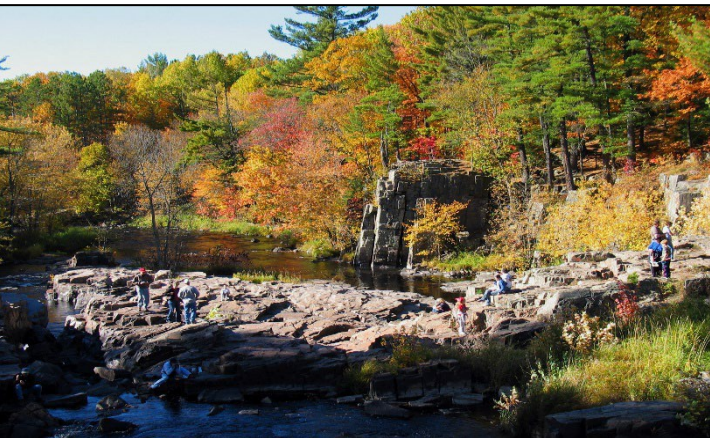


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Marathon County Comprehensive Plan 2026



DRAFT

**Marathon County
Comprehensive Plan
2026**

**Adopted by the Marathon County Board of Supervisors on the Recommendation of the
Executive Committee**

Executive Committee

Kurt Gibbs, Chair

Chris Dickinson, Vice-Chair

Matt Bootz

Randy Fifrick

Jean Maszk

Mike Ritter

Stacey Morache

John Robinson

Al Drabek

Jennifer Aarrestad

Developed by Marathon County Staff

Lance Leonard, County Administrator

Laurie Miskimins, Director of CPZ

Jeffrey Pritchard, Senior Planner

with assistance from the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

For more information, contact:



North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

210 McClellan St. Suite 210 Wausau, WI 54403

715-849-5510

www.ncwrpc.org

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Chapter One Introduction



The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan will help guide County decision makers on a wide array of issues over the next ten years. It will also provide guidance to the 41 towns, 15 villages, and 6 cities within the County. All these communities, working together, make Marathon County a special place.

Currently, the 139,000 County residents enjoy economic opportunity, quality schools, and strong communities, along with access to a wide variety of recreational options. Although the County compares well when compared to other counties, there is still room for improvement. An overarching goal of Marathon County is to become the Healthiest, Safest and Most Prosperous County in the State. Therefore, the intent of this plan is to provide the foundation for that improvement.

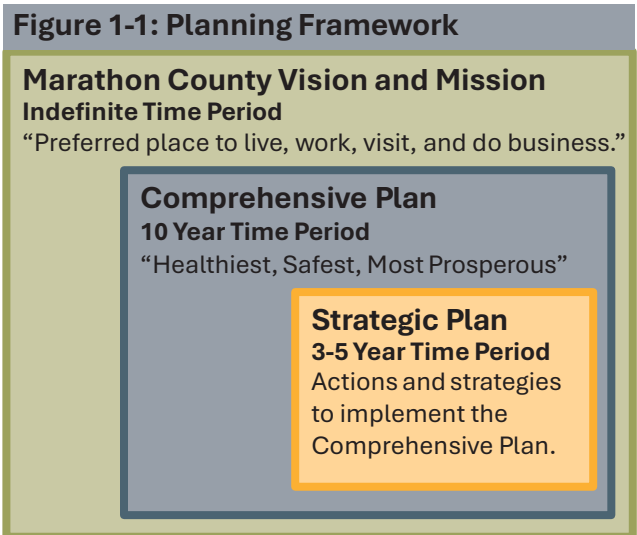
Mission and Vision

Mission Statement

Marathon County government serves people by leading, coordinating and providing county, regional, and statewide initiatives. It directly, or in cooperation with other public and private partners, provides services and creates opportunities that make the Marathon County area a preferred place to live, work, visit and do business.

Vision Statement

Marathon County government serves people by leading, coordinating, and providing county, regional, and statewide initiatives. It directly or in cooperation with other public and private partners provides services and creates opportunities that make Marathon County and the surrounding area a preferred place to live, work, visit, and do business.



Framework for the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Plan is one part of the overall planning process in Marathon County. **Figure 1-1** shows the relation between the Mission and Vision, the Comprehensive Plan, and the Strategic Plan.

Background

Marathon County has a strong tradition of planning. Numerous planning efforts have taken place since the last comprehensive planning process a decade ago. The 2006 plan was the first comprehensive plan developed for the County and its focus was more on meeting the requirements of the State Planning Law rather than being developed as a tool to guide the County as a whole.

The 2016 plan moved in a new direction, while still addressing the requirements outlined in Wisconsin Statutes 66.1001, to the extent applicable. That law requires that, at a minimum, these elements or issues be discussed: Issues & Opportunities, Natural, Agricultural & Cultural Resources, Housing, Transportation, Utilities & Community Facilities, Economic Development, Land Use, Intergovernmental Cooperation, and Implementation. New topics and chapters added to that plan covered Health and Human Services, Water Resources, and Community Character.

This plan updates the 2016 version, maintaining a similar layout and chapter content structure while incorporating revised demographics, issues, goals, objectives, and actions

Planning Process

The update to the Comprehensive Plan took place from January 2025 to MONTH 2026. Public input was also sought at several stages of the plan update process, as outlined in the Public Participation Plan. As part of this process, staff reached out to all local governments throughout the County. Each chapter of the plan was reviewed by the appropriate standing committee as well as the executive committee. The team working on the day-to-day work of the plan update consisted of staff from the Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department and staff from the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. County administration was also represented.

Standing Committees

The Marathon County Board of Supervisors has 7 standing committees: Human Resources, Finance and Property; Executive; Extension, Education and Economic Development; Environmental Resources; Health and Human Services; Infrastructure; and Public Safety.

Guiding Principles

The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan is based on principles that call for actions and outcomes that meet the overarching goal to ensure that Marathon County is the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin. The guiding principles serve as the foundation for shaping and navigating the future, and will ensure that the Comprehensive Plan remains consistent with the vision of Marathon County as the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Crossroads of Wisconsin

Encourage decisions that support options to allow safe and efficient movement of people and goods in and through Marathon County by a variety of modal means.

Education and Economic Development Epicenter

Encourage decisions that support lifelong education, workforce development, and diverse opportunities for economic growth.

Environmental Stewardship

Encourage decisions that enhance the ecology and natural resources of Marathon County, while preserving and protecting them from human impacts and development, for the benefit of current and future populations.

Health Focused

Encourage decisions that promote the physical, mental, and social health of the community through affordable access, health education, health care systems, and infrastructure to encourage healthy living at all stages of life.

Multi-Partners Cooperation

Encourage decisions that support cooperation and collaboration with local, county, state, and federal governments, public-private partnerships, nonprofits, and other organizations to improve communication and efficiency.

Recreation Hub

Encourage decisions that enhance the cultural, entertainment, and outdoor recreation amenities to ensure Marathon County's future as a year-round destination for residents and visitors.

Safe and Sound

Encourage decisions that support the promotion of public safety and a sense of personal security within the community.

Sense of Place

Encourage decisions that support and enhance local history, heritage, culture, values, social pride, and community character in Marathon County to foster growth and coordinated development and to establish a vibrant sense of place.

Sustainable Agriculture

Encourage decisions that support preservation of productive farmland, growth of agribusiness, and promote innovative farming practices to maintain a strong local agricultural economy which contributes to the local and global food system.

Embrace Innovation

Encourage decisions that support the utilization of new technologies and opportunities for innovation.

Structure of the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan includes thirteen chapters, see **Figure 1-2**, along with numerous tables, charts, and maps. The various chapters cover many issues impacting Marathon County today and in the future.

Chapter one provides an introduction and overview of the Comprehensive Planning process. The next eleven chapters focus on various topics, including: demographics; health and human services; community character; natural resources; water resources; public safety; infrastructure; land use; education, workforce development, and economic development; recreation, tourism, and cultural resources; and intergovernmental cooperation.

Each of these chapters is generally laid out covering these basic sections: introduction, previous plans and studies, inventory of current conditions, issues, goals and objectives. The final chapter, Implementation, includes an Action Plan, which identifies strategies or actions to move forward with the various goals and objectives from each of the previous chapters. Future Strategic Planning efforts will focus and prioritize the Comprehensive Plan even more.

Definition

Boxes like this will give definitions for some of the more technical terms used in the plan.

Figure 1-2: Chapters

1. Introduction
2. Demographics
3. Health and Human Services
4. Community Character
5. Natural Resources
6. Water Resources
7. Public Safety
8. Infrastructure
9. Land Use
10. Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development
11. Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources
12. Intergovernmental Cooperation
13. Implementation



Chapter Two

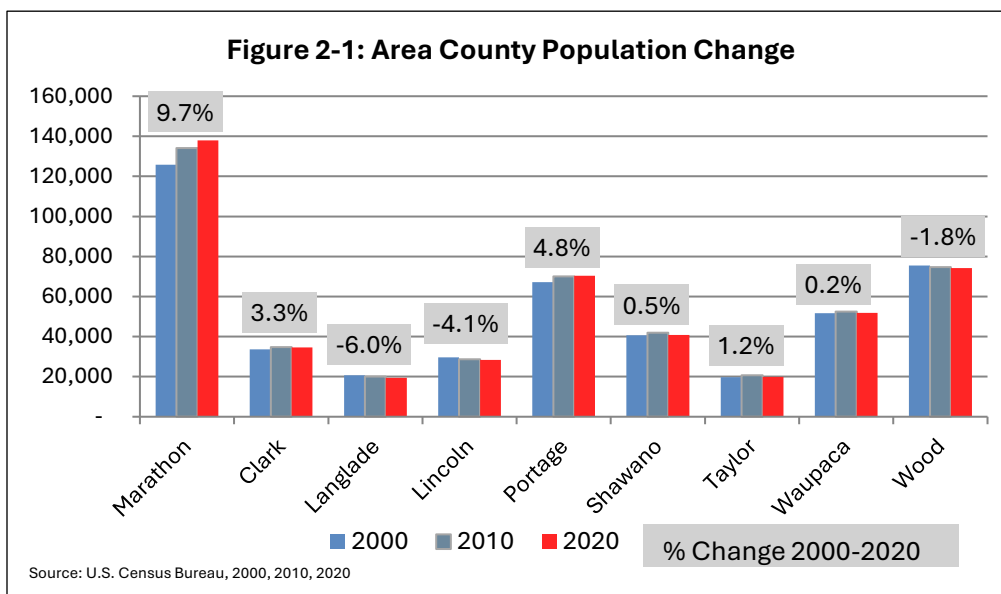
Demographics

This chapter describes demographic information as background for the planning effort. It will be used to identify trends that may have an effect on Marathon County over the next two decades. Demographics are presented in two sections: “Marathon County and Beyond” and “Within Marathon County”. “Marathon County and Beyond” shows the demographics of Marathon County compared to the State of Wisconsin and other neighboring counties. “Within Marathon County” breaks down the demographics within the county to show the regional distinctions between county borders.

Marathon County and Beyond

Regional Population Change

Marathon County has the largest population in the region and experienced the largest net increase in population, with 12,179 new residents. **Figure 2-1** illustrates population change in Marathon County and surrounding counties since 2000. The regional counties experienced a wide array of rates of population growth, with some counties experiencing a net decrease in population. Due to their smaller size, none of the regional counties added as many people as Marathon County.



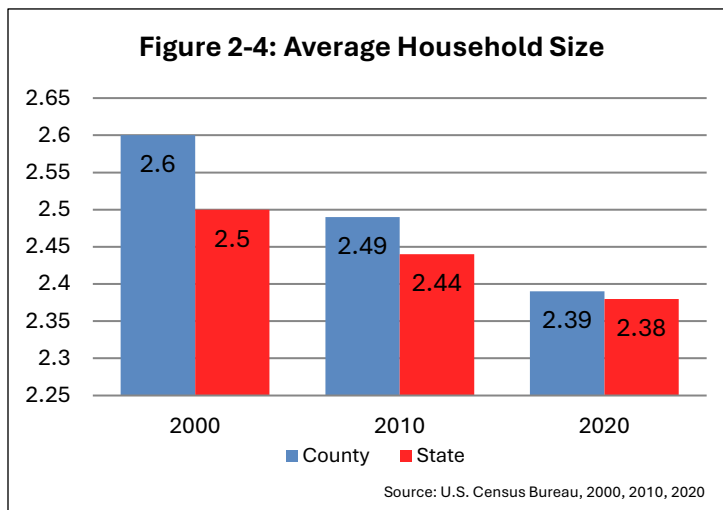
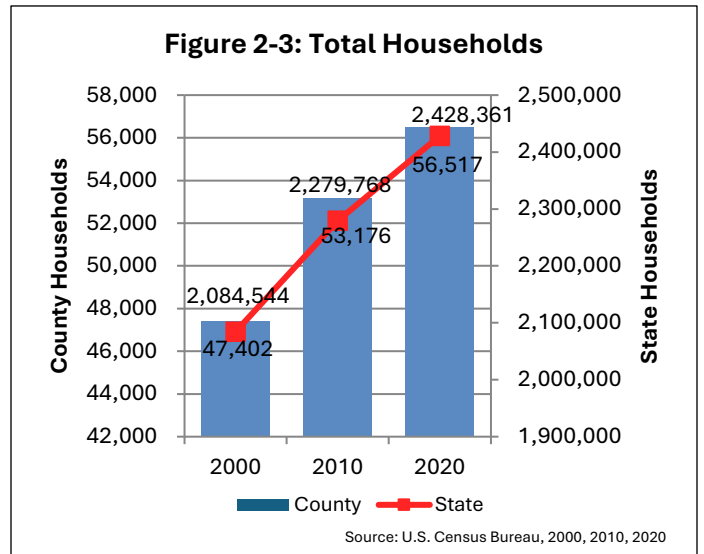
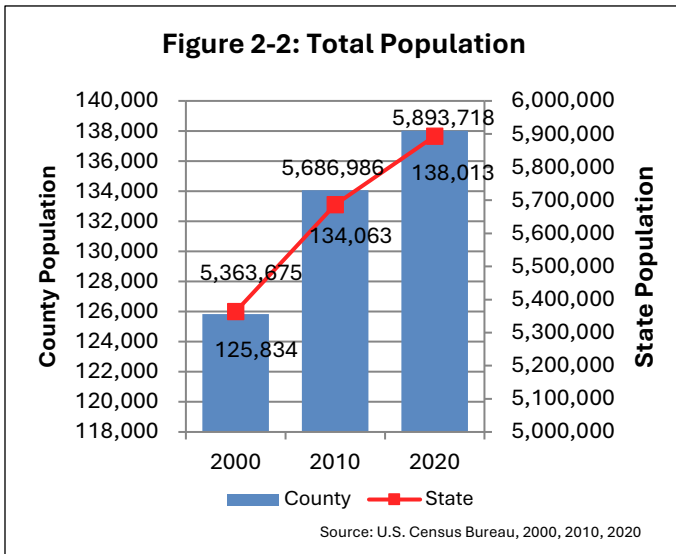
Population and Households

Since 2000, the population of Marathon County has increased by almost 10 percent, from 125,834 to 138,013. As shown in **Figure 2-2**, the population in the State increased at about the same rate during this period.

Household

All the people who occupy a housing unit, including family members and unrelated people.

Figure 2-3 shows that the number of households in Marathon County has increased by 19 percent since 2000. The average Marathon County household population declined from 2.6 people in 2000 to 2.4 in 2020, as seen in **Figure 2-4**. This is consistent with the national trend toward more households, with fewer people per household. More households are comprised of single adults, couples without children, and families with fewer children per household. Marathon County’s household numbers and household size mirrored the percentage change for the State of Wisconsin over the past two decades.



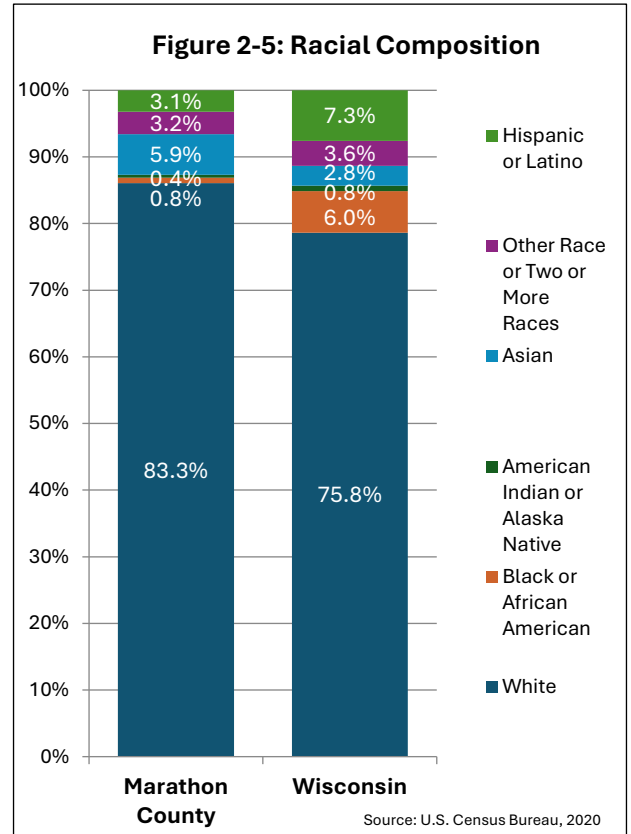
Racial Composition

The racial composition of Marathon County and the State of Wisconsin in 2020 is shown in **Figure 2-5**. Marathon County has experienced significant growth in racial diversity over the last three decades. Both Marathon County and Wisconsin are majority white, but are becoming more diverse. Marathon County has the highest Asian population percentage of all counties in Wisconsin.

The Latino population in Marathon County grew by over 1,400 people between 2010 and 2020, according to the U.S. Census. Countywide, Latinos made up 3.1 percent of the population in 2020. However, several municipalities have larger Latino population percentages, including 5 villages, 8 towns, and 4 cities.

Age

Figure 2-8 compares the distribution of population by age group from 2000 to 2020 for Marathon County and Wisconsin. Marathon County has lost population in the age groups under 25 years of age and gained population in the older age groups. Both Marathon County and Wisconsin have seen their median age increase over the past three decades. The population distribution at the County and state levels is roughly equivalent, with the biggest difference being in the 65 years and older age bracket. Marathon County has seen a 7 percent increase over the last 20 years, while Wisconsin has seen a 4.9 percent increase.



Population pyramids are a way to represent the age distribution within a population. **Figures 2-6 and 2-7** show the population pyramids for Marathon County and Wisconsin in 2020. Marathon County has a smaller percentage of its population in the young adult years than the State.

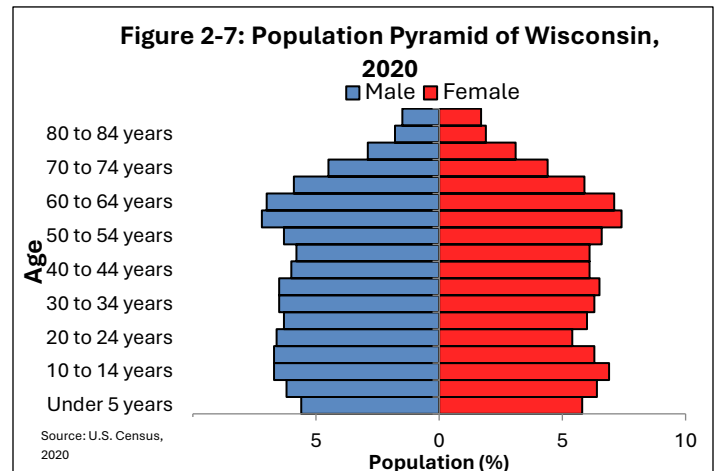
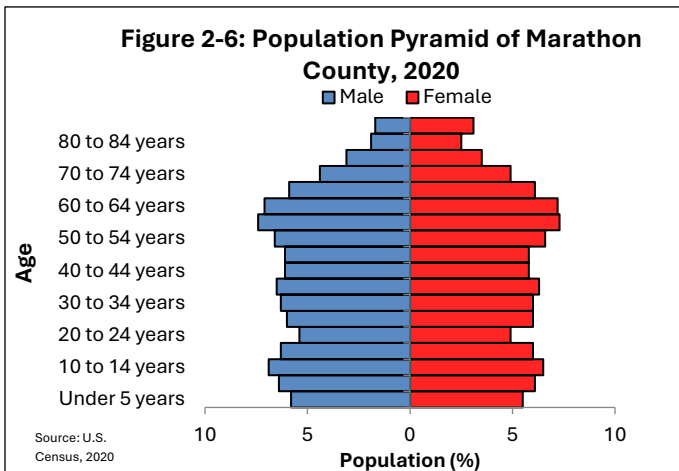


Figure 2-8: Population by Age Group						
Age Group	Percent of Population					
	Marathon County			Wisconsin		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
Under 5 years	6.4	6.5	5.7	6.4	6.	5.5
5 to 17 years	20.4	18	17	19.1	17.3	16.3
18 to 24 years	8.2	7.9	7.8	9.7	9.5	9.5
25 to 64 years	52	53.5	51	51.7	53.1	51.1
65 years and over	13	14.1	20	13.1	13.8	18.0
Median Age	36.3	39.4	41.1	36	38.5	40.1

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration, US Census, & NCWRPC

Education

Figure 2-9 compares levels of education attainment of County residents to State levels. Marathon County has seen an increase in the percent of the population with a high school degree and with a bachelor’s degree since 2000. The State has also seen an increase in these percentages and continues to be higher than County levels. In the County, 92.4 percent of the population has at least a high school degree, almost identical to the State figure. The County is farther behind the State levels in population with a bachelor’s degree, with 26.2 percent to the State’s 30.8 percent. More detailed information on education in general and the education levels of the County’s workforce can be found in Chapter 11.

Figure 2-9: Educational Attainment, age 25 and over						
Educational Attainment (as percent of population)	County			State		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
Less than 9th Grade	8.2	4.9	3.1	5.4	3.5	2.5
9th to 12th Grade, No Diploma	8	5.8	4.5	9.6	6.4	4.9
High School Graduate	38	38	33.9	34.6	33.1	30.3
Some College, No Degree	18.3	18.2	18.7	20.6	21.3	20.5
Associate’s degree	9.2	11.2	13.5	7.5	9.4	11
Bachelor's Degree	12.6	14.7	18.3	15.3	17.5	20.3
Graduate or Professional Degree	5.7	7.2	8	7.2	8.9	10.5
Percent high school grad. or higher	83.8	89.2	92.4	85.1	90.2	92.6
Percent bachelor's degree or higher	18.3	21.9	26.2	22.4	26.4	30.8

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration, 2000 & US Census - American Community Survey 2016-2020

Household Income

Both Marathon County and the State have experienced increases in median household income since 2000. The State’s median household income surpassed the County average in 2020; with the State also experiencing a faster rate of income growth

Income Level (as percent of population)	County			State		
	2000	2010	2020*	2000	2010	2020*
Less than \$10,000	5.9	4.3	3.7	7.1	5.9	4.6
\$10,000 - \$14,999	5.4	4.5	3.3	5.8	5.3	4.1
\$15,000 - \$24,999	12.3	10.8	8.9	12.7	10.8	8.6
\$25,000 - \$34,999	13.1	11.1	9.7	13.2	10.8	9
\$35,000 - \$49,999	19.4	15.8	13.2	18.1	14.8	13
\$50,000 - \$74,999	25.2	20.7	19.2	22.7	20.1	18.9
\$75,000 - \$99,999	10.5	15.3	16.8	10.9	13.6	14.1
\$100,000 - \$149,999	5.4	12	15.7	6.4	12.4	16.3
\$150,000 - \$199,999	1.3	3	4.9	1.5	3.5	6.1
\$200,000 or more	1.6	2.5	4.5	1.5	2.9	5.2
Total Households	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Median Household Income	\$45,165	\$53,762	\$63,029	\$43,791	\$52,627	\$63,293

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration, US Census American Community Survey 2016-2020 * Adjusted for inflation

than Marathon County. Income figures must be viewed with caution since the absolute numbers will rise with inflation. However, the relative percentages of residents in each income level indicate that income distribution in Marathon County is proportionate to levels observed Statewide in both 2010 and 2020. Chapter 11 goes into more detailed information about the income levels of Marathon County’s population.

Employment Characteristics

Figure 2-11 illustrates the breakdown, by occupation, of the employed population of Marathon County in 2010 and 2020. The ‘employed population’ is

Sector	2010		2020	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Management, Business, Science, and Arts Occupations	22,048	31.8	25,238	35.5
Service Occupations	9,731	14.1	10,568	14.8
Sales and Office Occupations	16,596	24.0	14,656	20.6
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	6,497	9.3	6,941	9.8
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations	14,376	20.8	13,784	19.4
Total Employed Population	69,248	100.0	71,187	100.0

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration, US Census American Community Survey 2016-2020

defined as people living in the County who are 16 years and older. In 2020, the County had an employed population of 71,187, a 2.8 percent increase from 2010. The three sectors with the highest employment in the County were Management, Business, Science, and Arts Occupations; Sales and Office; and Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations. Greater details regarding employment characteristics can be found in Chapter 11’s economic development section.

Within Marathon County

Marathon County is the largest county in the state of Wisconsin, based on the area. As such, its boundaries contain a diversity of commerce and communities, landscapes, and land uses.

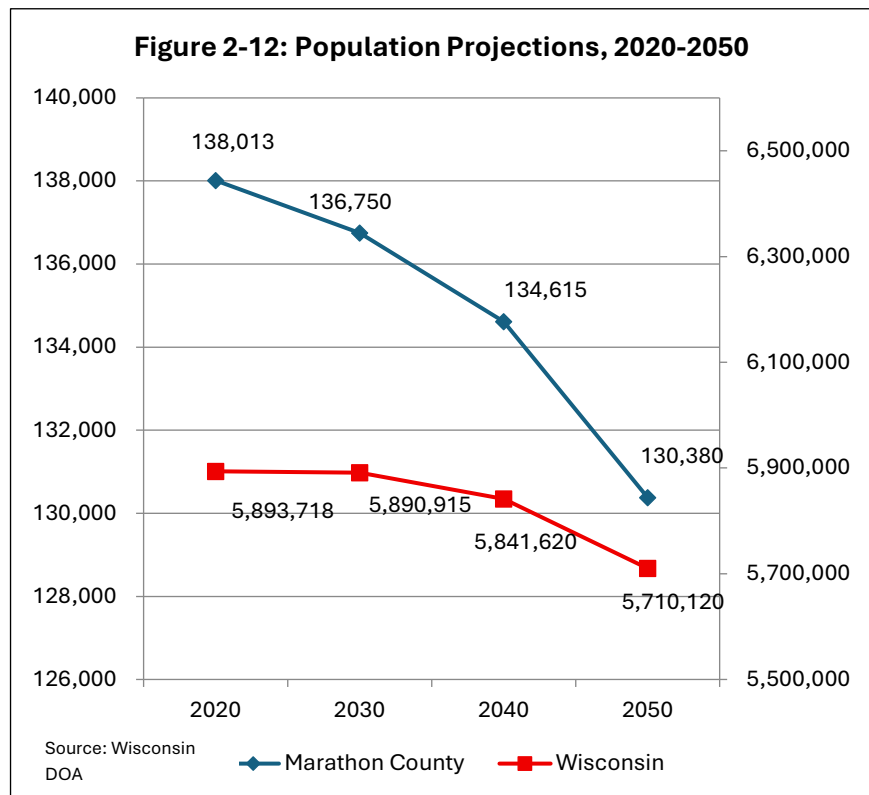
Municipal Growth

The areas within the County experience change and growth at different rates. Eight municipal units within Marathon County grew by over 100 people between 2010 and 2020. 30 units experienced negative population growth. The City of Wausau and its surrounding municipalities experienced the largest population changes. The City of Wausau and the Villages of Weston, Rothschild, Rib Mountain, and Kronenwetter all had high positive net growth, while the Village of Scholfield had negative net growth.

