statehood, the primary jurisdiction of roads was considered to be the responsibility of the town boards, counties played a secondary interest, and the state was responsible for few to no roads. From early statehood to the 1930's, the state took the responsibility for the 70 constitutional routes, in order to provide a network of uniformly constructed and maintained roads. During the Depression years (1930's) the prevailing sentiment shifted to placing jurisdictional responsibility at higher levels of government, where it was thought they could be better maintained. Currently, almost all roads under state jurisdiction were established 50 - 60 years ago. The 1921 new road law passed by the Minnesota Legislature created four systems of roads:

1. Trunk Highway System. Statewide, 70 routes were established under a 1920 Constitutional amendment (6,877 miles). In Cottonwood County, these state and US Highways include: 30, 60, 62, and 71.
2. County State Aid Highways (CSAH) are roads or streets that were established and designated under county jurisdiction in accordance with Minnesota Statutes Chapter 162. The state provides funding assistance to maintain the CSAH system.
3. County Roads (CR). These roads are established, constructed, and improved by the County Boards. They are under the sole authority of the County Board.
4. Township Road. A road under the authority of the town board, or reverted to township jurisdiction by the County Board. These roads are constructed and maintained by Town Boards

5. Municipal or City Street. - Any street under the jurisdiction of a municipality not otherwise designated as a Trunk Highway, County State Aid Street/Highway or County Highway.

Figure 4-2. Roadway Miles in Cottonwood County Per Road Jurisdiction						
US & State Hwy System	CSAH System	County System	Township System	Municipal Streets	State Game Preserve	Total Miles
188.617	637.282	193.358	1398.304	131.684	1.36	2550.604

Source: MN/DOT

D.3. Weight Restrictions

During the spring of each year, the load carrying capacity of highways is reduced as a result of thawing and excess water in the subgrade. Spring axle load restrictions are determined by testing the road while simulated truckloads pass over the road sections. The spring load restrictions for axle load are set when 85% of the road section is able to handle the weight.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN/DOT) has a policy to maintain the Trunk Highway network at a ten ton capacity. When road segments fall below this capacity, the District Office determines whether to allow ten ton loads, placing the section at higher risk of deterioration or to post the road at a lower level. Spring Weight Restrictions are applied to routes less than 10 tons year round and cause the greatest difficulty to commerce and industry where there is limited access.

Land use activities in the County that generate heavy traffic and are at times affected by the Spring Weight restrictions affect a variety of activities: grain elevators, animal confinement facilities, cement plants, feed supply companies, value-added agricultural processing facilities, contractors, farmers, and other businesses in the county. The majority of the value-added industries are located along the TH 60 / Union Pacific Railroad Corridor. Future impacts may be affected by increased size and / or weight of agricultural equipment and new development activity, such as wind turbine development.

D.4 Highway Improvements

Cottonwood County annually updates the County Five Year Road and Bridge Plan. This is a capital improvements plan that is reviewed and approved by the County Board. A copy is available from the County Engineer. The planning and development involved in the development of the County Road and Bridge Plan includes review of the entire County Road and Bridge network to assess changes that may have occurred during the year. The fiscally constrained list of projects is then revised based on the annual review of the system.

D.5 Bridges

The Minnesota Department of Transportation maintains an inventory of bridges in the state and record of an inspection report that identifies the condition of the bridges. There are 237 bridges, 10 feet or longer in the County. Figure 4-3 provides an inventory of the number and breakdown of bridges by road jurisdiction in 2003.

Bridge deficiency needs are identified by bridge sufficiency ratings. A sufficiency rating includes many factors, including actual structural condition of a bridge, detour length, traffic count, the approach, bridge length & width, and structural characteristics. The average age of all Minnesota bridges (10' and longer) is 31 years, in Cottonwood County the average age is 37 years; the average sufficiency rating for all bridges in the state is 88, in Cottonwood County the rating is 85. This indicates that the bridges in the County are on the average older and their sufficiency ratings are a little worse, but are still above a rating of 80. The 2003 inventory identified 15% of County bridges and 19% of township bridges (10' and longer) have a sufficiency rating at below 80.

Local roads play an essential role in the overall state transportation network and local bridges are the critical component of the local road systems. The State support for the replacement or rehabilitation of local bridges continues to be crucial to maintaining the integrity of the local road systems and is necessary for the County and the townships to proceed with the replacement or rehabilitation of the high priority deficient bridges. State Transportation Bond Funds are often the funding source to replace or rehabilitate bridges.

Figure 4-3. Bridge sufficiency rating (2003)	Age and condition of Bridges 10 feet & over.	Deficient Bridges, 10'+ Sufficiency rating <= 80	Age and condition of Bridges 20 feet & over.
TH	24	2	16
County	92	14	59
Twp	119	23	75
City	2	0	2
Total	237	39	152
Ave Age All Bridges	37, statewide 31		34, statewide 30
Ave Sufficiency Rating	85, statewide 88		86, statewide 87
Ave Age Local Bridges	37, statewide 31		34, statewide 30
Ave Sufficiency Rating	84, statewide 87		85, statewide 87

Source: MN/DOT

D.6. Railroads

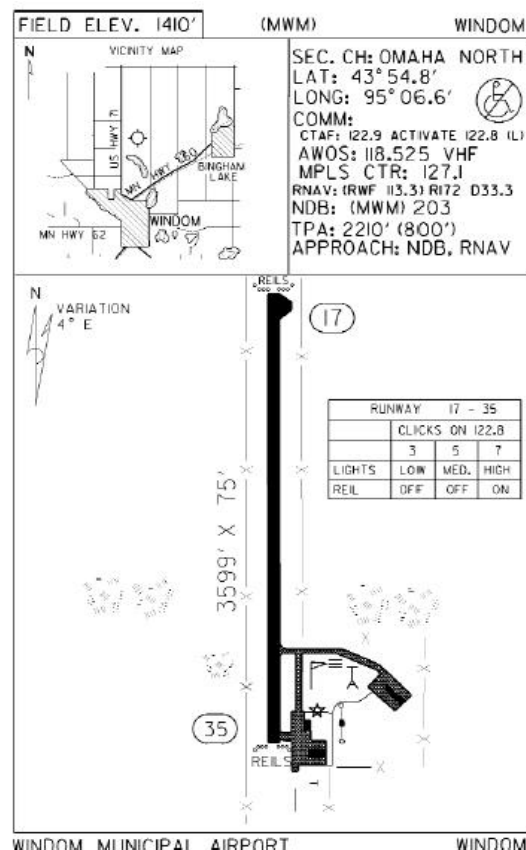
The Union Pacific Railroad (formerly the Chicago & Northwestern) runs parallel to Highway 60. This is a Class I Railroad that operates 4 trains per day through Cottonwood County at 49 miles per hour. The Track Classification is Class IV, which allows for up to 60 mph for freight movement and is a primary line.

Safety of rail crossings is an important issue in Cottonwood County, from the track speed as well as the railroad transecting at an angle over the gridiron layout of the roadways. There are 21 public crossings; 12 are marked with active warning devices.

Recently the rail industry has been experiencing a higher usage – in tandem with the rise in fuel prices. Planning issues to keep in sight include increased rail traffic (safety and increased exposure at crossings), potential businesses development and the need to access rail (via existing facility or new facility).

D.7. Aeronautics

The Windom Municipal Airport is located about three miles north of the developed part of the City of Windom on US Highway 71. The longest runway is 3,600 feet, and is paved and lighted. There is a beacon as a navigational aid and an automated weather observation station (AWOS). There are currently two hangers and 13 aircraft based at the field, all single engines and no jet engine aircraft. There are 10 average daily



aircraft operations, 50% of which are transient general aviation, 20% local general aviation and 30% air taxi. In 2005, the City of Windom received federal funding to construct two new hangers, capable of holding eight planes each, and a new arrival/departure building.

D.8. Transit

The County has operated a Countywide Public Transit System since 1989. The countywide system operates from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and utilizes 3 buses (2 primary and 1 backup). The system operating class is dial-a-ride. The County Family Service Agency coordinates many ride needs through volunteer driver trips, coordinated through RSVP.

During 2004, the Public Transit System picked up individuals in the Communities and the service is available to all residents in the County. The System currently has dial-a-ride demand 4 days per week in the morning and afternoon to Mountain Lake, and coordinates with medical appointments whenever possible. One day per week the dial-a-ride demand calls for a morning and afternoon run to the communities of Jeffers, Storden and Westbrook. One day per month, the transit system bus goes to Worthington.

In January 2005, the transit system began using tokens instead of tickets. Passengers will still be able to pay cash for their rides but will get a reduced fee as an incentive if they use tokens.

- ? **Intercity Bus Service** provides access to both the Twin Cities and Sioux Falls. The nearest passenger stops are located in Jackson (Jackson County) and Worthington (Nobles County). The Worthington stop has a ticket counter, and tickets can also be purchased through the Internet.

D.9. Emerging Issues

- ? **Access Management.** Roads serve a variety of purposes in a multi-modal transportation system. Roads may be designed to move the maximum amount of people and freight from one state to another in the least amount of time. Roads may only be needed to move people and their groceries to their individual driveways. There is always a tension between through-traffic and local access, especially on rural roads with fast trucks, slow farm machinery and plenty of wildlife to distract drivers.

Access management is the planning, design and implementation of land use and transportation strategies in an effort to maintain a safe flow of traffic, while accommodating access needs of adjacent development. MN/DOT's Access Management program provides a standard set of intersection and access guidelines scaled to different types of highways, to reduce conflicts between through and local traffic. In Cottonwood County, State Highway 60 is considered an Interregional Corridor, US 71 a Regional Corridor, and State Highways 30 and 62 Minor Arterial highways. Within each of these primary categories, highways are further broken down into sub-categories based on their urban, urbanizing, or rural character.

The Access Management guidelines kick in for a new access, when there is a change in use of an existing road access, or reconstruction of a highway. These guidelines recommend minimum distance between intersections of public roads and private access drives. For example, on the rural portions of US 71, there should be no new public roads closer together than the one-mile section grid, or possibly ½ mile with restrictions and special engineering. In some areas, a driveway for a single family dwelling may need only a few conditional improvements, where access for a gas station or warehouse could need a long list of conditions to prevent traffic conflicts.

MN/DOT also has a special process (Exception and Deviation) to accommodate immediate access needs while planning for alternative access in the future. Special plans can also be

conducted in areas that are congested or have unique concerns. In 2002, such a plan was conducted that addressed specific concerns in the urbanized area along Highway 60 in Windom.

It is important to consult state, county, and township officials at the beginning of a project, before too much time, effort and money is invested. Any new division of land should carefully plan for future access, not only for the site in question but also to avoid blocking future access for their neighbors. In the big picture, the key to successful access management is the well-planned

Figure 4-4: MN/DOT Access Management Guidelines in Cottonwood County
2004

Highway	Category	Intersection Spacing		Private Access
		Full Movement	Secondary	
MN Highway 60	Interregional Corridor			
Jackson Co line - Windom	Rural/Bypass	1 mile	*1/2 mile	Strongly Discouraged
Windom	Urban/Core	<i>See Access Management Plan for Windom</i>		
Windom - CSAH 2 (Bingham Lake)	Rural/Bypass	1 mile	*1/2 mile	Strongly Discouraged
Bingham Lake	Urban	1/2 mile	*1/4 mile	By Exception or Deviation
Bingham Lake - Watonwan Co line	Rural/Bypass	1 mile	*1/2 mile	Strongly Discouraged
US Highway 71	Regional Corridor			
Jackson Co line - Windom	Rural	1 mile	1/2 mile	Subject to Conditions
Windom	Urban	1/2 mile	1/4 mile	By Exception or Deviation
Windom - Redwood Co line	Rural	1 mile	1/2 mile	Subject to Conditions
MN Highway 30	Minor Arterial			
In & near cities of Westbrook, Storden & Jeffers	Urban	1/4 mile	1/8 mile	By Exception or Deviation
Rural portions	Rural	1/2 mile	1/4 mile	Subject to Conditions
MN Highway 62	Minor Arterial			
Murray Co line - Windom	Rural	1/2 mile	1/4 mile	Subject to Conditions
Windom	Urban	1/4 mile	1/8 mile	By Exception or Deviation

Source: MN/DOT Access Category System and Spacing Guidelines
Trunk Highway 60 Medium Priority Interregional Corridor Access
Management Plan, Windom, Minnesota (2002)

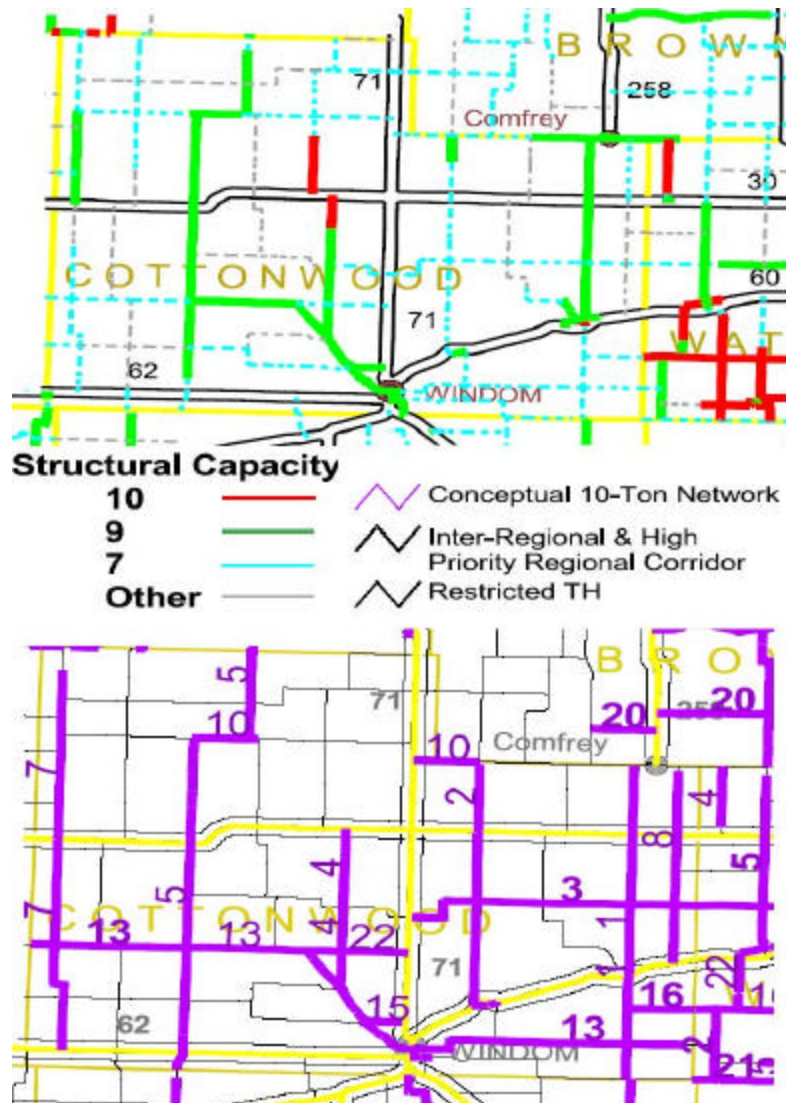
* may be limited

development of a network of connected streets and roads, so that people can access private property and public roads, and stay safe doing it.

- ? **Ten Ton Roads and Heavy-weight Traffic.** The State of Minnesota maintains a year round ten ton Trunk Highway road network. This network is built to facilitate the movement of freight. Often the location of business and industry is not located along one of these state routes and a lower capacity roadway is used. The integrality of the road is compromised when over weight traffic utilizes it. Cottonwood County has a large amount of agricultural activities which require access from the local road system to the state highway system. Other activities that also have a weight impact include sand and gravel mining; temporary traffic for construction and maintenance of facilities, including wind towers; feedlot operations; as well as other heavy weight traffic considerations.

A recent statewide initiative has been the identification of a system of local ten ton routes. These routes are identified in the structural capacity map. The County has constructed recent construction projects to ten ton capacity. However, to address ten ton needs of the county, the second diagram illustrates the conceptual 10-ton road network.

Many industries in the County generate heavy traffic, and over the years, the nature and weight of traffic has changed. In agriculture, semi-trucks are replacing grain wagons for the first haul (farm to market). Larger feedlot facilities are also increasing the size of agricultural equipment and increasing traffic. New traffic, such as construction and maintenance equipment for wind generation farms, will also affect the costs of road maintenance.



- ? **Rural Housing Development.** New non-farm rural housing has and will continue to impact maintenance of roads. Non-farm residents require access to communities for work and necessities, and road authorities have and will continue to feel increased pressure to increase maintenance of rural roads.

E. County Buildings and Facilities

There are many buildings and facilities owned by the County. The County Courthouse, Law Enforcement Facility (which includes a jail), County Office Building, County Highway Department facilities, and the County Family Service Facility are all located in Windom. The County Attorney is located in a building rented by the County. The County Courthouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The County owns Highway Shops located in Jeffers, Mountain Lake, Storden, and Westbrook besides the facility in Windom. The County Landfill is located in Section 31 of Dale Township. Cottonwood County owns park facilities throughout the County which are discussed in Chapter V. Cultural and Recreational Resources.

E.1. Landfill

The Cottonwood County Landfill (Permit SW-143) is located on Cottonwood County CSAH 22, approximately 8 miles northwest of Windom, MN via US Highway 71 or Cottonwood CSAH 13. The landfill is a 200-acre site with a permitted fill area of about 46 acres; remaining design capacity has an estimated life of approximately of 25 years (based on 2003 MSW received, 510,370 cubic yards of solid waste). Total capacity is 1,075,575 cubic yards of which 680,530 cubic yards are permitted (prior to the 2004 re-permitting). As of November 2003, the remaining capacity was 114,320 cubic yards. Cottonwood County continues to operate this site in compliance with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) regulations. An estimated 10 acres was developed on-site for future expansion by extending the liner system over the old fill area. The Certificate of Need capacity for the Cottonwood County Landfill is 207,221 cubic yards for the 10-year planning period 2003 through 2013, which includes Murray County MSW.

Figure 4-5. Waste Received/Disposed Cottonwood County Landfill	
2001	9,516.89 Tons
2002	8,459.17 Tons
2003	7,479.11 Tons
2004	6,500 Tons (loss of Murray County waste projected)

The MPCA will combine the MSW landfill permit number SW143 with the Demolition Permit number SW459 into one permit beginning with the issuance of the new permit pending.

A history of design, permitting and the Certificate of Need (CON) is on file at the Cottonwood County Solid Waste Office and is also contained in the Cottonwood County Solid Waste Management Plan. The landfill safety record has been free of any major problems during its period of operation. Some gas migration has been noted since the closure of the old fill area and was addressed by adding gas wells when cell #4 was constructed. With the vertical expansion over cell # 4, the horizontal vents will be moved to allow for the expansion. Vertical gas vents have been added to all new cells.

- ? **Potential Environmental Health Impacts.** On-site soils at the landfill consist primarily of sand and gravel overlaying a clay layer about 20 to 30 feet below the surface. A hydro-geologic study of the site has been completed to assess the landfill's impact on area groundwater, and included the installation of new monitoring wells and testing of private wells. Cottonwood County has identified minor groundwater contamination at the site from vinyl chloride and arsenic. The problem was evaluated through a risk assessment. To date no remedial action, other than additional well installation and testing, has been required. No indication of a problem severe enough to require the closure of the site exists.

MPCA inspection reports, over the past few years, have noted minor problems with blowing paper and inadequate covering of waste. Gas migration has been noted since the closure of the 14 acres of the old fill area, and was addressed in the permitting documents. Re-permitting was last completed in 2004. The landfill safety record has been free of any major problems noted in its history. The future viability of the landfill is suspect. The issue of flow waste surety has not been addressed. The loss of Murray County waste and the present tipping fees has placed the operation of the landfill at a marginal level, and additional loss of waste may require additional revenue either through additional subsidy or increase tip fee.