About half of the municipalities have experienced modest percentage growth over the last two decades. Most of the communities with negative percentage growth also have relatively small populations.

Growth Projections

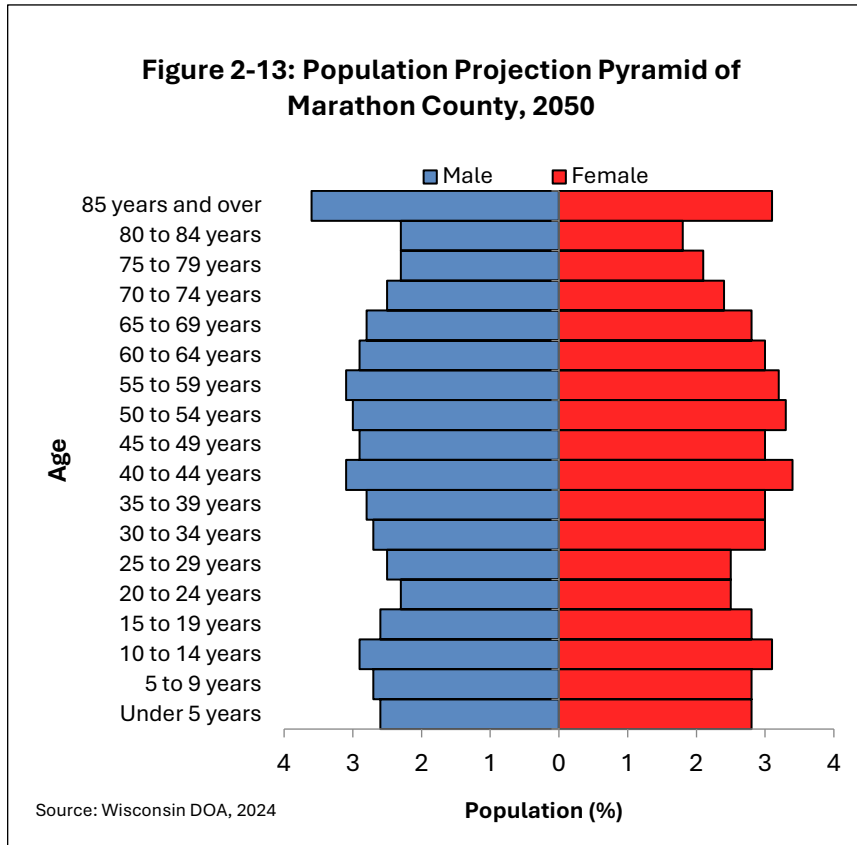
It is necessary, when planning for the future, to have an idea of future population growth. The Wisconsin Department of Administration (WDOA) statistically estimates population and household projections for Wisconsin. WDOA population projections are recognized as Wisconsin’s official population projections in accordance with Wisconsin Statute 16.96. **Figure 2-12** indicates population projections for Marathon County and Wisconsin completed in 5-year increments by WDOA.



For Marathon County, these projections assume a moderate rate of decline, resulting in a population decrease of 7,633 persons, or 5.5 percent between 2020 and 2050. Wisconsin is also projected to decline 3.1 percent by 2050. Few municipalities are projected to have very high positive population growth.

To add detail to the population projections, **Figure 2-13** shows the projected 2050 population broken down by age cohort. As the large baby boomer generation reaches retirement age by 2050, the pyramid shape of previous decades gives way to a more linear diagram. A significantly higher percentage of women survive into the older age cohorts than men. Marathon County is projected to continue to struggle to attract and retain both men and women in the 20 to 24 years of age cohort.

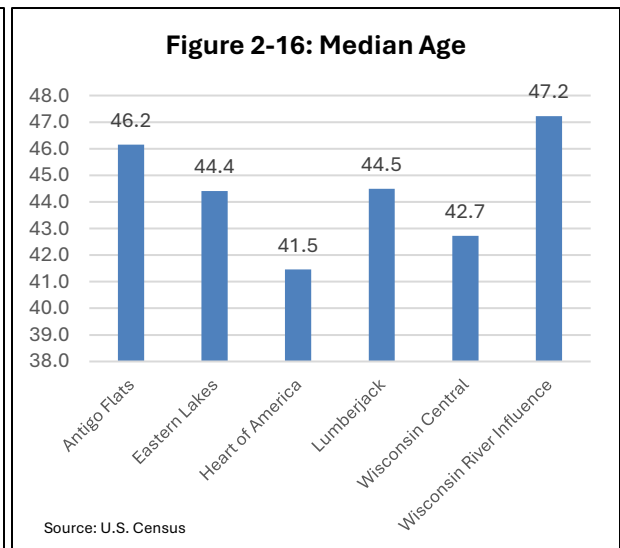
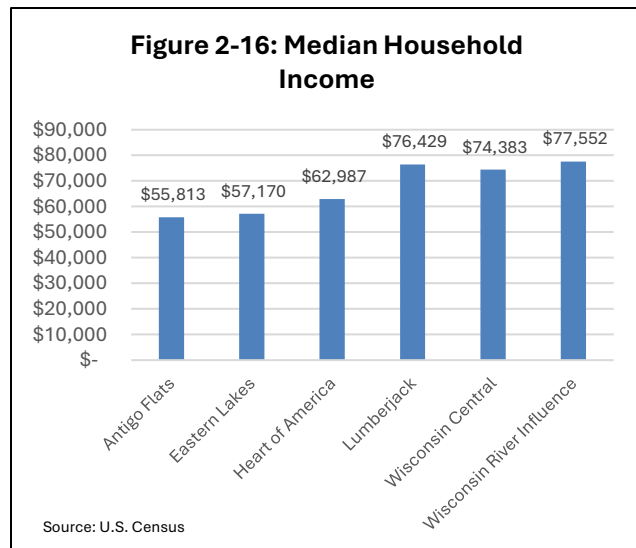
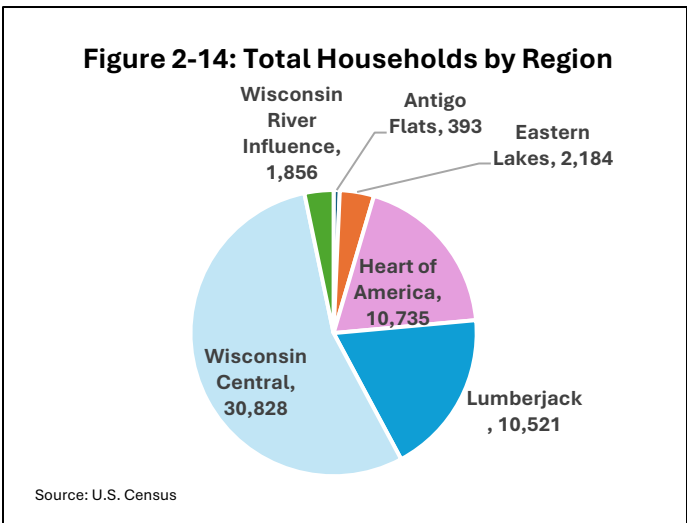
Cohort
A group of persons sharing a statistical or demographic characteristic.



Marathon County's Six Regions

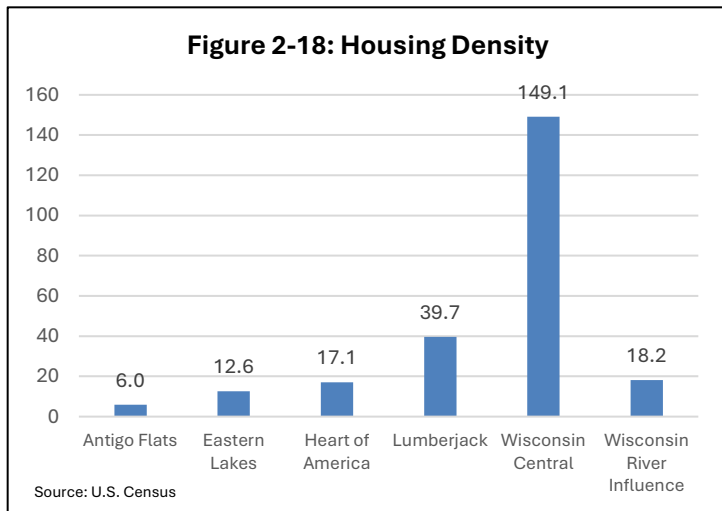
The recent Marathon County Farmland Preservation Plan examined the county in six subregions to better understand trends impacting agriculture. These regions are included in the plan for background. The work yielded the Six Regions of Marathon County—Antigo Flats, Eastern Lakes, Heart of America, Lumberjack, Wisconsin Central, and Wisconsin River Influence, see **Map 2-1**.

The six regions attempt to distinguish some of the unique features that set each area of the county apart. As **Figure 2-14** shows, residents are not dispersed evenly through the regions. Over half of the population lives in Wisconsin Central, while less than one percent live in Antigo Flats. However, there are also several unifying characteristics that show similarities within the County. Median Household Income, seen in **Figure 2-15**, is quite consistent across the regions, with Lumberjack and Wisconsin River Influence being slightly higher than the other regions. All regions have a higher median household income than Wisconsin (\$63,293) and the United States (\$67,521). **Figure 2-16** shows the median age among the regions between 41.5 years and 47.2 years, with a County median age of 41.1. Despite the variation among the regions, Marathon County has an older median age than Wisconsin (39.6 years) and the United States (38.2 years).



Antigo Flats

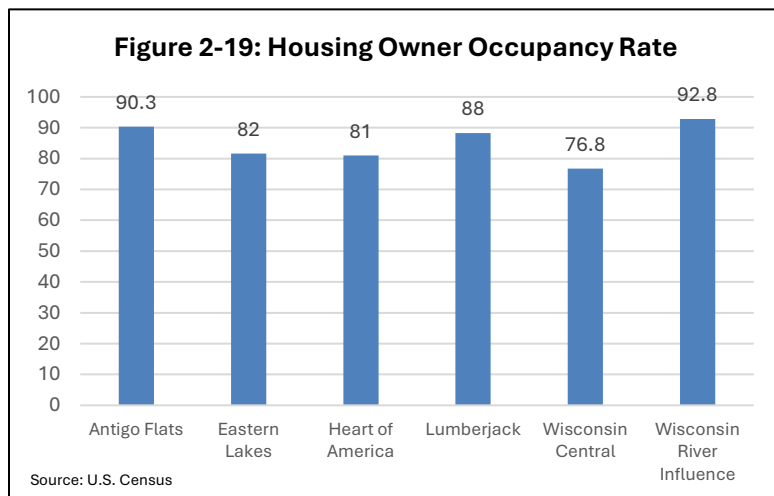
Encompassing the towns of Harrison and Plover, Antigo Flats earns its name for its regional connection to the City of Antigo in Langlade County and its subsistence on family potato farms. Antigo Flats is the smallest of the six regions, in both size and population. In 2020, the region had 995 people in an area of about 72 square miles. The median age in Antigo Flats is 46.2 years old.



In addition to the largely generational farms that make up Antigo Flats, this region is characterized by large tracts of publicly owned land and outdoor recreation areas, including the Bitzke Bird Walk, the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park, the Ice Age Trail, and the Plover River State Fishery. Private lands are a mix of agriculture and forest lands with scattered large lot residential development.

Density
The number of inhabitants, dwellings, or other similar measurements in a given area. Density is often expressed as dwelling units per acre or people per square mile.

The agriculture industry in the Antigo Flats region is primarily seed potato and vegetable crops. Farms are generational and include several Century Farms. Residents in the area primarily go to the City of Antigo for school, work, socializing, and shopping. Residents do not feel connected with their county of residence. The area is challenged with a lack of connection with Marathon County government, which can lead to both perceived and actual lack of county services.



Antigo Flats is the smallest geographic region, with only two towns. It is also the least populated, with a population density of 13.8 people per square mile, much lower than the County

average of 89.8 people per square mile. Antigo Flats has the lowest housing density in the county at an average of 6 homes per square mile, see **Figure 2-17**, and has large residential lots with an average of 2.7 acres. The actual housing density is even lower, given the large publicly owned land

base. Antigo Flats has the second highest owner occupancy rate, at 90.3 percent, behind only Wisconsin River Influence at 92.8 percent, see **Figure 2-18**.

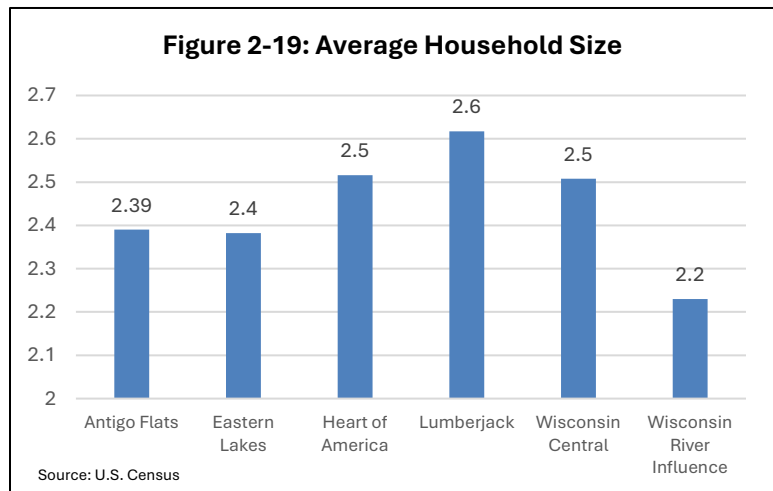
Eastern Lakes

The Eastern Lakes region includes the towns of Norrie, Elderon, Franzen, Reid, and Bevent, and the village of Hatley. With 5,265 people in a land area of 190.7 square miles, this is the third smallest region and has the second lowest population density at 27.6 persons per square mile. The Eastern Lakes region has a median age of 44.4, the same as the County median age of 44.1.

The area was glaciated, resulting in a forested landscape with many kettle lakes. The area is characterized by smaller tracts of forested and agricultural lands. Many residences are seasonal lake homes and hunting cabins. Residential development averages 1.6 acres, but lot size is highly variable due to the mix of larger residential lots in agricultural areas, smaller residential lots in the forested areas, and the smallest residential lots along lakeshores. The southeastern corner of Marathon County is spotted with lakes around which communities have developed. People from this region tend to value a more remote lifestyle, which gives this region the longest average commute and the farthest travel times to other services.

The Eastern Lakes region had stagnant population growth, the third lowest to Antigo Flats and Heart of America, which both saw population decline. Housing growth varies across the county, as housing units have declined by 1.7% (4.9% county-wide housing growth) over the last decade. Housing density is second lowest in the county (average of 12.6 homes/square mile) and on lots that are similar to the county-wide average (1.6 acres in the region, 1.6 acres county-wide).

The region does not have a commercial center for goods and services; therefore, residents in the region go to school, work, socialize, and purchase many of their goods and services from cities and villages outside the region, such as Stevens Point and Rosholt in Portage County, Wausau in Marathon County, and Birnamwood and Wittenberg in Shawano County. Because of the scattered service centers, various school districts, and the prevalence of seasonal homes, the region does not have the strong sense of community found in most of the other regions in the county. The area is challenged with a lower residency rate than other areas of the county due to seasonal lake homes and hunting cottages. This often results in less connection with the community and a lower degree of community involvement than in areas with high residency rates.



The Eastern Lakes region is similar to the average household size as the county, with 2.4 persons per household, see **Figure 2-19**. This is perhaps related to the prominence of retirement and vacation homes in the region. The region has the second lowest median household income of the regions at \$57,170 per household. Eastern Lakes also has the longest mean travel time to work, with people driving an average of 32 minutes to their place of employment.

Heart of America

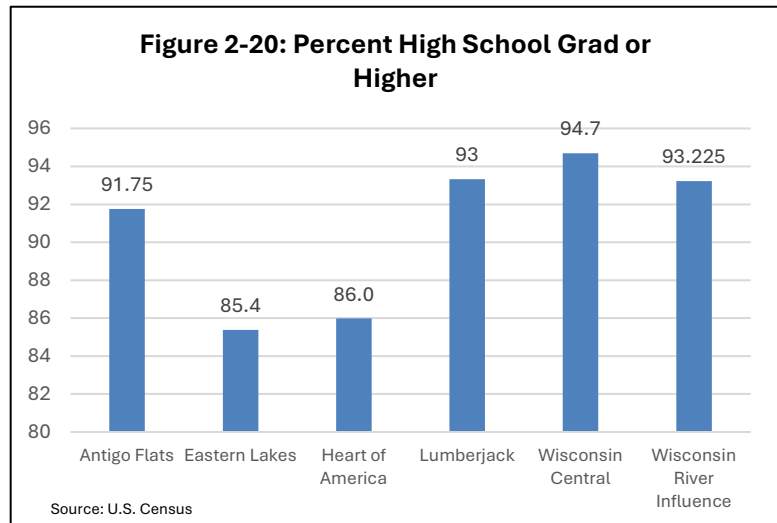
The Heart of America region is named after the Heart of America’s Dairyland Agricultural Enterprise Area in eastern Clark County and western Marathon County. The region includes the towns of Berlin, Bern, Brighton, Cassel, Day, Eau Pleine, Emmet, Frankfort, Halsey, Hamburg, Holton, Hull, Johnson, Marathon, McMillan, Reitbrock, Rib Falls, Spencer, and Wien; the villages of Athens, Dorchester, Edgar, Fenwood, Marathon City, Spencer, Stratford, and Unity; and the cities of Abbotsford, Colby, and Marshfield. The Heart of America is the largest of the regions in geographic area, with a land area of 665.1.8 square miles, and the second largest in terms of population, with 27,746 people in 2020. The large size and modest population give a population density of 41.7 persons per square mile. This region has the youngest median age of all the regions, at 41.5 years, similar to that of the County median age of 44.1 years.

The region is characterized by a flat to gently rolling landscape, with large tracts of contiguous farmland, and forest in the wetter areas and along streams. The Heart of America is fueled by Marathon County’s commercial dairy farms, giving western Marathon County an Americana appeal. A number of small towns—Athens, Edgar, Marathon City, Spencer, Stratford—are more than just service and commercial centers; they are foundational to community identities within this region.

The population and housing growth in the Heart of America is moderate, similar to that of county-wide growth. Homes in the area are scattered, about 17 homes per square mile, and on large lots with an average of 1.6 acres. Residents in the area have a

strong sense of community. Residents primarily live, work, attend school, socialize, and purchase many of their goods and services in the small villages and cities in the region.

The area is challenged with balancing the protection of transportation infrastructure with the needs of the agriculture industry, conflicts in the urban and rural transitional areas around villages and cities, limited groundwater quantity, and agricultural runoff. The conversion of the State Highway 29



corridor to limited access poses additional challenges to farmers with property on both sides of the highway.

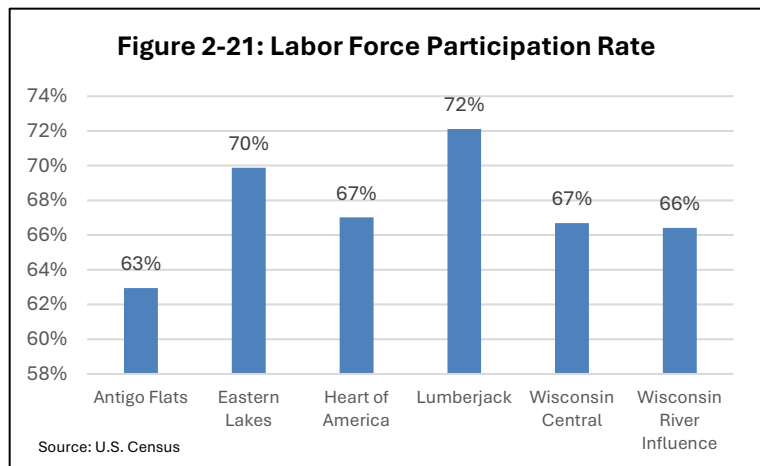
The Heart of America region is the largest, geographically, of the six regions in Marathon County, covering nearly half of the land area. Heart of America has the second-largest average household size, at 2.5 persons per household. **Figure 2-20** shows that the region also has the second lowest population percentage with an educational attainment of a high school degree or higher, at 86 percent.

Lumberjack

The Lumberjack region includes the towns of Easton, Hewitt, Maine, Ringle, Texas, Wausau, and Weston, and the villages of Brokaw and Weston. In 2020, this region had a population of 26,292 people in a land area of 277.1 square miles, giving Lumberjack the second-highest population density, with 90.7 persons per square mile. Lumberjack also has the third oldest median age at 44.5 years.

The area is characterized by family operations of small agri-tourism and activity farming, such as corn mazes, pumpkin patches, and hayrides. With the location of Wausau East High School, the Lumberjack region has seen an increase in residential development. Surrounding much of the metro area, especially to the north and east, farmland is converted into large residential lots for commuting professionals who want the commercial amenities of the urban area but the residential benefits of more rural parts of the county. The area is challenged to balance the demand for high level, cost effective public services with available resources.

The population and housing growth in the Lumberjack region is the second highest in the county (3.6% and 7.7% compared to 2.9% and 4.9% county-wide). This growth is at least partly due to the location of Wausau East

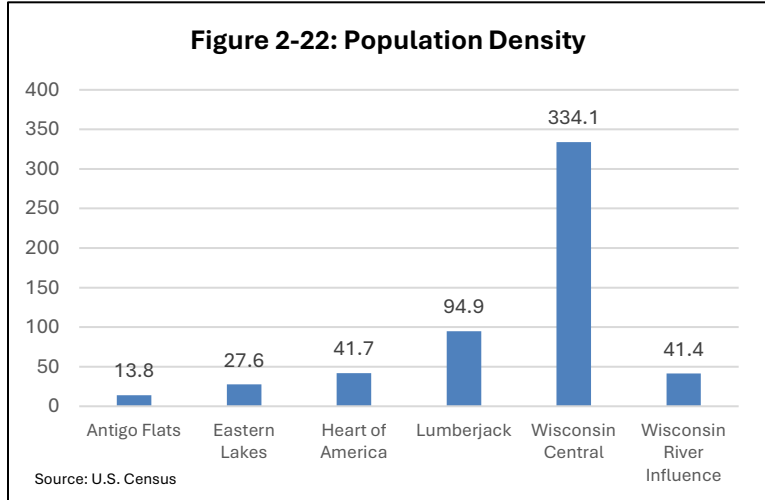


High School and the newer elementary schools in the region. Housing density is the second highest (about 40 homes per square mile) and on large lots (average of 1.9 acres). Residents in the area primarily work, socialize, and purchase many of their goods and services in the Wisconsin Central region.

The Lumberjack region has the highest labor force participation rate of the six regions at 72 percent, see **Figure 2-21**. For comparison, the labor force participation rate in Lumberjack is higher than in Marathon County (67.8%), in Wisconsin (66.1%), and in the United States (63.4%).

Wisconsin Central

The Wisconsin Central region includes the cities of Mosinee, Schofield, and Wausau; the Villages of Kronenwetter, Rib Mountain, and Rothschild; and the towns of Guenther, Mosinee, and Stettin. Wisconsin Central is the region with the largest population and the highest population density, with 72,990 people in 218.5 square miles of land area. The median age in this region is 42.7 years.

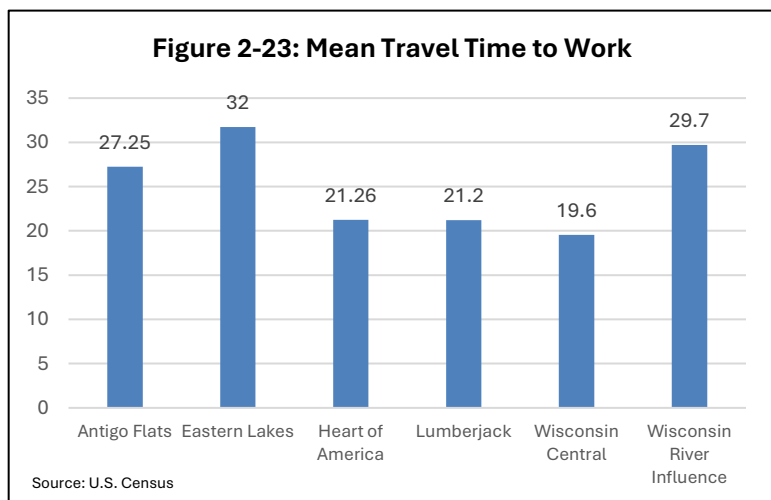


Wisconsin Central is the urban center of the county and serves as the employment, higher education, goods and services provider, and social recreation center of the county. This area serves as a regional marketplace for producers to sell goods at farmers’ markets and local businesses. The area is challenged by the loss of industry in a growing urban area that is served by public utilities.

The population and housing growth in Wisconsin Central is high (4.8% and 5.2% compared to 2.9% and 4.9% county-wide). Homes in the area are clustered (about 149 homes per square mile) and on small lots (average 1.3 acres), although the median lot size is much smaller because most of the housing is on small lots in the urbanized area. Residents in the area primarily live, work, attend school, socialize, and purchase many of their goods and services within the region.

Wisconsin Central combines the various communities that make up the Wausau Metro Area, offering higher-density residential living and the amenities of a more urban lifestyle, including arts and culture, restaurants, and retail. Its central location with easy access to highways 51 and 29 makes it a regional service provider for all of Marathon County and the greater Northwoods area.

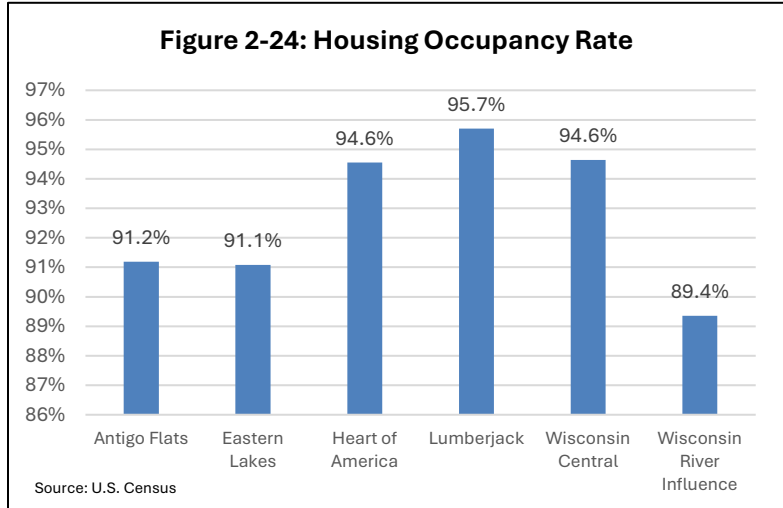
Wisconsin Central is the most centrally located region in the County and is also the most urban of the regions. As the urban region, it has the highest population density at 334 persons per square mile, about 3.5 times as dense as the second densest region, see **Figure 2-22**. Wisconsin Central has the shortest average travel time to work of the six regions at 19.6 minutes, which is over 1.5 minutes shorter



than any other region, see **Figure 2-23**. Additionally, Wisconsin Central has the second highest housing occupancy rate, at 94.6 percent, but the lowest housing owner occupancy rate, at 76.8 percent.

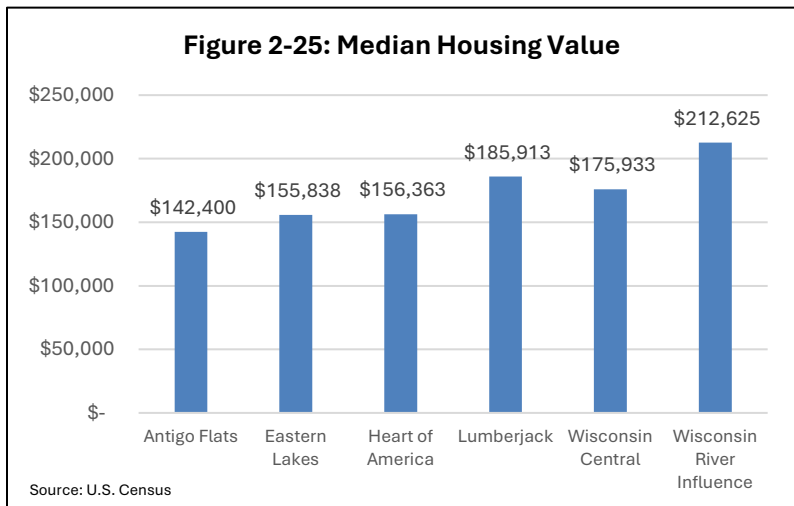
Wisconsin River Influence

The Wisconsin River Influence region includes the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, Lake DuBay, Wisconsin River, Mead Wildlife Area, and the surrounding towns of Bergen, Cleveland, Green Valley, and Knowlton. With only 4,725 people in a land area of 114.2 square miles, Wisconsin River Influence is the second smallest region. The median age in this region is the highest of any region, at 47.2 years.



The region is characterized by its surface water features, forests, and farmland. The agriculture industry is varied and includes berries, ginseng, Christmas trees, apple orchards, grain, dairy, and other livestock. This south-central region provides its residents with access to the benefits of Wausau, Stevens Point, and Marshfield, and the flowages of the Wisconsin River, making this region an attractive place to live and giving it the highest per capita income in Marathon County.

Household income and equalized value per capita are higher in this region than in any other region in the county. While the housing density is relatively low overall (18 homes per square mile), homes are somewhat clustered. This discrepancy is due to the significant surface water acreage in the region. Residential lots are smaller than county-wide (average 1.6 acres), likely due to smaller water frontage lots decreasing the overall lot size in the region.



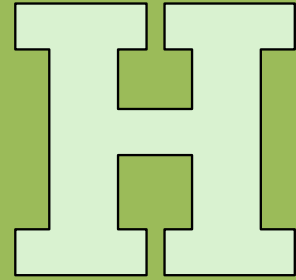
Residents of this region primarily work and shop outside the Wisconsin River Influence region in the cities of Stevens Point and Wausau.

The Wisconsin River Influence is the second smallest region, both in terms of geographic area and population. This region has the highest owner occupancy rate of the regions, at 92.8 percent, see

Figure 2-18. The region has the highest median housing value at \$212,625, see **Figure 2-25**. Wisconsin River Influence also has the highest median household income, at \$77,552 per household.

Section One

Healthiest



Chapter Three	Health and Human Services
Chapter Four	Community Character
Chapter Five	Natural Resources
Chapter Six	Water Resources

Chapter Three

Health and Human Services



N.B. The Health and Human Services chapter is an addition to the Marathon County Comprehensive Plan. By State Statute, this section is not required as part of a County Comprehensive Plan but was agreed to by the County Board Executive Committee as a vital addition. The framework of this chapter is slightly different than the other chapters in the plan. For each topic, an overview of the topic is followed by a brief description of the related services currently taking place in Marathon County.

Marathon County government plays a key role in shaping policies and delivering services that promote lifelong health and wellbeing. Residents benefit from coordinated efforts between public and private partners to provide accessible, effective health and human services.

Like many communities across the state and nation, Marathon County faces complex, interconnected challenges that affect individuals and families. Factors such as poverty, education, income, mental health, substance use, and childhood experiences are closely linked and influence both personal wellbeing and community resilience.

The ability of a community to improve health and wellbeing depends in large part on the collaboration among government agencies, healthcare and human service providers, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. Working together to reduce disparities among populations that experience a greater burden of health-related challenges is essential. Marathon County has a strong history of cross-sector partnerships. Continued collaboration, shared goals, and open communication are essential to drive progress and strengthen community health.

Previous Plans and Studies

LIFE Report & Marathon County Pulse – 2023

LIFE in Marathon County is a biennial report depicting the quality of life in Marathon County. The purpose of the LIFE in Marathon County Report is to acknowledge community strengths, identify community challenges, and serve as a catalyst for change by advancing community conversations and partnerships around the Calls to Action.

Marathon County Community Health Improvement Plan– 2022-2026

The LIFE Report is used as the basis for Marathon County’s Community Health Assessment. Marathon County Health Department is statutorily responsible for conducting a community health assessment and developing an improvement plan. This responsibility is shared with the Marathon County Board of Health and Healthy Marathon County. Healthy Marathon County is a partnership of health care and community organizations working together to make a healthier community. Community health priorities for 2022- 2026 include: mental health, access and affordability of health care, and alcohol, tobacco, and substance misuse.

Marathon County Comprehensive 20-Year Child Welfare & Family Well-Being Plan (2026-2046)

This plan adopts a vision that every child in Marathon County grows up in a safe, stable, and nurturing environment, supported by strong families, thriving communities, and a resilient service system that adapts to changing needs and emerging best practices. It includes four goals and numerous strategies for achieving this vision, with long-term impact goals to reduce the number of children entering foster care as a result of prevention investments, increase family stability via increased reunification rate, and build workforce resiliency and community capacity for child and family wellbeing efforts.

Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System - 2025

Established in 1984, BRFSS collects data nationwide, completing over 400,000 interviews a year on topics related to health, including disparities in health and health care, trends in chronic diseases, and behaviors that impact the risk of health challenges. The results are used to assess progress toward achieving public health goals and to plan, support, and evaluate programs promoting public health. Approximately 9,000 adult Wisconsinites are interviewed each year. The Wisconsin interactive module of data is available at: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/wish/brfs/form.htm>

Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Report – 2023

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) produce this annual report on Child Abuse and Neglect in Wisconsin. The Report tracks key statistics and performance measures to mark outcomes. The DCF values safety, permanence, stability, and well-being for children; strength-based family-centered approaches; respectful interactions for families; cultural competency; and partnership between the child welfare system and families and communities. Child welfare dashboards providing statewide and county performance in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being are available on demand.

Moving Forward: Policies and Strategies to Prevent and Reduce Excessive Alcohol Use in Wisconsin – 2021

Assembled by the Wisconsin State Council on Alcohol and Other Drug Use Prevention Committee and the Alcohol Prevention Ad-Hoc Workgroup, this report is an analysis and recommendations for addressing and reducing excessive alcohol misuse in Wisconsin before disorders and behavioral and medical intervention are necessary. The report uses evidence-based research to outline how policies in communities may play roles or contribute to alcohol misuse. It provides

recommendations on how to prevent misuse of alcohol, predominantly through making it harder to access, compliance checks, and interventions.

Marathon County Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Gap Analysis – 2024

Partnering with Third Horizon, Marathon County undertook a comprehensive gap analysis and needs assessment to make recommendations related to the substance use and opioid overdose epidemic in Marathon County. The report provides a thorough analysis of best practices in prevention, treatment, and recovery from SUD, highlighting current services available in the county, identifying populations that are disproportionately affected by substance use, and making recommendations to address needs and gaps in Marathon County.

Preventing Youth Access to Delta-8 THC and Other Hemp Derived Psychoactive Cannabis Products – 2024

The 2018 Farm Bill legalized hemp, defining it as, “the plant Cannabis sativa L. and any part of that plant, including the seeds thereof and all derivatives, extracts, cannabinoids, isomers, acids, salts, and salts of isomers, whether growing or not, with a delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol concentration of not more than 0.3 percent on a dry weight basis (7 USC § 1639o (1) HEMP).” This definition allows for wider ability to sell derived psychoactive cannabis products as long as their products fit the Farm Bill’s broad definition of hemp and allows wider access to youth. This report prioritizes strategies aimed at reducing access and appeal to young people as it relates to Derived Psychoactive Cannabis Products.

Wisconsin State Health Improvement Plan – 2023-2027

A state-mandated, five-year plan, the Wisconsin State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP), guides public health actions by identifying priority areas and strategies for improving health and reducing health disparities. It is a community adaptable document that provides a roadmap for addressing public health challenges through a combination of policy, systems, and environmental changes.

Current Conditions and Services

There are a number of factors and conditions that shape our communities, which impact people’s ability to enjoy lifelong health and wellbeing. The following sections provide an overview of these factors that will impact the future of Marathon County and the services provided.

Economic Wellbeing of Children

Between 9 and 11 million children in the United States live in poverty. Poverty is the single greatest threat to children’s wellbeing, and children living in poverty are at significantly higher risk for poor health and development.

Health Disparities

Health disparities are preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations.

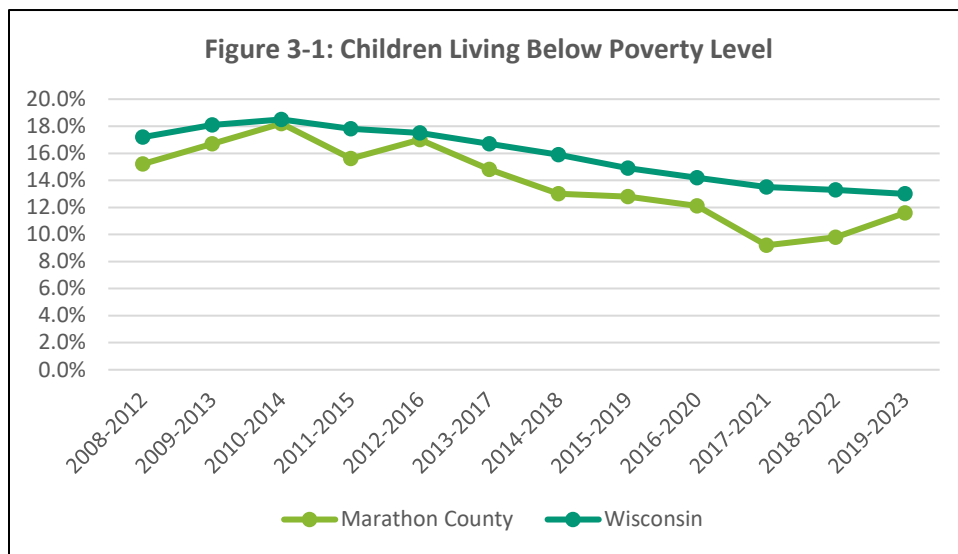
Family income has been shown to affect a child’s wellbeing in numerous studies. Compared to their peers, children in poverty are more likely to have physical and emotional health problems. The percentage of children in poverty in Marathon County has decreased from 17% in the 2012-2016 timeframe to 11.6% in the 2019-2023 timeframe.

Poverty

The poverty threshold is the measure used to reflect a family’s or an individual’s needs and varies based on the size of the family and the ages of the members. Any family or individual with an income lower than the threshold is considered to be in poverty.

Percentage of Children Under Age 18 in Poverty

In 2023, 11.6 percent of Marathon County residents under the age of 18 were living below the federal poverty level, according to the 2019-2023 American Community Survey.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Current Programs/Services

The Marathon County Department of Social Services provides support to vulnerable children, adults, and families in Marathon County through programs for food, housing, and other benefits. Most programs are mandated by state law.

The Wisconsin Shares Child Care program provides child care assistance for working low-income families, working foster parents, kinship care relatives providing care under a court order and receiving kinship care benefits, and for individuals who are preparing for employment through Wisconsin Works, FoodShare Employment and Training Program, or are in high school and working on their high school diploma. Wisconsin’s Caretaker Supplement (CTS) is a cash benefit available to parents who are eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments. Caretaker Supplement is not a Medicaid benefit; it pays cash only to eligible parents.

The Child Support Program is a cooperative county, state, and federal effort designed to ensure that all children are supported by their parents. Through the collection of support, the Child Support

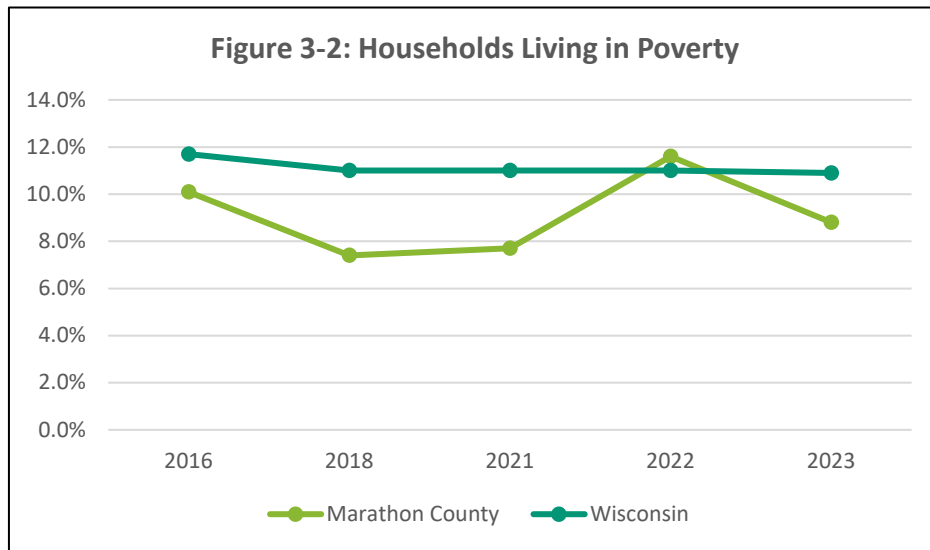
Program helps to ensure the economic well-being of children who reside in single-parent households, helps to reduce welfare dependence, and helps to reduce the costs associated with welfare.

Adult Economic Wellbeing

The social, economic, and physical environment in which a person lives shapes their individual characteristics and behaviors. Poor housing conditions, low education and income levels, unemployment, lack of access to affordable health services, and lack of social support networks are all consequences of complex problems that impact a person’s health and social wellbeing.

Households Living Below the Poverty Level

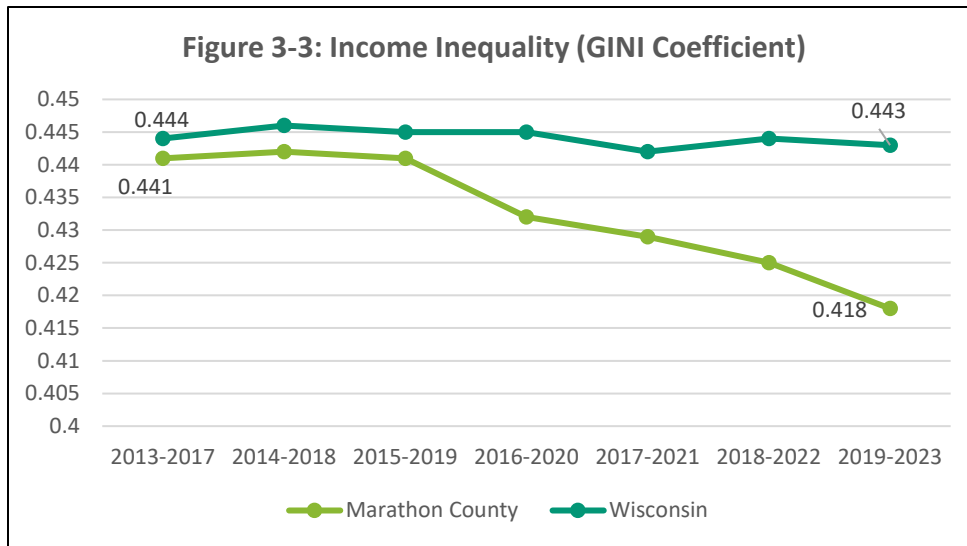
Federal poverty thresholds are set every year by the Census Bureau and vary size of household and the ages of household members. A high poverty rate is both a cause and a consequence of poor economic conditions. Through decreased buying power and decreased taxes, poverty is associated with decreased business survival. At 8.8 percent, Marathon County’s households living below the poverty level decreased slightly from the 2016 rate of 10.1 percent.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Income Inequality

Some studies show that the level of economic inequality in a community can be a strong indicator of the population's health level. The Gini coefficient is commonly used as a measure of income inequality, whereby zero denotes complete equality in a population and one denotes complete inequality. Marathon County, at .418, sits closer to zero than the Wisconsin and national averages.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

One measure of economic wellbeing is the ability to earn a living wage. A living wage accounts for covering the basic costs of a safe and decent standard of living without the need for government support or poverty programs. See the Workforce Development Section of Chapter 10 for a discussion of the living wage thresholds in Marathon County.

Homelessness is an issue that continues to grow in Marathon County. Many of these individuals have limited housing options and lack the financial resources to pay for housing. There is an increasing need in Marathon County for affordable and available housing needs for individuals and families, specifically low-income individuals and families.

Current Programs/Services

The Social Services Department has an Economic Support unit that determines eligibility and maintains benefits for many federal and state programs. The unit currently assists customers with health coverage and medical assistance through the Health Insurance Marketplace, medical assistance through Medicaid, food assistance through the FoodShare program, kinship care, caretaker supplement benefits, and the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program.

The Marathon County Veterans Service Office assists local veterans and their dependents or survivors in obtaining federal and state financial and educational benefits. Also, this program helps veterans who are homeless or at risk of being homeless by connecting them to the Veterans Assistance Program and many other services such as health care, mental health treatment, and transitional housing.

The Aging and Disability Resources Center of Central Wisconsin (ADRC-CW) provides information and assistance regarding all public and private benefit programs, such as Medicare, Medical Assistance, Social Security, as well as other legal, housing, and financial assistance programs that help maintain the financial, health, and social wellbeing of adults.

Many programs exist in Marathon County to help people find employment. See the Workforce Development section of Chapter 10 for details on these programs.

Children and Adults with Disabilities

Children and adults with disabilities need health care and health programs for the same reasons as anyone else does—to stay well, active, and a part of the community.

Children and adults with any disability are significant. Having a disability does not mean a person is not healthy or that he or she cannot be healthy. Being healthy means the same thing for all of us—getting and staying well so we can lead full, active lives. That includes having the tools and information to make healthy choices and knowing how to prevent illness.

For example, developmental disabilities are a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavioral areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person’s lifetime. Developmental disabilities begin anytime during the developmental period and usually last throughout a person’s lifetime. Most developmental disabilities begin before a baby is born, but some can happen after birth because of injury, infection, or other factors.

Current Programs/Services

Marathon County has a variety of programs and services to serve children and adults who have developmental disabilities to help them realize their full potential.

The Marathon County Social Services Department Children’s Long-Term Support Program provides services for families of children (age 0-18) with disabilities, with the goal of keeping children in their homes. Skilled professionals work with families to provide adaptive aids, day services, teach daily living skills, and offer in-home treatment therapies that help each child reach their greatest potential.

Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) is dedicated to meeting family needs through a statewide coordinated system of information, referral, and follow-up, family to family support, and strong partnerships with providers in 15 counties of northern Wisconsin. The Northern Regional Center provides free and confidential services for children less than 22 years of age who have a physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition that has lasted over a year and who require more health or educational services than other children their same age. The Wausau office serves all of Marathon County as well as other counties in northern Wisconsin.

North Central Health Care has a variety of programs for children and adults who have developmental disabilities to help them realize their full potential, helping them build daily living, learning, decision-making and vocational skills based on their personal choices and abilities.

North Central Health Care’s Birth to Three program works in partnership with the families and friends of children with developmental delays or disabilities, providing parents and their child with the extra support they need within their natural environment and daily routines. Their goal is to help make each day a learning opportunity — a day filled with opportunities that help children reach his or her full potential — by providing parents with the knowledge, skills, support, and resources they need.

The Adult Day Service is structured for individuals with developmental and physical disabilities, who are 18 and older, to reach their greatest social, educational, cognitive, life, and community potential by offering them a variety of activities that stimulate their interest and growth.

The Vocational Services program helps adults and transitional adolescents who have mental health disorders, cognitive disabilities, learning and physical disabilities, access employment opportunities suited to their abilities and preferences. NCHC teams with over 100 employers to provide creative employment opportunities that are mutually beneficial to the individual and the company.

Organizations like Inclusa (formerly Community Care Connections of Wisconsin) and Lakeland Care are State Certified Managed Long Term Care Organizations, whose primary role is to deliver the Family Care Program benefit to eligible residents. Family Care is a voluntary program, offering cost-effective choices for health and long-term support services for elders and adults with physical and/or developmental disabilities.

The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Wisconsin (ADRC-CW) is the first place to go for all adults with any type of disability, including developmental, physical, and mental health, to receive information and access to services in order to enhance and maintain health independence. All adults with any income level are served, including children with disabilities who will soon be transitioning to adulthood. The ADRC-CW is responsible for determining eligibility and enrolling individuals in publicly funded services, such as the Family Care or IRIS programs.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides monthly disability compensation payments and medical care to veterans who are injured or become ill while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

The Marathon County Veterans Service Office assists local veterans in applying for VA disability compensation. The Veterans Service Office educates, advises, and assists veterans throughout the application process.

Childhood Trauma and Welfare

Early relationships between a child and caregiver are essential for developing emotional bonds, trust, and a sense of safety. These foundations shape how children see themselves and the world. Trauma during early childhood can severely disrupt this development, leading to feelings of hopelessness, mistrust, fear, and low self-worth. The link between childhood trauma and long-term health outcomes was first studied in the Adverse Childhood Experience ACEs study by Kaiser Permanente in the 1990s. ACEs are traumatic events before age 18 that can cause toxic stress, disrupting brain development and increasing the risk of poor mental, physical, and social outcomes, such as depression, substance abuse, obesity, heart disease, and violence. ACEs often occur in clusters, amplifying their effects.

Trauma is an overwhelming stress response to events that threaten a person’s safety, sanity, or well-being. Though subjective, trauma often causes lasting feelings of fear, helplessness, and vulnerability. It can impact every area of functioning—physical, emotional, behavioral, social, and spiritual. Common sources of trauma include:

- Violence in homes, schools, workplaces, or communities
- Emotional, verbal, physical, sexual, or spiritual abuse
- Sexual, financial, or psychological exploitation
- Sudden life changes (e.g., loss of housing, job, or health)

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse childhood experiences are potentially traumatic events that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental drivers or the incarceration of a parent or guardian.

Trauma-informed care is an intervention and organizational approach that shifts the focus from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” This approach reduces stigma, fosters understanding, and supports healing by recognizing how past trauma influences present behavior and health.

Resilience is a child’s ability to recover and thrive after adversity. Supportive caregivers play a critical role in fostering resilience by creating safe environments, modeling healthy coping, and building strong relationships. Programs that support parenting, meet basic needs, and strengthen social connections can help both parents and children develop the skills to adapt, grow, and heal.

The Marathon County Comprehensive 20-Year Child Welfare & Family Well-Being Plan (2026-2046) includes the goal to *reduce the need for child welfare involvement by addressing root causes and strengthening family resilience*. Efforts toward achieving this goal will focus on:

- **Expand Evidence-Based Prevention Services (Family First Prevention Services Act Alignment):** Advocate for Wisconsin’s selection of effective evidence-based services and implement them locally.
- **Home Visiting & Early Childhood Programs:** Sustain and expand early childhood home visiting programming, Head Start, and community-based early childhood supports.
- **Economic Stability:** Build cross-sector initiatives addressing poverty, housing insecurity, food insecurity, and access to affordable childcare.
- **School Partnerships:** Implement early behavioral and academic interventions to prevent downstream child welfare involvement.

The plan also has a goal to *strengthen protective factors and promote health, stability, and permanence for children and families*. Efforts toward achieving this goal will focus on:

- Social Determinants of Health: Integrate education, healthcare, housing, and workforce development into child welfare planning.
- Behavioral & Mental Health Supports: Expand trauma-informed services, school-based mental health, and community treatment options.
- Kinship Care: Prioritize family-based placements with financial, legal, and emotional support for kinship caregivers.
- Foster Parent Recruitment & Retention: Build targeted campaigns, offer increased support (training, respite, financial incentives), and focus on homes for high-needs and older youth.
- Therapeutic & Specialized Foster Care Expansion: Train and support foster families caring for children with complex needs.
- Post-Permanency Supports: Strengthen adoptive and guardianship family supports to prevent disruptions.
- Reduce Length of Stay in Foster Care: Streamline reunification and permanency processes through stronger judicial and family engagement.
- Housing Stability Initiatives: Utilize Family Keys philosophies and develop supportive housing models for families at risk of system involvement.

Current Programs/Services

Marathon County Social Services Department is responsible for investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. Reports include concerns of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional damage. Social workers assess the situation and take the necessary next steps to ensure the child's safety.

The On-going Child Protective Services unit works closely with families and other service providers in an attempt to reduce family stressors, which contribute to abuse/ neglect. Social workers interact with families in their homes, in community service team meetings, and in court. Services include case management, direct parent education, substitute care placement, and court liaison.

The Foster Care program provides temporary care for children whose parents cannot provide care for them. Persons licensed by the Department of Social Services provide foster care. The usual license is for the care of up to four children; however, this may increase to six if it is necessary to keep siblings together. Children are most often placed in care because of a court order but may occasionally be placed by agreement between the parents and Social Services for up to six months. Foster care is not adoption. While the goal is to safely reunite these children with their birth families, it is not always possible.

Kinship care helps a family support a child in the home of a relative when situations occur that a biological parent is unable to provide care. A financial payment may be available to kin (or relative), so that placing a child in a foster home or another out-of-home care setting may be avoided.

In recent years, Marathon County has piloted the Family Keys program, a program that focuses on preventing children from entering out-of-home care and facilitating reunification of children with their parents. It is a program that connects families with safe housing options when the parent(s) can meet all other requirements to be reunited with their children, except for safe housing. In 2023 and 2024, the program served 21 families and 53 children, with the vast majority successfully completing the program, staying reunited with their children, and transitioning to their own stable housing long-term. The county also realized cost savings over the typical model of paying for out-of-home care. Going forward, Social Services will be asking the county to continue focusing existing out-of-home care funding toward the Family Keys model.

The Community Response Program (CR) is an early intervention program intended to strengthen families and circumvent their future inclusion into the Child Protective Services area. The Community Response program is voluntary and is the only Child Protective Service not mandated by statute but continues to be an important intervention program with good long-term outcomes.

The Children's Long Term Support (CLTS) Program supports families who have children with substantial limitations in their daily activities, and care for their children in their homes and community. A child's eligibility is based on his or her functional limitations, which include a physical, developmental, or emotional limitation that restricts a child's ability to carry out daily living activities, such as dressing, eating, communicating, or mobility. The CLTS program is a voluntary program, funded by the federal and state governments. To be enrolled in CLTS, a child also needs to be eligible for Medicaid.