F. Educational Facilities

There are eight different public school districts with jurisdictions within Cottonwood County. Open Enrollment is also an option for students in the State of Minnesota. Mountain Lake and Westbrook both

have a Christian School; the Hutterian Brethren Colonies south of Mountain Lake have their own schools, and there are a number of families within the county that are home schooling their children.

F.1 Public Schools

Public Schools include Butterfield-Odin, Comfrey, Heron Lake-Okabena, Mountain Lake, Red Rock Central, Westbrook-Walnut Grove (with facilities in both towns), and Windom. Red Rock Central is a consolidated school district consisting of Jeffers, Storden, Lamberton and Sanborn with grades K – 5 in Jeffers and 6 – 12 in Lamberton. Four of these districts—Mountain Lake, Red Rock Central, Westbrook-Walnut Grove, and Windom—have facilities operating within the County.

Figure 4-6. School Enrollment Numbers P-K to 12 Fall Enrollment Ethnicity by District						
	2003-2004		2002 – 2003		2001 – 2002	
	Total	Total Minority	Total	Total Minority	Total	Total Minority
Mountain Lake	526	153	512	144	501	122
Red Rock Central	524	14	533	14	547	11
Westbrook-Walnut Grove	524	117	509	91	507	71
Windom	1040	88	1047	58	1085	56

The enrollment trend over the past three years for the 4 public schools located in the County has decrease by 1% (26 students). A larger impact is a growing minority population. In the 2001-2002 school year, enrollment figures identified 260 minority students (9.8% of the total enrollment). In the 2004 to 2004 school year, the enrollment had grown to 14.2% or 372 students.

F.2 Public Libraries

The Plum Creek Library System is a regional library system covering nine counties in southwest Minnesota, including Cottonwood. The cities of Westbrook, Mountain Lake, and Windom all have public libraries, and a bookmobile provides access to the library system about once per month in the communities of Delft, Jeffers, and Storden. Patrons can access the Plum Creek Library System catalog though the internet.

G. Public Health and Safety

One of the primary services provided by government under the Constitution is the protection of public health, safety and welfare. Cottonwood County is fortunate to have service providers in the private, non-profit and public sectors.

G.1 Medical Facilities

Access to state of the art technology and equipment as well as professional staff are essential ingredients of good health care. Currently, timely access to major medical facilities is conducted by helicopter transport or ambulance. Specialty medical services now come to the local medical facilities on a regular basis. Technology advancements on the horizon may include telemedicine, which has the potential to reduce the access time required for major medical service.

Public and private medical facilities, pharmacies, nursing homes and assisted living facilities located in Cottonwood County include:

- ? Schmidt Memorial Hospital in Westbrook
- ? Windom Area Hospital in Windom
- ? Medical doctor offices in Mountain Lake, Westbrook, and Windom
- ? Dental offices in Mountain Lake, Westbrook, and Windom

- ? Nursing home facilities in Mountain Lake, Westbrook, and Windom
- ? Assisted living facilities in Mountain Lake, Westbrook, and Windom
- ? Medical supply / pharmacies in Mountain Lake, Westbrook, and Windom

G.2 911 Emergency System

In an emergency, dialing 911 is usually the most effective way to summon help. That's because 911 is more than just an easy to remember number. When you dial 911, the system is designed to automatically connect your call to the right public safety agency serving your location, and provide the 911 call taker with a display of your telephone number and your address location. Help can be dispatched to your location even if you cannot speak. Minnesota State Statute 403.03 identifies the 911 services that shall be provided as: police, firefighting, and emergency medical and ambulance services. Other emergency and civil defense services may be incorporated into the 911 system at the discretion of the public agency operating the public safety answering point.

"911 service" means a telecommunications service that automatically connects a person dialing the digits 911 to an established public safety answering point. 911 service includes: 1) equipment for connecting and outswitching 911 calls within a telephone central office, trunking facilities from the central office to a public safety answering point; 2) equipment, as appropriate, for automatically selectively routing 911 calls in situations where one telephone central office serves more than one public safety answering point; and 3) provision of automatic location identification if the public safety answering point has the capability of providing that service.

- ? **Enhanced 911 service** means the use of selective routing, automatic location identification, or local location identification as part of local 911 service. The State of Minnesota 911 website identified Cottonwood County at a Phase II Enhanced wireless 911 status. This means that Wireless Phase II coverage is available to cell phone users in areas where wireless carriers and local 911 centers have added technologies to locate wireless callers in emergencies

Figure 4-7. Cottonwood County 9-1-1 PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING POINTS				
Telephone Numbers	Agency Address	9-1-1 System	Area Served	Other Contacts
24 HOUR 507-831-1375 VOICE: 507-831-1375 FAX: 507-831-1957	Cottonwood Co Sheriff's Office 902 Fifth Avenue Windom, MN 56101	IES Ruthton Selective Router, ALI	Cottonwood Co Phase II LAT LON	Marshall State Patrol 507-537-6277

Source: Minnesota 911 System website

G.3 Ambulance and Fire Protection.

Volunteer fire departments have a long tradition of service in our rural communities. Departments in Westbrook, Storden, Jeffers, Windom and Mountain Lake serve the city and areas in the county. Comfrey, Fulda, Darfur, Lamberton and Walnut Grove also serve parts of Cottonwood County.

Volunteers also provide EMT and ambulance service in the county.

G.4 Law Enforcement.

Cottonwood County Law Enforcement Office is located at 902 Fifth Avenue, Windom, Minnesota and are responsible for the whole county. The staff of 21 includes the Sheriff, Deputies, Dispatchers, Jailers, Secretaries, and Custodians. They receive the 911 calls and dispatch the emergency equipment. Deputy vehicles are equipped with GPS units and radios which allow contact with other

area Law Enforcement agencies. The present tower located beside the Windom office will soon be replaced with a stronger tower and will allow sharing space with other entities.

Cottonwood County has a jail with 21 beds and house male and female inmates. 10 beds are for inmates with work release privileges and 11 are for those who must serve a sentence with no work release. Cottonwood County will house prisoners from other counties as room allows.

The municipalities of Mountain Lake, Windom and Westbrook have their own city police.

G.5 Hazard Mitigation

Hazard mitigation planning allows a community to plan for a disaster before it occurs, as was noted in Chapter V. Cultural and Recreational Resources as is related to floods. The federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 established a national program for pre-disaster mitigation, to break the cycle of disaster-repair-disaster in too many places. The Southwest Regional Development Commission has assisted several counties in the region to complete this public planning process, which can include the county, cities and townships in one multi-jurisdictional document. As of November of 2004, communities must have mitigation plans in place to be eligible for certain hazard mitigation funding. The Cottonwood County's Sheriff's Office is responsible for Emergency Management.

H. Public Utilities.

H.1. Energy Utilities.

Electric Utility providers in Cottonwood County include South Central Electric, Federated Rural Electric, Alliant Energy, Windom Municipal Utilities, Mountain Lake Municipal Utilities, and Westbrook Municipal Utilities. Electric utility providers are regulated by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC), which has discussed retail competition but has not moved forward on the issue.

Increased use of renewable energy is being seen in rural Minnesota. Cottonwood County has areas that are a good wind regime and development can be anticipated to occur. However, access to transmission lines has been an issue in the region and may impede further development.

H.2 Telecommunications

Utilities provide essential services to the public, and can be investor-owned or operated by public organizations. Modern telecommunications utilities provide the electronic transmission of information, including digital data, voice, fax, sound and video, from one location to another over some form of communications link. Up to date telecommunications is one way for rural areas of the country to be competitive in the state, nation, and world.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates the provision of interstate and interLATA long-distance service. Local long distance service and local telephone service are regulated by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Companies and cooperatives which provided monopoly service prior to the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 are known as "incumbent local exchange carriers" (ILECs). Minnesota now also permits "competitive local exchange carriers" (CLECs) so that consumers can have a choice for telecommunications service. The City of Windom has recently begun offering local telecommunications services in addition to cable TV through a 100 MBs data fiber-to-home architecture, and will be considering additional services in the future.

Figure 4-8. Firms Providing Telecommunications Services

	CenturyTel of Minnesota	Citizens Telecom. Co of Minn (Frontier)	Digital Telecommunications Inc	Eschelon Telecom of MN Inc	Excel Telecom. Inc	Integra Telecom of MN, Inc	Ionex Communications North, Inc	MediaComm	NOS Communications, Inc	Qwest Corporation	Redwood County Telephone Co	Sprint Communications Company	USLink, Inc	Western Telephone Co.	City of Windom	Z-Tel Communications, Inc
Amboy Twp	x	x														
Amo Twp	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x
Ann Twp	x										x					
Bingham Lake City			x	x	x	x	x			x		x	x			x
Carson Twp		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x
Comfrey City		x														
Dale Twp	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x
Delton Twp	x	x												x		
Germantown Twp	x													x		
Great Bend Twp		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x
Highwater Twp	x															
Jeffers City	x															
Lakeside Twp		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x
Midway Twp		x														
Mountain Lake City		x						x								
Mountain Lake Twp		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x
Rose Hill Twp	x															
Selma Twp		x														
Southbrook Twp	x															
Springfield Twp	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x			x
Storden City	x															
Storden Twp	x															
Westbrook City	x															
Westbrook Twp	x															
Windom City			x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x		x	x

Source: Minnesota Department of Commerce, Cottonwood County Zoning Office

As new development occurs in the County, the initial cost of telecommunication service may rise in areas not currently served. To reduce costs of initial service, infrastructure development costs may need to be shared among all lot owners.

V. CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Cottonwood County is named after the Cottonwood River. The word “cottonwood” is a translation of “Waraju”, the Dakota name for the river, reflecting the abundance of the tree found on the banks of the river. Situated in the southwestern portion of the State of Minnesota, Cottonwood County is bounded by Redwood and Brown counties on the north, Watonwan County on the east, Jackson County on the south, and Murray County on the west.

During the period of initial settlement, Cottonwood County was primarily covered by tall prairie grass. The prairie land was originally diverse and full of lush plant growth that enabled it to support many different types of animals. By 1900, a major part of the county was in farms and 92% of the land was improved.

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote of our unalienable Rights: “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” and that governments are formed specifically to protect these rights. After basic public health, and safety, Americans have always turned to our cultural and recreational resources in the pursuit of happiness.

Today, Cottonwood County’s residents face the challenges and opportunities of preserving what is best of our communities and taking advantage of opportunities our local amenities present. Like all things of value, these amenities must be managed as sustainable resources so that those who come after us will be able to enjoy our historic places, conservation areas and parks as well.

A. Issues Summary

- ? Historic and cultural resources must be carefully managed so that future generations can benefit.
- ? Regulations need to be reviewed for compliance with the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA).
- ? Surface waters and aquifers are susceptible to contaminants which may harm human health.
- ? Shoreland development poses increasing challenges.
- ? Conservation of native grasslands and wildlife habitat needs to be balanced to minimize land use conflicts.
- ? County parks and trails provide opportunities for recreation.

A.1 Cultural and Recreational Strengths, Challenges and Future Direction

The County Committee identified issues concerning Cultural and Recreational Resources in Cottonwood County.

Cultural and Recreational Strengths

- ? Cultural activities and festivals
- ? Pre-historic cultural sites
- ? Public access to lakes and hunting areas
- ? Parks and recreation opportunities
- ? Walking and biking trails

Cultural and Recreational Challenges

- ? Lack of continual funds for maintenance
- ? Spreading costs over changing population bases
- ? Water quality issues
- ? Potential conflicts between conservation lands and residences
- ? Some recreation areas are not used as much as they could be
- ? Demographic shifts changing cultural expectations

Future of Cultural and Recreational Resources

- ? Support local community cultural and historic points of interest
- ? Support restoration of appropriate natural landscapes
- ? Diversify types of recreational activities available
- ? Increase the number of campsites available during peak demand
- ? Access to public waters should be carefully considered as new development occurs
- ? Surface water issues should continue to receive attention. All water and watersheds should continue to remain protected and preserved.
 - o The County should continue to work with municipalities to develop well-head protection plans
- ? Future planning in this area should continue to focus on preserving existing facilities to prevent deterioration. The County should also examine expanding use of underutilized recreational areas.
 - o Access funding from MN DNR and other sources to provide new uses such as ATV parks or snowmobile trails
- ? Continue coordinated development of the trails system.

B. Cottonwood County History

Cottonwood County was established by the Territorial Legislature on May 23, 1857. In 1858, Minnesota Territory became a State, and in 1858-1859, the County was surveyed by a Governmental Survey. The only sign of human habitation at that time was an occasional Native American teepee—prior to settlement this area was home to the Dakota tribe, and the Cheyenne before about 1750. The surveyors found one white man, Charles Zierke (a trapper known as “Dutch Charlie”) residing in the Southwest Quarter of Section 14 of Highwater Township.

Originally the County included twenty townships, but by an act of the state legislature in 1864, two of the northeastern townships were made part of Brown County. The 1860 census listed Cottonwood County as having a total population of twelve—six men and six women.

The first settlers coming into the county after the civil war settled in the northwest part of the county and were men and their families, men who had served in the Civil War, and others who came from foreign countries. The government did not have the means to pay the veterans bonuses, so they passed a homestead law for the benefit of the veterans. This law provided for the right of a veteran to take a homestead of 160 acres. They had to build a home of some sort and break up 10 acres of land; then they could leave it for a few months and come back and prove the claim by paying a small amount of money and get title to the land.

Cottonwood County was organized July 29, 1870, at the Village of Big Bend. Big Bend was located in the southeast quarter of Section 6, Township 105 North, Range 36 West, (in Great Bend Township, north of the Great Bend School). Big Bend was the first county seat and had the first post-office but ceased to exist when the railroad failed to come its way.

The 1870 census found only 534 people living in Cottonwood County; however, the area began to grow rapidly as people moved north and westward following the Civil War. The first railroad in the county—the St. Paul & Sioux City, later to become the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis & Omaha Railway; Chicago & North Western; and today the Union Pacific—was constructed en-route to Sioux City, Iowa. In July of 1871, the first locomotive entered the villages of Mountain Lake and Windom. Three towns in Cottonwood County are on this rail line. Mountain Lake was platted and named in 1870. Windom was platted on June 20, 1871 (incorporated in 1875), and named in honor of U.S. Senator William Windom. Anticipating the growth and need for water, the first community well was dug in Windom in 1871. Also in 1871, the first schoolhouse was built and the county’s first physician arrived. Windom was designated the county seat by a vote of the people within the county in 1872. Bingham Lake was platted in 1875 and named in honor of the surveyor’s friend, and was incorporated in 1900.

The Currie branch of the Omaha railroad was built through Cottonwood County in 1900, and resulted in the development of Delft, Jeffers, Storden and Westbrook. The village of Delft was a direct result of the building of the railroad, and remains an unincorporated village. Land for the Village of Jeffers was platted in 1899, having been purchased from and named after a Mr. Jeffers who had homesteaded the land. The Village of Storden was incorporated in 1920. The Village of Westbrook was platted in June of 1900. This railroad line has since discontinued and the property is now farmland.

The 1875 census showed a county population of 2,870. The 1880 census showed that several small but thriving communities had developed, the county had a population of 5,553, and 867 farms were located throughout the county.

During the next twenty years the county grew even more rapidly, until the turn of the century at which time there was no more open land available. The population in 1890 was 7,414, and in 1900 was 12,069. The population of the county continued to grow, reaching 16,143 people by the 1940 census. Since then the population has been declining to fairly stable at today's 12,167.

B.1 Ethnic Heritage

The early base of Yankee and immigrant settlers, mixed with the constant flux of the modern economy, has produced a somewhat diverse ethnic heritage in today's residents.

From 1990 to 2000, the racial mix of the Cottonwood County population changed from 98.9% white to 95.2% white. The 2000 Census identified the largest area of growth as Asian or Pacific Islander—one race and in the “other race” category. The 2000 Census also counted persons who identified more than one race, which were counted in the non-white category. Persons of Hispanic origin (of any race) experienced growth from less than 1% of the population to 2.2%.

The 2000 Census also asked ancestry questions, with more than 36 different ancestries reported in Cottonwood County. German was the predominant ancestry reported at 44 % of the population, with Norwegian at 17%. The majority of the population reported they had ancestry in Europe. Exceptions were: French Canadian, Greek, and West Indian.

Religion also is an influence on culture. There are at least 17 different religious organizations serving Cottonwood County. Two of the nine Hutterite colonies in Minnesota are also located in the county, both within Mountain Lake Township. Originally migrating with other Germans from Russia in the 1870s, Hutterite colonies usually provide for between 60 and 160 persons, living in clustered housing and sustained by agriculture (<http://www.hutterites.org/>). Such a religious-based development pattern poses distinct challenges for land use regulation under the recent federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA).

B.2 Historic Sites

Many factors can determine how long a culturally significant building retains its beauty and luster. It takes people with a certain kind of desire to care for these buildings and to value the past that they represent.

The U.S. Department of Interior's National Register Bulletin defines cultural resources as a “building, site, structure, object, or district evaluated as having significance in prehistory or history.” As is the case in many counties, the largest threat facing these culturally significant structures is the lack of resources and willingness to properly maintain them. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) offers technical assistance to community organizations seeking to reuse and restore historic structures, including information on federal



investment tax credits that may be available for income-producing properties. There are about 6,000 properties in the state of Minnesota on the National Register of Historic Places, including within Cottonwood County:

- ? Isaac Bergen House, 1215 Mountain Lake Road, Mountain Lake; 1888
- ? Chicago, St Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Depot, 4th St and 1st Ave, Westbrook; c.1900
- ? Cottonwood County Courthouse, 900—3rd Ave, Windom; 1904
- ? Jeffers Petroglyphs, located in Section 9 of Delton Township; 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1750
- ? Mountain Lake Village Site, Mountain Lake Township; 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1200

B.3 Cultural and Historic Points of Interest

- ? **Cottonwood County Historical Museum – Windom.** Established in 1901 as the Old Settlers Association and became the Cottonwood County Historical Society in 1949, affiliated with the State Historical Society. The Society's mission is to collect, preserve, and disseminate the history of the county. A new building was constructed in 1998 and includes the Remick Gallery, (a changing-exhibit gallery showcasing local and regional artists along with thematic shows); an Exhibit Hall with 3,000 square feet of space dedicated to the interpretation of the county's rich history; and an expanded research library.
- ? **Heritage Village – Mountain Lake.** Located on the southwest edge of Mountain Lake, near the intersection of County Road 1 and MN Highway 60, Heritage Village was established in 1972 to remember the Russian-Mennonite and German Lutheran immigrants who were early settlers to the area. Visitors stroll through 21 buildings filled with displays depicting the Mennonite experience in Mountain Lake. Many of the buildings were built in the 19th century and have been lovingly restored and preserved. A European style attached house and barn, and the Minnesota Hall of Fame Telephone Museum are located on the grounds. Heritage village is open afternoons in the summer.
- ? **Heritage House Museum – Westbrook.** This 1900 depot of the Chicago-Saint Paul-Minneapolis-Omaha railroad was restored in 1985 by volunteers of the community. Exhibits reflect and preserve the history of the community of Westbrook. Included is a log cabin from the late 1800's that was located near Dutch Charley Creek.
- ? **Jeffers Petroglyphs.** The Jeffers Petroglyphs is the largest group of rock carvings in Minnesota. To ensure preservation of the Petroglyphs, the Minnesota Historical Society purchased the site in 1966. The carvings include: animals such as bison, rabbits, wolves, turtles, and elk; human stick figures; and various weapons such as spear points, arrowheads, axe heads, and lances. The carvings appear to date from two major archaeological periods, the Late Archaic-Early Woodland Periods of 3,000 BC to 500 AD and the Lake Woodland Period from 900 AD to 1975.
- ? **Red Rock Falls.** The unique feature is a 30-foot waterfall, one of the few in this part of the state. Pathways have been constructed above and below the falls in order to allow visitors to view the area of unique, scenic, and natural beauty. Red Rock Falls is located Red Rock County Park, section 36 of Germantown Township.