Comprehensive Community Services of North Central Health Care (NCHC) provides a flexible array of community-based services to youth with diagnosed mental health or substance use disorders. A Service Facilitator, with support of a multi-disciplinary team, works with the youth and family to provide support and services aimed at helping the child reach their full potential and remain in their home, school, and community. Services are individualized to meet each child's unique needs and include assessment, service planning, service coordination, crisis planning, individual skill building and development, wellness education, medication management, and other services identified as necessary.

The Coordinated Services Team initiative of North Central Health Care (NCHC) provides wraparound services to families with children who are involved in two or more systems of care (such as special education, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, or substance use services) and have complex needs. A Care Coordinator works with the family, and all identified supports to develop a plan of care that improves the functioning and quality of life for the youth and their family. Through the Coordinated Services Team model, the Care Coordinator works collaboratively with all involved to form a Child and Family Team that works together to meet the needs of the youth and family. Services are voluntary and driven by the family.

Youth Justice handles referrals of delinquent behavior that would be considered a crime or status offense if the juvenile were an adult. Referrals from law enforcement go through an intake process

and are reviewed by the District Attorney's office for charges. Lower risk cases have deferred prosecution, and higher risk cases have dispositional court orders with the goal of protection of the youth and community, and rehabilitation services for the youth.

Marathon County UW-Extension programs in 4-H Youth Development give young people opportunities to learn new skills, gain self-confidence, and contribute to their communities. Backed by the knowledge and research base of the University of Wisconsin, 4-H Youth Development educators design educational, leadership, and citizenship experiences for youth.

In addition, community partnerships across public and private sectors are in place to prevent and reduce the impact of childhood trauma in Marathon County. Current partnerships include:

Healthy Homes

Housing concerns such as a lack of heat, water, mold, garbage, hoarding, pests, groundwater contamination, or failing to maintain property at a reasonable level conducive to health and safety can be considered human health hazards.

Marathon County residents have an increased risk of exposure to lead paint in their homes. Lead is toxic to everyone, particularly to children under the age of 6. Lead exposure to young children can cause reduced IQ and attention span, learning disabilities, developmental delays, and a range of other health and behavioral effects. Although lead paint was banned in 1978, the health risk persists today. Over 80% of houses in the City of Wausau and 70% in Marathon County were constructed before 1978. Most childhood lead poisoning occurs in the home where the child lives or regularly visits. Wisconsin recommends that children between the ages of 6 months through 5 years be screened for the risk of lead exposure. The effects of lead poisoning are irreversible, so early intervention is key to preventing increased negative impacts for a child and the community.

Radon is a naturally occurring, odorless, radioactive gas that is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. In Wisconsin, 5–10% of homes have radon levels above the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guideline of 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L), or 150 becquerels per cubic meter (Bq/m³). The EPA recommends that homes be mitigated if radon levels are 4 pCi/L or higher. Because there is no known safe level of radon exposure, the EPA also suggests that homeowners consider mitigation even when levels are between 2 and 4 pCi/L (75–150 Bq/m³). Some areas, such as Marathon County, have a significantly higher percentage of homes with elevated radon levels compared to the state average.

Extreme temperature events, both cold and heat, pose significant health risks, particularly for vulnerable populations. In Marathon County, approximately 4,000 households receive utility assistance each year to help cover heating costs during the winter. On the other end of the spectrum, extreme heat events, or heat waves, are the leading cause of weather-related deaths in the United States. Over the past five years, Marathon County has experienced between 15 and 32 days each summer with temperatures exceeding the 90th percentile for the season.

Current Programs/Services

Marathon County Health Department works with families whose children have had evidence of exposure to lead. When children are identified as having elevated blood lead levels, parents receive public health intervention to identify the source and reduce further exposure. Before intervening at blood levels of 3.5 ug/dl, it could take 1-3 years to reduce a child's blood lead level into a safe range. Early intervention has cut that time down to a few weeks or months in most cases. This early intervention approach is not only the first of its kind in the state but has also produced a significant decrease in elevated blood lead levels (over 20 ug/dl for one or two consecutive over 15) in Marathon County.

The Marathon County Health Department intervenes at blood lead levels of 3.5 microgram per deciliter (ug/ dl) and above to provide education, technical assistance, and some access to limited testing. If a child has blood levels at 10 micrograms per deciliter (ug/dl) or above, remediation orders will be issued. The department then tries to connect homeowners with funding for remediation and abatement.

Marathon County Health Department also serves as a Regional Radon Information Center (RIC) for 11 counties in Wisconsin and provides technical consultation on testing for radon and how to mitigate or remove radon from the home. On average, two out of every 3 radon tests conducted in Marathon County return a high result.

Marathon County Health Department also serves as an educational and technical resource for residents on other human health hazards, such as rabies, mercury, mold, and housing concerns. With all potential health hazards, the Marathon County Health Department seeks to provide information on the amount of risk associated with circumstances and how it may impact health. When conditions warrant, the Health Department works closely with municipal and county zoning, investigates, and issues orders as needed to address the hazard.

The department relies on the National Weather Service to issue advisories for temperature extremes. Once an advisory is issued, the department collaborates with its partners to disseminate information and provide education on how to prepare for the event, stay safe, and recognize the signs and symptoms of heat- or cold-related health emergencies.

Communicable Disease

Communicable diseases, sometimes called infectious diseases, are illnesses caused by organisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites. They remain a major cause of illness, disability, and death worldwide. These diseases can spread in many ways, including through contaminated food or water, insect bites, contact with animals, and from person to person. Sexually transmitted infections, tick-borne illnesses, tuberculosis, and hepatitis continue to be significant health concerns both locally and nationally.

Communicable Disease

Communicable diseases spread from one person to another or from an animal to a person. The spread often happens via airborne viruses or bacteria, but also through blood or other bodily fluid. The terms infectious and contagious are also used to describe communicable diseases.

Immunizations are one of the most effective and cost-efficient ways to prevent communicable diseases. They protect the individual and the community by reducing the spread of illness. On-time vaccination throughout childhood is especially important, as it helps build immunity before children are exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases. All vaccines are carefully tested to ensure they are safe and effective when given at the recommended ages.

Screening programs provided by the Health Department include sexually transmitted disease testing and screening for tuberculosis for high-risk individuals. Early identification of disease leads to prompt treatment, which improves health outcomes and reduces community transmission. The Health Department has strong partnerships with community organizations to ensure screening is accessible to vulnerable populations.

Current Programs/Services

The Marathon County Health Department is responsible for preventing and controlling infectious disease threats in the community. The department investigates reportable diseases to ensure people receive appropriate treatment, education about the illness, and to prevent further spread. Health care providers, schools, childcare centers, nursing homes, and long-term care facilities are key partners in quickly identifying cases and supporting control measures.

To improve access to immunizations, the Marathon County Health Department also provides immunization clinics across the county. Immunizations are provided at no cost to individuals who qualify through the Vaccine for Children and Vaccine for Adult programs.

Safe Food & Water

Safe Food Sources

While safer food sources have been identified as one of the 10 greatest public health advances of the 20th century, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimated in 2024 that each year roughly 1 in 6 Americans get sick from food-related diseases, resulting in 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified reducing foodborne diseases as 1 of 10 winnable battles, having known effective strategies to reduce the impact of foodborne diseases.

Current Programs/Services

The Marathon County Health Department serves as an agent for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, and the Department of Safety and Professional Services and as such is responsible for the county licensing and regulation of food operations, grocery and convenience stores, bakeries, lodging establishments, campgrounds, swimming pools, and body art businesses. The Department provides routine inspections, follow-up on complaints, and education and consultation to businesses on regulations and practices.

The Health Department investigates reports of illnesses related to food and waterborne diseases. The goal of investigations is to identify the source of the illness and contain the spread of the disease.

Some commonly reported food and water-borne diseases are Salmonella, Cryptosporidium, Campylobacter, Norovirus, and Shiga toxin-producing Escherichia coli (STEC).

Safe Drinking Water

Clean, safe drinking water is essential for good health. In Marathon County, residents get their drinking water from either public water systems or private wells. The development of public water and waste-disposal systems, along with regulatory oversight, has significantly reduced the risk of waterborne illnesses and diseases. For those who rely on private wells, annual water testing is recommended to ensure their drinking water remains safe.

Current Programs/Services

The Marathon County Health Department Water Testing Laboratory provides water testing services to the citizens of Marathon County and surrounding counties, with the goal of safer water supplies. The lab is involved in monitoring public drinking water supplies, which include municipal community water systems and those involved in the Department of Natural Resources' transient non-community water (TNC) systems program. The Health Department advises all private well owners to have their well water tested annually for coliform bacteria. If higher than recommended contaminants are found, the department can assist homeowners with possible technical and funding resources to re-test for confirmation and mitigation measures.

Burden of Chronic Disease

Chronic diseases account for most illness, disability, and death in the United States, and are the leading drivers of health care costs. More than half of all Americans suffer from one or more chronic diseases. Chronic diseases are illnesses that last a long time, are rarely cured, and can result in disability. Examples of common chronic diseases include heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, obesity, and oral disease.

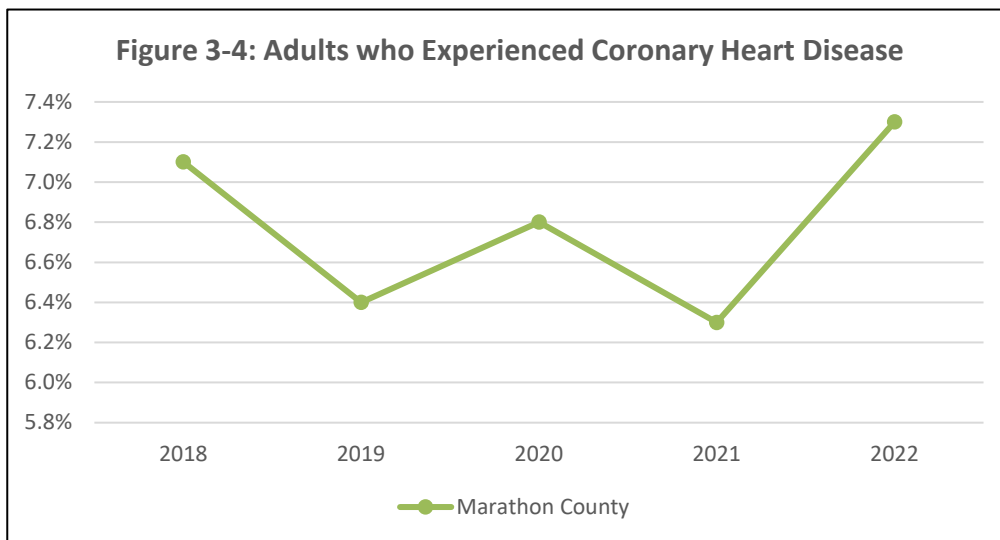
Chronic Disease

Chronic disease is a long-lasting condition that can be controlled but not cured. While they are among the most common and costly health problems, they are also among the most preventable, and most can be effectively controlled.

The rapid growth of chronic disease is costing lives, quality of life, and prosperity. Chronic diseases are responsible for 8 out of 10 deaths each year and treating chronic diseases accounts for 90% of our nation's health care costs. Most chronic diseases can be prevented by addressing a set of common risk factors responsible for unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity, tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure, and excessive alcohol use.

Adults Who Experience Coronary Heart Disease

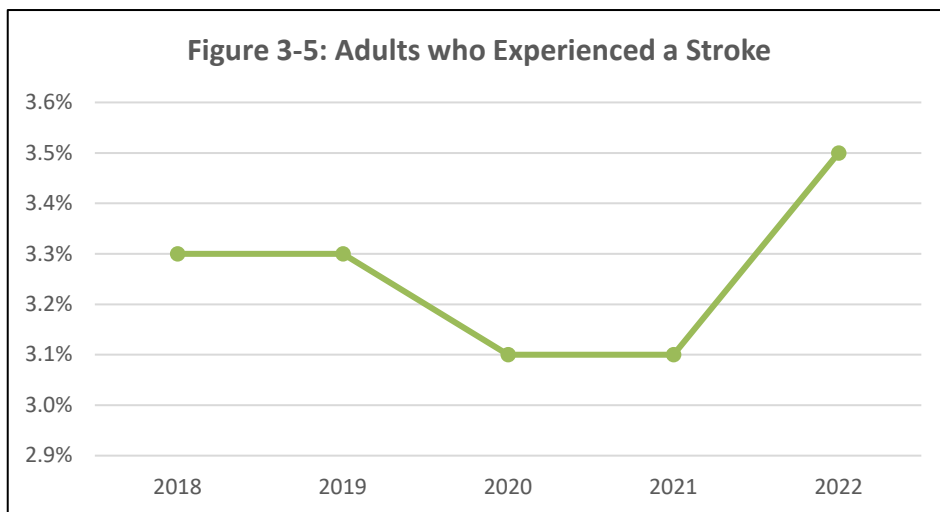
In 2022, 7.3 percent of Marathon County residents experienced coronary heart disease in their lifetime, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Adults Who Experienced Stroke

In 2022, 3.5 percent of Marathon County residents experienced a stroke in their lifetime, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Cardiovascular diseases, including heart disease and stroke, cause over one-third of all U.S. deaths and are a leading cause of disability. The most common form, coronary artery disease, can lead to heart attacks, angina, heart failure, and arrhythmias. Many risk factors—such as smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, and poor diet—are preventable.

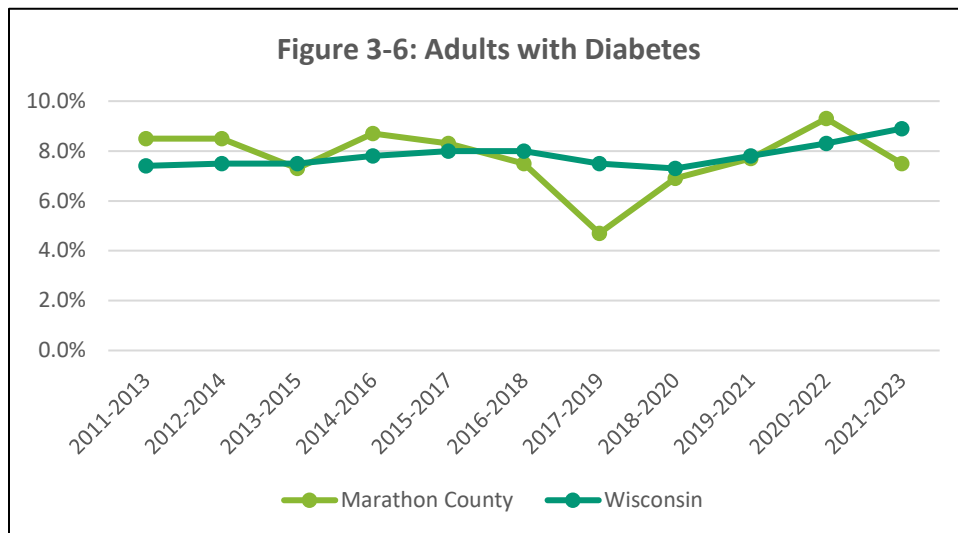
Adults with Cancer (non-skin or melanoma)

In 2022, 9.3% of adults in Marathon County reported that they were told by a health professional that they have melanoma or any other type of (non-skin) cancer. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) defines cancer as a term used to describe diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control and can invade other tissues. According to the NCI, there are over 100 different types of cancer, but breast, colon, lung, pancreatic, prostate, and rectal cancer lead to the greatest number of annual deaths. Risk factors of cancer include, but are not limited to, age, alcohol, tobacco use, a poor diet, certain hormones, and sun exposure. Although some risk factors cannot be avoided, such as age, limiting exposure to avoidable risk factors may lower the risk of developing certain cancers.

Adults with Diabetes

In 2022, 7.5 percent of Marathon County residents were diagnosed with diabetes, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

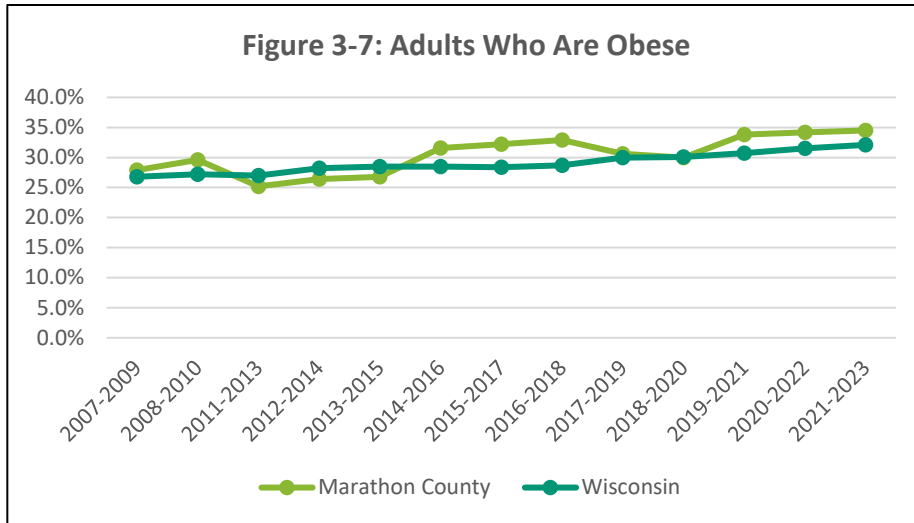
Diabetes is a leading cause of death in the U.S., affecting over 25 million people, including undiagnosed cases, according to the CDC. It can damage nearly every organ system and is a major cause of kidney failure, non-traumatic amputations, and blindness among working-age adults. People with diabetes also face higher risks of heart disease, stroke, and nerve damage. The disease disproportionately affects minority groups and older adults, and its prevalence is expected to rise with an aging and more diverse population. Direct medical costs exceed \$116 billion annually.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Adults Who are Obese

In 2022, 34.5 percent of Marathon County residents were obese according to the Body Mass Index (BMI) and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. The BMI is calculated by taking a person's weight and dividing it by their height squared in metric units ($BMI = \text{Weight (Kg)} / [\text{Height (m)}^2]$). A $BMI \geq 30$ is considered obese.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Rising obesity rates threaten to send healthcare costs for chronic disease soaring for the next few decades. Obesity is a complex health issue that is affected by a person’s genetics, lifestyle choices, and the environment in which they live in. In the simplest terms, obesity results from a lack of physical activity and poor nutrition. The key to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is living a lifestyle that includes healthy eating and regular physical activity.

Healthy Eating

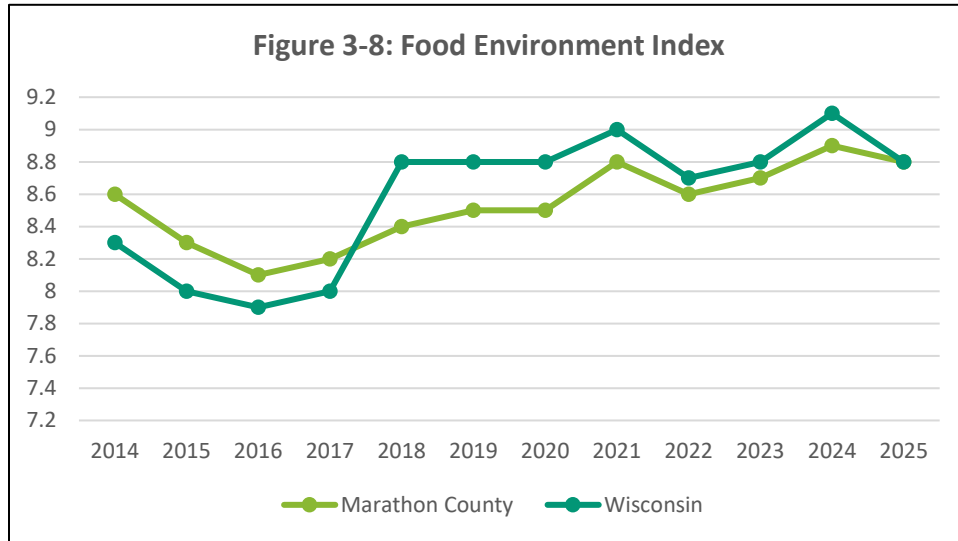
Good nutrition is essential for good health throughout the lifespan. Healthy eating means choosing a balanced diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, and includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts.

Supporting the expansion of locally grown food is a key strategy to tackling the obesity epidemic and will stabilize community-supported markets, thus creating permanent jobs. Marathon County has a proud heritage in the agriculture business, contributing not only to the economy but to our health. Public and private partnerships are underway to expand access to locally grown food, including farmers' markets, community gardens, Farm to School, and local food pantries.

Food Environment Index

The Food Environment Index measures access to healthy food by combining two factors: the percentage of people who are low-income with limited access to grocery stores, and those experiencing food insecurity in the past year. The index ranges from 0 (worst) to 10 (best), with both factors equally weighted. In 2022, the Food Environment Index for Marathon County was 8.8, according to the County Health Rankings and Roadmaps.

Limited access to healthy food is a major barrier to good nutrition. Low-income communities often lack stores with nutritious options, increasing reliance on convenience stores and fast food. Food insecurity—defined as limited or uncertain access to adequate food—is linked to chronic conditions.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Partners in Nutrition Access

The United Way of Marathon County’s Hunger Coalition’s mission, in which Marathon County government is a partner, is to mobilize the community to research, identify, implement, and promote long-term sustainable solutions to the problem of hunger and food insecurity in Marathon County. The county is also served by several food pantries, including the Neighbors’ Place, Community Center of Hope, the Salvation Army, and many located within area churches or other non-profits.

The Aging and Disability Resource Center of Central Wisconsin (ARDC-CW) provides a comprehensive nutrition program to all adults aged 60 and over of any income level. The program includes delivering hot nutritious meals to the homes of homebound adults and a Café 60 program, whereby adults aged 60 and over can receive a nutritious meal at a local restaurant. In addition, the ARDC-CW provides other evidence-based healthy living programs that support a healthy lifestyle to maintain and improve health in individuals.

Active Living

Regular physical activity helps improve your overall health and fitness and reduces the risk of many chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers.

Physical activity is important throughout the lifespan and has physical, mental, and emotional benefits for people of all ages. Benefits include aiding in the prevention of chronic diseases; maintaining mobility with age; improving mood and boosting energy; promoting better sleep; reducing the risk of depression; and keeping thinking, learning, and judgment skills sharp as you age.

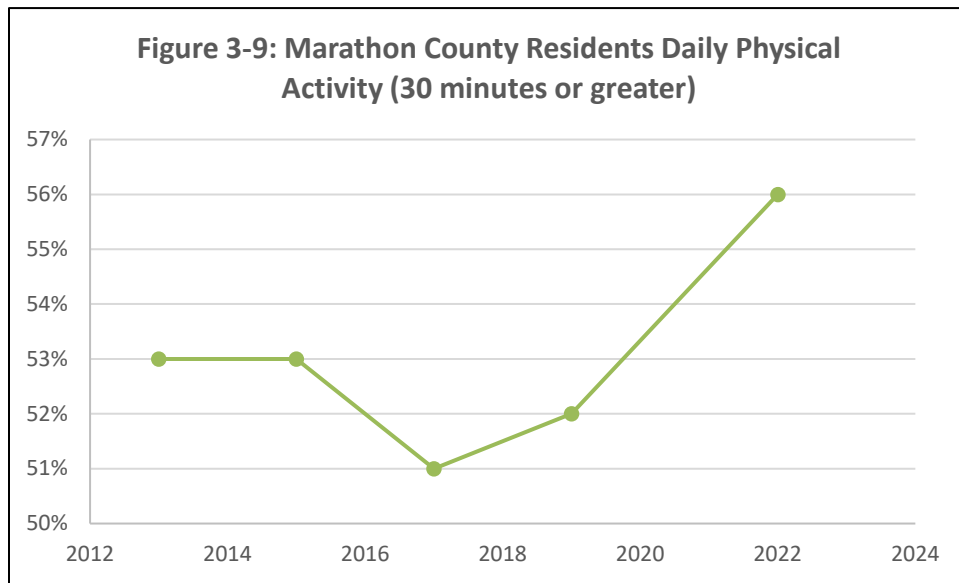
Numerous studies have shown that children’s stress levels fall within minutes of playing outside in green spaces. Spending regular time outdoors helps children grow lean and strong, enhances imagination and attention spans, decreases aggression, boosts classroom performance, and makes kids better caretakers of the environment.

The physical places and spaces in which we live, learn, work, and play shape how active we can be. An active community is a neighborhood, city, or county that explores opportunities to enable physical activity in the daily routine of its residents – sidewalks, neighborhood parks, bike paths. Designing the built environment to include safety and accessibility for all people results in opportunities that will improve health outcomes, transportation options, and social capital within the community.

Marathon County has an abundance of recreation opportunities in all four seasons. From the plethora of city and county parks to the numerous miles of hiking, biking, snowshoeing, and cross-country ski trails, there is always somewhere new to explore in Marathon County. Maintaining and enhancing the active community environment is paramount to ensure all residents and visitors can be physically active.

Marathon County Residents' Physical Activity

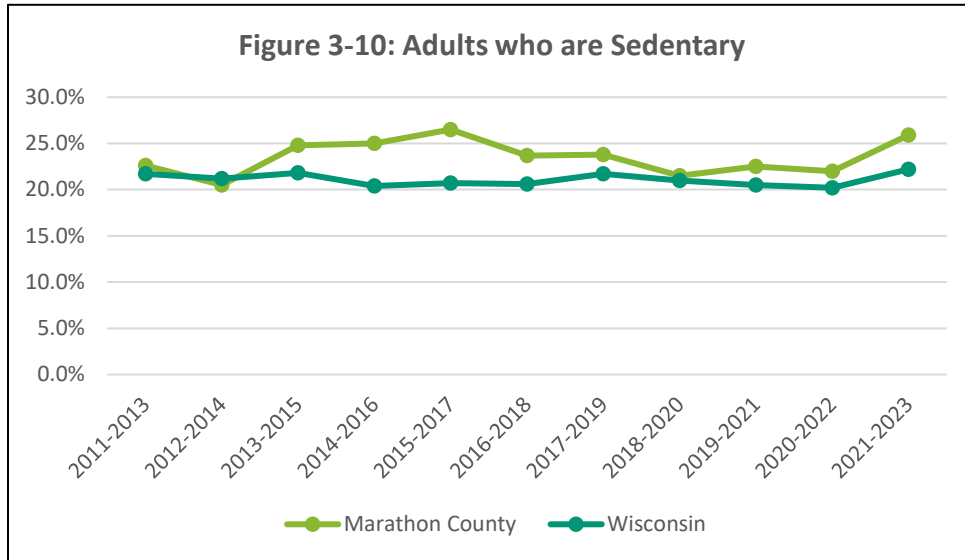
In 2022, 56 percent of Marathon County residents reported exercising for 30 minutes or more per day, according to the Marathon County LIFE survey.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Adults Who are Sedentary

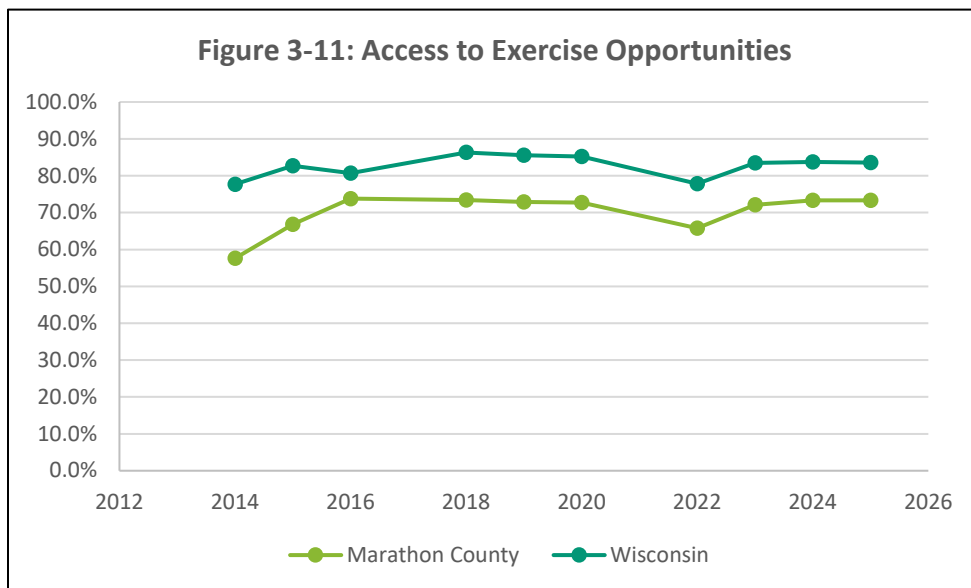
In 2022, 29.5 percent of adults in Marathon County did not participate in any leisure-time activities (physical activities other than their regular job) during the past month, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Access to Exercise Opportunities

In 2022, 73.3 percent of Marathon County residents live reasonably close to a park or recreational facility, according to the Conduent Healthy Communities Institute.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Current Programs/Services

The Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) Bicycle & Pedestrian Sub-Committee reorganized in 2025 to work on bicycle and pedestrian planning, engineering, education, and events in the Wausau metro area. The MPO Bike/Ped Sub-Committee is working to link transportation

planners, city planners, public works directors, park and recreation directors, law enforcement officials, and public health educators with local bike clubs, bike shop owners, and area bicycle enthusiasts.

The Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department manages a county-wide park system that typically focuses upon a high-quality natural feature and provides limited areas of development that support low-intensity recreation uses, such as picnicking, hiking, fishing, swimming, and camping. These parks serve large areas of the county. The county park system also provides specialized facilities that serve the entire county or major populations within the county, such as the fairgrounds, Nine Mile mountain bike and cross-country ski trail system, shooting range, softball complex, and indoor ice skating. Management and future improvements to these parks and facilities are guided in part by the Marathon County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, which aims to maintain and enhance the quality of these county assets.

Tobacco and Vaping

Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S., even as smoking rates continue to decline. Declining smoking rates in Wisconsin can be attributed to a number of successful interventions, including price increases, smoking bans and restrictions, community efforts that educate tobacco retailers, and actively enforce retailer sales laws.

While traditional cigarette smoking rates have dropped, use of electronic smoking devices has skyrocketed among young people, exposing them to the dangers of nicotine, addiction, and a variety of new health risks. In 2023, 23 percent of teens in Marathon County reported having at least tried vaping, while 15.7 percent of all Wisconsin high school students said they are current e-cigarette and vape users.

Access to Derived Psychoactive Cannabis Products

Wisconsin has seen a significant increase in the ability to access Derived Psychoactive Cannabis Products (DPCPs) in various forms and across many retail settings. Research continues to show that DPCPs can have effects on the health and development of adolescents, including compromising cognitive development and the development of use disorders. DPCPs are currently unregulated at both the federal and state levels. In Wisconsin, unless a municipality chooses to impose its own restrictions, there are no state-level regulations in place to prevent underage exposure to and use of these products.

Current Programs/Services

The Marathon County Health Department provides staff support to the Nicotine Prevention Alliance of Central Wisconsin, which strives to reduce tobacco/nicotine-related death and disability through education and advocacy, creating a community environment that encourages tobacco-free living. Nicotine Prevention Alliance of Central Wisconsin is made up of public and private partners from Marathon, Portage, and Wood counties.

Culture of Alcohol & Other Drugs

The burden of alcohol and other drug abuse continues to negatively impact county and municipal governments, law enforcement, local treatment providers, and area non-profit organizations in Marathon County. Substance abuse is in large part shaped by community-level factors, including availability, accessibility, acceptability, and affordability of substances.

Wisconsin's alcohol environment is a prime example of how communities play a role in shaping culture. In Wisconsin, municipal governments have the ability and authority to control the number and location of alcohol outlets in their community. In 2025-2026, 427 alcohol licenses were issued in Marathon County, which is one alcohol outlet for every 326 citizens. The number of alcohol outlets has a significant impact on both the culture and economic future of a community. Communities experience more alcohol-related problems when a large number of alcohol outlets sell and serve in a dense geographic area.

Wisconsin's rates of alcohol use and misuse continue to be the highest in the country. Wisconsin frequently has one of the highest rates of adult binge drinking in the U.S., a heavy drinking rate higher than the national average, and the highest binge drinking rate of women of childbearing age in the nation. The rate of adult alcohol-related mortality in Marathon County is significantly higher than in the United States, the state of Wisconsin, and the counties adjacent to Marathon County.

In Marathon County, the number of teens who have tried alcohol before 13 years of age is 34 percent, double the percentage of ten years ago. However, the number of teens reporting binge drinking behavior has continued to decrease over the last 10 years, to 7 percent in 2023.

Alcohol continues to be a contributing factor to traffic crashes, with Saturday and Sunday mornings between 2:00 am and 3:00 am depicting the highest statistic for alcohol-related crashes. A majority of traffic deaths in Marathon County occur on state highways, while a majority of injuries from traffic crashes occur on local streets or roads. Excessive alcohol consumption is also a contributor to intimate partner violence, which refers to any behavior in an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in that relationship.

Marathon County, as well as the rest of Wisconsin, continues to see upward trends in drug-related overdose deaths. In 2024, in Marathon County, there were 13 drug overdose deaths per 100,000 people. Methamphetamines and heroin continue to be the most prevalently seized drugs by the Central Wisconsin Narcotics Task Force; however, in the last two years, there has been a resurgence in seizures of cocaine and crack cocaine.

Non-medical use of prescription drugs continues to be a problem in Wisconsin. The impact of opioid overdoses has had a significant public health impact on Marathon County, Wisconsin. Data shows that the rates of opioid overdose emergency department (ED) visits related to opioid overdoses have been steadily increasing since 2018.

Despite the availability of evidence-based treatments, there is a substantial treatment gap, with most individuals living with a substance use disorder (SUD) not receiving necessary care. This gap is

exacerbated by stigma and the lack of trained health care providers, which impede efforts to reduce the prevalence and impacts of SUD. SUD carries high levels of comorbidity with other Mental Health (MH) disorders, which complicate both diagnosis and treatment. This is compounded by the economic and social costs of SUD, including the associated health care burdens and loss of productivity. Marathon County needs a unified approach to capacity building that involves training health care providers, engaging community stakeholders, and implementing sustainable models of care that are culturally adaptable. Taking this approach will ideally close the treatment gap and improve health outcomes related to SUD.

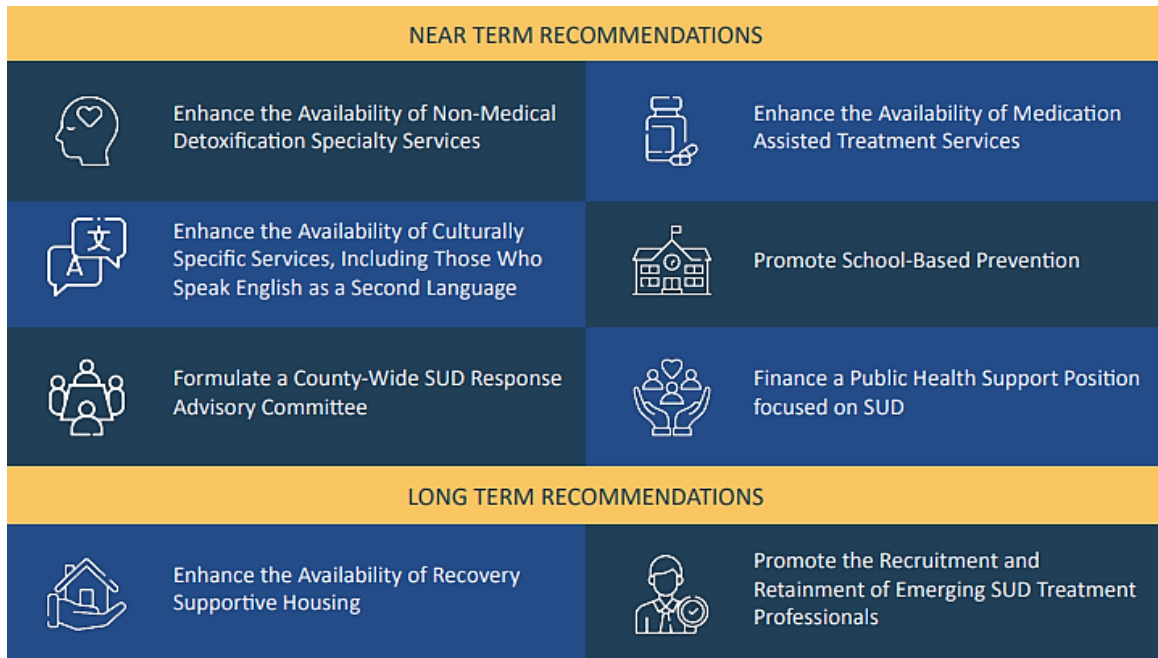
Current Programs/Services

The Marathon County Health Department provides staff support to the Marathon County Alcohol & Other Drugs (AOD) Partnership, a substance abuse prevention coalition made up of over 250 individuals and organizations. Members include schools, law enforcement, local government, healthcare providers, community groups, parents, and youth—all working together to reduce the impact of substance abuse in the county.

In 2018, the county also established the Marathon County Fatal Overdose Review Team (FORT), a collaborative group of key partners that reviews accidental overdose deaths and offers recommendations to improve policies, environments, and community systems to help prevent future fatalities.

To address the ongoing opioid and substance use crisis, the county has expanded access to treatment and support services. Recognizing the need for a more strategic approach, the Marathon County Health Department, on behalf of the County Board, partnered with Third Horizon Strategies (THS) in the summer of 2024. This health care advisory firm conducted a comprehensive gap analysis of local prevention and treatment services. The resulting recommendations will guide the County Board's use of opioid litigation funds to strengthen the county's response to substance use challenges.

Recommendations from the analysis were set up in near-term and long-term and are presented in **Figure 3-1**.

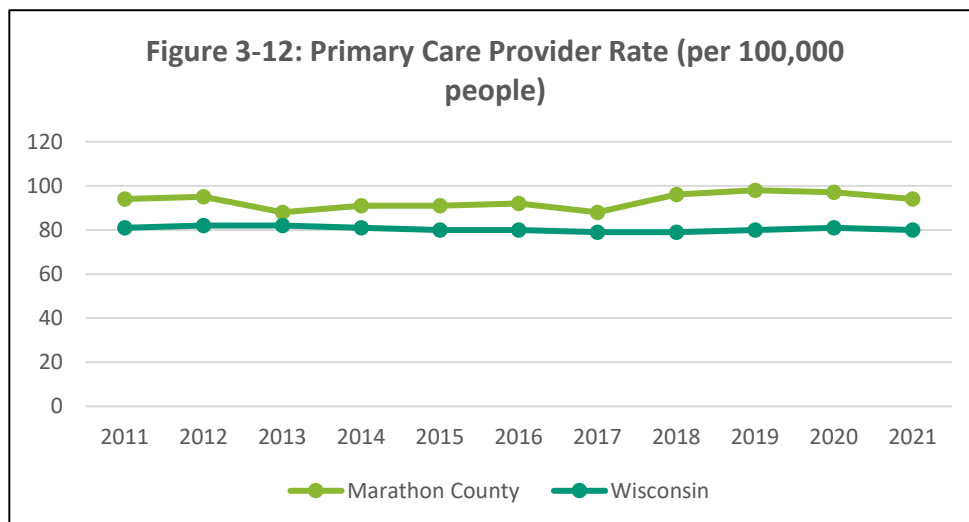


Access to Care

Access to high-quality health care is vitally important for individuals and families, protecting individuals and families from unexpected, high medical costs and providing free preventive care, like vaccines, screenings, and check-ups.

Primary Care Provider Rate

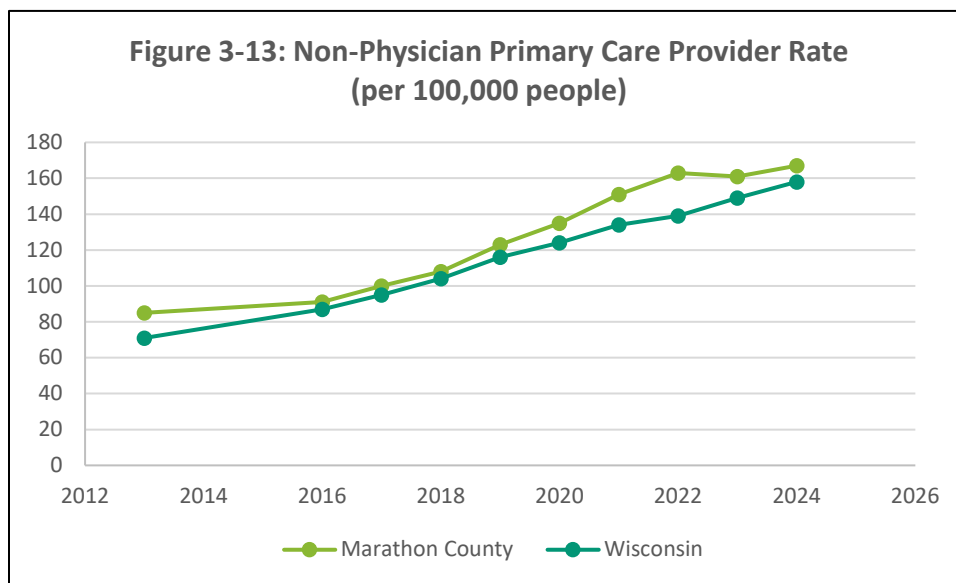
In 2021, there were 94 primary care providers per 100,000 people in Marathon County, according to County Health Ranking and Roadmaps.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Non-Physician Primary Care Provider Rate

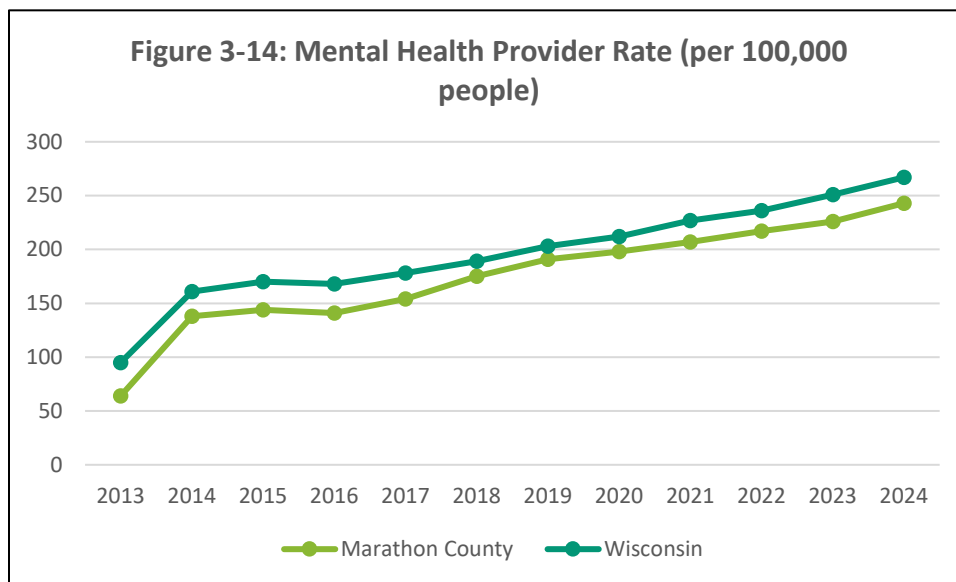
In 2021, there were 167 non-physician primary care providers per 100,000 people in Marathon County, according to County Health Rankings and Roadmaps.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Mental Health Provider Rate

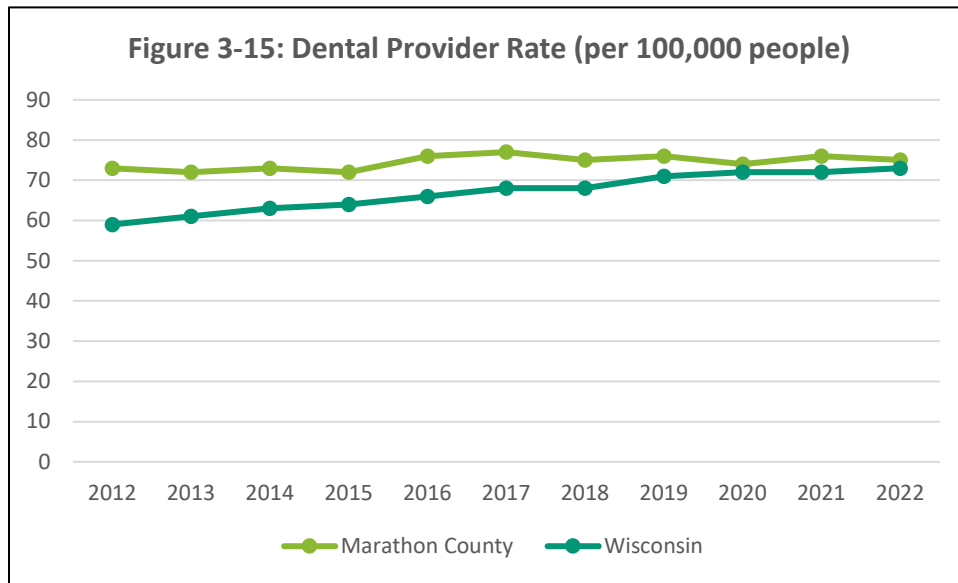
In 2021, there were 243 mental health providers per 100,000 people in Marathon County, according to County Health Rankings and Roadmaps.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Dental Provider Rate

In 2021, there were 75 dental providers per 100,000 people in Marathon County, according to County Health Rankings and Roadmaps.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Oral health is also integral to an individual’s overall health. The most common oral diseases among children and adults are dental cavities and gum disease. Dental decay is the most common chronic disease among children, five times more common than asthma. Recent studies indicate that infections of the mouth may increase the risk for heart disease, premature delivery, low birthweight babies, and complicated control of blood sugar for people with diabetes.

Improving access and effectiveness of health care continues to be a national and state priority. Access to affordable and high-quality integrated health care ensures not only the health of Marathon County’s families, but also their economic security.

Current Programs/Services

Marathon County residents are served by two major healthcare systems: Aspirus and Marshfield Clinic Health System. Hospitals include Aspirus in Wausau, Marshfield Medical Center- Weston, and Marshfield Medical Center - Marshfield. In addition to the hospitals, primary care clinics are in communities throughout Marathon County with specialty services in the Wausau metro and Marshfield areas. Subscription-based healthcare, like Astia, and clinics that provide services to Amish and Mennonite communities, like the Country Health Clinic, are also becoming more common in Marathon County.

Marathon County remains a strong health care hub for Central Wisconsin, with higher rates of primary care providers and non-physician primary care providers (nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and clinical nurse specialists) than the state of Wisconsin.

Partners in Access to Health Care

The Hmong and Hispanic Communication Network (H2N) serves as a vital connection to individuals and communities throughout Marathon County. Outreach by H2N Community Health Workers has provided a variety of supports and services, including COVID-19 testing and vaccination, food and rental assistance, mental health services, domestic abuse resources, legal rights, and more. Programs like H2N are a potent tool to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities in Marathon County.

Residents who are uninsured or underinsured have access to health, dental, and behavioral health services through federally qualified health clinics, Bridge Community Health Clinic, Wausau, and the Family Health Center of Marshfield, Inc. Both clinics provide dental care to all people, regardless of their income or insurance coverage, with a sliding fee scale for individuals without insurance.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system provides comprehensive medical care and treatment to eligible veterans. The VA operates a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Marathon County. The nearest VA Medical Center is located in Tomah, Wisconsin.

In addition to these partners, North Central Health Care and the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Central Wisconsin play critical roles in connecting the community, and especially the elderly, to health care services. Their programs are more fully addressed in the next two sections of the chapter.

The Marathon County Veterans Service Office assists local veterans with establishing eligibility for VA healthcare by explaining the benefits and assisting with the application process.

Mental Health

Mental illness is defined as “collectively all diagnosable mental disorders” or “health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.”

Evidence has shown that mental disorders, especially depressive disorders, are strongly related to the occurrence and successful treatment of many chronic diseases, including diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease, asthma, and obesity. In addition, depressive disorders are associated with many risk behaviors for chronic disease, such as physical inactivity, smoking, excessive drinking, and insufficient sleep.

Mental Health

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is a state of well being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can make a contribution to his or her community.

The average Marathon County adult experiences 5.2 poor mental health days per month, according to the 2025 *County Health Rankings*. This measure is based on survey responses to the question: “Thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?”

Mental health and substance abuse conditions often co-occur. Integrated treatment or treatment that addresses mental health and substance abuse at the same time is associated with lower costs and better outcomes, such as reduced substance use, improved symptoms and functioning, decreased hospitalization, increased housing stability, fewer arrests, and improved quality of life.

Access to mental health care is vitally important to the health of individuals and the safety of communities. In Marathon County, the ratio of mental health providers is 243 per 100,000 in population, compared with the Wisconsin state rate of 267. Mental health providers include psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, counselors, marriage and family therapists, and advanced practice nurses specializing in mental health care. While the ratio for Marathon County has improved, like many communities across the U.S. do not have an adequate number of providers and services for the growing demand.

Some populations are at greater risk for poor mental health, and that can include veterans, individuals with chronic disease, the aging population, and individuals in the criminal justice system. Childhood trauma plays a major role in increased levels of toxic stress, higher risk for alcoholism, illegal drug use, obesity, chronic disease, and crime.

Current Programs/Services

North Central Health Care's (NCHC) mental health services offer programs that provide mental health support in community, home, and workplace settings. They provide individual, couples, family, and group counseling options. NCHC manages supportive living environments that help individuals lead independent lives and provide crisis and inpatient services for those with more pressing mental health needs. In addition, NCHC provides in-patient services for acute mental health and detoxification. Community Treatment of North Central Health Care, which includes Comprehensive Community Services and the Community Support Program, provides intensive case management along with a flexible array of services to youth and adults with mental health and substance use disorders with a goal of helping adults be as independent as possible and helping youth remain in their homes, schools and communities.

Through the Marathon County School-Based Counseling Consortium (MCS-BCC), local mental health clinics and schools built a mental health care delivery system that previously did not exist and have provided mental health therapy to over 2,000 students from 2018-2023.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system provided mental health care and treatment to eligible veterans. The VA provides mental health counseling at the local Wausau Community-Based Outpatient Clinic in Marathon County. The VA also operates a Vet Center in Wausau, which provides mental health and readjustment counseling services to combat veterans from all eras.

The Marathon County Veterans Service Office assists local veterans with establishing eligibility for VA healthcare, which includes mental health services. We explain the benefits and assist veterans with the application process.

Aging

As Marathon County's population ages, ensuring the health and well-being of older adults becomes increasingly important. Over the past century, the leading causes of death have shifted from infectious diseases to chronic and degenerative conditions. Today, more than two-thirds of older Americans live with multiple chronic conditions, accounting for a significant share of healthcare costs. Living well with these conditions requires access to comprehensive healthcare, including mental health services and caregiver support.

Falls were the leading cause of injury death in Marathon County from 2018 to 2022. Falls commonly produce bruises, hip fractures, and head trauma. These injuries can increase the risk of early death and can make it difficult for older adults to live independently. Most fatal falls occur among adults aged 65 or over. Falls are also the leading cause of work-related injury death, especially among construction workers. Most falls are preventable. Effective prevention strategies create safer environments and reduce risk factors, from installing handrails and improving lighting and visibility, to reducing tripping hazards and exercising regularly to enhance balance.

Social connectedness is a vital component of healthy aging, too. Older adults who experience social isolation are at significantly higher risk for premature death. Opportunities for community engagement and support play a crucial role in improving the quality of life.

Safe, affordable, and flexible housing is also essential. While nursing homes remain a critical resource for long-term and rehabilitative care, many older adults prefer to age in place. Marathon County offers a range of options, including in-home services, adult day programs, subsidized housing, and assisted living facilities, that support independence and community connection.

Current Programs/Services

The Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) of Central Wisconsin provides information and access to a full array of services and resources that promote health and independence. Services include information and assistance, information and help with applying for benefits, caregiver support, elderly nutrition, evidence-based healthy living programs, and eligibility determination and enrollment in publicly-funded programs, such as Family Care and Include, Respect, I Self-direct (IRIS). All older adults, adults with disabilities, and their families, regardless of income level, are welcome at the ADRC-CW. The Elderly and Disability Benefit Specialist works with people 60 and older to help them understand programs such as the many parts of Medicare, Medical Assistance, Social Security Retirement and Disability benefits, Medicare Supplement Insurance, Food Share, as well as other legal, housing, and financial assistance programs.

Inclusa is a State Certified Managed Long Term Care Organization, whose primary role is to deliver the Family Care Program benefit to eligible residents. Family Care is a voluntary program, offering cost-effective choices for health and long-term support services.

North Central Health Care operates Mount View Care Center, a facility that offers skilled nursing services, in Wausau. This facility serves people requiring either short-term or long-term skilled nursing care because of complex physical needs, psychiatric and neurological diseases, dementia, or behavior problems.

Issues

Concerns for Long-Term Sustainable Funding for Health and Human Services Programs -

There continues to be uncertainty about the long-term availability of several state and federal funding sources that support health and human services programs. In order to strengthen family outcomes and services capacity, the County needs to strategize and identify sustainable funding solutions to maintain critical services, reduce reliance on unstable sources, and ensure the ability to meet growing community needs over time. Building collaboration with businesses, nonprofits, and faith communities can help to fill service gaps and strengthen the safety net. Also, strengthening relationships with nonprofit and neighborhood-based organizations to assist in providing trusted, culturally responsive service will remain important.

Workforce Development and System Capacity - To ensure better outcomes for children and families, Marathon County must strengthen workforce development and system capacity across all child-serving sectors. This requires urgent action to retain skilled staff, reduce burnout, offer competitive compensation, and invest in leadership development. Enhanced cross-system collaboration, integration of youth justice alternatives, and sustained support for the Income Maintenance Consortium are also critical to building a resilient, coordinated service network that meets the growing and complex needs of our community.

Addressing Gaps in Mental Health Care Access - Despite having more mental health providers than ever, Marathon County still faces a significant gap between demand and available services. Long waitlists, limited appointment availability, and insurance barriers continue to prevent residents from accessing timely care. Reducing obstacles for both individuals seeking care and providers delivering services is essential to improving mental health outcomes in the community. Identifying strategies to increase the number of providers or expand alternative services that can help meet the need may also improve access and community health.

Reports of depression and anxiety amongst youth are increasing in Marathon County. By expanding and investing in comprehensive school-based mental health services in Marathon County school districts can help ensure that students have access to the support and resources they need.

Vaccination Rates and Maintaining Public Health Capacity to Respond to Communicable Diseases - Childhood vaccination rates in Marathon County are declining. Vaccines remain an important tool to prevent the spread of communicable diseases. Many families delay or skip

vaccines due to questions or concerns. Ongoing education and outreach are essential to support informed decision-making and protect public health.