- ? **Mountain County Park.** Located approximately 2 miles southeast of the City of Mountain Lake, the park was once a large lake with an island emerging in the center. The island now called a “mountain” was the dwelling site of the earliest known inhabitants in the state, the Fox Lake Indians. Carbon 14 dating places organic material found on the mountain at more than 1,000 years older than any other dwelling yet discovered in Minnesota. A large amount of primitive tools, arrowheads, pottery, and other artifacts were removed and are on display at the Minnesota Science Museum in St. Paul. Replicas can be seen at the Heritage Village in Mountain Lake.

B.4 Festivals and Events

March

- ? **Farm & Home Show – Windom.** Held the second Saturday in March, featuring exhibits, entertainment, and a noon meal.

June

- ? **Riverfest – Windom** This celebration is held the second weekend in June and includes fireworks, a parade, an outdoor dance, concessions, a classic car show, softball and tennis tournaments, turtle races, petal tractor pull, and a fishing contest.
- ? **Pow Wow – Mountain Lake.** This celebration is billed as the longest-running town celebration in the State of Minnesota and is held the third weekend in June. Included is a parade, midway, road race, fitness walk, entertainment, booths, food stands; square dancing, pedal tractor pull, and cash prizes.
- ? **Fun Days – Westbrook.** For many years this festival was called “Hospital Days”. The celebration is held at the end of June or early July and includes a parade; food stands; and events that vary year by year. Proceeds help to maintain and improve the city park.

July

- ? **Relay for Life – Windom.** A yearly county-wide fundraiser for the American Cancer Society. Teams raise money by selling luminary bags in honor of cancer survivors, or in memory of a cancer victim. The relay is a walk on the path lighted by the luminary bags.

August

- ? **Cottonwood County Free Fair – Windom.** This free five day fair is normally held the second week in August. Exhibits and judging of 4-H projects includes Livestock projects of beef, hogs, horses, sheep, goats, rabbits, chickens, ducks, and geese; and Non-Livestock projects including clothing, shop, aerospace, environmental, conservation, and foods are an important part of the fair. Food stands include the 4-H Stand; Cattlemens’ Beef-burger stand; Lions pop stand, Dairy Malt Stand, Knights of Columbus food stand, and other food stands. There are also Open Class exhibits and judging of crops, hand work, and foods. Exhibits and judging of FFA projects include livestock and crops. Children and adults enjoy the FFA Children’s Barn, and the fish, animals, and taxidermy exhibits in the Fish and Wildlife Building. Other events include the Commercial Exhibits; State Suffock Sheep Show; Lama Show; Cat Show; Dog Show; Pedal Tractor Pull; Grandstand events; Demolition Derby; Open Class Horse Show; Machinery and Vehicle exhibit area; Bingo; Midway and Concessions.

September

- ? **Utschtallung – Mountain Lake.** Utschtallung, which means "setting out" in German, is also known as Heritage Fair. This celebration of ethnic food and culture is held the second Saturday in September and features exhibits, and entertainment.

C. Natural Resources

The southwestern region of Minnesota has a conspicuous feature called the Coteau des Prairies, meaning “highland of the prairies” or “hill of grasses”, which bisects Cottonwood County. This is a ridge that extends northwest to southeast across South Dakota to Minnesota and on into Iowa, consisting of quartzite bedrock that is overlain by glacial sediment. The county can be delineated as having two classifications of original

vegetation: grasslands and hardwood forests. Grasslands were the predominant form of native vegetation, while hardwood forests are primarily river-bottom stands.

The total area in Cottonwood County is 648 square miles or 414,720 acres, according to the Minnesota State Planning agency, although according to an 1896 Cottonwood County Plat Book, the county consisted of 650.39 square miles or 416,250 acres, with 8,000 acres covered by water. A 1970 land use study reported that approximately 402,000 acres were directly related to farming practices, with approximately 74% actually used for cropland. The incorporated areas making up the six municipalities in Cottonwood County consisted of approximately 3,078 acres in the 1970 study. The remaining acres were woodlands or pastures, or used for other purposes. The most important land use within the county has been and will probably continue to be agriculture.

C.1 Water

There are about 30 bodies of water in Cottonwood County, which cover 5,824 acres of land and average about 170 acres each in size. Surface waters are typically undeveloped and most of the runoff and drainage water is not retained.

Cottonwood County has five major watersheds located within the county borders. The three larger watersheds include: the Cottonwood River Watershed which encompasses the north-central and western portion of the county covering 245.28 square miles or 38% of the county land area; the Watonwan River Watershed which covers the eastern portion of the county and contains 197.92 square miles or 31% of the county land area; and the West Fork Des Moines River Watershed located in the southwestern and central portions of the county covering 164.56 square miles or 25% of the county land area. The two smaller watersheds include the Middle Minnesota Watershed (also called the Little Cottonwood River Watershed) which starts close to the center of the County and continues to the very northeastern edge of Cottonwood County covering 39.27 square miles or 6% of the land area; and the smallest one, the Blue Earth Watershed which covers only 1.29 square miles in the southeastern corner of the county.

The following rivers and creeks make up drainage within these watersheds:

- ? Cottonwood River Watershed: Dry Creek, Dutch Charley Creek, Highwater Creek, Mound Creek, Pell Creek
- ? Watonwan River Watershed: Watonwan River, North Fork of the Watonwan River, South Fork of the Watonwan River
- ? West Fork Des Moines Watershed: Des Moines River, Heron Lake Outlet
- ? Middle Minnesota River Watershed: Little Cottonwood River
- ? Blue Earth River Watershed: no named streams

Typical land use and management practices have caused water quality degradation in all of the County's lakes. Due to the increase in nutrients in the water column, the County's lakes have seen an increase in algae blooms and other suspended sediments. With this decrease in water clarity, the sunlight is not able to reach all areas of the lake and this restricts many different kinds of plant growth. This not only eliminates a food supply for many game fishes, but it also favors the growth of less desirable species such as carp and black bullhead. These fish then cause greater destruction to the lake by uprooting other types of vegetation and sending more debris into the water column.

One of the goals of the Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan should be to work in conjunction with the Cottonwood County Comprehensive Water Plan to protect and preserve the County's ground and surface waters. Instituting well-head protection is also a means of safeguarding public water supply by preventing contaminants from entering the area that contributes water to well fields. The highest yielding aquifers are also often those most susceptible to contaminants which may harm human health. The County should work with all incorporated municipalities in Cottonwood County to develop well-head protection plans (See Chapter IV. Infrastructure & Public Facilities).

C.2 Floodplains

Floodplains are areas which have had a history of frequent flooding. The Floodplain zone district has been established in the County Zoning Ordinance for land mapped as flood hazard areas by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These maps are currently only available on paper, rather than a digital format. Enforcement of restrictions on building in FEMA floodplains is a requirement to participate in FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

Development activity in flood-prone areas should be avoided. For example, high risk areas could receive a permanent vegetative cover in order to help alleviate problems caused by flooding. Some communities have adopted a No Adverse Impact (NAI) floodplain management approach, which extends beyond the floodplain to manage development in the watersheds where flood waters originate. NAI requires new development to mitigate potential impacts before disaster strikes.

Local units of government must undertake and approve coordinated all-hazard mitigation planning to be eligible for state and federal mitigation funds to prevent future flooding or other natural disasters.

C.3 Shoreland

The uncontrolled use of shoreland in the County affect public health, safety and general welfare, not only by contributing to pollution of public waters, but by also impairing the local tax base. Therefore it is in the best interest of the public to provide for the wise use and development of the shoreland of public waters. This responsibility was recognized by Cottonwood County by adopting Shoreland Regulations. These regulations apply to land 300 feet back from rivers and 1000 feet back from lakes in the county.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) identifies three river types in Cottonwood County, which are addressed in the Cottonwood County Zoning Ordinance (Transition River Segments, Agricultural River Segments, and Tributary River segments). The lakes within Cottonwood County are classified as Natural Environment, Recreational Development and General Development lakes. Guidelines for the development of lakes were developed by the DNR and adopted by the County in its zoning code.

Natural Environment Lakes are generally small and often shallow, with limited capacities for development and recreational use. Recreational Development Lakes are normally medium sized lakes with varying depths and shapes. Often these lakes have capacity for accommodating residential and recreational-oriented commercial uses. General Development Lakes are generally large, deep lakes. They are often extensively used for recreation and can become heavily developed along the shores, including second and third tier development.

Most lakes in the County have areas that are unsuitable for development, such as wetlands or soils not capable for development (septic systems, wet soils, strength). Before development occurs, a detailed study of a lake in question should be completed, identifying the areas that would create the least environmental impact. If development occurs, consideration should be given to public access as part of the development.

C.4 Conservation Areas

The conservation of land and wildlife habitat is and should continue to be important to Cottonwood County. The importance placed on conservation lands in Cottonwood County in the past is evident in the amount of state and federally owned acreage within the County. According to the Cottonwood County Water Plan, the MN DNR, and the Cottonwood County Farm Service Agency, the following statistics show the acres retained as of December 1, 1999:

- ? 17 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) – 5,800 acres
- ? 12 Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) – 2,952.6 acres
- ? 545 Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts totaling 10, 039 acres

- ? Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) – 2,427 acres (+400 pending)
- ? Division of Waters – 291 acres (in and around Mountain Lake)
- ? Division of Trails and Waterways – 55 acres (water access sites)
- ? Division of Fisheries – 184 acres (Warren Lake and Bingham Lake)
- ? 14 Habitat Easements – 557.3 acres



Cottonwood County should actively monitor management plans for conservation areas to minimize the potential for land use conflicts. Wildlife management areas, for example, require isolation from residential development to preserve hunting opportunities. WMAs are attractive to housing development, since they provide open scenic areas and buffers from other development.

Conservation overlay zoning districts have been used in a variety of settings and may help Cottonwood County protect important wildlife areas that are threatened by development and other changes in land use. An overlay zoning districts could, for example, buffer a riparian corridor with a sliding setback for new structures along creeks and wetlands, protecting water from development and the development from flooding while leaving the underlying zoning district in place.

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C.5 Corridor Management

Transportation corridors provide plant and animal wildlife with a continuous string of habitat, in addition to (and often connecting) riparian corridors.

Rights-of-way surrounding the railroads within Cottonwood County provide the County with essential prairie remnants. This, in turn, provides a functional wildlife habitat. However, these corridors may be threatened by herbicide drift from agricultural and railroad maintenance practices. The use of chemicals from farming operations may blow onto the corridor and potentially kill beneficial wildlife habitat. Also, abandoned railroad ties left along the rail lines make the use of fire to keep up the vitality of the prairie an unsafe choice. This leads to the additional use of chemicals by the railroads to control unwanted weeds and further destruction of the prairie remnants may result. It would be in the county's best interest to work with the Union Pacific Railroad and the DNR in order to provide proper management of the railroad corridor.

Road corridors provide efficient, continuous habitat as well. Proper policies regarding allowable mowing and spraying dates, as well as proper vegetation management, will allow many different types of bird species time to nest. This will have positive effects on bird populations such as pheasants and mallard ducks living within these corridors.

Cottonwood County could also consider restoring native plant species such as prairie grasses and flowers within various road rights-of-way. The restoration of such native plant species will aid in the decreased need for weed control in these areas as well as provide considerable nesting cover for wildlife, such as pheasants.

D. Parks and Recreation

Cottonwood County owns and operates six County Parks. The municipalities of Jeffers, Mountain Lake, Storden, Westbrook, and Windom also own and operate parks within their boundaries. These parks, along with the County's undeveloped parks and conservation lands, provide a great deal of opportunity for recreation throughout Cottonwood County. Park and recreation areas provide recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, fishing, swimming, playing ball games, picnic areas, and bird watching. Cottonwood County has many good hunting areas, but hunting is not allowed in any of the parks.

Many residents are becoming more interested in active recreation. As well, new types of recreation become more or less popular with changes in residents' interests and demographic makeup. For example, the City of Mountain Lake has proposed the development of an ATV and off-road motorcycle park. The County's responsibility in regards to parks is to enhance the condition of natural resource-based parks and recreational activities in the County, and to identify ways to preserve these resources. The County parks and trails should be developed to complement the opportunities supported by other park and recreation providers in the region.

Implementing the Comprehensive Plan, the County should examine ways to further promote their parks and their respective resources. A system of coordinating the County Parks and the Municipal Parks together is also recommended. The yearly County information guide published by the Citizen Publishing Company is an aid in this.

D.1 County Park System

- ? **Dynamite Park.** A 3.06-acre park which became located within the city limits of Windom when the area was annexed. This park serves as a playground with an asphalt basketball court and an assortment of playground equipment. It also has an enclosed shelter house, picnic tables, and toilet facilities.
- ? **Mountain Park.** A historic park consisting of 24 acres. This park has a well, toilets, trails, some playground equipment, picnic tables, and a shelter house.
- ? **Pats Grove.** This is an 80-acre parcel and is a primitive park, which offers open, hiking trails and picnic areas in a natural setting.
- ? **Red Rock Falls Park.** A very picturesque 13-acre park with trails along the falls, a shelter house, picnic tables, playground equipment, and toilet facilities.
- ? **South Dutch Charley Park.** A 24 acre park with lots of trees, a well, a shelter house, picnic tables, some playground equipment, toilet facilities, and electrical service for 5 campers.
- ? **Talcot Lake County Park.** A 40 acre park along the shore of Talcot Lake in the Southwestern corner of the County. There is a swimming area with a sandy beach but is not staffed by a lifeguard. Development includes 53 camping sites with water and electricity, plus addition area for tenting. Facilities include bathroom facilities with showers for campers and swimmers, an enclosed shelter house, picnic tables, outdoor charcoal grills, a sand volleyball court, and a trail. A dump station for campers is also available at the park. The park is open from the first of May through the fall, maintenance personnel are available on a daily basis, and the entry station is staffed in the summer months. A seasonal pass is required at a minimal cost.

Talcot Lake is the largest lake in Cottonwood County and provides Northern Pike, Perch, Crappies, Walleye, and Bullheads for those interested in fishing, and the park has a fish cleaning house. A man-made fish pond is part of the campground for youngsters to try their luck at fishing. Fishing bait is available in nearby towns. There are fishing docks in the County Park, and along the south shore of the Lake in the DNR area. There is also a public boat launching pad in this area just east of the park. There is a very short trail in the park area, and no other developed trail. Wildlife such as deer, birds, geese, ducks, mink, etc. can be seen in the area. It is a good area for bird watching.

Talcot Lake itself is a Wildlife Management Area, and is therefore regulated by State of Minnesota rules. There are areas of the lake where no motorized boats are allowed; and the fall hunting season has specific lake rules. Jet skis are not allowed on any area of the lake. For winter fishing, a car or pickup is allowed on the ice, but no ATV's or Snowmobiles are allowed.

D.2 Outdoor Sports

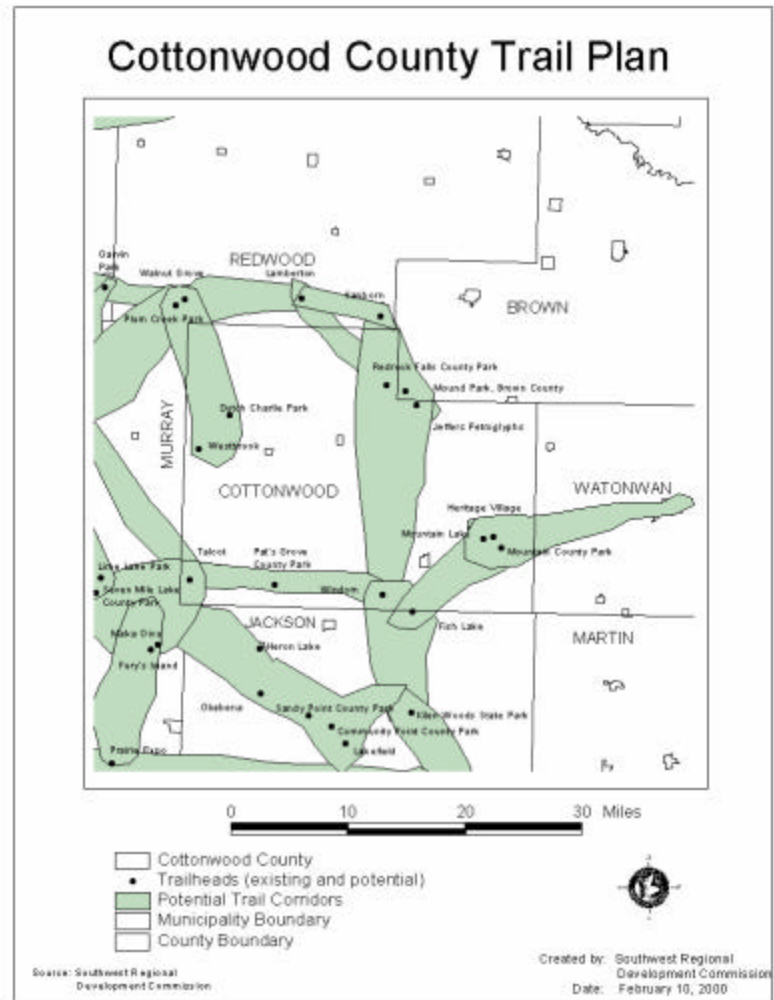


- ? **Canoeing.** The Des Moines River is a designated canoe route, with three canoe accesses in Windom.
- ? **Fishing.** Residents of Cottonwood County have several lakes for enjoying the challenge of summer fishing and winter fishing, and other water-related activities. Handicapped accessible fishing piers are located at Cottonwood Lake, Fish Lake, and Double Lake. Other lakes include: Bean Lake, Bingham Lake, Clear Lake, Eagle Lake, Long Lake, Mountain Lake, Oaks Lake, South Clear Lake, String Lakes, and Summit Lake. Sheldorf Creek is a DNR designated Trout Stream.
- ? **Golf.** The Windom County Club is tucked neatly in the valley along the banks of the Des Moines River on the northwest edge of Windom. The Mountain Lake Golf Course is located on the northwest edge of Mountain Lake. The Rolling Hills Golf Course (sometimes referred to as the Westbrook Golf Course) is actually in Murray County, a few miles west of Westbrook.
- ? **Gun Club.** The Sun Valley Gun Club is located northwest of Windom and is known for its many trap-shooting activities, but also has an NRA-approved rifle range and pistol range. There is also a gun club in the Mountain Lake area.
- ? **Windom Arena.** A 50,000 square foot multi-purpose facility built in 1976 offering year-round recreation, including racquetball courts; wallyball; indoor batting cage and golf driving range; two ice rings for hockey and figures skating; horse shows; auto shows; auctions; and special county fair events.
- ? **Swimming.** Mountain Lake has an indoor swimming pool at the school. The cities of Westbrook and Windom have outdoor swimming pools. There is a nice beach at Cottonwood Lake and at Talcot Lake, but are not staffed with a lifeguard. Bean Lake is known for its nice sand bottom.

D.3 Trails

The *Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan* inventoried existing trails in Cottonwood County in 1999. Potential trail heads were identified as well as potential trail corridors. Recreational trailheads (beginning or ending places for trails) in Cottonwood County include: Dutch Charlie County Park, Fish Lake, Heritage Village in Mountain Lake, Jeffers Petroglyphs, Mountain Lake (lake), Mountain County Park, Red Rock Falls County Park, Talcot County Park, Westbrook, Windom, and Mound Park in Brown County.

Cottonwood County has a well-established network of snowmobile trails. While pedestrian and bicycle trails are beneficial to residential health and safety, they are often set at a lower funding priority level, in favor of essential services. Trail development will be considered as funding opportunities become available.