As laws related to public health authority evolve across the U.S., it is important to ensure that local public health systems retain the capacity to respond effectively to communicable disease threats. Ongoing evaluation and planning are needed to safeguard the critical tools and infrastructure necessary to protect community health in future outbreaks.

Improving Access to Dental Care in Marathon County -

Nearly one-third of Marathon County residents did not visit a dentist in the past year, highlighting persistent gaps in access to oral health care. A key challenge is the shortage of dental providers, particularly those who accept Medicaid, which limits access for low-income individuals and families. Expanding the local dental workforce, increasing provider participation in Medicaid, and exploring alternative care delivery models, such as mobile clinics or school-based programs are critical steps toward improving oral health and reducing disparities across the community.

With continued discussion at the state and municipal levels relative to the use of fluoride in public water treatment systems, the county will continue to support informed decision-making regarding community water fluoridation and access to dental care.

In addition, our public health department will continue to monitor local impacts and support appropriate access to dental care.

Defining the County's Role in Addressing DPCPs - With the rise in use of Derived Psychoactive Cannabis Products (DPCPs) among youth, and growing evidence of their harmful effects on adolescent development, the County must consider its role in limiting access and mitigating impacts. Discussions will be needed to determine how best to support prevention, education, and potential policy measures to protect youth health.

Identifying Opioid Gap Analysis Recommendations to Guide Use of Opioid Litigation Funding -

The 2024 Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Gap Analysis identified a range of near-term and long-term strategies to further address the opioid crisis in the County. These recommendations provide a roadmap for targeted interventions, improved access to care, and enhanced prevention efforts. To effectively allocate opioid litigation settlement funds, further discussion and direction are needed to establish priorities and determine which recommendations should be advanced for implementation. Aligning funding decisions with identified gaps will be essential to achieving meaningful, sustained impact.

Monitoring and Planning for Evolving Federal Program Eligibility - Anticipated changes to federal income maintenance and Medicaid programs may introduce new challenges for both individuals and counties responsible for administering these services. While the demand for and rising costs of these programs are expected to continue, available funding sources may shift or decline.

To maintain services and fiscal responsibility, the county must actively monitor policy developments, assess their local impact, and implement responsive strategies. The changes may be outside of county control, but the county can play a role in how we manage and respond to them. This includes advocating for necessary resources at the state level, while also reviewing and optimizing internal operations to improve service efficiency and effectiveness.

Health and Human Services Goal and Objectives

Health and Human Services Goal: Marathon County promotes the physical, mental, and social health of the community and takes steps to support healthy living for residents at all stages of life.

Objectives:

1. Enable older adults and people with disabilities to live safely and independently in their communities.
2. Support expansion of access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food.
3. Support every child in reaching adulthood with health, stability, education and growth opportunities.
4. Reduce the impact of chronic diseases.
5. Reduce injury risks and improve safety across all age groups.
6. Increase access to timely, affordable, and effective mental health treatment close to home.
7. Foster a welcoming community in Marathon County.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Four

Community Character



This chapter addresses housing, community character, and livability. Housing is a fundamental component of any comprehensive planning effort. Housing is more than merely shelter; it is the quality, availability, and types of housing that shape and help define the rural and urban communities within Marathon County. Community character refers to the natural and built features that shape a community's identity. In Marathon County, that character is varied and diverse, reflecting the area's geography, history, architecture, and natural setting. That character is still evolving. Livability is about quality of life. It is that quality of life that is critical to the future of Marathon County.

Other chapters of this plan also impact community character, including land use.

Previous Plans and Studies

Centergy Regional Housing Study, 2025

In 2025, Centergy, Inc., worked with the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) to produce this study in response to growing concerns over housing affordability. This study recommends a variety of strategies and programs that each individual community may explore, depending on their own needs, to encourage the construction and rehabilitation of needed housing, along with recommendations for a possible Regional Housing Fund. The Centergy Region includes Adams, Lincoln, Marathon, Portage, and Wood Counties.

Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2025

The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) updated its Regional Comprehensive Plan, formerly known as the Regional Livability Plan (2015), in 2025. The plan meets the requirements of Wisconsin State Statutes 66.1001, which mandate updates to regional and local comprehensive plans every 10 years. It provides data, strategies, and guidance for local comprehensive plans and helps direct development across the 10-county North Central Wisconsin region. The plan also identifies ways to build on regional strengths and address challenges to improve livability, covering topics such as housing, economic development, transportation, and

land use, and offering goals, objectives, and recommendations for counties, cities, villages, and towns.

Wausau Metropolitan Area Regional Housing Assessment, 2022

In 2022, the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission completed a regional housing assessment for the Villages of Kronenwetter, Maine, Marathon City, Rothschild, Rib Mountain, and Weston, and the Cities of Schofield and Wausau. This project uses Census data, real estate data, surveys, and interviews to find out what kinds of housing need to be built in the region and what communities can do to help.

County Comprehensive Plan, 2016

The previous plan included a discussion of housing. A variety of data and other information was collected. In addition, a variety of goals, objectives, policies and actions were identified. Much of that material is incorporated within this chapter.

Marathon County LIFE Report

The LIFE report provides a wide array of information and data depicting the quality of life in Marathon County. It contains a variety of information that relates to housing in the Basic Needs Section. The report, which is published every two years, also serves to monitor change over time.

Housing

Housing is an important component of the comprehensive plan. This section provides an inventory and analysis of housing conditions in Marathon County.

There are a variety of housing options available within the County. However, most housing for special populations, such as the elderly or lower income, is concentrated in incorporated municipalities, particularly in the Wausau metropolitan area. These areas are generally more able to provide necessary support facilities (medical facilities, public transportation, etc.) and therefore will likely continue to be where most specialized housing is located in the future. With the aging of the population, demand for senior housing will continue to increase.

While most of the housing stock is generally in good condition, there are areas where older structures are beginning to experience deterioration and need rehabilitation to remain safe and viable dwellings. While the County is not directly involved in housing rehabilitation, many local municipalities have established programs aimed at home improvements and rehabilitation.

Overall, Marathon County has quality housing stock. However, limited housing supply and increased demand are driving up housing costs in all areas of the County. Single-family homes continue to be the predominant type of housing in both urban and rural areas. However, the number of duplexes and other multi-family homes is increasing, thus providing a wider variety of housing choices. Housing characteristics, however, vary greatly across the County. Different trends can be observed

in rural, suburban, and urban areas. Rural towns that are more distant from the growth pressures of the Wausau and Marshfield urbanizing areas typically display higher rates of home ownership and occupancy, larger household sizes, and lower housing costs. Suburban areas, including towns and villages within the USH 51 corridor, typically show the highest housing values and costs. Growth rates in these communities are among the highest in the County. The City of Wausau and other more urban communities demonstrate a wider range of housing options in terms of price, age, and amenities.

Additional data and context were added to several sections of this chapter to reflect the significant changes in the housing market since 2020.

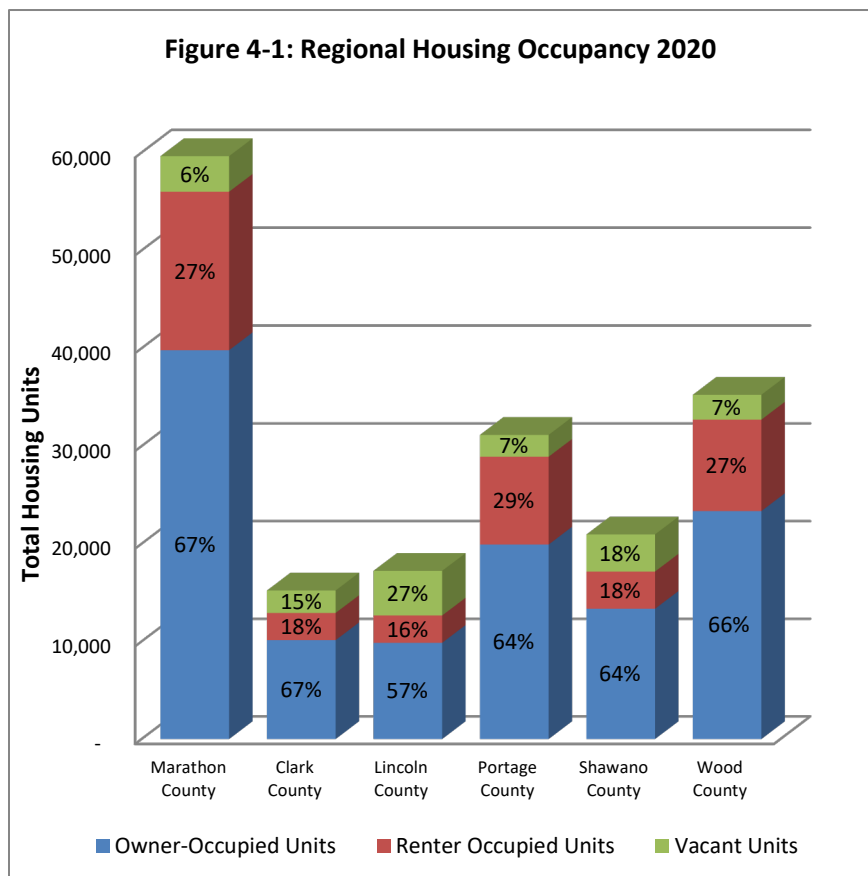
Housing Inventory

According to the 2020 Census, Marathon County has a total of 59,828 housing units. Over 71 percent of the total housing stock is classified as owner-occupied. **Figure 4-1** illustrates that Marathon County has far more total housing units compared to neighboring counties. This is partially due to the size and number of communities in Marathon County. Despite the size, Marathon County has the highest percentage of owner-occupied units, along with Wood County, and the second lowest percentage of vacant units, behind Wood and Portage Counties.



Newer Apartment Complex in Wausau

Figure 4-2 displays total housing units for all Marathon County communities. Four villages have fewer than 100 housing units, but several of these communities have boundaries that extend into



Clark County to the west. Ten communities have over 1,000 housing units, all located in the USH 51 corridor.

Data indicates that owner-occupied housing rates are highest in the rural areas of the county. Several of the unincorporated towns surrounding the Wausau metropolitan area have owner-occupancy rates in excess of 90 percent. With a few minor exceptions, the smaller villages in the County had owner-occupied housing percentages similar to that of the County average. The larger municipalities along the USH 51 corridor, including the cities of Wausau and Schofield, and the Village of Weston, exhibit the highest percentage of renter-occupied housing.

Figure 4-2: Housing by Municipality, 2020

Area	Total Housing Units	Total Occupied Housing Units	Total Vacant Housing Units	Average Household Size	Percent of Housing Built Before 1970
Abbotsford city	226	205	21	2.58	50%
Athens village	526	449	77	2.12	64%
Bergen town	299	287	12	2.73	46%
Berlin town	393	370	23	2.47	63%
Bern town	201	178	23	3.53	58%
Bevent town	539	432	107	2.36	60%
Birnamwood village	14	14	0	2.21	43%
Brighton town	223	221	2	2.49	61%
Cassel town	378	354	24	2.54	60%
Cleveland town	600	556	44	2.78	40%
Colby city	289	270	19	2.3	49%
Day town	413	410	3	2.71	55%
Dorchester village	0	0	0	-	0%
Easton town	409	397	12	2.61	57%
Eau Pleine town	613	602	11	1.92	35%
Edgar village	631	615	16	2.21	54%
Elderon village	109	109	0	2.53	98%
Elderon town	326	269	57	2.15	55%
Emmet town	398	373	25	2.73	41%
Fenwood village	66	66	0	2.42	56%
Frankfort town	248	240	8	2.5	67%
Franzen town	229	210	19	2.34	55%
Green Valley town	282	187	95	2.17	52%
Guenther town	138	126	12	2.41	38%
Halsey town	246	229	17	2.81	55%
Hamburg town	385	373	12	2.73	52%
Harrison town	217	164	53	2.21	45%
Hatley village	212	212	0	2.63	42%
Hewitt town	261	246	15	2.39	49%
Holton town	328	311	17	2.8	64%
Hull town	303	286	17	2.99	69%
Johnson town	323	312	11	2.71	68%
Knowlton town	868	699	169	2.33	39%
Kronenwetter village	2,919	2,919	0	2.69	34%
McMillan town	754	728	26	3.99	45%
Maine village	1,061	1,024	37	2.51	54%
Marathon town	458	429	29	2.72	53%
Marathon City village	615	565	50	2.35	65%
Marshfield city	444	374	70	1.61	15%
Mosinee city	2,059	1,973	86	2.06	69%
Mosinee town	1,029	993	36	2.8	36%

Norrie town	482	413	69	2.76	46%
Plover town	291	243	48	2.66	53%
Reid town	556	494	62	2.36	53%
Rib Falls town	367	343	24	2.67	50%
Rib Mountain village	2,924	2,837	87	2.42	46%
Rietbrock town	375	361	14	2.47	71%
Ringle town	619	599	20	2.57	45%
Rothschild village	2,380	2,215	165	2.36	60%
Schofield city	1,160	1,078	82	2.12	72%
Spencer village	790	765	25	2.21	74%
Spencer town	542	532	10	2.92	36%
Stettin town	1,057	1,021	36	2.91	39%
Stratford village	714	684	30	2.11	51%
Texas town	633	601	32	2.72	64%
Unity village	90	86	4	2.23	86%
Wausau city	18,606	17,254	1,352	2.18	73%
Wausau town	840	810	30	2.39	61%
Weston village	6,619	6,358	261	2.36	37%
Weston town	259	248	11	2.69	43%
Wien town	297	279	18	3.11	67%
Marathon County	59,633	55,998	3,635	2.39	57%

Source: American Community Survey, 2020

Seasonal Housing

Seasonal housing units are defined by the Census Bureau as housing units for “seasonal, recreational, or occasional use”. Seasonal housing is found throughout the County, but the communities with the largest number of seasonal homes are generally located in the south central and eastern portions of the County. This may be

due to the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir and Lake Du Bay in the south and the proximity to large tracts of open space and undeveloped land in the eastern portion of the County. In five towns, seasonal homes account for more than ten percent of total housing units, these are: Green Valley, Elderon, Bevent, Harrison, and Plover. Green Valley, which has extensive frontage on the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, has the highest percentage of seasonal housing, with 27 percent. Wausau has the most seasonal units with 104, followed by Green Valley with 75 units. In all, seasonal housing makes up less than 2 percent of the county’s housing units.

Seasonal Housing Units

Seasonal housing units are those intended for occupancy only during certain seasons of the year and are found primarily in resort areas.

Changes in Housing Stock

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of housing units in the County increased by almost 2,000 units (3%), as shown in **Figure 4-3**. More recently, between 2020 and 2023, total housing units have grown by 1.1%. With this slower growth than in previous decades, it is important to note that the percentage of owner-occupied to renter-occupied housing has shifted. Single-family housing grew by only 2 percent but remains the most common housing type throughout Marathon County. Renter-occupied housing increased by 17 percent. The largest percent growth among housing types was seen in multi-family housing, which experienced a 37 percent increase in buildings with 10 or more units, while smaller buildings with 3 to 9 units increased by 1 percent. In 2000, duplexes were the most common type of multi-family unit, but between 2010 and 2020, the number of units decreased by

almost 400. 15 communities saw a reduction in housing units during the decade, while two saw a growth of more than 50 percent.

Figure 4-3: Change in Housing Stock, 2010-2020

	2010	2020	Net Change	% Change
Housing Units	57,734	59,633	1,899	3%
Occupied Housing Units	52,893	55,998	3,105	6%
Vacancy %	8.30%	6.10%	-2.20%	-27%
Owner Occupied Housing Units	39,046	39,804	758	2%
Renter Occupied Housing Units	13,847	16,194	2,347	17%
Owner Occupied Housing Units as percent of Total	73.80%	66.70%	-7.10%	-10%
Persons per Household	2.49	2.39	-0.1	-4%
Number of Homes for Seasonal/ Recreational Use	840	829	(11)	-1%
Number of Single-Family Homes	44,296	45,457	1,161	3%
Number of Duplexes	3,503	3,104	-399	-11%
Multi-Family Units 3-9 Units	4,030	4,084	54	1%
Multi-Family Units 10+ Units	3,787	5,192	1,405	37%

Source: U.S. Census 2010, 2020

Housing Age

The age of housing stock typically reflects several important factors, including size, amenities, and overall condition or associated maintenance costs. The age of the home often reflects different regional and national trends in housing development. Housing predating the 1940s, for example, was typically smaller and built on smaller lots. In subsequent decades, both average lot and home sizes have increased. The average number of homes constructed in the 1980s and 1990s is typically much larger than that of housing built in previous decades. This can be seen in both the rural and more urban environments of Marathon County. Additional bedrooms, bathrooms, and attached garage space are among the amenities found in newer housing units.

Census data shows that over 1,899 new housing units were built in Marathon County between 2010 and 2020. Housing buildings during the 2010s represented about 5 percent of total housing units, significantly less than in the 2000s. At the other end of the spectrum, it should be noted that approximately 57 percent of Marathon County’s housing stock was built before 1970. This could indicate a need for additional housing rehabilitation programs to assist in the maintenance of these older homes. See **Figure 4-2**.

Physical Characteristics

The physical quality of housing stock is measured by several interrelated features, including structural integrity, size, and available facilities. Physical quality needs vary, depending on the type or function of the dwelling. For example, recreational housing will typically require different amenities than a primary residence. Although a great deal of variation exists throughout Marathon County, data obtained through statistics, interviews, and observations indicate that the County’s housing stock is generally sound.

In 2020, the median number of rooms for a Marathon County dwelling was 5.9 rooms, which is slightly larger than the statewide average of 5.6 rooms. Generally speaking, there is an increasing market demand for larger housing units. A majority of the rural and suburban towns report having a larger median room size than the County overall. On the other hand, urban municipalities, such as the cities of Wausau and Schofield, generally have median room sizes slightly below the County figures.

Housing Values

Figure 4-4 shows median housing values in 2020 for Marathon County, surrounding counties, and the State of Wisconsin. The median value is based only on single-family houses located on lots less than 10 acres in size. Additionally, this statistic only considers housing units without a business or medical office on the property. In 2020, the median housing value in Marathon County was \$161,500, which is higher than median values in neighboring counties except Portage County, but below the state median value.

From 2020 to the latest data in 2023, the median housing value in Marathon County has increased by 27.2%, reaching \$205,500. Comparatively, during this same time, the state median housing value has increased by 30.75%, reaching \$247,400.

Providing a range of housing values is important to meet the housing needs of people of different income levels and at different times in their lives. **Figure 4-5** shows the range of housing values in Marathon County in 2020. The percentage of housing units below \$100,000 decreased by nearly 20 percent. Conversely, the percentage of housing valued above \$200,000 rose by 50 percent.

The median value of housing varies significantly across the County, although housing has become more expensive in the past decade. Lower median values often reflect older and smaller housing stock, which is typically concentrated in the older urban areas and villages. Housing in the growing metro suburban areas is generally more expensive, in part because larger percentages of the housing stock in these communities are relatively new and quite large. Likewise, communities with housing located on property with lake frontage generally have higher median values.

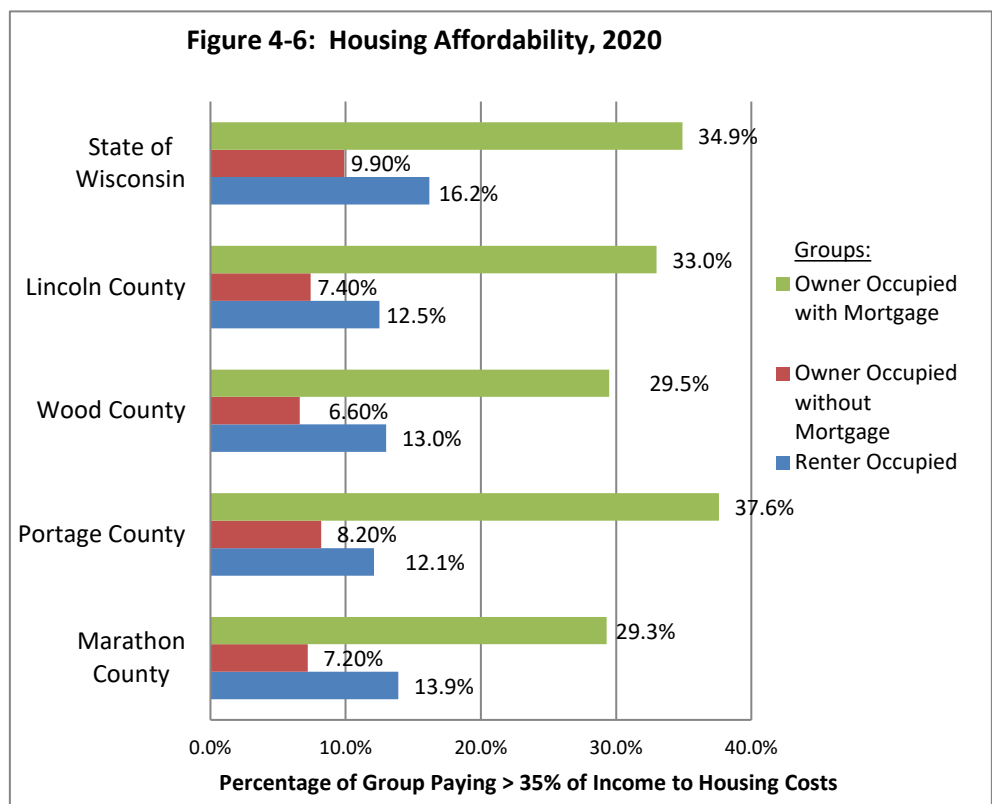
Figure 4-5: Range of Housing Values, 2010-2020			
Range of Values	Number of Housing Units		Percent Change
	2010	2020	
< \$99,999	9,948	8,081	-18.8%
\$100,000 to \$199,999	20,702	17,971	-13.2%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	5,814	8,478	45.8%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	2,466	4,117	67.0%
\$500,000 or more	867	1,157	33.4%
Source: American Community Survey, 2010 and 2020			

Housing Affordability

Several factors impact housing affordability. These factors include rent and mortgage payments, maintenance expenses, lot size, and required or desired amenities. Household size and income are also key factors contributing to what housing options are available and accessible to residents.

Affordability is relative; therefore, it is difficult to define a firm standard for affordability. Statistically speaking, those spending more than 35 percent of their total household income on housing costs may be facing affordability difficulties. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) recommends that rental-housing costs not exceed 30 percent of monthly income. HUD also indicates that mortgage lenders are more willing to make loans if the scheduled mortgage payment is less than 29 percent of the monthly household income. For this analysis, the threshold of 35 percent of total household income was used to define affordability.

Overall, select median owner-occupied costs in the County, both with and without a mortgage, are lower than figures for the State. This suggests that while general housing costs are lower in the County than the State on average, household incomes are also comparatively lower. Marathon County has a smaller percentage of residents paying greater than 35 percent of their income toward



housing than the State of Wisconsin, two percent fewer among owners with a mortgage, three percent fewer owners without a mortgage, and six percent fewer renters.

Figure 4-6 compares median monthly housing costs among local counties. Owner-occupied housing is distinguished between with and without a mortgage. Marathon County has the lowest percentage of homeowners with a mortgage paying more than 35% of their income toward housing relative to nearby counties and the state. Only Wood County has a lower percentage for homeowners without a mortgage, but Marathon County has the highest percentage for renters. Housing costs in Marathon County are slightly higher than in nearby counties, but Marathon County is more affordable than most, particularly if you own your own home and are paying a mortgage.

Since 2020, the percentage of renters spending more than 35% of their income on housing has grown, reaching 32.6% in 2023. The percentage of homeowners with or without a mortgage paying over 35% of their income has not grown significantly.

According to the Wausau Metropolitan Area Housing Assessment, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, and affordablehousingonline.com, as of 2022, over 1,870 rental housing units received federal assistance in the County. These housing units are located in at least 35 different developments in various communities throughout the County, including the cities of Colby, Mosinee, Schofield, and Wausau; and the villages of Athens, Edgar, Marathon City, Rothschild, Spencer, Stratford, and Weston. These housing units serve elderly, families, and people with disabilities, as well as Section 8 voucher recipients. Other developments that have received affordable housing tax credits are found throughout Marathon County.

Homeless Services

There are many services for homeless citizens of Marathon County. The efforts of most organizations working on homeless issues in Marathon County are directed towards preventing people from becoming homeless. Preventing homelessness is the preferred means of intervention, as it is less costly for all involved and helps maintain household stability. It is also widely recognized that homelessness is often the result of other factors such as unemployment, mental illness, domestic abuse, and drug addiction. As such, providing an integrated network of support is essential to address this complex issue.

The United Way of Marathon County Housing Task Force is one community partnership that focuses on reducing the number of individuals experiencing homelessness by connecting them with resources and permanent solutions. Additionally, in 2023, the Community Partners Campus opened in Wausau. The campus mission is to create a single location for the provision of a wide range of human services by offering functional, collaborative, shared space facilities for its non-profit partners, all of which have mission-driven purposes to serve disadvantaged individuals and families in the greater Wausau Area. Community Partners Campus helps its nonprofit partners meet their clients' needs, with an emphasis on food, shelter, medical, mental health, and social well-being. In addition to providing more services to more people, it allows its partners to focus their efforts on their missions without the distractions of owning their own building or renting a facility at market rates that don't truly meet their needs.

Shelters for the unhoused are mostly located in the Wausau metro area, with some services also located in Marshfield. An estimated 200 to 300 people in Marathon County seek shelter each year, and around 52 to 53 are unsheltered on any given day, according to Community on Call. Catholic Charities operates a shelter in Wausau that serves about 30 persons per night, from November 1 through April 30. The Salvation Army provides shelter for up to three families, and The Women's Community provides emergency shelter for women and children as well. The City of Wausau also activates a *Community on Call* program when temperatures are anticipated to fall below 15 degrees

Fahrenheit. During these times, additional shelters are opened for the unhoused. In 2025, the Wausau Police, in partnership with Marathon County, operated an eight-month, short-term shelter for up to 60 individuals. Starting in 2026, Bridge Street Mission will operate a year-round shelter in Wausau for 40 men and 20 women, with overflow space for up to 75 people.

In 2024, Marathon County and the City of Wausau formed a Homelessness Task Force to continue studying the homelessness issue and make recommendations on additional strategies the community can pursue to help address the growing number of unhoused individuals in the area. A detailed plan coordinated between Marathon County and the City of Wausau is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2026. The task force's initial recommendations focused on improving coordination between the county and the City of Wausau—specifically identifying existing services, who is providing them, where service gaps exist, and how those gaps can be addressed.

In late 2025, the county voted to add a Public Health Coordinator for Homelessness within the Health Department. This position will lead collaborative efforts with the city and other regional communities to implement strategies and build a model that will ensure a unified, integrated, and effective approach to reducing homelessness across the county.



Community Partners Campus in Wausau

Figure 4-7: Current Programming and Resources in Place for the Unhoused in Wausau Area



Source: Wausau Police Department, 2024

Senior and Subsidized Housing

In Marathon County, housing for seniors and populations with special needs is primarily provided in the urbanized areas in and around Wausau. The Marathon County Aging and Disability Resource Center, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, and the Marathon County United Way all maintain a list of these housing options throughout the County. As the number of elderly persons increases in the coming years, there will continue to be an increased need for these types of housing options. This trend will be seen throughout Marathon County, the State of Wisconsin, and the nation, as the baby-boom population ages. The Highway 51 area is the center of Marathon County for population, jobs, and housing opportunities. As such, most of Marathon County’s senior housing opportunities are centered in and around this area as well.



Senior Apartments in Wausau

Migrant Worker Housing

Some communities in Marathon County have identified concerns about providing adequate housing for migrant workers, particularly in the western half of the county. Currently, many of these migrant workers pass through Marathon County to work on large agricultural operations. Based on anecdotal evidence, these workers are often housed at their work site, sometimes in temporary housing. Many rural communities have expressed concerns about the quality of these on-site housing units for migrant workers.

Community Character

Community character is less quantifiable than other aspects of comprehensive planning, but it is equally important to the creation of livable communities. Marathon County’s character is diverse, including rolling farmlands, woodlands, urban neighborhoods, modern suburban developments, historic downtown districts, and scenic natural areas.

Community Character

Community character is the sum of all the attributes and assets that make a community unique and that establish a sense of place for its residents.

Every community has its own unique sense of place felt by residents and visitors alike. A few major factors have a direct influence on this character, including the mix of uses present, public and open spaces, the street/road network, level of density, focus on design, and diversity. The mix of uses present can include the primary destinations of daily life, such as home, work, shopping, school, and recreation amenities, and their proximity to one another. Public and open spaces include civic buildings, churches, libraries, parks, and other places for people to gather. The street/road network is part of the character by influencing how people navigate their environment, the means by which they travel, traffic levels, and safety concerns. Density plays a role in community size, walkability, and the variety of retail and commercial uses a community can support. Design can impact aesthetics with architectural features, scale, and the visual style that unites or divides a community into neighborhoods. Finally, diversity includes a range of retail and housing options that allow for people of different socioeconomic groups to live within a community.

Maintaining “rural character” has been mentioned throughout this planning process and numerous other planning efforts in the County. However, rural character is not defined. Usually, it is an image of a farm or open space with very little development. A definition might be as follows: rural character is a landscape where the predominant feature is the natural environment, such as farmland, woodlands, open space, or water bodies, and the placement of development is minimal.

Marathon County’s rural heritage of family farms and Main Streets has been maintained in some areas, but in others it has transitioned to scattered subdivisions and strip commercial development. In many places, people can no longer walk or bike to neighboring residences or convenience stores because these uses have been separated or are located too far away. Achieving the right balance between the quantity and quality of new development and redevelopment is important.

This Plan provides guidance for the creation and maintenance of specific identities for the different land use groups in the county. Unique and identifiable communities and neighborhoods contribute to a sense of place and help create pride in where one lives and works. That pride then encourages higher levels of quality and maintenance. The county is a growing and evolving community where the community character is not static or easily definable within a single type. However, it is important to maintain local traditions and historic architectural styles.

The physical components of community character generally include the following design elements:

- Architectural elements and style of buildings
- Street patterns & streetscape (landscaping, light fixtures, street furniture, etc.)
- Layout and design of development
- Open spaces and preserved resources

Local zoning and subdivision ordinances impact the overall character as well. It is important to consider these as well.

County Transect

The transect is an approach to planning and design based on a series of habitats or “ecozones” that are placed on a continuum from rural to suburban to urban. The zones are distinguished by varying density and character of the built and natural environment. See **Figure 4-7**. Development in each zone is regulated differently, related to building design standards, building setbacks, height, scale, as well as types of use.

Neighborhoods throughout a city:

- Illustrates the transition from rural to suburban to urban,
- Incorporates a variety of uses into one neighborhood,
- Combined uses reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) by increasing options,
- Highest intensity in core, then intensity decreases moving outward

Rural to Urban Continuum

Rural

These areas are characterized by agriculture, woodlands, and open spaces, with very low density scattered development – mainly to support agricultural uses. Most of the towns in the county would be considered rural where agriculture and woodlands dominate the landscape.

Rural Places

These are very small communities, sometimes unincorporated, with limited services.

Rural Centers

These are local trade centers that serve the rural areas surrounding them. These are often small cities and villages.

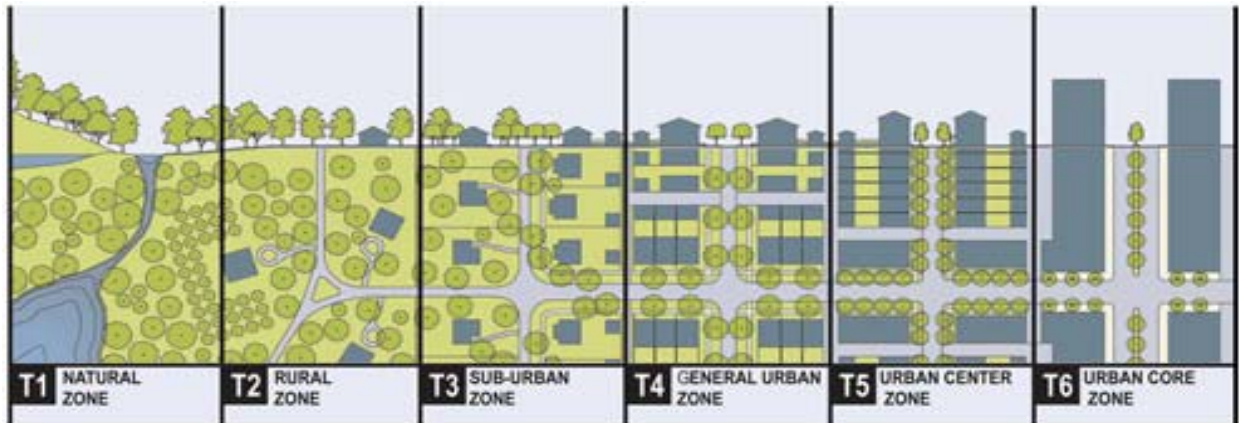
Urban Fringe/Suburban

Areas adjacent to urban centers, usually incorporated areas, sometimes unincorporated towns, that were, and continue to be, the major focus of growth within the Region. This includes the Villages of Weston and Kronenwetter and Rib Mountain.

Urban Center

Cities and villages within the region, densely built, and contain the majority of the employment, business establishments, and community facilities and services. The primary center is the Wausau Urban Area, which includes the cities of Wausau and Schofield and the Village of Rothschild.

Figure 4-7: The Transect



The way these physical components of community character, as mentioned earlier, are used creates different communities ranging from rural to urban. The qualities of each of these elements are described for five community groupings. There are many broad types of development that exist throughout the county. They include rural crossroads and villages, traditional farms, suburbs, and small and large cities. Similar to the transect communities can be grouped on a continuum based on density.

- Rural (agricultural and wooded lands with scattered other development)
- Rural Place (crossroads, hamlet, unincorporated cluster)
- Rural Center (small cities & villages)
- Urban Fringe/Suburban (Lower density/mainly residential with some retail/business)
- Urban (Higher density/Mixed uses)

Different strategies need to be developed in local planning efforts for the communities to preserve their individual character.

Livability

Livability is often defined as the sum of the factors that add up to a community’s quality of life—including the built and natural environments, economic prosperity, social stability and equity, educational opportunity, and cultural, entertainment, and recreation possibilities.

Multiple federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and professional associations have developed different definitions of livability. Livability is most often used to describe the diverse aspects of society, surroundings, and shared experiences that shape a community. It includes an interrelated set of economic, spatial, and social components that together are challenging to understand and measure in the defined work of planning and development. In addition, livability embraces the human experience of place and is specific to the place and time in question.

Livability matters particularly for an aging population because it directly impacts older adults' health, independence, safety, and overall quality of life. As more people choose to “age in place” by staying in their homes longer, communities should adapt to their changing needs. Aspects like safe and accessible housing as well as reliable transportation options for drivers and non-drivers, are essential to meeting the needs of residents.

The six livability principles established by the Partnership are a solid foundation for improving livability in Marathon County. All communities can be made more livable. When residents are able to live near their place of employment, travel costs, transportation maintenance, pollution, and congestion are reduced. Efficient use of land and support for walking, biking, and access to transit reduces energy consumption, saving money for individuals, communities, and the region. Typically, livable and sustainable developments are less expensive to build, require fewer municipal services, result in higher values for property owners, and generate a range of long-term social and environmental benefits.

Six Livability Principles

1. Provide more transportation choices. Develop safe, reliable, and economical transportation choices to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote public health.
2. Promote equitable, affordable housing. Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.
3. Enhance economic competitiveness. Improve economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access to employment centers, educational opportunities, services and other basic needs by workers, as well as expanded business access to markets.
4. Support existing communities. Target federal funding toward existing communities—through strategies like transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling—to increase community revitalization and the efficiency of public works investments and safeguard rural landscapes.
5. Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment. Align federal policies and funding to remove barriers to collaboration, leverage funding, and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth, including making smart energy choices such as locally generated renewable energy.
6. Value communities and neighborhoods. Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods—rural, urban, or suburban.

Issues



Rising Housing Costs & Housing Supply - Housing costs remain high in some communities, making it challenging to find housing that is affordable for people at all stages of life. These costs result from multiple factors, including land prices, building materials, insurance, code requirements, and labor. Taxes and municipal service costs (e.g., utilities, public protection) also affect overall housing affordability. While the county cannot control all these factors, it can continue to examine how county policies and ordinances may assist in improving affordability.

Housing Rehabilitation - Marathon County has a relatively high proportion of older housing stock, mostly concentrated in older cities (e.g., Wausau, Schofield) and rural villages (e.g., Stratford, Edgar). Older homes are generally smaller and less expensive than newer ones and therefore play an important role in offering diverse housing options.

However, to remain viable, some of these homes require rehabilitation. In rural areas, some residential lots remain unoccupied due to the deteriorating condition of an existing home. Removing these structures could open opportunities for new construction on existing lots, helping reduce the need for new land development and preserving forested and agricultural lands in rural areas.

Currently, there are some programs available to help homeowners with housing rehabilitation of older homes. The county can concentrate on providing education and coordination to connect homeowners with these programs.

Scattered Rural Housing Development - Demand for rural housing is growing due to factors such as improved road access to Wausau and Marshfield, and a growing desire to live in rural settings. While rural development is not inherently negative, uncontrolled growth can have significant impacts.

New housing in rural areas can lead to the fragmentation of woodlands and prime farmland. Additionally, as more people move near active farms, conflicts may arise between farmers and non-farming residents. Urban-to-rural migrants often expect higher service levels (e.g., paved roads), which can burden rural municipalities financially.

There is a need to strike a balance between regulatory control of rural housing development and the protection of private property rights.

Homelessness - There is a growing number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless. Social services and support programs addressing the root causes of homelessness remain limited.

While expanding affordable housing can help, homelessness often stems from health and social issues—such as substance use or mental health challenges—independent of housing supply.

Addressing homelessness requires a multi-faceted approach involving housing, healthcare, and social services.

Recently, a County-City Task Force was formed to address homelessness. Its recommendations will help guide the county's future role in tackling this complex issue.

Senior Housing & Services - As the baby-boom population continues to age, demand for senior housing and related services will increase. Most existing senior housing is currently located in the metro areas or in rural villages, locations that provide convenient access to healthcare, shopping, and social services. It makes sense that most senior housing and associated services will continue to be concentrated in these areas.

Many seniors are choosing to remain in their homes longer due to better health and increased life expectancy. This trend will increase demand for supportive services and specialized transportation. The City of Wausau offers several senior-focused housing options, with additional options scattered across the county. The ability to expand upon and sustain existing services will remain vital.

Planning: Maintenance and Coordination - To ensure well-planned housing development, it is essential for most communities in the county to develop and regularly update comprehensive plans, zoning codes, and ordinances. Currently, only about half of the county has a current comprehensive plan.

Many issues, such as transportation, housing, and environmental concerns, are regional in nature and cannot be effectively addressed by any one local government. Communities must plan proactively to make informed decisions that shape the places where people live, work, and recreate.

Development should follow land use patterns compatible with each region's character, environmental constraints, and available services. Planning must also consider historical development patterns and support a sense of community, economic well-being, and environmental awareness.

Livability - As market demands evolve, there is a growing need for diverse housing styles and amenities to attract younger generations and help older residents age in place. Strategic investments in communities build upon one another, enhancing livability throughout the county.

Encouraging people to live, work, and recreate in the same area strengthens community connections and supports economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

Community Character Goal and Objectives

Community Character Goal: The local history, culture, social pride, and community character are established and enhanced as defining elements that make Marathon County a vibrant and inviting place to be.

Objectives:

1. Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members.
2. Support efforts to reduce homelessness.
3. Enhance community livability, including the unique characteristics of all communities, by investing in healthy and safe neighborhoods throughout the county.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Five

Natural Resources



Natural resources, the soil, water, and air, are critical to the future of Marathon County. Marathon County has identified Natural Resource protection as a priority because the economic strength and vitality of our community are dependent on the quality of these resources. These resources are highly valued for their natural beauty, wildlife habitat, the recreational opportunities they provide, and their important contribution to the economy of Marathon County

Marathon County's natural resources are covered in this Comprehensive Plan in two different chapters. Land and biological resources are discussed in this chapter. Water resources receive extra attention in a chapter devoted specifically to them, Chapter 6.

Previous Plans and Studies

In the last decade, several plans were prepared and/or adopted by Marathon County specifically to address protection and management of natural resources. These plans may be used as resources to guide local policy and decision-making regarding resource management and protection.

Marathon County Land and Water Resource Management Plan (LWRMP)(2021)

The Marathon County Land and Water Resource Management Plan outlines a comprehensive strategy for the implementation of soil and water conservation in Marathon County from 2021 to 2030. The Land Conservation and Zoning Committee identified the following goals and objectives for the natural resource protection efforts in Marathon County:

Goal 1: Land and resources are protected and improved countywide

- A. Reduce soil erosion on all land.
- B. Improve soil health.
- C. Forest management - Private and public forest lands in Marathon County are well managed to support wildlife, recreation and timber harvest goals.
- D. Protect and preserve prime agricultural lands.

Goal 2: Surface water quality is protected and improved

- A. Reduce agricultural runoff to surface water (soil sediment, organics, and nutrients).
- B. Work to implement the Wisconsin River Watershed and Upper Fox Wolf River Total Maximum

Daily Load (TMDL) identified goals.

- C. Protect and enhance natural habitat areas along riparian corridors and wetlands.
- D. Reduce runoff from non-agricultural sources to improve water quality.
- E. Manage lake and stream resources to protect and improve the water quality and habitat.

Goal 3: Groundwater is protected and improved

- A. Protect and enhance the quantity and quality of groundwater resources.

Goal 4: Actively educate and engage community stakeholders to develop an understanding of land, surface water, and groundwater quality concerns.

- A. Improve public awareness and provide educational opportunities to enhance agricultural practices that protect land and water quality.
- B. Conduct information and educational activities as it relates to plan goals.

Marathon County Farmland Preservation Plan - Current Version

The Marathon County Farmland Preservation Plan is required under Chapter 91 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The purpose of this plan is to guide and manage growth and development in a manner that will preserve the rural character; protect the agricultural base and natural resources; and contribute to the County's overall goal of promoting public safety, health and prosperity within the County. This plan is the primary policy document in directing the preservation of agricultural production capacity, farmland preservation, soil and water protection, and future land development while respecting private property rights and individual units of government. That plan, in part, serves as the agricultural chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. Also see the Land Use Chapter.

Regionalization of Services

Marathon agriculture is diverse and extends over a large geographical region of nearly 1 million acres. During the development of the farmland preservation plan and through many citizen meetings, Marathon County recognized that a one-size-fits-all strategy of policy would not be effective, nor would it best utilize the limited resources available to serve the residents.

Marathon County has identified six unique regions that vary in demographics, land use, soils, and patterns of agriculture to best understand unique challenges and opportunities. Programs will be tailored to best serve each region's needs. The six regions are described in Chapter 3 and shown on Map 3-3.

Marathon County has identified high-priority Farmland Preservation Areas to be protected: The following purposes were used in establishing these areas:

- Preserve productive agricultural lands in the long-term
- Preserve the rural character and aesthetic quality of Marathon County
- Minimize nonagricultural development on prime farmland
- Protect environmentally sensitive areas

The farmland preservation plan proposes two primary strategies for protecting identified prime working farmland: Farmland Preservation Zoning and Agricultural Enterprise Areas. Marathon County

has two Agricultural Enterprise Areas. Antigo Flats in the northeast part of the County grows primarily seed potatoes, and the Heart of America's Dairyland in the western half of the County is primarily a dairy-producing area.

The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative continues the opportunity for landowners within areas planned and zoned for agricultural preservation to claim farmland preservation income tax credits. Within Marathon County, eligible landowners may collect \$10.00 per acre if in an area planned and zoned for farmland preservation and also designated as an Agricultural Enterprise Area, where the landowner signs a 10-year farmland preservation contract. Eligible landowners may collect \$12.50 per acre per year if in an area both planned and zoned for farmland preservation and is also designated as an Agricultural Enterprise Area, where the landowner signs a 10-year farmland preservation agreement contract.

Farmland Preservation Zoning

Marathon County has also implemented Farmland Preservation Zoning to restrict non-agricultural development in the Farmland Preservation Zoning district. The strategy requires a minimum of 35 acres to construct a residence or farm operation. Establishment of a minimum 2-acre parcel is also allowed in the event of a farm consolidation (existing farm operator purchases land but not necessarily existing buildings or residences, which are then separated from the farmland). Requests for development or land division that do not meet the standards in the zoning district may be granted or denied through a process that rezones the property into a different zoning district. Not allowing nonagricultural development in the Farmland Preservation Zoning district meets DATCP requirements.

Marathon County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan, 2021-2035

The Marathon County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan is a management guide for the Marathon County Forest and is updated every fifteen years. The mission of the plan is to manage and protect natural resources on a sustainable basis for the ecological, economic, educational, recreational, and research needs of present and future generations. The report includes a number of recommendations for:

- Multi-Use Trail Management
- Timber Management
- Wildlife Habitat and Game Management
- Public Information and Education
- Land Acquisition and Forest Boundary Management
- Biodiversity Management
- Forest Administration, Budgets, Intergovernmental Relationships
- Watershed Management
- Tourism, and
- Staffing and Personnel Management.

Solid Waste Strategic Plan 2026-2030

The Solid Waste Strategic Plan sets the direction and work plan of the Solid Waste Department for the next five years. In early 2025, the Board, department staff, and other stakeholders worked to assess the strengths, problems, opportunities, and threats of not only the department, but the entire waste industry to update the strategic plan. The plan is designed to make the Marathon County Solid Waste Department the “integrated waste management system of choice, fostering economic development while protecting human health and the environment,” and in helping Marathon County be the “healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in the State.” The following goals are identified in the Plan:

- Strategic Goal 1: Protect and enhance groundwater and air quality.
- Strategic Goal 2: Maximum economic opportunities from the landfill and solid waste operations.
- Strategic Goal 3: Build relationships with community haulers, municipalities, businesses, and organizations.
- Strategic Goal 4: Provide leadership on waste, recycling, diversion, environmental education, and outreach to begin the transition from waste management to resource management.
- Strategic Goal 5: Sustain safe and productive materials management.

Wisconsin Land Legacy Report, 2006

The Wisconsin Land Legacy Report is an inventory of places critical to meet Wisconsin’s future conservation and recreation needs. The Report identifies 229 Legacy Places and 8 statewide needs and resources that the public and the DNR staff believe are the highest priorities for conservation going forward. This report has a 50-year time frame, asking what lands to preserve in Wisconsin for the year 2050.

Air Resources

Climate

Marathon County has a continental climate, which experiences four distinct seasons with cold winters and warm summers. Winter temperatures average between 0 and 25°F, and summer temperatures average between 55 and 80°F. Summers are fairly short, which limits the crops that can be grown. Average annual rainfall is 33 inches, and the average annual snowfall is 64 inches.

The impacts of climate change will continue to increase in future years, which will likely affect the temperatures in the region and the length of the seasons. Increases in storms could also affect precipitation levels. More extreme weather events like heat waves, tornados, and flooding are more likely to occur as well. Impacts are having an effect locally. For instance, over the last few years, snowmobile seasons have been shorter, while county frozen timber sales have declined.

Air Quality

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sets National Ambient Air Quality Standards according to the Clean Air Act. These standards set parts per million maximums for six principal pollutants: Carbon Monoxide, Lead, Nitrogen Dioxide, Ozone, Particle Pollution, and Sulfur Dioxide. Hundreds of other air toxics are regulated through permits. Wisconsin DNR monitors air quality to inform the public when air

pollution reaches unhealthy levels. WDNR does ozone monitoring in Marathon County at a rural location near Lake Dubay in Bergen Township. Ozone levels at this location have decreased from about 61 parts per billion in 2010 to about 57 parts per billion in 2022, levels within the national standards.

The EPA also makes designations on counties dependent on whether or not they meet the national primary or secondary ambient air quality standards for pollutants. Those that do meet the standards are Attainment Areas; those that do not are Nonattainment Areas. Marathon County is designated as an Attainment Area and thus does not have additional regulations on new industries desiring to locate in the County.

The American Lung Association produces an annual report on air quality, State of the Air. According to the 2024 report, Marathon County received an A grade for having few high ozone days. The County has received a passing grade for high ozone days every year since 2000. Northern Wisconsin consistently has some of the nation's highest air quality scores.

In addition to these outdoor air quality issues, the Marathon County Health Department is concerned with indoor air quality, particularly regarding radon. Radon is a leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, second only to tobacco. Marathon County, in partnership with the regional Northcentral Radon Information Center (RIC), performs tests to measure indoor radon levels. In Marathon County, 57% of tests had results showing elevated radon levels in 2023. Other indoor air quality issues the Health Department responds to are smoke, carbon monoxide, and mold.

Land Resources

Terrain

Marathon County's terrain is primarily the result of glaciation. The far northern and western areas of the county are broad, nearly level to sloping ground moraines. The central area, except for the Wisconsin River Valley, is a mixed terrain of ground moraines and uplands underlain by bedrock at a depth of 2 to 20 feet. The Wisconsin River Valley is composed of nearly level to very steep outwash terraces and nearly level and gently sloping flood plains. The southeastern area of the county consists mainly of nearly level to steep outwash plains and stream terraces and undulating to very hilly moraines and drumlins. Map 5- 1 illustrates some of the natural resources in Marathon County.

Depth to Bedrock

The depth of bedrock below the soil surface can affect the suitability of land for development and other uses. In areas with shallow depth to bedrock construction of homes and other buildings may be limited since the cost to excavate the bedrock can be cost-prohibitive. Likewise, high bedrock may preclude installation of conventional on-site septic systems. The quantity of available water from low-producing bedrock aquifers is a serious concern that may limit the expansion of residential and business in the County and also increases the cost of drilling water wells. In most areas in Marathon County, bedrock is over 60 inches below the surface, see Map 5-2. Some areas in the center of the County have shallower bedrock with depths from 40 to 60 inches below the surface. A few isolated areas, such as near the base of Rib Mountain, have bedrock 20-40 inches below the surface.

Farmland Preservation Plan: Six Regions Terrain

Antigo Flats

The Antigo Flats region includes the towns of Harrison and Plover. The area is characterized by large tracts of publicly owned land and outdoor recreation areas (Bitzke Bird Walk, Dells of the Eau Claire, Ice Age Trail, and Plover River state fishery). Private lands are mixed agriculture and forest lands with scattered large lot residential development. The agriculture industry in the Antigo Flats region is primarily seed potato and vegetable crops.

Heart of America

The Heart of America region is named after the Heart of America's Dairyland Agricultural Enterprise Area in eastern Clark and western Marathon counties. The region includes the towns of Bern, Halsey, Hamburg, Berlin, Holton, Johnson, Rietbrock, Rib Falls, Hull, Frankfort, Wien, Cassel, Marathon, Brighton, Eau Pleine, Emmet, Spencer, McMillan, and Day; the villages of Dorchester, Unity, Spencer, Stratford, Fenwood, Edgar, Marathon City, and Athens; and the cities of Marshfield, Abbotsford, and Colby. Pre-settlement, the area was dominated by wetlands, which were drained to make way for agriculture. The region is characterized by a flat to gently rolling landscape, with large tracts of contiguous farmland, and forest in the wetter areas and along streams.

Wisconsin River Influence

The Wisconsin River influence region includes the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, Lake DuBay, Wisconsin River, Mead Wildlife Area, and the surrounding area in the towns of Cleveland, Green Valley, Bergen, and Knowlton. The region is characterized by surface water features, forest, and farmland.

Wisconsin Central

The Wisconsin Central region includes the cities of Wausau, Schofield, and Mosinee; the Villages of Rib Mountain, Rothschild, and Kronenwetter; and the towns of Stettin, Mosinee, and Guenther. The area is the urban center of the county and serves as the employment, higher education, goods and services provider, and social recreation center of the county. Agricultural lands in the Wisconsin Central region are historically under the most non-agricultural development pressure in the county due to the availability of urban amenities. With the downturn in the economy and resulting decreased housing construction, this development pressure has lessened in recent years. However, it is anticipated to return to pre-recession levels in the future.

The agriculture industry in the Wisconsin Central region includes greenhouses, grain, ginseng, dairy, and agribusinesses that provide agricultural services and products. Wisconsin Central serves as a regional marketplace for producers to sell goods at farmers' markets and local businesses.

Lumberjack

The Lumberjack region includes the towns of Maine, Texas, Hewitt, Easton, Wausau, Weston, Ringle, and the village of Weston. The area is characterized by large tracts of forested lands with scattered smaller agricultural tracts, mixed with large lot residential development.

The agriculture industry in the Lumberjack region is smaller scale grain, beef, and “lifestyle farms”. Lifestyle farming is characterized by family operations of small agri-tourism and activity farming such as corn mazes, pumpkin patches, and hayrides, etc.

Eastern Lakes

The Eastern Lakes region includes the towns of Norrie, Elderon, Franzen, Reid, and Bevent; and the village of Hatley. The area was glaciated, resulting in a forested landscape with many kettle lakes. The area is characterized by smaller tracts of forested and agricultural lands. Many residences are seasonal lake homes and hunting cabins. Residential development averages 1.8 acres, but lot size is highly variable due to the mix of larger residential area in agricultural areas, smaller residential areas in the forested areas, and smallest residential area along lakeshores.

Soil Resources

Most of the soils found in the County are best used for cropland and woodlands. The soils of Marathon County are primarily derived from the weathering of glacial drift, outwash, and bedrock. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service conducted a Soil Survey, which described the kinds of soils that exist in an area. Soils are described in terms of their location on the landscape, profile characteristics, relationship to one another, suitability for various uses, and needs for particular types of management. The Survey identified 13 primary soil associations in Marathon County. See the survey online for more detailed and up-to-date information.

Another method of describing soils is through hydrologic soil groups. Hydrologic soil groups are based on estimates of runoff potential. Soils are assigned to one of four groups according to the rate of water infiltration when the soils are not protected by vegetation, are thoroughly wet, and receive precipitation from long-duration storms. Surface runoff refers to the loss of water from an area by flow over the land surface. Surface runoff classes are based on slope, climate, and vegetative cover.

Soils play a significant role in determining the suitability of a site for development. Most soils in Marathon County are suitable for agriculture, except those with excessive slopes or areas that are poorly drained. Areas most suitable for agricultural production, with minimal limitations and requiring minimal inputs for successful production, have been identified as “prime farm lands” by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Not all lands classified as prime farm soils are used for farming; some have been developed for residential or other uses. The western half of the County is home to most of the prime farmland. However, several areas of prime farmland are found east of the Wisconsin River, particularly northeast of the City of Wausau and along the Eau Claire and Plover rivers. The Marathon County Farmland Preservation Plan includes more detailed information on prime farm soils.