- ? **Mountain Lake Trail.** The walking and bicycling Mountain Lake trail has been a work in progress since the mid 90's. With available monies from the Lake Commission and currently from a DNR Trails Grant, the trail is advancing toward completion. Beginning in LAWCON Park on the southeast corner of the Lake, the trail follows along the east and north shorelines. The wetland area at the west end of the Lake is traversed with a raised boardwalk. The finished trail currently ends at the DNR boat landing on the southwest corner of the lake. The proposed last section will finish the four-mile loop back to LAWCON Park.
- ? **Red Rock Falls County Park Trail.** This grass-walking path is less than one mile and runs throughout the County Park. The path goes by the Falls, picnic area, and playground equipment.
- ? **Mound Creek Park, Brown County Trail.** This grass-walking trail connects the lake with the disc golf course.
- ? **Dutch Charlie County Park Trail.** This grass-walking path is less than one mile and connects all the campsites within the park. The trail goes over a little bridge and all throughout the park.
- ? **Jeffers Petroglyphs Trail.** This is a 1.75-mile gravel/grass-walking path. The trail goes by the Petroglyphs and Virgin Prairie.

- ? **Talcot Lake County Park Trail.** This grass and sand walking path connects the campsites with the beach. The trail goes by a small pond and follows the beach of Talcot Lake.
- ? **Witt Memorial Park in Windom.** Witt Memorial Park sports a roller-blading court, spearheaded by Windom Hockey Association Boosters in 1995 and was completed in 1997. It includes a 60 by 175 foot cement pad and sideboards.
- ? **Snowmobile Trails.** The Big Bend Snow Riders Club, local, county, and state officials have worked with area farmers and landowners to develop groomed snowmobile trails for the enjoyment of snowmobile enthusiasts. The Windom Area Chamber of Commerce provides information on the snowmobile trail. There are 125 miles of County and Grants in Aid snowmobile trails in Cottonwood County (1999 DNR data).
- ? **Proposed Windom Municipal Recreation Area trail.** Windom plans to develop 3 miles of paved trail that will connect two city parks, the Community Center and several residential areas. The paved trail will be used for walking, bicycling, and roller-blading within the recreation area. Landscaping such as wildflowers and natural prairie vegetation and trees would be planted along the trails. Rest areas with park benches would be scattered throughout the trail system. A gravel parking lot would be built along the east side of the project.

Potential bicycle and pedestrian corridors identified in the Region Plan for Cottonwood County include:

- ? Westbrook North to Walnut Grove
- ? Jeffers Petroglyphs to Red Rock Falls County Park
- ? Windom to Sanborn to include Jeffers Petroglyphs and Red Rock Dells
- ? Mountain Lake East to St. James
- ? Mountain Lake to Mountain Park and South to Fish Lake
- ? Windom to Fish Lake to Kilen Woods State Park
- ? Windom to Talcot Lake area
- ? Jeffers Petroglyphs and Red Rock Falls to Lamberton
- ? Windom Municipal Recreation Area Trail

VI. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The economic base of a community sets the trend for population, housing, and commercial development, as well as demand for parks, recreation and cultural activities. The economic base consists of those certain enterprises which mobilize resources and knowledge to produce goods and services, which can be sold for income outside of the community. The income generated by base industries then creates retail demand which multiplies within the community.

Cottonwood County is representative of the economy of rural Southwestern Minnesota. While Agriculture remains the mainstay of our economic base, a strong local manufacturing sector provides a springboard for future diversification. However, low wages pose a challenge to retaining a skilled and creative workforce going into the future.

A. Issues Summary

- ? More reliant on Manufacturing and Health Services
- ? Gap in employment in Financial and Professional Services
- ? Unemployment rate higher than regional average
- ? Need to balance supply and demand of labor, wages and employment
- ? Infrastructure is required to be prepared for future opportunities

A.1 Economic Development Strengths, Challenges and Future Direction

The County Committee identified economic development issues and concerns in Cottonwood County.

Economic Development Strengths

- ? Growing labor force
- ? Strong manufacturing base
- ? Fertile farmland
- ? Pro-growth local development attitude & incentives
- ? Affordable cost of living

Economic Development Challenges

- ? Low wages and declining population
- ? The delayed completion of 4-lane sections of Highway 60
- ? Vulnerability to business cycles of large manufacturers

Future of Economic Development

- ? Diversify with renewable and value-added industries
- ? Continued growth of large farms
- ? Increasing number of small farms
- ? Monitor issues with large-scale livestock facilities
- ? May be housing opportunities for out-of-county commuters

B. Employment and Income

The number of Cottonwood County residents participating in the labor force—those actively working or seeking work—has contracted and expanded in recent years, even while the total county population has gone down. Having more people working out of a smaller total population is common in some rural communities, as farmers and second-income family members seek more regular employment. Also, since there are fewer job opportunities for residents, many rural residents accept jobs that require a skill or education level below what they have obtained, and take a job for less pay or commute a further distance to find a good job match. Cottonwood County's average unemployment rate has improved over years past, yet is still higher than the regional average for Southwestern Minnesota

**Figure 6-1: Labor Force
By Place of Residence**

Cottonwood County	1993	1998	2003
Labor Force	6,081	5,633	6,415
Employment	5,707	5,359	6,114
Unemployment Rate	6.2%	4.9%	4.7%
Development Region 8*	1993	1998	2003
Labor Force	61,710	63,448	65,523
Employment	58,899	61,409	62,818
Unemployment Rate	4.6%	3.2%	4.1%
* Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, Pipestone, Murray, Cottonwood, Rock, Nobles, Jackson counties			
Source: MDEED LAUS, SWRDC Historical Data			

B.1. Labor Force Assessment

In 2001, Cottonwood County participated in a Labor Force Assessment conducted by the Minnesota Department of Economic Security (now Dept of Employment and Economic Development, DEED) and the Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC). The survey was intended to serve as a tool to determine gaps between the supply and demand of workers in the region. There were two components to the study: employer perspective and the perspective of area residents. There were 365 residents, age 16 or older, in Cottonwood County randomly selected and interviewed by phone.

Under employed workers represent another potential pool of labor. The survey information further indicated a significant number of employed part-time workers would work more hours if offered. Retraining will be necessary in many cases if underemployed or non-working individuals are to move to higher paying or high-demand occupations. Over half of total respondents indicated they would seek further training if it meant getting a better job.

? Specific details from the survey:

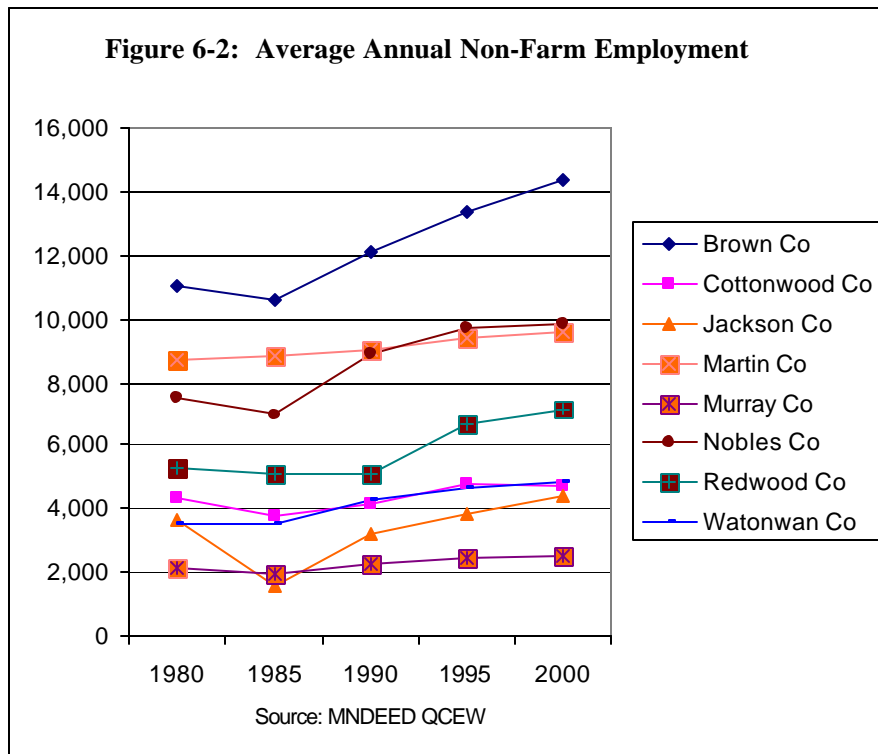
The largest portion of workers (82%) reported working full time (35 or more hours per week). Eighty-six percent were employed by a single employer. Employment tenure ranged from less than one year to over 50 years. The median employment tenure for primary jobs in the County was 9 years, and the average employment tenure was 13 years. Thirty percent of the respondents reported working at their primary jobs for 3 years or less and 33% reported working at their primary jobs for 16 year or more.

The largest portion of workers reported an annual pre-tax salary of \$20,000 to \$30,000 at their primary job, assuming a 40 hour work week.

Workforce demographics identified 20% with less than high school diploma, 34% with diploma, 20% with some college, 7% with associate degree and 19% with a bachelor's degree or higher.

B.2. Employment

Regular surveys of Cottonwood County employers by Minnesota DEED show a similar pattern of job loss and gain. The mid-1980s were a hard time for the entire region, although Cottonwood County was spared the drastic job losses of, for example, Jackson County to the south.



DEED's Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages survey (QCEW, also known as the ES-202 series) tracks jobs in the unemployment insurance system. As DEED explains, "The Unemployment Insurance system covers about 97 percent of Minnesota employment. Workers and jobs excluded from these statistics include proprietors and the self-employed, railroad workers, family farm workers, full-time students working for their school, elected government officials, insurance and real estate salespeople, and others who

work only on a commission basis. Employment at federal government establishments is covered by the QCEW program."

In the most recent year available for Cottonwood County, 165 people were counted at 10 establishments in the Natural Resources category (including crop and animal production), 98 of these on 5 covered hog farms. (See Figure 6-3 at right.) Twenty-one manufacturers employ about 1,400 people while 43 covered establishments employed 1,325 people in education and health services, including 447 in schools and 537 in nursing and residential care facilities. The other large employer was trade (wholesale and retail), transportation and utilities with just over 1,100 jobs in 121 establishments.

Figure 6-3: Non-Farm Employment By Industry, 2003

	Cottonwood	Local Share	MN	State Share
Natural Resources	165	3%	21,034	1%
Construction	239	5%	131,945	5%
Manufacturing	1,417	27%	344,417	13%
Trade, Transport & Utilities	1,104	21%	542,048	21%
Information	65	1%	64,304	2%
Financial Activities	157	3%	174,948	7%
Professional Services	67	1%	296,945	12%
Education & Health	1,325	25%	547,748	21%
Leisure & Hospitality	265	5%	248,661	10%
Other Services	127	2%	87,627	3%
Public Admin	293	6%	116,312	5%
Total	5,223		2,575,989	

Source: MNDEED QCEW

Compared to the state of Minnesota overall, Cottonwood County has a much stronger manufacturing base, with twice the state-wide average of local employment in that sector. There are also three times as

many local jobs in nursing and residential care as the state average. On the down side, there are many fewer jobs in information, finance and professional services.

With a local assembly facility of the Toro Company, established in 1951, and the recently expanded facility of PM Windom, it should not be surprising that Cottonwood County has strong manufacturing employment. While this large base provides benefits, it also opens a window of vulnerability to industry-specific economic ebbs and flows.

Figure 6-4: Major Employers in Cottonwood County

Company	Product or Service	Employees*
Toro Co	Lawn and Garden Equipment	660
PM Windom	Animal Slaughtering & Processing	500
Windom Public Schools ISD #177	Elementary & Secondary Schools	180
Sogge Memorial Good Samaritan	Nursing Care Facilities	170
Cottonwood County	Government Services	130
Westbrook/Walnut Grove ISD#2898	Elementary & Secondary Schools	120
Mountain Lake Public Schools	Elementary & Secondary Schools	110
Windom Area Hospital	General Medical & Surgical Hospitals	100
Good Samaritan Village/Mt Lake	Nursing Care Facility	100
Fortune Transportation	Local Trucking Without Storage	80
Home for Creative Living	Residential Services for People with disabilities	75
Balzer, Inc	Agriculture, Construction & Mining Machine Mfg.	65
Gordy's Foods	Retail	65
MN Department of Transportation	Government Services	65
Westbrook Good Samaritan	Nursing Care Facility	65
Westbrook Health Center	Hospital & Medical Center	55
Preferred Residential Lifestyles	Residential Services for People with Disabilities	55
Bargen, Inc	Highway, Street & Bridge Construction	50
Eventide Home/Mt Lake	Nursing Care Facilities	50
Fast Distributing	General Manufacturing	50
Country Pride Services Coop	Agricultural Services	50
McDonalds	Eating Places	50
Hy-Vee Food Stores	Retail	45
City of Windom	Government Services	45
Ethanol 2000	Fuel Plant	40
Conestoga Furniture	Furniture & Cabinet Mfg.	35
Protient	Dairy Product Manufacturing	35
Schwalbach Ace Hardware	Retail	30
Cottonwood-Jackson Health Svc	Government Services	30
Hiebert Greenhouses	Greenhouse, Nursery & Floriculture Production	30
Kennel-Aire Manufacturing Co.	Spring & Wire Product Manufacturing	30
* Full-Time Equivalent		
Source: MN DEED, Windom EDC, SWRDC		

Figure 6-5: Projected Employment in Southwestern Minnesota

	2000-2010 Employment Change	Percent Change
Agriculture & Forestry	147	1%
Ag Services	456	42%
Mining	13	3%
Construction	1,079	14%
Manufacturing	395	1%
Rubber & Misc. Plastic Products	(75)	-5%
Electronic Equipment	(881)	-12%
Transport & Communication	686	8%
Wholesale Trade	1,152	11%
Retail Trade	2,970	10%
Apparel & Accessory Stores	(89)	-12%
Finance, Insurance & Real Estate	576	9%
Nondepository Credit Institutions	204	31%
Services	9,427	16%
Business Services	2,052	52%
Misc. Repair Services	192	37%
Amusement & Recreation	1,038	35%
Engineering, Accounting, etc.	747	34%
Social Services	2,103	34%
Educational Services	(348)	-2%
Motion Pictures	(31)	-9%
Private Households	(146)	-36%
Public Administration	37	0%
Total All Industries	17,673	8%

Source: MDEED Employment Outlook

Minnesota DEED develops projections for future employment by examining trends in the local and national economies. These projections rely heavily on the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) nation-wide occupational estimates. For the broad area of Southwestern Minnesota (Planning Regions 6W, 8 and 9, mostly counties below the Minnesota River) DEED projects modest job growth in the current decade, although at 8% it is below the state-wide average of 14%. Services are predicted to be the fastest growing industries such as business services, agricultural services (veterinarians, land-scaping), amusement and recreation, engineering and architecture, and residential care.

B.3. Income and Wages

The long form of the decennial U.S. Census surveys income of all residents in the year prior to the census. Per Capita Income (PCI) is measured by dividing total income reported by the number of people living in an area. Minnesota's PCI for 1999 was reported to be \$23,198, while Cottonwood County's PCI was \$16,647.

The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages survey (QCEW), which tracks jobs in the unemployment insurance system,

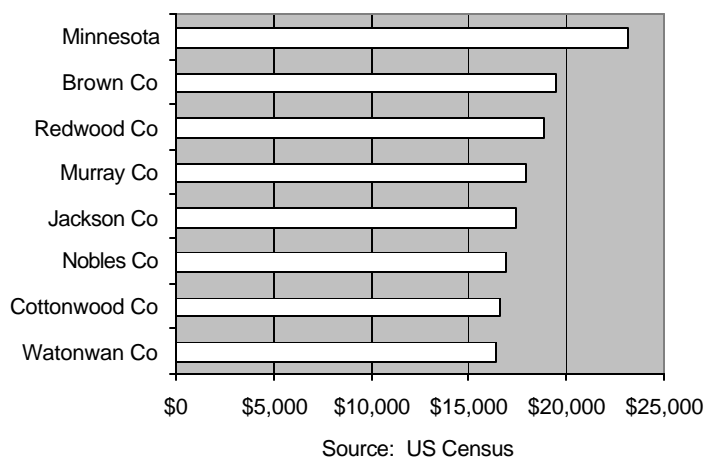
Figure 6-6: Per Capita Income, 1999

Figure 6-7: Annual Non-Farm Wages by Industry, 2003

	Cottonwood	Local Share	MN	State Share
Natural Resources	2,101,000	2%	649,174,000	1%
Construction	7,745,000	8%	5,987,184,000	6%
Manufacturing	20,707,000	20%	16,061,280,000	16%
Trade, Transport & Utilities	23,112,000	23%	18,776,458,000	19%
Information	2,036,000	2%	3,092,304,000	3%
Financial Activities	4,384,000	4%	10,111,099,000	10%
Professional Services	6,029,000	6%	14,787,403,000	15%
Education & Health	26,300,000	26%	19,606,727,000	20%
Leisure & Hospitality	1,876,000	2%	3,677,085,000	4%
Other Services	1,841,000	2%	2,054,848,000	2%
Public Admin	5,984,000	6%	4,647,838,000	5%
Total	\$102,115,000		\$99,451,399,000	

Source: MN CQEW

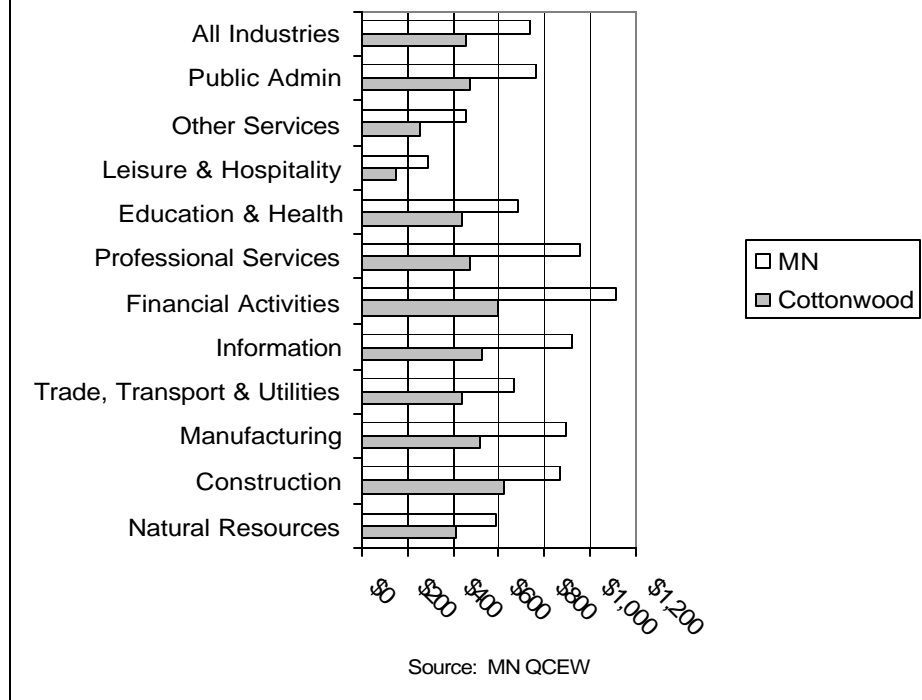
also tracks wages paid. As with the number of employees in each industry, covered wages disproportionately come from Education & Health; Trade, Transport & Utilities; and Manufacturing, while lagging in its share of wages in Financial Activities and Professional Services. Total annual income from

wages received in Cottonwood County also reflects both the lower average wages as well as the mix of employment in different industries. The 13% of Minnesota employees who work in the manufacturing sector bring home 16% of all wages in the state. Yet the 27% of local employees in manufacturing only see 20% of total wages.

A look at average weekly wages is insightful.

Cottonwood County ranked below the state in every industry, with an average \$452 weekly wage. This is 39% lower than the \$742 average weekly wage in Minnesota overall. Professional services see the largest gap at 51% of the state wage. Only Natural Resources (mostly hog farm labor) and Construction have average wages at less than a 1/3

discount of the state average. While it is difficult to balance the needs of employers and employees, the significant gap in wages is and will be a continuing challenge to retaining a skilled and creative workforce into the future.

Figure 6-8: Average Weekly Wages by Industry

Source: MN CQEW

B.4. Commuting

Minnesota DEED's 2001 Labor Force Assessment also identified commuting patterns. Eighty percent of Cottonwood County respondents indicated that they work within the county. Time spent commuting to

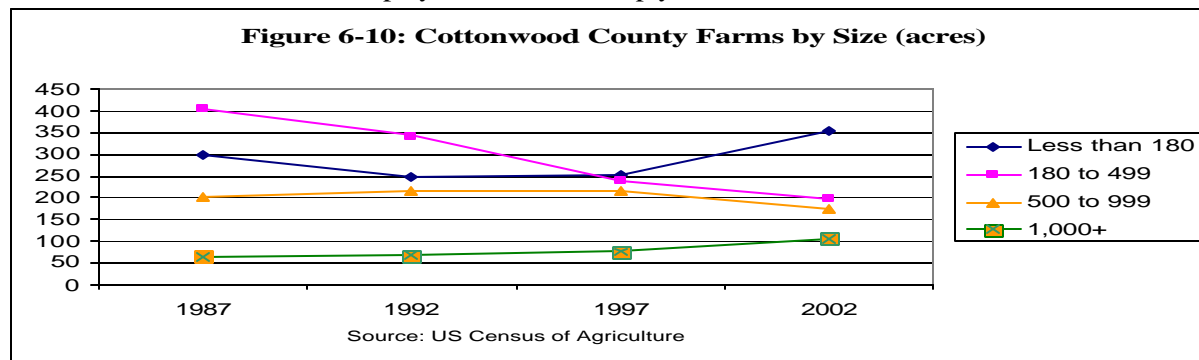
work time was also recorded: 80% of the respondents reported a 0 to 15 minute commute, 13% at 16 to 30 minutes, 4% at 31 to 45 minutes, and 3% reported traveling 46 minutes or more to work.

The Labor Force Assessment survey data is similar to the 2000 US Census journey-to-work data, where the average commute to work was 14 minutes, an increase of 3 minutes from the 1990 Census reports. With the location of Windom and Mountain Lake on a state trunk highway not far from county lines, it should not be surprising that more people commute in to Cottonwood County each day than drive out to find work. This may indicate opportunities for housing closer to people's place of work, especially if gasoline prices continue to become more expensive.

Figure 6-9: Cottonwood County Commuting, 2000					
Where Residents Drove to Work			Where Cottonwood Co Workers Reside		
Cottonwood Co.	4,825	83%	Cottonwood Co.	4,825	78%
Jackson Co.	218	4%	Jackson Co.	527	9%
Redwood Co.	160	3%	Watsonwan Co.	225	4%
Nobles Co.	130	2%	Murray Co.	179	3%
Brown Co.	102	2%	Nobles Co.	85	1%
Watsonwan Co.	78	1%	Redwood Co.	68	1%
Murray Co.	60	1%	Martin Co.	51	1%
Lyon Co.	50	1%	Brown Co.	47	1%
Other	176	3%	Other	182	3%
Source: US Census					

C. Agriculture

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) surveyed America's farmers for the 2002 Census of Agriculture. Cottonwood County's results mirror trends in the national agricultural economy. As is typically seen outside urbanizing metropolitan areas, the total land in farms has remained fairly stable even as the total number of farms falls. There are more larger farms, and more smaller farms, as the operators in the middle are squeezed on both sides. Although 72% of respondents listed Farming as their primary occupation, an increasing number are seeking work off-farm. This may be to even out the ebb and flow of crop cycles, or often simply for access to affordable health insurance.



A "farm" is defined by the Census of Agriculture as "any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. The \$1,000 value is not adjusted for inflation." In 1997 and 2002, USDA also counted as farms operations receiving \$1,000 or more on Federal crop payments. The Ag Census is a survey (rather than a 100% count like the decennial census of population) and statistical adjustments may affect county-level results.

The price of farm land is an indicator of the health of the local ag economy. The University of Minnesota Extension Service has tracked recorded, arms-length bare land sales in Southwestern Minnesota, excluding buildings and other improvements. In the last 10 years, Cottonwood County's average price paid per acre for total tracts (not just tillable acres) has ranged from a low of \$1,141 in 1998 to \$1,854 in 2004. Cottonwood

County's 2004 sales ranged from a high of \$2,456 to \$1,125. In the region, 2004 average prices ranged from \$1,172 in Lincoln County to \$2,476 in Martin County.

C.1 Livestock

Local farms are becoming more specialized as they become larger. Just less than one in four Cottonwood County farms has cattle (beef or milk cows), down from 1/3 in the late 1980s. After a drop by half in the 1990s, only a handful of dairy farms remain. The total number of cattle is also down by over 20% from the 1980s. In 1987, 30% of local farms raised hogs. In 2002 only 10% raised hogs, yet the total number of hogs and pigs has grown by 80%.

C.2 Crops

Two-thirds of Cottonwood County farms grow corn for grain, and a similar number grow soybeans. In 1987, over 80% of local farms grew these crops. About one-quarter of farms now grow hay for forage, down from one-third.

Figure 6-11:

Agriculture in Cottonwood County	1987	1992	1997	2002
Farms (number)	970	876	784	832
Land in farms (acres)	377,506	374,920	368,346	374,717
Total Harvested cropland (acres)	276,326	312,520	316,894	326,562
Land in farms - Average size of farm (acres)	389	428	470	450
Farms by size - 1 to 9 acres	65	48	28	47
Farms by size - 10 to 49 acres	52	58	62	134
Farms by size - 50 to 179 acres	184	144	163	174
Farms by size - 180 to 499 acres	405	343	241	198
Farms by size - 500 to 999 acres	202	216	215	174
Farms by size - 1,000 acres or more	62	67	75	105
Operator's Primary Occupation - Farming	810	708	575	602
Operator's Primary Occupation - Other	160	168	209	230
Principal Operator working off-farm any	372	306	353	441
Farms with Cattle	316	284	221	192
Cattle and calves on farms	32,828	35,194	29,375	25,490
Farms with Milk Cows	70	52	23	16
Milk Cows on farms	3,041	2,385	1,562	1,194
Farms with Hogs	287	255	132	80
Hog and pigs on farms	100,534	103,092	138,938	183,550
Farms with Sheep	56	33	34	37
Sheep and lambs on farms	3,498	2,625	2,888	3,817
Farms growing Corn for grain	817	742	632	550
Acres of Corn harvested for grain	110,696	153,348	149,057	161,862
Bushels of Corn harvested for grain	13,539,125	18,559,993	18,464,071	23,638,267
Farms growing Soybeans	818	729	621	542
Acres of Soybeans harvested	146,418	148,913	160,915	152,532
Bushels of Soybeans harvested	5,700,633	5,444,844	6,359,457	7,022,231
Farms growing Forage-Hay	338	281	195	193
Acres of Forage-Hay harvested	9,774	7,855	5,269	6,537
Tons (dry) Forage-Hay harvested	29,446	26,393	12,588	20,723

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture

D. Diversification Opportunities

In years gone by, public officials and private economic development organizations typically focused on recruiting industry. Today, local leaders are more broadly challenged to create attractive and functional communities that provide the resources necessary for entrepreneurs creating new wealth and jobs. Once we understand the economic base of our community, we can then make better decisions about preparing for the future.

The City of Windom and the City of Mountain Lake employ full-time economic development professionals, and both participate in the State of Minnesota's Jobs Opportunities Building Zones (JOBZ) tax incentive program and provide loan funds to qualifying businesses. SRDC facilitates enterprise creation and expansion across Development Region 8, and offers a revolving loan fund for new job creation. Communities can also draw on state-wide expertise from the DEED. In 2004, DEED targeted a number of industries for Southwestern Minnesota, including:

- ? Crop & Animal Production
- ? Utilities
- ? Heavy & Civil Engineering Construction
- ? Food Manufacturing
- ? Wood Product Manufacturing
- ? Chemical Manufacturing
- ? Machinery Manufacturing
- ? Computer & Electronic Product Manufacturing
- ? Transportation Equipment Manufacturing
- ? Merchant Wholesalers, Durable & Non-Durable Goods
- ? Non-store Retailers
- ? Truck Transportation
- ? Credit Intermediation & Related Activity
- ? Educational Services
- ? Ambulatory Health Care Services
- ? Hospitals
- ? Nursing & Residential Care Facilities
- ? Social Assistance

D.1. Manufacturing

Cottonwood County should be prepared for opportunities from increasing manufacturing activity along Minnesota Trunk Highway 60, although there is great concern that the delay completing Highway 60 will discourage new growth. Although some industry prefers greenfield locations in the countryside, towns and cities are usually better able to provide urban services such as water, sewer, paved streets and emergency services—police, fire, ambulance. Cottonwood County will need to work closely with local municipalities to coordinate the location of future infrastructure to be able to respond to demands for new growth and development.

D.2. Renewable Energy

In the continuing environment of energy insecurity—between concerns for resource depletion at home and the global war on terror abroad—Cottonwood County has opportunities to take some control of its own energy destiny. An expanding number of rural communities are turning to renewable energy as an alternative to traditional fossil fuels.

- ? **Ethanol and Bio-diesel** are becoming a fuel of choice in many areas, to reduce auto air emissions and to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. E-85, an 85% ethanol product for flexible fuel vehicles, is being offered in many more convenient locations. Locally, Ethanol 2000 was built in 1997 at Bingham Lake. The facility, recently expanded to 30 million gallons production capacity, consumes 11 million bushels of corn and provides 93,500 tons of livestock feed annually. These types of facilities require infrastructure such as clean water, wastewater treatment, heavy-weight roads and rail sidings.
- ? **Wind Power** production offers to help diversify the economy of Cottonwood County. This industry has the potential to create jobs, increase the tax base, and provide income for local landowners. The direct effects of wind power generation are seen through wages and salaries received through the local energy-producing industry, the easement payment made to landowners, property taxes assessed on wind generation sites, and revenue from the production of electricity. The benefits to locally owned cooperatives (who distribute the newly generated electricity) will also increase the public's overall benefit. Setbacks and other permit requirements require careful consideration if wind power production is to be a good neighbor.

D.3 Tourism

Some areas in southwest Minnesota, especially those located near lakes or rivers, are seeing new residential development. Many of these areas are beginning to lose their “vacation area only” image and are attracting new “year-round” arrivals from larger neighboring communities and metropolitan areas. Hunting and fishing are also historic tourism uses in Cottonwood County—deer, ducks, geese, and pheasant are attractive to metro sportsmen as well as locals. Anecdotal evidence suggests that as baby boomers increase their discretionary income and pressures increase on public lands, more recreational users are looking at purchasing private land for hunting and fishing. With the County's location on a prime corridor between the Twin Cities and I-90, there is also some concern that delays completing State Highway 60 will discourage economic benefits of both destination and pass-through traffic in the area.

VII. HOUSING

Housing supply and demand depends on many factors outside of local control, growing and contracting with trends in the national and regional economies. Most housing is located within the County's cities, close to urban services, while the number of active farmsteads decreases as farms grow larger and consolidate operations. While most detailed census information is only available for the county as a whole, national trends show continuing interest in rural home sites, especially for recreational and lifestyle amenities.

A. Issues Summary

- ? Cities provide over 70% of housing units
- ? The total number of housing units in the county declined 2% from 1990 to 2000
- ? Every township except one had a net loss in housing units
- ? There was growth in the number of housing units in duplexes, 3-4 unit and 20+ unit structures
- ? Housing costs are fairly stable
- ? Vacancy rates are low in almost all areas
- ? Farmsteads are being converted to other uses

A.1 Housing Strengths, Challenges and Future Direction

The County Committee identified Housing concerns in Cottonwood County.

Housing Strengths

- ? Affordable housing
- ? Few properties sitting vacant
- ? Growing labor force indicates potential demand for housing

Housing Challenges

- ? Lack of appreciation in home values
- ? Aging housing stock
- ? Conversion of farmsteads to non-farm uses

Future of Housing

- ? Most housing will be provided within cities where urban services are provided
- ? Existing homes will be maintained and improved
- ? Opportunities for limited rural non-farm housing will exist where proper infrastructure is available.

B. Profile of Housing

The total number of housing units in Cottonwood County (both within incorporated and unincorporated areas) declined by 2.2% from 1990 to 2000. Over 70% of the county's housing units are located in incorporated cities. The City of Windom, with 39% of the county's housing, added housing units. However, the largest portion of the City's gain was realized from annexations of existing housing units in Great Bend Township, primarily in the River Road and Cottonwood Lake areas. All towns except Mountain Lake Township had a net decrease in housing units. Even with the Windom annexations, Great Bend Township has the largest number of housing units under the direct jurisdiction (the unincorporated townships) of Cottonwood County.

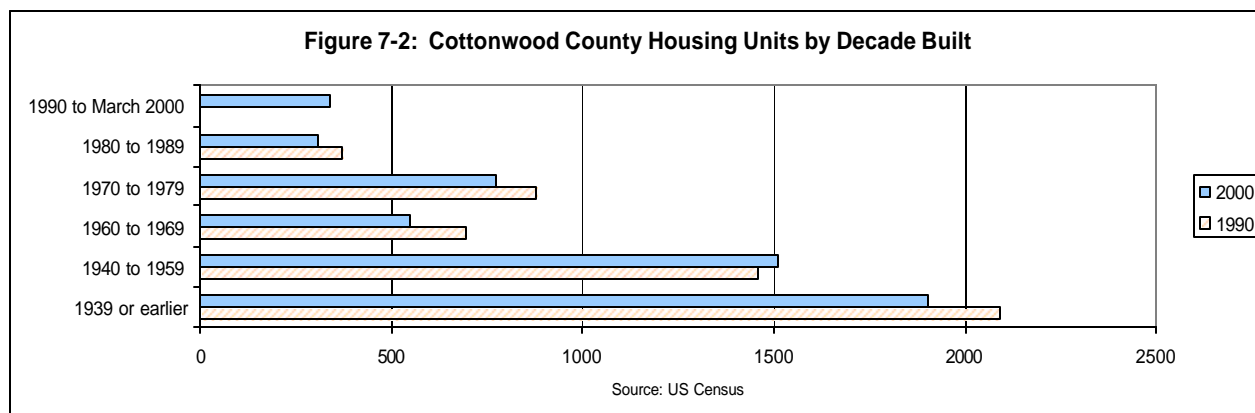
While the 1980s were a slow period for the local economy, the 1990s were just as slow for housing with only 335 new units reported to have been built between 1990 and 2000. Most housing units (56%) are heated with utility gas, with 23% using LP gas, 12% fuel oil and 7% electricity.

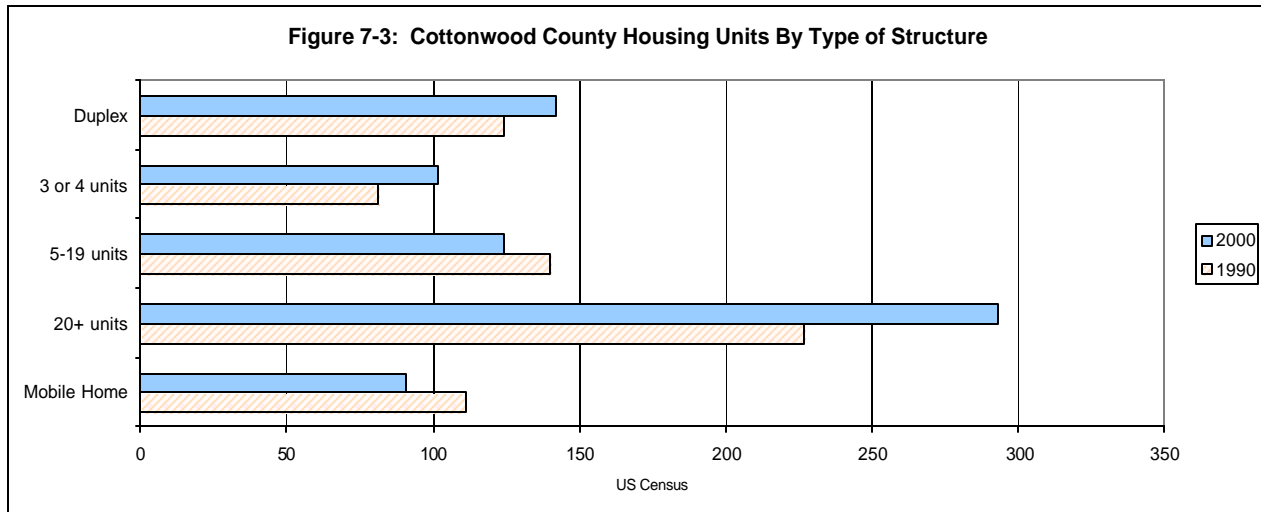
Figure 7-1: Housing Units, 2000

	Number Housing Units	Homeowner Vacancy Rate	Change in Housing Units From 1990
Amboy township	79	0	(10)
Amo township	63	0	(28)
Ann township	84	1.4	(11)
Bingham Lake city	65	5.4	(1)
Carson township	125	1.9	(1)
Comfrey city	6	0	4
Dale township	70	1.8	(4)
Delton township	58	0	(10)
Germantown township	92	7.8	(4)
Great Bend township	140	2.7	(126)#
Highwater township	74	3.4	(10)
Jeffers city	200	1.9	1
Lakeside township	102	1.2	(3)
Midway township	112	1.1	(5)
Mountain Lake city	896	1.6	13
Mountain Lake township	101	0	3
Rose Hill township	76	1.6	(7)
Selma township	90	0	(18)
Southbrook township	43	2.9	(9)
Springfield township	70	3.9	(13)
Storden city	132	5.2	(5)
Storden township	91	1.5	(9)
Westbrook city	412	5	(33)
Westbrook township	106	0	(10)
Windom city	2089	3.7	167#
Cottonwood County Total	5376	2.8	(119)

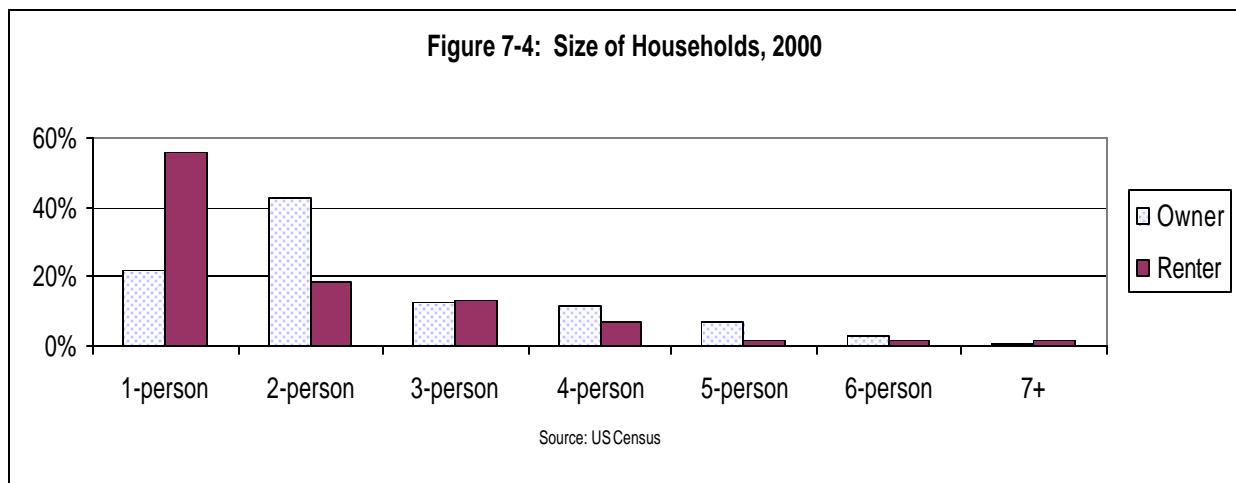
The City of Windom annexed existing housing units from Great Bend Township between 1990 and 2000.
Source: US Census of Housing 2000

Figure 7-2: Cottonwood County Housing Units by Decade Built





Eighty-six percent of all local housing units are single family dwellings. Almost all multi-family housing units are located within the municipalities. Aside from large congregate housing complexes—often assisted living or skilled care facilities—the makeup of housing has shifted away from mobile homes and mid-size apartment complexes to favor duplexes and 3-4 unit buildings. Consistent with the population demographics, the largest number of households consist of just one or two persons.

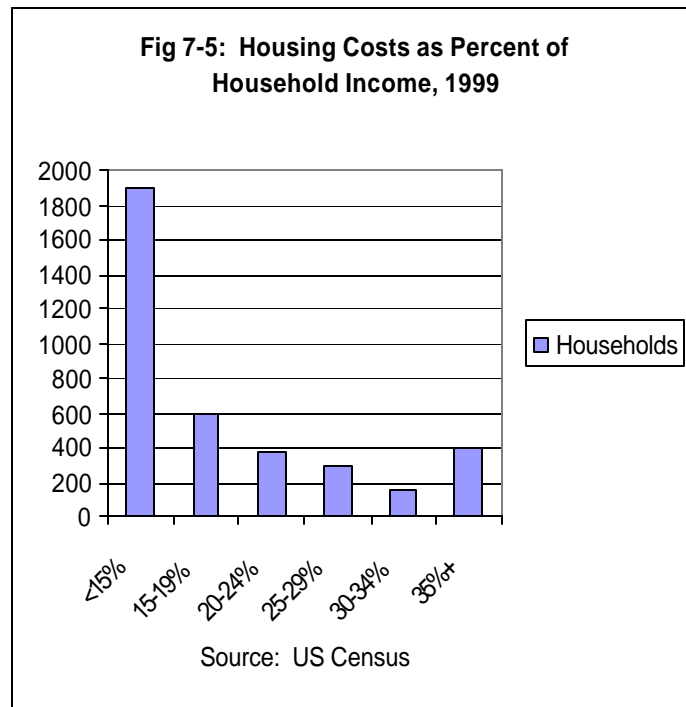


New housing does continue to be built in the county. Since 2000, 37 permits have been issued by the County Zoning Office for new homes and 97 permits issued for home additions in the unincorporated portions of Cottonwood County. The Windom EDA has been involved in development of River Bluff Estates Subdivision in that city, with assistance from the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership. SWMHP, officed in Slayton, offers comprehensive services in support of housing rehabilitation and new development, including housing planning, construction management, program administration, project fiscal management, lending, grant writing, marketing, education, and mortgage counseling. Since forming in 1992, SWMHP has undertaken projects in Westbrook, Storden, Jeffers, Comfrey, Windom and Mountain Lake. Other groups, such as Western Community Action (a non-profit organization with offices in Marshall & Jackson), also work with communities on housing issues in Cottonwood County.

B.1 Housing Costs

Housing costs are fairly stable across the region. Typically, housing is considered “affordable” when they are in a safe and sanitary condition and do not require more than 30% of a household’s annual income. More than half of all households in Cottonwood County reported spending less than 15% of their 1999 income on housing costs and over 50% of households that occupy their own homes reporting not having a mortgage. (It may be that some of these housing units are financed with agricultural notes as part of a farming operation.) The Minnesota State Demographic Center found, in an analysis of Minnesota Dept. of Revenue sales data, that the median sales price of existing housing units in Cottonwood County rose from \$52,150 in 2000-2001 to \$56,268 in 2002-2003, a modest 8% change. The

statewide median sales price was \$169,900 in 2003, over a 21% rise in the same period. In the region, median sales prices ranged from \$54,000 in Jackson County to \$87,650 in Brown County, with appreciation from on 5% in Jackson County to over 20% in Redwood County. While lower costs provide for more affordable housing, the lack of appreciation tends to discourage people from investing and building new homes anywhere in Southwestern Minnesota.



C. The Character of Rural Housing

Rural housing units include farmsteads, non-farm homes and home occupations, and seasonal cottages or lakeshore homes, although Cottonwood County has comparatively few lakes to attract seasonal homebuyers. The unincorporated community of Delft also accounts for housing units in Carson Township. Former farmsteads, as was noted even in the 1970 *Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan*, are typically occupied by retired farmers, or simply enjoyed by people who work in the urban areas and prefer the country lifestyle. In 1997, University of Minnesota geographers Prof. John Fraser Hart and student Lisa Rainey studied farmsteads in Carson Township (“Redundant Farmsteads in Minnesota”, *CURA Reporter* September 1998). They found that about 1/3 of occupied farmsteads in the township were home to full-time farmers and 11% were occupied by part-time farmers, most with off-farm jobs. Of the non-farm farmsteads, many were still home to former farmers now working in town, with a few places occupied by families which had moved from town for the country location.

Isolated farmsteads may not necessarily be appropriate for non-farm residential use. Some are located along less accessible township roads or in environmentally sensitive areas. For many it simply may not be cost-effective to update utilities and septic systems to modern standards. However, few townships saw substantial vacancy rates for owner-occupied units in 2000. Generally, a 5% vacancy rate is considered normal to account for homeowner turnover, renovations, etc. Only Germantown Township, just south of Sanborn, exceeded this level. As Hart and Rainey surmised, it appears that property owners have been actively converting old farmsteads to tillable acres rather than let the old homes and barns sit vacant.

Conversion of rural farmsteads to farmland is of mixed public benefit. It does encourage active use of the land, and discourages potential vandalism and misuse of abandoned property, which has become even more of a problem with the national growth of clandestine drug manufacturing in rural areas. However, it also decreases the township tax base and removes units from the pool of available housing. The lower tax base provides fewer resources for public services in rural areas, such as maintenance of local roads. Less available housing also discourages people from locating in the County, accelerating the historical downward spiral of population loss.



USDA Photography

VIII. LAND USE

The use of land has been a primary concern of government from the original U.S. Public Lands Survey through the Homestead Act and railroad land grants to modern planning, zoning and environmental regulations. Land in Cottonwood County is used for a range of activity, from agriculture to residences to some industry. Careful and systematic planning for growth can minimize conflicts between different land uses, and provide for a measure of predictability and security for the future. This chapter examines different uses of land in the county, and local government regulation of those uses.

A. Issues Summary

- ? The majority of land in Cottonwood County is in agriculture
- ? Feedlot expansion has at times created conflicts with nearby residents
- ? Development in agricultural and natural areas can lead to sprawl and land use conflicts
- ? Character of development along protected waters and wetlands
- ? Mining, even as a temporary use, has long-term impacts
- ? Existing development regulations work well, yet can always work better

A.1 Land Use Strengths, Challenges and Future Direction

The County Committee identified issues and concerns regarding the use of land in Cottonwood County.

Land Use Strengths

- ? Fertile farmland
- ? Public support and space for agricultural expansion without crowding
- ? Land for value-added agricultural processing
- ? Sensible land use regulations

Land Use Challenges

- ? Review of feedlot standards as more scientific research is completed
- ? Balance development with environmental impacts
- ? Make zoning maps available in GIS format

Future of Land Use

- ? Production agriculture is vital and productive
- ? Land use changes are evaluated for effect on agriculture
- ? Housing opportunities are provided in both town and country
- ? New development makes efforts to fit in, locating in clusters around existing farmsteads, on non-productive land, and closer to urban services.
- ? Clear and easily available development regulations, maps and applications are posted online for easy public access

B. Agricultural and Commercial Land Uses

Rural land is predominately used for agriculture and certain other commercial uses that may not fit into an urban environment. According to analysis by Minnesota State University Mankato, over 90% of the land in Cottonwood County is used for farms and fields. As more of our nation becomes urbanized, it is important to protect productive agricultural land for the future.

As was discussed in Chapter VI. Economic Development, the business of agriculture continues to change, with national trends reflected in Cottonwood County. Diversified mid-size operations are becoming less common. Instead, modern production agriculture is growing more specialized. Farmers are responding by growing larger to maximize economies of scale—or by growing smaller and more focused.

Space is an important ingredient in the success of modern agriculture. Farms can be more productive with room to spread out and take advantage of economies of scale. Larger farm equipment makes better use of larger fields, yet also requires wider field access points, and may have a greater impact on township, county and state highways. Space is also needed for larger barns, equipment sheds, grain storage, and other specialized buildings and structures. Smaller specialized operations may also have their own space requirements, such as growers of pharmaceutical crops that need large buffers to prevent crop cross-pollination.

In general, local residents have experience with and support production agriculture. Cottonwood County has not seen the divisive (and expensive) litigation that some other rural communities have had to work through as urban and rural values collide. Any change in the use of land should be evaluated for potential impacts to agriculture.

B.1 Commercial Uses in Agricultural Areas

Certain commercial uses may be best located in rural areas. For example, agricultural supply depots benefit by being close to their customers, and may have dangerous chemicals that pose a danger to homes and other businesses. Value-added ag processing facilities like ethanol plants or packing plants may need more space than is available in an urban industrial park, or may give off odors unwelcome in town. Larger manufacturing and wholesaling facilities also need to be located where the infrastructure is—highway and railroad, water and sewer, electricity and natural gas—in city or country.



SWRDC

Other non-agricultural uses encroaching on rural lands set the stage for conflict. Commercial uses also have a detrimental effect on agriculture beyond taking land out of production. Recreational vehicle parks may fit into natural areas near streams or creeks, but would create problems in a farming area if adjacent landowners ever wanted to put in a feedlot. Gas stations, retail stores, restaurants and bars strung out in strip development on county and state highways create traffic and place demands on public safety and other services. Problems with blowing trash, litter, and vandalism of crops or feedlots are also common with unfettered sprawl.

Farmers have a harder time moving tractors and implements on rural roads when cars and trucks are darting around them. Some conflicts can be mitigated by controlling access to highways. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN/DOT) Access Management Program sets useful guidelines depending on the type of land use and the purpose of a highway—if it primarily serves a regional user base or collects local traffic from homes and business. Careful, coordinated site planning before construction can prevent many problems in years to come.

Some counties have a dedicated Agricultural zone, excluding commercial and industrial uses, for property owners who desire more protection of production agriculture. Cottonwood County may want to look at this option in the future.

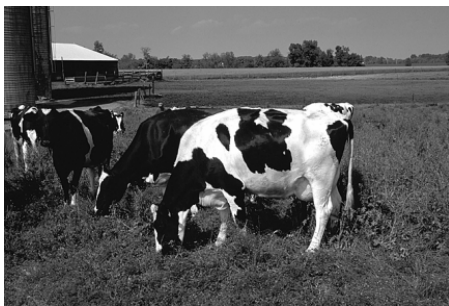
B.2 Feedlots

Animal agriculture is an integral part of Cottonwood County. There are several layers of regulation of animal agriculture facilities and operations—in particular the waste and wastewater from feedlots—including the US Environmental Protection Agency, Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. Requirements and recommendations for best practices are constantly changing, and it can be difficult to determine a predictable process for new and expanded feedlots.

Although fewer farms in the area raise animals than in the past, the number of hogs and sheep has grown. In 1995, Cottonwood County put in place a temporary moratorium on new or expanded feedlots to establish regulations for feedlots. The County settled on a setback between feedlots and rural residences. The County also soon after established a density limit on new residential development to help prevent future conflicts.

Communities across the state are having to balance the need for feedlot growth and expansion with the property rights of existing rural residences. The Governor's Livestock Advisory Task Force, for example, recommended that local units of government develop checklists to clarify the process required for feedlot permitting, inclusion of State agencies in revisions of local ordinances, review of impacts of regulations on the local economy, continued research on feedlot

odor separation distances, and training and technical assistance for local units of government.* Some of these recommendations were included in new state statutes in 2005 governing regulation of feedlots.



USDA Photography

Issues with feedlots continue to be studied across the state of Minnesota and the Upper Midwest. The County will need to periodically reexamine regulations for animal agriculture facilities and operations as more scientific research and policy development is completed.

C. Rural Residential Land Uses

Fewer than 30% of homes in Cottonwood County are located outside of municipalities, accounting for only 1.3% of the county's land area. As we saw in Chapter VII Housing, many of these homes are used as part of active agricultural operations, including organized farm colonies. Non-farm rural residents may be retired farmers, people with non-farm home occupations, or others employed in town who enjoy the country lifestyle. The county also has a few seasonal homes, typically on lakes or streams. Home sites in rural areas offer a choice that can make Cottonwood County an attractive location to live.

* Governor's Livestock Advisory Task Force Local Siting Sub-Committee Recommendations, January 2005.



It can be difficult to fit rural residences into agricultural and natural areas without destroying the qualities that attracted homeowners in the first place. Currently there is a limit on density of new homes in agricultural areas. Clustering home sites, especially around existing farmsteads or established windbreaks, can reduce the amount of farmland taken out of production. Better yet, new residences should only be established on the least productive farmland available. Locations closer to one of the County's incorporated communities also puts residents closer to jobs and services.

C.1 Preventing Sprawl

Preventing sprawl—urban development outside of urban areas—is important to contain the County's cost of providing services, and to prevent conflicts between rural residents and farmers. Scattered leap-frog pattern residential development does not pay the full cost of delivering urban services.[†] While Counties and Townships do provide services essential for public health and safety, cities are established to provide urban services. These services are outlined in Chapter IV. Infrastructure. From water and sewer to police and fire safety, not to mention libraries, parks, and other social services, urban services are typically more effectively and efficiently delivered inside city limits.



As the Minnesota Department of Agriculture has found, “cities are generally much more able to provide the level of urban services typically demanded by new residents.” People who live in unincorporated areas traditionally have understood and supported this arrangement. However, many former city dwellers who move out into rural areas expect the high urban level of service to continue, without the higher urban level of property taxes. They expect that somebody from the County will pave the roads, plow the snow and fix the fence. They don't expect that the farmer next door doesn't keep bankers hours, or that manure spread on the fields has an aroma that's not exactly fresh country air.

Cottonwood County may want to develop a notice to new residents in agricultural areas. This may be as simple as including a notice on new subdivision plats or with real estate sales closing documents, stating that the property is in an agricultural area. *The Code of the West*, a brochure first developed by former Larimer County (Colorado) Commissioner John Clarke and adopted by many other counties across the country, is an illustrated guide for new residents, addressing access, utility services, property rights and responsibilities, mother nature, and modern agriculture. While some of these items may be obvious to long-time residents—not all property has public access, it can take an ambulance a very long time to get to the end of your dirt road from town—this sort of “advance notice” is proving a popular way to help get newcomers started fitting into the neighborhood.

[†] See for example, Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture, *Cost of Public Services Study* (Duncan Assoc. Sept. 1999) [<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/agdev/pubservcosts.pdf>]; American Farmland Trust, *Cost of Community Services* studies [<http://www.farmland.org/research/index.htm>].

C.2 Residential development in natural areas

As discussed in Chapter V. Cultural and Recreational Resources, development in and near environmentally sensitive areas poses unique and increasing challenges. Rather than rely on a case-by-case evaluation of development in these natural areas, the State of Minnesota has adopted model land use rules for Shoreland areas. While often seen as just one more layer of bureaucracy, these requirements provide a guide to helping inherently different (natural and developed) land uses to fit together.

Homes have been built on lakes in Minnesota for many years. These were usually seasonal cabins, used only a few weeks in the summer, or if the ice fishing was good, in the winter, too. As baby boomers reach their prime earnings years, many people are realizing the dream of a second home fronting a lake, or secluded out in the country with a view of prairie grasslands. However, more people are choosing the lake as their primary residence. Recreational lifestyles appeal to people who may have jobs that are not tied to a particular location, retirees or couples who are already commuting in different directions and split the mileage difference with a lakeside or natural area retreat.

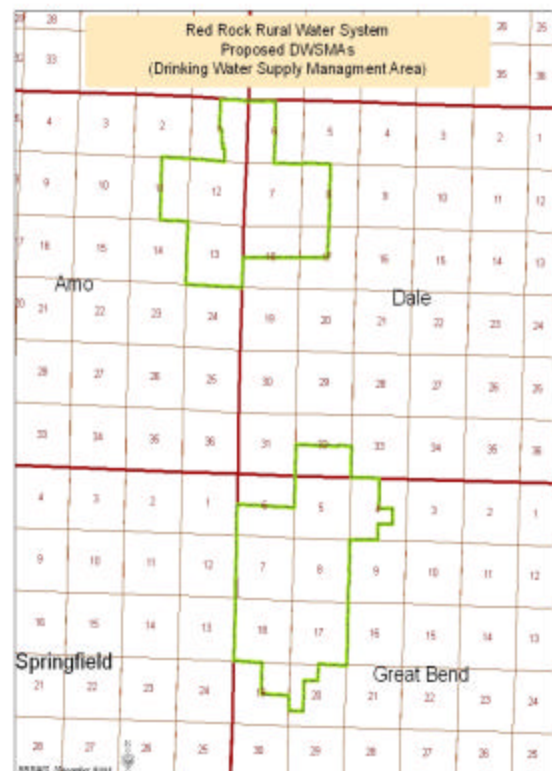
Land use regulations for scattered seasonal cabins do not work particularly well for more intensive, year-round homes. Cottonwood County has the opportunity to learn what other rural counties are doing to address this trend, before the pressure for development in natural areas builds.

D. Mining

Certain areas in Cottonwood County are underlain by sand and gravel deposits which may be commercially-viable for aggregate mining. Likewise, certain hard-rock deposits lie close to the surface and are in demand as raw material to be crushed for aggregate. These deposits typically lie in protected floodplains and state-designated shoreland areas, compounding the difficulties in management for both local government and private land owners.

Mining, unlike many activities, is a temporary, interim use of land. When a house is built, it is likely intended to stay a home for the foreseeable future. A mine, however, has a defined beginning and end, with observable impacts during the run of activity and a specific need for reclamation when the deposit is played out. The County should work with mine operators to minimize impacts on adjacent land owners and the natural environment, and to ensure that reclamation will return the site to a beneficial and compatible use. The County may also want to develop specific standards to ensure that all operators are subject to the same requirements.

In May 2005, the Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners adopted a moratorium on new zoning applications for mining in designated Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs) “Ten-Year Time of Travel” area, with the intention of establishing conditional use requirements for mining. The County will need to carefully consider criteria to adequately protect the aquifer while protecting the rights of private property owners.



Minnesota DNR's Division of Lands & Minerals provides specific county-wide geographic information system (GIS) mapping of aggregate resources location and quality, including availability, usability and supply. While the Legislature has given priority to areas where urbanization or other factors may threaten long term protection and use of aggregate resources, Cottonwood County should look into securing a priority position in the program.

E. Regulation of Land Use

Minnesota Statutes, Section 394.21, grants counties the ability to “*to carry on county planning and zoning activities*”. The County Comprehensive Plan, when adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, becomes the basis upon which “official controls” such as zoning and subdivision regulations must be based. Cottonwood County first completed a comprehensive plan in 1970, following up on adoption of a zoning ordinance in 1968. The zoning ordinance currently regulates subdivision of land as well.

Existing development regulations in the County seem to be working well, for the most part. Zoning and subdivision regulations are not any more restrictive than is typical in the region, and may be less restrictive in many areas. Ordinance texts are fairly straightforward and easy to read. There is some concern about compliance with the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA), as noted in Chapter V. Cultural and Recreational Resources. As enabling legislation, court decisions, and accepted development practices change, development regulations should be regularly reviewed to ensure they meet the goals and objectives of the community, as expressed in this Comprehensive Plan.

E.1 Zoning Districts

The Cottonwood County Zoning Ordinance, as currently amended, establishes five zoning districts:

- ? F-1 Floodplain
- ? AG-1 Agriculture
- ? R-1 Residential
- ? C-1 Commercial
- ? I-1 Industrial

Shoreland regulations have also been applied as an overlay district on top of existing zoning districts, in those areas defined as such by Minnesota regulations. Section 17 of the Ordinance outlines Shoreland requirements, including additional standards for variances, conditional use permits, and notice of public hearings; lot size and setbacks, public access, roads, storm water management, and water/sewer treatment and supply. There are also special requirements for commercial, industrial, public, agricultural, forestry and mining uses.

- ? Shoreland regulations may be more clearly understood, and more easily administered, if converted to a sixth dedicated, stand-alone zoning district.

In addition to these individual districts, the Zoning Ordinance regulates other land uses in separate sections, including Individual Sewage Treatment Systems (ISTS), pipelines, telecommunication towers, wind energy towers, and public nuisances.

Currently, zoning district maps have not been digitized. Although the zoning ordinance text includes legal descriptions of zones, the physical maps located in the Environmental Office are not easily reproducible for public review. Good, clear maps are essential for the public to understand what and where uses are permitted. Cottonwood County should create electronic versions of zoning maps in a geographic information system (GIS), including state Shoreland areas, as soon as possible.

Many counties now post their ordinances, zoning maps and development applications online. This increases public access to the information, and can reduce the time staff has to spend on the phone or at the front desk making copies.

E.2 Development Review

Local residents do not interact very often with the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations. The process can be confusing, unclear, and frustrating for the newcomer and the experienced planner alike. Decision makers are often faced with difficult issues, and are responsible to review impacts on the entire community. Simply avoiding the appearance of conflicts of interest can be difficult in a small towns where everybody seems to know everybody else. It is important that we make the development review process as fair, efficient and effective as possible.

Cottonwood County has implemented a "Setback and Use" permit for many projects, administered by the Environmental Office to ensure compliance with the Zoning Ordinance. The County has not adopted an official building code. Permits are also required for septic systems and feedlots.

- ? A **Conditional Use Permit (CUP)** is reviewed by the Planning Commission and approved by the Board of County Commissioners. Any application for a CUP must consider the standards outlined in Section 18 of the Zoning Ordinance. Minnesota Statutes, Section 394.22 offers this definition of a Conditional Use:

Subd. 7. Conditional use. "Conditional use" means a land use or development as defined by ordinance that would not be appropriate generally but may be allowed with appropriate restrictions as provided by official controls upon a finding that (1) certain conditions as detailed in the zoning ordinance exist, and (2) the use or development conforms to the comprehensive land use plan of the county and (3) is compatible with the existing neighborhood.

- ✍ Findings of Fact in granting a CUP should include conformance with this Comprehensive Plan.

- ? The **Board of Adjustment**, established under Minnesota Statutes, Section 394.27, reviews and grants requests for Variances to performance standards of the Zoning Ordinance and appeals of official interpretations and decisions., as outlined in Sections 7 and 19 of the Ordinance. Performance standards include lot size, setbacks, etc. Minnesota Statutes, Section 394.22 define a Variance as:

Subd. 10. Variance. "Variance" means any modification or variation of official controls where it is determined that, by reason of exceptional circumstances, the strict enforcement of the official controls would cause unnecessary hardship.

Use variances (which would permit uses of land not listed in a district) are considered by the courts to be arbitrary and capricious, and are not permitted in Minnesota.

The Board of Adjustment must find that a variance application meets certain stringent tests. A variance must be consistent with statements of purpose and policy of development regulations, beyond the stated dimensional standard, and must not alter the essential character of an area. A variance may only be granted when there is an undue hardship that is unique to the property involved—something completely different from other property in the same zone. This hardship cannot be self-imposed by the applicant. Financial hardship is not sufficient to grant a variance.

✍ Findings of Fact in granting a variance should include consistency with this Comprehensive Plan.

- ? The **division of land** is not subject to public review if conveyed by metes and bounds description which can be described by aliquot parts (government fractions) down to 2.5 acres. In this case, the County Zoning Administrator may only review the Certificate of Survey for compliance with the County Zoning Ordinance. For divisions with three contiguous splits of 2.5 acres or less, a preliminary and final plat are required to be reviewed by the Planning Commission and approved by the Board of County Commissioners.

✍ Findings of Fact in approving a subdivision plat should include consistency with this Comprehensive Plan.

- ? **Planned Unit Developments (PUDs)** are not presently an option under the Cottonwood County Zoning Ordinance. PUDs are commonly used for larger (10+acre) developments that are planned, developed, operated and maintained as a single entity, allowing for flexibility in subdivision design and permitted uses. For example, using a PUD process, a dairy could add on-site workforce housing, or an organized farm colony could design necessary housing, agricultural and commercial structures, with appropriate performance standards to address impacts of the development. While this flexibility can enable more creative development, complex customized subdivision and zoning permits can add significantly to administrative workload.
- ? **Townships** may also adopt development regulations, which cannot not be inconsistent with or less restrictive than a county ordinance. Currently, all unincorporated areas of Cottonwood County are included in the jurisdiction of County planning and zoning.

E.3 Municipal Annexation

In most cases, new development should occur inside cities, to assure adequate and cost effective provision of urban services. When parcels are adjacent to city limits, state statutes outline methods for cities to annex that land into their municipal boundaries, including by petition (typically of landowners), by ordinance of the municipality, or with an “orderly annexation” agreement between a city and affected township.

As the League of Minnesota Cities’ *Handbook* (2004) explains, “Annexation questions pose some of the most difficult technical and policy problems facing municipal officials.” If new development occurs in unincorporated areas, the County and/or Township will face increasing pressure to become an urban services provider. Cities, on the other hand, already provide urban services. Yet cities are concerned about taking on new demands if their tax-benefit analysis doesn’t balance. Cities can not expect existing residents to subsidize the costs of growth. It may cost too much to extend sewer lines to growth areas, or reduce response time for emergency services.

Cottonwood County can work with cities and townships to coordinate development in urban growth areas. The County may want to create growth management areas to the extent cities determine they could realistically provide urban services within the next 20 years. This is a common approach that has been adopted in many communities. The County and the city in question could harmonize development regulations covering growth areas so new development would fit into the city when eligible for annexation. Or the County may simply pledge to look more closely at development in the growth area. Either way, residents and property owners would gain a more certain future regarding the costs and benefits of development.

IX. IMPLEMENTATION

This plan is not intended to sit on a shelf. A good community plan is a living document. People will pick up these pages and browse. They may study certain sections of interest. They may quickly scan charts and maps and go about their business. In time, students may judge our stewardship of the land by how well this plan comes to life.

A comprehensive plan is intended to be a long-term guide for decision-makers to evaluate and take action that supports new growth and development. This section outlines the community's vision for the plan, and how it will be implemented today and into the future.

A. Goals, Objectives, Policies & Tasks

While much of this plan contains measurable statements of fact, implementation requires more subjective statements to fill out the vision for the future. These goals, objectives, policies and tasks reflect hours of discussion, reflecting a balance between varied interests and community concerns. As the plan is implemented, the community will want to revisit, clarify, even change these statements to reflect changing conditions and concerns over time.

A.1 Goals & Objectives

Goals are broad statements of direction and purpose, reflecting the long-term vision and desires of the County and local citizens. Goals spell out a desired future. Objectives are more precise targets necessary to achieve goals. For example, it may be your goal to build a house, requiring home-building objectives such as completing a site survey and plan, securing permits, excavating the foundation, and enclosing the structure before the snow flies. An objective should be a detailed statement of quantitatively or qualitatively measurable results the plan hopes to achieve.

A.2 Policies

Policies state strategies or techniques to achieve goals and objectives, and ultimately towards achieving the intent of the plan. In terms of planning a home-building project, during site planning you may follow policies such as preserving as many trees as possible and placing windows to take advantage of prevailing wind and solar energy. Policies provide specific guidance for future decisions. Applicants for new development that goes through the development review process, such as subdivisions, conditional use applications, variances, etc, should demonstrate how their projects meet and exceed the policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

A.3 Tasks

Tasks detail specific items for action. As tasks can accomplish multiple goals, objectives, and policies, they are outlined at the end of this chapter. To obtain construction bids for your new home site, you would outline specific tasks such as having a survey of your lot, staking out the building site, and drafting a grading plan. Each of these tasks would follow policies to meet objectives necessary to achieve the goal of building your new home.

B. Demographics

Cottonwood County faces demographic challenges typical of rural America in the 21st century, with a sense of civic pride not so common these days in our urbanizing nation. In the future, the County will work to maintain the population base with a balance of residents in different generations and from different places.

B.1 Young people have opportunities to work and live in Cottonwood County.

The County supports retention of a good educational system with opportunities for life-long learning, and opportunities for residents entering the workforce.

- B.1.a Support local and regional economic development programs.
- B.1.b Support school district programs.
- B.1.c Support local provision of courses with state colleges and universities.

B.2 Residents return to rural Minnesota.

In today's economy, youth often are forced to leave home to gain education and job opportunities. The County needs to be open to opportunities for them to come back home again, and to welcome native people of other places who can find opportunity here.

- B.2.a Support local and regional efforts to recruit new residents to the area.
- B.2.b Consider how provision of County services can be more readily available to immigrants and other non-local residents.

B.3 The quality of life is maintained and improved for an increasing aging population.

As the median age of the population grows older, there will be more demand for different types of housing and services, including second homes and accessible facilities.

- B.3.a Applicants for new development (subdivisions, conditional use applications, variances, etc) should explain how they meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- B.3.b Applicants for new development should consider the full range of needs of aging residents.
- B.3.c Consider needs of aging residents for increased transit services.
- B.3.d Consider how provision of County services can be more easily accessible.

C. Infrastructure and Public Facilities

Infrastructure and public facilities are basic tools for the provision of essential services to protect and enhance public health, safety and welfare. Improvements in many areas will continue to be necessary to reflect new or emerging technology, and to support opportunities for economic development. Facilities will need to continue to adapt to the needs of an aging population, while providing education and career opportunities for younger and working-age residents.

C.1 There is an adequate and safe water and wastewater system

Local water supplies are provided by public and private wells and the Red Rock Rural Water System. Wastewater is treated by Individual Sewage Treatment Systems (ISTS), private treatment facilities, or municipal facilities.

- C.1.a Applicants for new development should document long-term sources of water, and long-term treatment of wastewater.
- C.1.b Applicants for new development should document financial ability to complete extension of infrastructure.
- C.1.c Support development of the Red Rock Rural Water System.
- C.1.d Support policies of adopted Wellhead Protection Plans.
- C.1.e Protect quality of water supply.
- C.1.f Encourage regular screening clinics for testing private wells for nitrates.
- C.1.g Applicants for new development should document quality of water supply and mitigate any potential detrimental impacts.
- C.1.h Discourage development in areas where poor soil characteristics may not support ISTS systems.
- C.1.i Encourage property owners to upgrade septic systems.
- C.1.j Encourage new development located closer to existing utilities to save the cost of extending infrastructure and services.

C.1.k Enforce standards for on-site sewage treatment systems.

C.2 There is a safe and efficient, multi-modal transportation system that meets local and regional needs.

Cottonwood County's transportation system includes state highways, county and township roads, municipal streets, the railroad, airport, and transit.

- C.2.a Applicants for new development should document impact of traffic on transportation systems.
- C.2.b Applicants for new development should work with township, county, and state officials to design access and assure long-term maintenance of roads affected.
- C.2.c Applicants for new development on state trunk highways should follow MN/DOT access management guidelines.
- C.2.d Carefully control highway access near major intersections to protect safety, accessibility and traffic function.
- C.2.e Continue support to complete four-lane sections of State Highway 60.
- C.2.f Undertake coordinated transportation planning considering current and future land use patterns in the region.
- C.2.g Balance safety, accessibility, environmental protection and cost when planning improvements to the transportation system.
- C.2.h Consider the effects on adjacent land use when expanding or reconstructing roads.
- C.2.i Provide for pedestrians and bicycles when expanding or reconstructing roads.
- C.2.j Support improvements to railroad sidings and crossings.
- C.2.k Support public transit systems.
- C.2.l Consider needs of aging residents for increased transit services.
- C.2.m Encourage new development located closer to existing roads to save the cost of extending infrastructure and services.

C.3 The County's public buildings and facilities meet residents' needs.

Cottonwood County owns and/or operates a number of public facilities, including the County Courthouse, Law Enforcement Facility, County Office Building, Highway Office and shops, Family Services Facility, and the County Landfill.

- C.3.a Undertake long-term capital improvement program planning so that public facilities can safely, adequately and efficiently meet future demands.
- C.3.b Locate new public facilities close to users and existing infrastructure.
- C.3.c Avoid locating major public roads and facilities on good agricultural land.
- C.3.d Carefully control solid waste disposal sites to minimize pollution and nuisance problems.
- C.3.e Applicants for new development within 1 mile of the Landfill should address potential concerns of future residents and landowners, such as blowing waste and odors, potential for groundwater contamination, or conflicts with future vertical or horizontal expansion.

C.4 Public education is strong and innovative.

New development can bring in new students and property tax revenues, or place unfunded demands for future educational services. The different public school districts and regional library system providing service to Cottonwood County are important partners for the long-term future of the area.

- C.4.a Applicants for new development should address impacts on school district tax base, enrollment, bus service, and other services.
- C.4.b Support the Plum Creek Library System.
- C.4.c Support school district programs.

- C.4.d Encourage renovation and expansion of school facilities in existing communities, to reduce traffic and contain costs of infrastructure and services.
- C.4.e Encourage new development in all local school districts.

C.5 Public safety services are provided to all residents.

Public safety is a primary responsibility of local government. The many different organizations providing health care, law enforcement, and fire protection services must work together to protect and serve the citizens of Cottonwood County.

- C.5.a Applicants for new development should document projected response time for public safety providers (law enforcement, fire protection, ambulance service).
- C.5.b Undertake hazard mitigation planning.
- C.5.c Support timely access to major medical services.
- C.5.d Support provision of state-of-art technology in local medical facilities.
- C.5.e Support Enhanced 911 system.
- C.5.f Encourage new development located closer to existing public safety facilities to save the cost of extending infrastructure and services.
- C.5.g Control signs and billboards to protect scenic views and reduce distractions to drivers.
- C.5.h Dedicate resources to properly enforce zoning regulations.

C.6 Adequate telecommunications and energy utilities are available to all residents.

Telecommunications and energy services—provided by investor-owned or public utilities—are local residents’ lifeline to the outside world. A well planned and maintained system can hasten the economic development of any area. Quality services can level the playing field and open up a whole new world of opportunities.

- C.6.a Applicants for new development should document provision of basic telephone and energy utilities.
- C.6.b Applicants for industrial or commercial development should address potential impacts on “incumbent local exchange carriers” (ILECs) and the public power grid.
- C.6.c Applicants for new development should document financial ability to complete extension of infrastructure.
- C.6.d Support competitive provision of broadband (wireless and wireline) telecommunications service in all areas of the county.
- C.6.e Revise and update provisions of zoning ordinance for telecommunications towers.
- C.6.f Encourage installation of underground utility lines.
- C.6.g Encourage new development located closer to existing utilities to save the cost of extending infrastructure and services.

D. Cultural and Recreational Resources

Local cultural and historic points of interest are valued by the community and must be carefully managed as sustainable resources. The natural environment requires protection from sources of contamination. Yet complicated (and at times conflicting) regulations pose increasing challenges. Cottonwood County is fortunate to have a variety of parks and recreational areas, with the potential to diversify and expand opportunities for residents to experience their heritage and the great outdoors.

D.1 Community cultural and historic points of interest are carefully managed for future generations.

A lot of history has gone by since Cottonwood County was established in 1857. From the 534 residents in 1870 to the 12,167 residents in 2000, local citizens have a unique and diverse heritage of cultural and

historic sites, festivals and events.

- D.1.a Applicants for new development should mitigate impacts on cultural and historic resources.
- D.1.b Support local community cultural and historic points of interest.
- D.1.c Consult with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office prior to planning changes to the National Register-listed buildings and sites.
- D.1.d Focus on preserving existing facilities to prevent deterioration.

D.2 Peoples of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds are made welcome.

As eastern and immigrant settlers brought new settlements to the Minnesota prairie in the 19th century, new immigrants are a source of ethnic and religious revitalization and change in our communities. As well, Americans of all origins are continually reinventing themselves and their preferences for community and cultural life.

- D.2.a Support continued use and maintenance of rural churches.
- D.2.b Review and revise the County Zoning Ordinance for compliance with the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA).
- D.2.c Review provisions in the Zoning Ordinance for churches and assembly uses, such as non-traditional facilities and retreat centers.

D.3 Natural resources are preserved and protected.

While most of Cottonwood County is dedicated to agriculture, areas of grasslands and rock outcroppings, hardwood forests and wetlands remain of what the original settlers saw years ago. These natural areas are hard at work recharging our aquifers, draining away storm runoff, and providing wildlife habitat.

- D.3.a Applicants for new development should mitigate impacts on natural resources.
- D.3.b Protect major natural resource areas.
- D.3.c Support restoration of appropriate natural landscapes.
- D.3.d Balance conservation of native grasslands and wildlife habitat to minimize conflicts with other land uses.
- D.3.e Work with DNR to identify priority areas for habitat conservation.
- D.3.f Discourage fragmentation of wildlife corridors.
- D.3.g Consider provisions in the Zoning Ordinance for a Conservation Overlay District to reduce conflicts between wildlife and natural areas and residential development.
- D.3.h Provide incentives and technical assistance to landowners for wildlife habitat.
- D.3.i Control signs and billboards to protect scenic views and reduce distractions to drivers.
- D.3.j Encourage development conforming to natural limitations presented by topography and soil to create the least potential for environmental degradation.
- D.3.k Applicants for new development near protected waters and wetlands should address land management practices to prevent water quality degradation.
- D.3.l Encourage farmers to adopt Best Management Practices (BMPs) to optimize farm profits, conserve soil and to protect and enhance ground and surface water quality.
- D.3.m Carefully control the location of feedlots and other animal confinement operations to minimize the potential for pollution.
- D.3.n Encourage property owners to upgrade septic systems.
- D.3.o Periodically review and update the Cottonwood County Comprehensive Water Plan.
- D.3.p Pursue GIS floodplain mapping.
- D.3.q Undertake hazard mitigation planning.

D.4 Development around lakes and streams is compatible with the natural environment.

Many lakes and streams have areas that are unsuitable for development, and require detailed study to

prevent unintended harm.

- D.4.a Applicants for new development in shoreland areas should provide detailed analysis of how the project may affect the watershed and mitigate potential impacts.
- D.4.b Encourage new development around water bodies best suited for more intensive uses; discouraging development around more sensitive areas.
- D.4.c Encourage natural landscaping to enhance wildlife habitat and protect water quality.
- D.4.d Encourage new development around public waters to consider public access to lakes and streams.
- D.4.e Review and revise shoreland regulations in the Zoning Ordinance to create a stand-alone zone district.
- D.4.f Consider implementing a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program that permits increased housing density in some areas in exchange for development rights in other areas.

D.5 Parks and recreation areas provide a variety of opportunities for local residents.

County parks and trails, along with municipal parks, provide a number of different opportunities for recreation, primarily serving local residents. Given changing cultural demands and expectations, underutilized recreation areas could be put to more intensive uses.

- D.5.a Applicants for new development should address impacts on parks and recreation areas.
- D.5.b Undertake long-term planning so that parks and recreation facilities can safely, adequately and efficiently meet future demands, given the challenge of spreading costs over a changing population base.
- D.5.c Diversify types of recreational activities available.
- D.5.d Avoid duplicating existing state and federal park lands and facilities.
- D.5.e Work with DNR to identify priority areas for recreation.
- D.5.f Coordinate facilities and services of County Parks and the Municipal Parks.
- D.5.g Increase the number of campsites available during peak demand.
- D.5.h Continue coordinated development of the trails system.
- D.5.i Access funding from MN DNR and other sources to provide new recreational uses.
- D.5.j Discourage incompatible uses adjacent to park and recreation areas.
- D.5.k Encourage the protection of natural resource areas through public acquisition for active and passive recreation.
- D.5.l Examine ways to further promote County parks and recreational resources.

E. Economic Development

Cottonwood County has an agricultural economy based on fertile farmland, with added strength in manufacturing and health services employment. Future regional employment growth is projected in areas such as business services, agricultural services, and residential care. There is a pro-growth local development attitude and an affordable cost of living.

E.1 Agriculture will continue to be a significant economic activity.

The future will see continued growth of large farms, with an increasing number of smaller farms as well. Fewer farms will have animals, but those THAT DO will have more cattle, hogs and sheep. The volume of crops harvested will likely grow with increasing productivity on a stable acreage.

- E.1.a Support the right to farm.
- E.1.b Recognize and support the agricultural character of the county.
- E.1.c Support provision of agricultural services.
- E.1.d Support and encourage legislation that will help retain and promote the agricultural economy.
- E.1.e Support production of alternative crops with the potential for local value-added processing.

- E.1.f Provide for home occupations and limited non-farm businesses in agricultural areas.
- E.1.g Monitor issues with large-scale livestock facilities.

E.2 The local labor force will have the skills and education to compete for 21st century jobs.

Although the local unemployment rate is higher than the regional average, Cottonwood County's labor force has been growing even as the total population contracts. Local job seekers will need to constantly upgrade and improve skills to take advantage of new opportunities.

- E.2.a Support state workforce development programs.
- E.2.b Support training for small business owners and farm operators.
- E.2.c. Support local provision of courses with state colleges and universities.
- E.2.c. Support local and regional housing programs to reduce commuting out of the county.

E.3 The existing economic base will become more diversified.

The manufacturing and services industries have become even more important to Cottonwood County as more farmers seek off-farm jobs to supplement agricultural income. Future development should seek to take advantage of this cluster of basic-sector economic activity, yet also diversify to decrease vulnerability to the business cycles of large manufacturers.

- E.3.a Support local and regional economic development programs.
- E.3.b Continue support to complete four-lane sections of State Highway 60.
- E.3.c Work with local municipalities to coordinate location of infrastructure to support new development.
- E.3.d Discourage isolated, scattered commercial development in the county.
- E.3.e Encourage commercial and industrial development inside municipal limits.
- E.3.f Encourage "clean" non-polluting light industry.
- E.3.g Explore opportunities for adding value to local agricultural products (value-added manufacturing)
- E.3.h Develop performance standards in the Zoning Ordinance for light industrial facilities.
- E.3.i Support local and regional tourism programs.

E.4 New sources of renewable energy will be developed.

New opportunities are growing for rural communities with alternatives to traditional sources of energy.

- E.4.a Develop performance standards in the Zoning Ordinance for heavy industrial facilities such as ethanol and bio-diesel refineries.
- E.4.b Revise and update provisions of zoning ordinance for wind towers and power generation.

F. Housing

Most of the housing in Cottonwood County is located inside city limits, close to urban services. Local housing is fairly stable and affordable in relation to area pay scales, with relatively low vacancy rates. In addition to farmsteads on active agricultural operations, there is a continued interest in rural home sites with recreational and lifestyle amenities.

F.1 Most housing will continue to be provided within cities where urban services are provided.

Cities are organized to deliver urban services, such as police and fire protection, public water and sewer service, streets and sidewalks, schools and libraries, close to clusters of homes and jobs. Cities are also better able to serve a broad choice of housing types for all income groups.

- F.1.a Work with local cities to coordinate location of infrastructure to support new development.
- F.1.b Encourage infill development in existing developed communities.

- F.1.c Encourage new housing development adjacent to existing communities where urban services can be easily provided.
- F.1.d Encourage cities to identify and modernize regulations that may create barriers to affordable housing.
- F.1.e Encourage renovation and expansion of school facilities in existing communities, to reduce traffic and contain costs of infrastructure and services.
- F.1.f Support local and regional housing programs to provide affordable new housing opportunities.

F.2 Existing homes will be maintained and improved

Individual homeowners have the primary responsibility for their own homes. However, local regulations can have large (and often unanticipated) effects on currently developed property. Given changing demographics and housing preferences, there may be opportunities to renovate and improve an aging housing stock to meet future demands.

- F.2.a Review use of the Residential zone district for existing homes and unincorporated communities.
- F.2.b Support rehabilitation and re-use of farmsteads no longer used for ag operations.
- F.2.c Support local and regional housing programs to maintain and improve existing housing stock.

F.3 There should be opportunities for limited rural housing where infrastructure is available.

The rural lifestyle—fresh country air, wide open spaces, a horse or rabbits for the kids—is a powerful draw as our nation becomes increasingly urbanized. New housing continues to be built outside of city limits, and Cottonwood County must be prepared to protect the health, safety and welfare of all residents, today and tomorrow.

- F.3.a Applicants for new commercial development should demonstrate compatibility with nearby agricultural uses.
- F.3.b Applicants for new rural development should document access to essential public services.
- F.3.c Applicants for new housing development on state trunk highways should follow MN/DOT access management guidelines.
- F.3.d Discourage new subdivisions sprawling outside of established cities.
- F.3.e Discourage scattered development that “leap frogs” and splinters agricultural areas.
- F.3.f Encourage the use of natural resource information such as soils, topography, solar aspect, surface and groundwater, etc, in residential site selection and design.
- F.3.g Prohibit the location of rural housing with septic systems in areas of high bedrock or water tables.
- F.3.h Consider septic system requirements when setting minimum lot sizes.
- F.3.i Review the Zoning Ordinance density limit on new residential development, and it’s effectiveness in preventing land use conflicts.
- F.3.j Consider adding provisions in the Zoning Ordinance for on-site housing for agricultural employees.
- F.3.k Consider adding provisions in the Zoning Ordinance for accessory dwelling units, such as “granny flats” or guest houses.
- F.3.l Discuss with cities creation of growth management areas in areas with demand for new housing near city limits.

G. Land Use

The vast majority of land in Cottonwood County is used as farms or fields. Development in agricultural and natural areas can lead to sprawl and land use conflicts, such as those between feedlots and residents

too common in rural Minnesota. Overall, development needs to be balanced with environmental concerns. Special areas, such as protected waters and wetlands or aggregate deposits, require special attention as demands for new development grows. While existing land use regulations work well, they can always work better.

G.1 Agriculture is a viable, permanent, productive land use.

There is public support and space for agricultural expansion without crowding in Cottonwood County. As the business of agriculture continues to evolve, farmers need options for innovation, whether by growing smaller and more focused, or larger to realize economies of scale.

- G.1.a Support the right to farm and preserve and protect productive agricultural land.
- G.1.b Applicants for new development should mitigate effects on agriculture.
- G.1.c Applicants for new development should agree to maintain adjacent agricultural fencing, control noxious weeds, and retain excess drainage on site.
- G.1.d Encourage farmers to adopt Best Management Practices (BMPs) to optimize farm profits, conserve soil and to protect and enhance ground and surface water quality.
- G.1.e Work with other units of government and private service providers to avoid locating major public facilities, roads and developments in productive agricultural areas.
- G.1.f Meet with township officials and agricultural groups to discuss how well the development review and approval process is working for agriculture.
- G.1.g Carefully control the location of feedlots and other animal confinement operations to minimize land use conflicts.
- G.1.h Review Zoning density limits on residential development in agricultural zones, and it's effectiveness in preventing conflicts between residents and agricultural uses.
- G.1.i Periodically Review Zoning Ordinance feedlot standards as more scientific research is completed.

G.2 Commercial uses in rural areas are compatible with agricultural neighbors.

Certain commercial uses are best located away from population centers, while other non-agricultural uses encroaching on rural lands set the state for conflict.

- G.2.a Applicants for new commercial development should demonstrate compatibility with nearby agricultural uses.
- G.2.b Applicants for new development on state trunk highways should follow MN/DOT access management guidelines.
- G.2.c Locate commercial and industrial uses in areas with existing infrastructure, such as water, sewer, roads and railways.
- G.2.d Encourage buffers with natural landscaping to reduce conflicts between commercial and agricultural uses.
- G.2.e Review Zoning Ordinance standards for home occupations.
- G.2.f Review Zoning Ordinance standards for non-agricultural commercial uses in the Agriculture zone district.
- G.2.g Consider creation of a dedicated Agricultural zone district, excluding commercial and industrial uses, for property owners who desire more protection of production agriculture.

G.3 Residential uses in rural areas are compatible with agricultural neighbors.

Housing should be available to local residents in both town and country. It can be difficult to fit rural residences into agricultural areas without destroying the qualities that attracted homeowners in the first place. It is important to prevent sprawl if the County hopes to contain the cost of providing public services and prevent future land use conflicts.

- G.3.a Applicants for new residential development should demonstrate compatibility with nearby agricultural uses.
- G.3.b Applicants for new rural development should document access to essential public services.
- G.3.c Limit rural housing development in prime agricultural areas.
- G.3.d Locate urban-density development in and near cities where urban services can be provided.
- G.3.e Discourage scattered development that “leap frogs” and splinters agricultural areas.
- G.3.f Encourage new development to make efforts to fit in, locating in clusters around existing farmsteads, on non-productive land, and closer to urban services.
- G.3.g Encourage buffers with natural landscaping to reduce conflicts between residential and agricultural uses.
- G.3.h Develop a notice to new residents in residential areas, similar to the Code of the West brochure.

G.4 Residential uses in rural areas are compatible with protected natural areas.

Development in and near environmentally sensitive areas poses unique and increasing challenges. It can be difficult to fit residences into natural areas without destroying the qualities that attracted homeowners in the first place.

- G.4.a Applicants for new residential development should demonstrate compatibility with nearby natural areas.
- G.4.b Balance development with environmental impacts.
- G.4.c Encourage new development to cluster building sites in conservation developments, leaving larger natural and/or agricultural parcels.
- G.4.d Only permit multi-family residential development in areas with community water and sewer service.
- G.4.e Review and revise shoreland regulations in the Zoning Ordinance to create a stand-alone zone district.
- G.4.f Review provisions in the Zoning Ordinance for resorts and retreat centers.

G.5 Mining operations balance extraction with impacts to residential, agricultural and natural areas.

Areas of Cottonwood County have mineral deposits which may be commercially viable for mining.

- G.5.a Applicants for new and expanded commercial mining development should demonstrate compatibility with other nearby uses.
- G.5.b Work with commercial mine operators to minimize impact on adjacent land owners and the natural environment.
- G.5.c Review Zoning Ordinance provisions for mining and consider classifying mining as a conditional use, for some or all zone districts.
- G.5.d Require mining reclamation when active operations end or are suspended for a period of time.
- G.5.e Work with Minnesota DNR’s Division of Land & Minerals to map aggregate resources.

G.6 Land Use Regulations are sensible, clear and easily available.

The County Comprehensive Plan, when adopted by the Board of County Commissioners, becomes the basis upon which “official controls” such as zoning and subdivision regulations must be based.

- G.6.a Review and revise the Zoning Ordinance to ensure regulations meet the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.
- G.6.b Review and revise the Zoning Ordinance for compliance with the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA).
- G.6.c Shoreland regulations may be more clearly understood, and more easily administered, if converted to a dedicated, stand-alone zoning district.

- G.6.d Consider standards in the Zoning Ordinance for mining as a conditional use.
- G.6.e Expand the use of GIS to create maps and visually analyze land use trends and proposals.
- G.6.f Provide digital copies of zoning maps and zoning text online for easy public access.
- G.6.g Dedicate resources to properly enforce zoning regulations.

G.7 The Development Review Process is fair, efficient and effective.

Development review is the process to ensure building and development is in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance, including setback and use permits, conditional use permits, requests for variance, and divisions of land.

- G.7.a Applicants for Development Review should clearly explain in their written application how their proposals meet the goals and policies of this Comprehensive Plan, the Zoning Ordinance, and other applicable regulations and standards.
- G.7.b Applicants for Development Review should provide clear and concise maps and illustrations so that decision makers and the public can fairly, efficiently and effectively evaluate their proposals.
- G.7.c Findings of Fact in granting CUPs, Variances and Subdivisions should specifically include conformance with this Comprehensive Plan.
- G.7.d Variances to the Zoning Ordinance should be rarely granted, and then with specific findings of how the individual property meets the tests for unique hardship.
- G.7.e Consider creation of a Planned Unit Development (PUD) zone district, which would permit clustered lots and/or non-traditional housing with heightened public review similar to a conditional use permit.
- G.7.f Work with cities and townships to coordinate development in areas with demands for new growth.
- G.7.g Discuss with cities creation of growth management areas in areas with demand for new growth near city limits.
- G.7.h Provide regular training for board and commission members in different aspects of the development review process.
- G.7.i Consider creating special area or corridor plans to more closely plan for neighborhoods and communities in the county.
- G.7.j Regularly review and update the Comprehensive Plan.

H. Implementation Tasks

Implementation tasks are specific work items to carry out the goals, objectives, and policies of this plan. Timing indicates whether the task should occur in the near term (within 2 years of adoption), short term (2-3 years), long term (3-5 years), or is ongoing.

The figure below highlights tasks for which the Cottonwood County Planning Commission is or could be the lead agency. While the Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan is adopted by the Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners, coordination and cooperation of many different local units of government, interest groups, and private citizens is required for successful implementation. Only by working together can we see these goals and policies come to life.

Figure 9-1: Cottonwood County Comprehensive Plan Implementation Tasks

Task	Related Goals / Policies	Timing	Lead Agency	Other Public Partners
H.1 Review and update Zoning Ordinance				
a Assure consistency with Plan's Goals and Policies	All	Near Term	Planning Commission	
b Convert Shoreland provisions to a stand-alone zone district	D.4.e, G.4.e, G.6.c	Near Term	Planning Commission	DNR
c Develop Conditional Use requirements for mining	C.1.e, G.5.c, G.6.d	Near Term	Planning Commission	Red Rock RWS, DNR MNDOT
d Update tower regulations	E.4.b	Near Term	Planning Commission	
e Digitize GIS zoning maps	G.6.e	Near Term	Environmental Office	
f Monitor livestock provisions and standards	D.3.m, E.1.g, G.1.g G.1.j	Ongoing	Environmental Office	MPCA, Dept. of Ag
g Review residential density limits in the Ag zone	F.3.i, G.1.h, G.3.c	Short Term	Planning Commission	
h Review purpose and extent of the Residential District	F.2.a	Short Term	Planning Commission	
i Develop Planned Unit Development (PUD) standards	G.7.e	Short Term	Planning Commission	
j Develop standards for light industry	E.3.h	Short Term	Planning Commission	
k Develop standards for heavy industry (e.g. ethanol & biodiesel)	E.4.a	Short Term	Planning Commission	
l Develop home occupation standards	E.1.f, G.2.e	Long Term	Planning Commission	
m Review non-ag uses in ag district	G.2.f	Long Term	Planning Commission	
n Review retreat, resort provisions	D.2.c, G.4.f	Long Term	Planning Commission	
o Digitize GIS FEMA floodplain maps	D.3.p, G.6.e	Long Term	Environmental Office	FEMA
p Map aggregate resource areas	G.5.e	Long Term	Environmental Office	DNR
H.2 Improve public access to information				
a Develop a "Code of the West" brochure	G.3.h	Short Term	Environmental Office	
b Post Zoning Ordinance text, maps and application forms online	G.6.f	Short Term	Environmental Office	
H.3 Complete an All-Hazards Mitigation Plan	C.5.b, D.3.q	Short Term	Emergency Management	Planning Commission
H.4 Discuss Development Issues				
a Meet with cities on growth management	F.3.j, G.7.f	Short Term	Planning Commission	Cities, Townships
b Meet with townships and ag groups	G.1.f	Short Term	Planning Commission	Townships, Dept. of Ag
c Work with DNR to ID priority areas	D.3.e, D.5.e	Long Term	Planning Commission	DNR
H.5 Continue land use training for staff and decisionmakers	G.7.g	Ongoing	Environmental Office	Planning Commission Board of Adjustment County Commissioners
H.6 Complete a Parks and Rec Plan	D.5.b	Long Term	Planning Commission	Cities, DNR
H.7 Review and update County Water Plan	D.3.o	Short Term	Water Plan Task Force	Planning Commission
H.8 Review and update Comprehensive Plan	G.7.j	Long Term	Planning Commission	

X. ADOPTION

The County Board of Cottonwood County Ordains:

A. PUBLIC HEARING AND PLANNING COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION.

WHEREAS, the Cottonwood County Planning Commission, after proper notice and publication, held a public hearing on the adoption of this Ordinance on the 26th day of September 2005, at the DNR Conference Room in Windom, Minnesota. After hearing public testimony and with due deliberation, the Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend adoption of this Ordinance to the Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners

B. ADOPTION.

THEREFORE, the Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners, on the 27th day of September, 2005 at their regular scheduled meeting, after reviewing public testimony and the recommendation of the Cottonwood County Planning Commission, with due deliberation, the Cottonwood County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to repeal Ordinance #11 dated May 20, 1981, and adopt Ordinance #35.

C. EFFECTIVE DATE.

Ordinance #35, shall be in full force and effect 30 days after its passage and publication, as provided by law.

Adopted this 27th day of September, 2005.

Chuck Severson

Chairperson, Cottonwood County
Board of Commissioners

Attest: Jan Johnson
County Auditor/Treasurer

COTTONWOOD COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2005

Appendices

- A. Acronyms & Definitions
- B. Color Maps

A. ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

The following list of acronyms and planning jargon is intended to assist the reader with interpreting sometimes technical information. There are many useful resources available to help understand the terms of the trade, such as *Under Construction: Tools and Techniques for Local Planning* published by the former Minnesota Planning agency, or Moskowitz and Lindbloom's *The Latest Illustrated Book of Development Definitions*.

Legal terms are defined in the applicable ordinances and in statute.

Access Management	Planning, design, and implementation of land use and transportation strategies in an effort to maintain a safe flow of traffic while accommodating the access needs of adjacent development.
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act (federal law)
ATV	All terrain vehicle
AWOSA	Automated weather observation station
Biodiesel	A domestic, renewable fuel for diesel engines derived from natural oils like soybean oil.
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics (federal)
CIP	Capital Improvement Plan, a long-range plan or budget for capital expenditures, usually five years in length with annual updates.
Comprehensive Plan	The official public document adopted by a community as the policy guide for decisions about future development and redevelopment. Typically covers 20 years with 5 year updates.
C&NW	Chicago & Northwestern Railway (now part of UP)
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CSAH	County State Aid Highway
DEED	Department of Employment and Economic Development (Minnesota)
DNR	Department of Natural Resources (Minnesota)
DWSMA	Drinking Water Supply Management Area
E-85	Designed for use in flexible fuel vehicles, 85% ethanol and 15% petroleum.
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
GIS	Geographic information systems
Goal	A statement that describes, usually in general terms, a desired future condition.
Granny Flat	An accessory dwelling unit, smaller than the primary dwelling.
Infrastructure	Public services and facilities needed to support commercial, residential and other land use activities.
ISTS	Individual sewage treatment system

JOBZ	Jobs Opportunities Building Zones (Minnesota)
LMIC	Land Management Information Center (Minnesota)
MHS	Minnesota Historical Society
MN/DOT	Minnesota Department of Transportation
MPCA	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
NAI	No Adverse Impact floodplain management approach
NASS	National Agricultural Statistics Service (federal)
NFIP	National Flood Insurance Program (federal)
Official Controls	Ordinances and regulations that control development, implementing the goals and policies of a comprehensive plan. These may include the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, site plan & building codes, and sanitation requirements.
Policy	A course of action to be followed in achieving goals.
PUC	Public Utilities Commission (Minnesota)
QCEW	Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages survey
RLUIPA	Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000
RRWS	Red Rock Rural Water System
SHPO	State Historic Preservation Office (Minnesota)
SWMHP	Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership
Spot Zoning	Rezoning a parcel to benefit an owner for a use that is incompatible with surrounding land use and that does not further the comprehensive plan.
Sprawl	Poorly planned development separated and at a distance from existing communities and infrastructure.
SRDC	Southwest Regional Development Commission (Minnesota)
TDR	Transfer of Development Rights, a system that moves density permitted in one area to another area.
TH	Trunk Highway
UP	Union Pacific Railroad
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
Watershed	Physical land area that naturally drains into a lake, river or stream system.
WMA	Wildlife Management Area
WPA	Waterfowl Production Area
Zoning	Regulation which divides an area into districts or zones to implement the comprehensive plan.
Zoning Map	The official public map adopted by a community that identifies and defines various zoning district boundaries.
Zoning Ordinance	The legally established text for implementing the vision, goals and policies of a comprehensive plan, typically by regulating the use of land.

B. COLOR MAPS