Soil Erosion

The primary concerns with regard to soil erosion are the potential loss of productive farm soils and the impact of sediment and nutrient runoff on water quality. To maintain soil productivity, an average soil erosion rate of three to five tons per acre per year for cropland is considered allowable or tolerable (“T” level). The average soil loss rate for Marathon County is two tons per acre per year. To preserve water quality, the County’s goal is to keep soil erosion rates below “T” levels, particularly in water-quality management areas. Most soil erosion in Marathon County is associated with agricultural activities. Soil erosion can also be a problem related to mining, the development of buildings and roads, and forest clearing.

Soil Erosion

Soil erosion is a naturally occurring process in which a field’s topsoil is worn away by the natural physical forces of water and wind or through forces associated with farming activities such as tillage.

A variety of efforts are currently used or encouraged to control and minimize soil erosion, including conservation tillage, stormwater permitting requirements, management intensive grazing, crop rotations, development restrictions on steep slopes, and construction best management practices. See the Farmland Preservation Plan for more information on efforts to control and minimize soil erosion.

Soil erosion has many potential sources. With over 329,036 acres of cropland within the county, agricultural soil erosion has been a long-time concern for the Marathon County Conservation, Planning and Zoning Department. However, other land disturbances such as mining, residential and commercial construction, roads, and forestry have the potential to deliver significant amounts of sediment to waterways. Soil erosion delivers soil sediment, organic material and nutrients to surface waters and is considered the primary nonpoint source of pollutants to our waterways.

Soil Erosion Transect Survey

In June 1999, Marathon County conducted its first transect survey. The survey has been repeated every year from 1999 to 2004 and has been repeated every other year from 2006 to 2020. The average annual “tolerable” soil loss rate (“T”) per acre for Marathon County is 3.7 tons per acre per year. It is important to understand that soil loss calculations and acceptable “T” are performance values based on maintaining soil productivity, not protecting water quality. The current average countywide soil erosion rate is 2.6 tons/acre/year with an upward trend. The following trends can be identified from the Transect Survey:

1. Cropland soil erosion rates have been increasing over the last ten years.
2. Cropping practices are trending toward more annual and erodible crop types being grown.
3. Tillage practices are trending toward less erodible methods being used, but a higher percentage of cropland is being tilled annually.

Based on these trends identified by the Transect Survey, the following conclusion can be drawn: the increase in erodibility of the crop types being grown, and the increase in cropland being tilled annually, more than offset the decreased erodibility of the tillage methods being used.

Figure 5- 1 Annual Soil Erosion Rates

Marathon County	
Year	Average Soil Erosion Rate (tons/acre/year)
2016	2.2
2018	2.5
2020	2.6
2022	2.5
2024	2.4

Source: Marathon County Soil Erosion Transect Survey

Sleep Slopes

Steep slopes are defined as slopes with gradients over 12 percent. Most steep slopes in Marathon County are located along the Wisconsin River valley and its tributaries, along the glacial moraine east of CTH Q, where ridges of steep slopes occur in a northeast to southwest direction, roughly parallel to the Plover River, and near Rib Mountain. Steep slopes are marked on Map 5-1.

Steep slopes pose challenges for development and are often vulnerable to erosion. Land disturbances, such as construction and vegetation removal, are often restricted on steep slopes through regulations. Slopes can be cost-prohibitive to development due to the high level of technical engineering required to build upon them. The County does not regulate development on steep slopes, but WDNR restricts most land disturbance activities on slopes of 30 percent and over. Municipalities with local zoning ordinances may also regulate development on steep slopes.

Non-Metallic Mining

Marathon County adopted a Nonmetallic Mining Ordinance in 1989. The ordinance was adopted in response to the approximately 400 operating or abandoned excavations of sand, gravel, decomposed granite, and stone. The ordinance requires restoration of the site to a purposeful and acceptable landscape appearance and use. Mining activities at active mining sites are administered through the collaboration of DNR and county regulations to prevent sediment delivery to surface waters and to protect groundwater.

Non-Metallic Minerals

Non-metallic minerals are minerals that have no metallic luster and break easily. They are typically some form of sediment and are often used in the creation of industrial products. Examples of nonmetallic minerals include sand, limestone, marble, clay, and salt.

Marathon County has over 150 operating non-metallic mines as of 2025. These mines are important sources of locally used construction aggregate and also produce value-added stone products (such as shingle aggregate, decorative stone, architectural stone, and railroad ballast) that are marketed regionally and nationally. Local non-metallic mines help to keep construction and infrastructure development costs low by minimizing the high transportation costs of these necessary materials.

The County has several hundred additional abandoned or closed non-metallic mining sites. A non-metallic mining ordinance requires reclamation of mining sites to a purposeful and acceptable landscape appearance and use. The program is administered by the County CPZ. Non-metallic mines in Marathon County are marked on Map 5-1.

Metallic Mining

Gold was discovered in Marathon County in the 1970s in what is called the Reef deposit, located in the Town of Easton. Aquila Resources owned mining rights and had done exploratory drilling as recently as 2012. Green Light Wisconsin, a subsidiary of Green Light Metals, acquired Aquila Resources, including its Wisconsin assets, in July 2021. Green Light Wisconsin obtained an exploratory drilling license in February 2022 and a subsequent license renewal in June 2022. According to the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, the Reef deposit contains between 120,000 and 140,000 ounces of gold. Currently, the DNR is reviewing additional information related to further exploratory drilling.

Farmland Resources

Agriculture has played a dominant role in the culture and economy of Marathon County for the last century. A significant number of people in the County are employed in agriculture-related industries, and the economic health of many rural communities is directly tied to agriculture.

Agriculture in Wisconsin has experienced several changes in the past few decades. Significant amounts of cropland have been converted to non-farm uses, such as residential, woodland, or idle land. Marathon County has had around 25,000 acres of farmland converted to other uses since 2000. The number of farms has decreased while the average farm size has increased. This reflects a decrease in the number of farm owners. The number of dairy herds and the total number of cows have decreased. More conflicts are occurring between farm and non-farm uses. This is primarily a result of the increased demand for rural residential development and the subsequent increase in non-farm residents living in close proximity to active farm operations.

A fundamental purpose of the Farmland Preservation Plan is to guide and manage growth and development in a manner that will preserve the rural character, protect the agricultural base and natural resources, and contribute to the safety, health, and prosperity of the communities. The Plan also recognizes the importance of fairness toward individual property owners and individual units of government.

Vision of Agriculture in Marathon County

Marathon County agriculture will be diverse, sustainable, and profitable now and in the future. Through shared responsibility and stewardship of resources, and community engagement/cooperation, we will enjoy a sufficient and sustainable supply of groundwater, high-quality water resources, and productive soil. Agriculture will be supported by adequate economic and structural infrastructure; access to technological advances in equipment, communication, and waste management; access to local, domestic, and international markets, ample land supply, and balanced mix of land uses.

Farmland Preservation Plan utilizes the Marathon County Comprehensive Plan’s Goals, Objectives, and Action Steps (That are related to and/or have an impact on farmland preservation, agriculture, and/or agricultural development in Marathon County)

- **Community Character (Chapter 4 of Comprehensive Plan) Goal:** The local history, culture, social pride, and community character are established and enhanced as defining elements which make Marathon County a vibrant and inviting place to be.
- **Natural Resources (Chapter 5 of Comprehensive Plan) Goal:** The natural resources of Marathon County are managed in a balanced way, so they are protected and preserved, for current and future generations’ health, enjoyment, and benefit.
- **Land Use (Chapter 9 of Comprehensive Plan) Goal:** Marathon County makes sound land use decisions which balance the needs of agriculture, recreation, economic development, and growth to wisely maximize the land’s potential.
- **Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development (Chapter 10 of Comprehensive Plan) Goal:** Marathon County is a community where every person can find a family supporting job and every business to have a strong workforce.
- **Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development (Chapter 10 of Comprehensive Plan) Goal:** Marathon County’s a diverse economy, a place of opportunities where people and businesses can grow and be successful.

Farmland Preservation

The preservation of farmland is very important in Marathon County because of the importance of agriculture to the local economy and identity. The Farmland Preservation Plan details policies and strategies the County is committed to in the effort to support and sustain active farms. The Farmland Preservation Plan identifies and distinguishes farm preservation areas from non-farm preservation areas and future development areas.



Farm in Marathon County

Property owners in farm preservation areas may participate in the Farmland Preservation Program, an income tax credit program administered by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection. The goals of the program are twofold: to preserve Wisconsin farmland by means of local land use planning and soil conservation practices, and to provide property tax relief to farmland owners. Landowners keeping land in agricultural use can claim a credit on their state income tax through the program if they meet the requirements of acreage and farm sales. Landowners must also comply with County soil and water conservation standards.

The tax credits are intended as an incentive to keep land in active farming and meet soil conservation standards. The program is also intended to help off-set increases in farm land values and associated

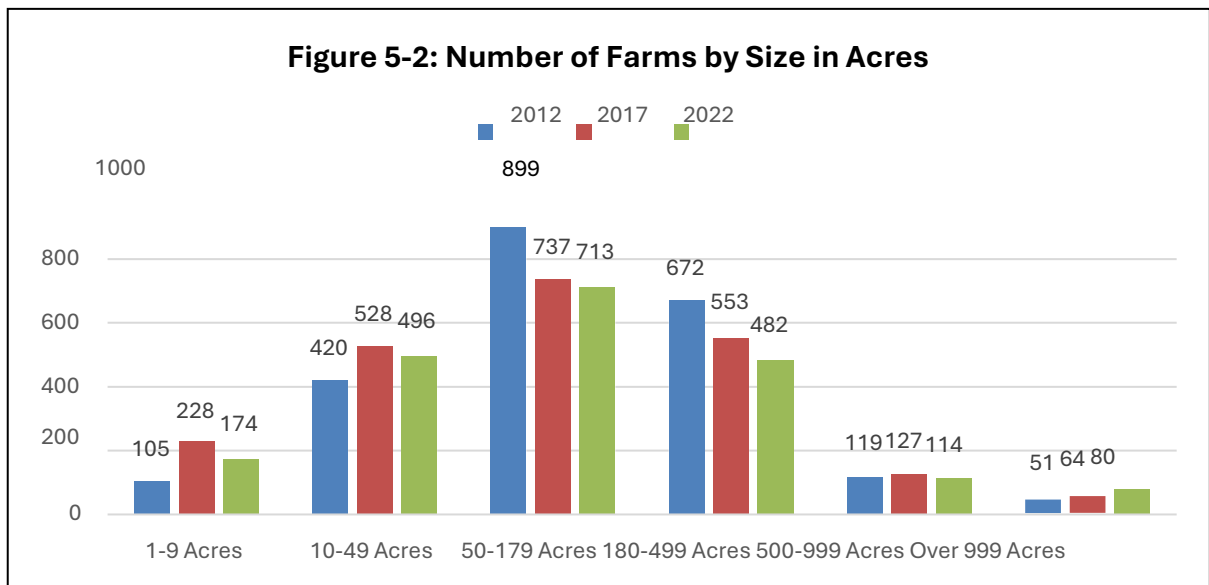
higher taxes. The Marathon County CPZ is responsible for administering the soil conservation plan and monitoring compliance with soil conservation standards. The County conducts compliance “spot checks” on about a quarter of the program participants annually.

Farmland Preservation Zoning

Farmland Preservation Zoning is a voluntary zoning classification intended to minimize fragmentation of farmland by imposing a minimum lot size of 35 acres. In order to adopt farmland preservation zoning, a municipality must be enrolled in the Farmland Preservation Program. Since Marathon County adopted its first Farmland Preservation Plan in 1982, seven towns have adopted Farmland Preservation Zoning. These include: Brighton, Eau Pleine, Hull, Marathon, McMillan, Mosinee, and Stettin.

Agriculture Inventory and Trends

Farmland can be analyzed by observing the change in the total number of farms, the acreage of each farm, and the amount of revenue from farm sales. According to the United States Department of Agriculture’s 2022 Census of Agriculture, there were 2,059 farms in Marathon County with an average size of 232 acres. This is down from 2,237 total farms in 2017 and 2,266 in 2012.



Using Marathon County and GIS data, there are currently over 400,000 acres of farmland in the county. Large areas of agriculture are found in both the eastern and western parts of the county. Two state-designated Agricultural Enterprise Areas are located in Marathon County. These are the Antigo Flats and Heart of America regions.

Figure 5-3: Farmland Uses, 2022

	Number of Farms	Number of Acres	% Change No. Farms Since 2012	% Change No. of Acres Since 2012
Total Cropland	1,852	329,036	-8.6%	-8.6%
Harvested Cropland	1,720	304,708	-10.3%	0.9%
Total Woodland	1,257	90,342	-16.3%	-3.1%
Permanent Pasture (other than cropland or wooded pasture)	828	23,552	-26.0%	-20.8%
Land in Farmsteads (bldgs., livestock, facilities, ponds, roads, etc)	1,439	34,647	-19.2%	-3.9%
Pastureland, all types	1,029	41,467	-23.3%	-17%
Land used for vegetables and vegetables harvested for sale	156	3,189	23.8%	20.5%
Land in Orchards	57	156	32.6%	60.8%

Figure 5-3 illustrates farmland uses in the County between 2012, 2017, and 2022. The amount of permanent pastureland had the largest reduction at 20.8%. Total cropland acreage increased by 2.8%, while harvested cropland increased by 0.9% in the County. The total amount of woodland decreased by 3.1%

Wind, Solar, and RNG in Farmland

There is growing interest in renewable energy, like wind and solar, on agricultural land in Marathon County. These rural areas offer space and conditions suitable for utility-scale energy projects, attracting developers seeking to establish wind farms and large-scale solar installations. While such projects can provide supplemental income for landowners and support statewide clean energy goals, they also raise questions about long-term land use, potential impacts on prime farmland, and broader natural resource concerns such as soil health, water runoff, and wildlife habitat. In Wisconsin, the siting of renewable energy systems is regulated by state statutes, including Public Service Commission (PSC) rules, which limit the ability of local governments to restrict wind and solar developments. Local restrictions must be based on health or safety concerns, must not significantly increase project costs, and must allow for a system of similar cost and efficiency.

Another emerging opportunity in renewable energy is Renewable Natural Gas (RNG), which is produced by capturing methane emissions from organic waste sources such as municipal solid waste landfills and anaerobic digester plants at water resource recovery facilities (wastewater treatment plants), livestock farms, food production facilities, and organic waste management operations. Given Marathon County’s strong agricultural base, there could be a path for farmers and municipalities to turn waste into RNG. Wisconsin's dairy farms are increasingly adopting anaerobic digesters to capture

methane from manure, which is then processed into RNG. This process not only generates renewable energy but also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provides farmers with an additional revenue stream.

Biological Resources

Biological resources include the living elements of natural resources, the flora and fauna present in Marathon County. A variety of plants and animals are found in the County, including several endangered and threatened species and several sensitive animal habitats.

Biological Resources

Biological resources refer to the living landscape—the plants, animals, and other aspects of nature—and are important to society for the various services they provide, as well as the problems they may create.

Forest Transition Zone

The Wisconsin Land Legacy Report is a document produced by the WDNR in 2006 to be an inventory of places to meet Wisconsin’s conservation and recreation needs for the next 50 years. The Report divides Wisconsin into 16 Ecological Landscapes and 229 Legacy Places, which are distinct places of conservation and recreation significance. Marathon County is wholly within the Forest Transition ecological landscape and contains five Legacy Places. Other areas of interest in Marathon County include the Brokaw Hemlock Hardwood forest. It is the largest hemlock-hardwood forest in the Forest Transition ecological landscape and is indicative of the forests that occurred in this part of Wisconsin in pre-settlement times. The ground layer harbors a diverse plant community, and many forest interior birds are present.

Vegetation

Marathon County’s original vegetation consisted primarily of deciduous and evergreen forests. Forests played a significant role in the early development and economy of the County. As of 2015, approximately 38 percent of the land area in Marathon County is forested. Forest lands continue to provide resources for lumber, pulp, and associated industries. They also provide opportunities for recreation and are increasingly sought for rural residential development.

Marathon County has nine county forest units covering 29,937 acres. The county forests include a mix of uplands, marshes, water impoundments, and wildlife. County forests are open to the public for hiking and camping. The County also has significant private forest land. The State Managed Forest Law provides tax credits to private forest owners who are part of the program. Marathon County has approximately 112,400 acres of private woodland enrolled in the Managed Forest Law programs. See the Land Use chapter for more information on the Managed Forest Law in Marathon County.



Five Legacy Places in Marathon County (Wisconsin DNR)

- **Big Eau Pleine River Woods** – This diverse, high quality hemlock/hardwood forest exists around the Big Eau Pleine River. The corridor of forest along the river provides important pathways for animal species movements. Aquatic resources in the river include several rare invertebrates. The land adjacent to the forest is dominated by farms and open grasslands. The area could support a range of low-impact recreation uses.
- **Central Wisconsin Grasslands** – This area stretches from Taylor County south to Adams County and is attractive to a diverse community of grassland birds, including large populations of prairie chicken and Henslow’s sparrow. Other declining or rare grassland birds, including grasshopper sparrow, upland sandpiper, eastern meadowlark, northern harrier, and short-eared owls, are locally abundant. Several large state wildlife properties, including the McMillan and Mead Wildlife Areas, are managed primarily to provide a mosaic of grassland habitats.
- **Middle Wisconsin River** – The middle portion of the Wisconsin River is an important biological and recreation corridor linking northern and southern Wisconsin. Due to the proximity of several large population centers, including Wausau and Mosinee, this portion of the river receives substantial public use with recreation, boating, fishing, and waterfowl hunting. Large numbers of anglers take advantage of the river’s robust warmwater fishery, which includes muskies, walleye, smallmouth bass, and several other species. The black redbreast is found below the dam in Wausau, the only place in the state where it is known to occur. Upland forests in the area typically contain a mix of oaks, aspen, and conifers, while the floodplain forests are dominated by silver maple, green ash, and hackberry. These forests provide important habitat for a variety of resident and migratory wildlife.
- **Norrie-Hatley Wetlands** – This is a large open forested wetland that harbors many species typically found much further north. Two softwater seepage lakes occur within the wetland. Vegetation present includes open bog, muskeg, black spruce swamp, and calcareous white cedar/tamarack swamp with several rare plant species. Potential habitat for rare birds and plants exists among the conifer swamps. Recreation opportunities may be limited to low-impact uses due to the wetness of the area, but protection would conserve scenic views from the Mountain Bay State Trail.
- **Rib River** – The Rib River offers some of the finest trout fishing in the area. The river has a medium gradient with gravel, rock, and cobble substrate, offering excellent in-stream habitat. Natural vegetation, predominantly northern hardwood forest, covers most of the stream corridor. The shoreline corridor, with its wooded, wild, and steep banks, gives the angler a feeling of seclusion. Some agriculture occurs within the middle and lower reaches.

Wildlife

Wildlife resources are abundant in the many undisturbed sanctuaries, refuges, reserves, and forests located throughout the County, including large tracts under private ownership. Wildlife resources in Marathon County include a variety of game and non-game species. Numerous species of songbirds, waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and mammals are found in county forests. See the County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan for more information about the wildlife species present in the County.

Endangered Species

Information on endangered resources in Wisconsin is provided in general terms only since Wisconsin State Law prohibits identification of specific locations of these resources. State Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) maps are appropriate for general planning and assessment purposes only. Endangered species include those species recognized by state and federal governments as having severely declining populations that are in jeopardy of extinction. Species identified (listed) as “Threatened and Endangered” are protected under Federal law.

In Marathon County, the WDNR has documented many species of endangered, threatened, or special concern status. The locations of endangered resources that are not considered vulnerable to collection are identified at the town level in Marathon County. Locations of more vulnerable species are generalized to minimize the potential for collection or disruption.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Endangered Species list for Wisconsin as of November 2024, the following species are federally-listed species present in Marathon County:

- Gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) – Endangered
- Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) – Threatened
- Whooping crane (*Grus americanus*) – Non-essential experimental population

Biological Resource Regulation

Some existing regulatory and management programs related to biological resources are listed below:

- Game Animals - Game animals are regulated through hunting restrictions. The WDNR is responsible for permitting and enforcement of these restrictions.
- Migratory Birds - Migratory birds are regulated by the Migratory Bird Act, which is administered by the WDNR.
- Forestland - The State’s Managed Forest Law (MFL) offers substantial tax reduction to property owners who agree to manage their forestland in accordance with a WDNR-approved plan. The MFL program provides incentives to protect privately owned woodlands from destructive timber cutting practices and overharvesting, and prevents land from becoming developed and/or converted to agricultural land use. Marathon County also has a plan for the management of County forestland.
- Shoreland Habitat – The County enforces zoning regulations to limit development in identified shoreland and floodplain areas. These restrictions also protect and minimize disturbance to wildlife habitat located in shoreland areas.

Preserve Land with Prime Soils for Agriculture and Forests – Agricultural land and forests are very important to Marathon County. Increasing development pressure has led to more of this land being converted to other uses. At the same time, Marathon County is experiencing new pressures related to potential renewable energy development, including wind and solar projects. These facilities are recognized as essential for meeting state and local goals for clean energy, reducing carbon emissions, and diversifying energy sources. However, they can also compete with agriculture and forestry for land. Large-scale solar installations, for example, are often proposed on flat, cleared areas with access to transmission lines where land frequently overlaps with prime agricultural soils. Wind projects, while more dispersed, may also affect farmland operations and forested areas through siting of turbines, access roads, and transmission infrastructure.

The Farmland Preservation Plan identifies the need to protect prime soils for agriculture and forests. While the county should continue to monitor state policy and local roles as they relate to wind and solar development, the county, through zoning and conservation programs, can encourage the protection of prime soil areas. See the Land Use chapter for more information about preserving land for agriculture and forests

Woodland Conservation– Development pressures and clearcutting for agriculture have led to increasing fragmentation of Marathon County’s woodlands. The timber industry was instrumental in the settling of Marathon County and remains an important piece of the local economy. Some tools are in place to continue sustainable forestry methods and encourage woodland conservation. One of these methods is participation in the Managed Forest Law program.

Multi-use Access to Resources – Convenient access to natural resources (lakes, rivers, trout streams, woodlands, etc.) is highly valued by County residents. While current levels of access appear good, the demand for access to natural areas will likely increase as Marathon County and the Wausau metro area grow. Balancing the provision of access with resource protection can create conflicts between different user groups. For example, excessive mountain biking or ATV use can damage vegetation and create erosion in sensitive areas such as floodplains or on steep slopes. Determining the appropriate level of access to these areas will likely need to be addressed on a case-specific basis, as impacts vary depending on the type and character of the natural resource and the intensity of the activity.

Healthy Soil for Healthy Plants, Animals, and People – Soil health is critical for the capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. The importance of managing soils so they are sustainable for this, and future generations cannot be overlooked. To do this, we need to consider soil as a living organism that, when provided with the basic necessities for life, performs functions required to produce food and fiber. Only "living" things can have health, so we must consider soil as a living ecosystem. It is teeming with billions of bacteria, fungi, and other microbes that are the foundation of a symbiotic ecosystem. A healthy soil

ecosystem provides nutrients for plant growth, absorbs and holds rainwater for use during drier periods, filters and buffers potential pollutants from leaving our fields that serve agriculture and forestry. If we were to measure only one criterion for healthy soils, it would be the organic matter. If organic matter levels are decreasing, our soils are losing health; if they are increasing, soil health increases. What is truly essential for soil health is covering our soils year-round to improve infiltration, reduce erosion, and nutrient loss. The practices most common for this are managed grazing, cover crops, conservation tillage, and hay rotations. We can no longer leave our soils exposed to the elements from early October through mid-June if we want to have healthy soils.

Weather Pattern Changes and Impacts to Natural Resources – Changes in weather patterns are already affecting Marathon County’s natural resources and land management practices. Warmer winters are reducing the window for winter timber harvests, making it more difficult to conduct logging operations without causing soil damage in forested areas. County Forest use is also changing, with shorter or infrequent winter recreational opportunities caused by warmer winters. Additionally, intense storms are causing more frequent damage to trails and infrastructure. Conservation practices and engineering standards are being re-evaluated, as traditional designs based on historical weather data may no longer be adequate to handle more extreme precipitation events and runoff. These changes also impact insurance coverage and costs, with rising premiums and shifting availability for those landowners and producers facing greater climate-related risks. In addition, the county is experiencing shifts in species distribution as warmer conditions lead to the spread of new pests, diseases, and invasive species, posing challenges for forest and habitat management. Together, these climate-driven changes highlight the need for adaptive management strategies to protect natural resources and maintain long-term land resilience.

Natural Resources Goal and Objectives

Natural Resources Goal: The natural resources of Marathon County are managed in a balanced way (so they are protected and preserved) for current and future generations' health, enjoyment, and economic benefit.

Objectives:

1. Promote sound land use decisions that protect, conserve, and preserve natural resources in balance with economic development and growth.
2. Mitigate and adapt county strategies to respond to impacts from changing weather patterns.
3. Support strategies that protect and improve air quality.
4. Protect and preserve soil health with a focus on prime agricultural areas.
5. Promote balanced use of non-metallic mineral resources and ensure mine reclamation.
6. Protect and sustainably manage public and private county forest resources.
7. Manage solid waste and contaminants to reduce negative impacts on the environment and on health.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Six

Water Resources



Marathon County depends on its water resources. They are economically and ecologically important to the health and welfare of their citizens. These water resources provide drinking water from both surface and groundwater sources. They provide very important recreational benefits as well as contribute to a diverse ecosystem that provides important functional and economic benefits. However, changes in land use and population shifts have increased demand for these water resources, and this, in turn, threatens many of them.

Nonpoint runoff problems are both water quality and quantity-based. Nonpoint pollution is a result of activities that take place on the land surface, and how water runs off the land surface or seeps into the ground. Most land use activities have the potential to contribute to nonpoint pollution problems.

Generally, because of the complexity of the problems and multiple jurisdictions involved, no single protective measure will wholly solve the problem caused by nonpoint sources of pollution in each watershed or area of the county. More likely, a combination of mechanisms will be necessary, and in many cases may be preferred, to give locally based and supported initiatives maximum flexibility in achieving their protection goals and needs. Improved linkages among different levels of government and existing protective mechanisms are needed to ensure that actions taken actually provide the desired protection of Marathon County's water resources.

Water Resources are prominent in Marathon County, which contains many streams and rivers. Most are tributaries to the Wisconsin River, which bisects the County as it flows to the south. In addition to 200-plus lakes, the County also has significant amounts of wetlands and floodplains. Maintaining excellent water quality is fundamental to the high quality of life in Marathon County.

Previous Plans and Studies



Marathon County Land and Water Resource Management Plan - 2021

The Marathon County Land and Water Resource Management (LWRM) Plan responds to soil and water quality concerns through local, state, and federal programs. The plan represents a 10-year (2021-2030) implementation plan that emphasizes cooperation with State and Federal conservation partners, as well as a renewed emphasis on education. The LWRM Plan brings the human and natural resources together in a strategic plan to protect and improve our soil and water resources.

The goals, objectives, strategies, and measurable outcomes are presented in detail in the LWRM Plan. The goals are highlighted below:

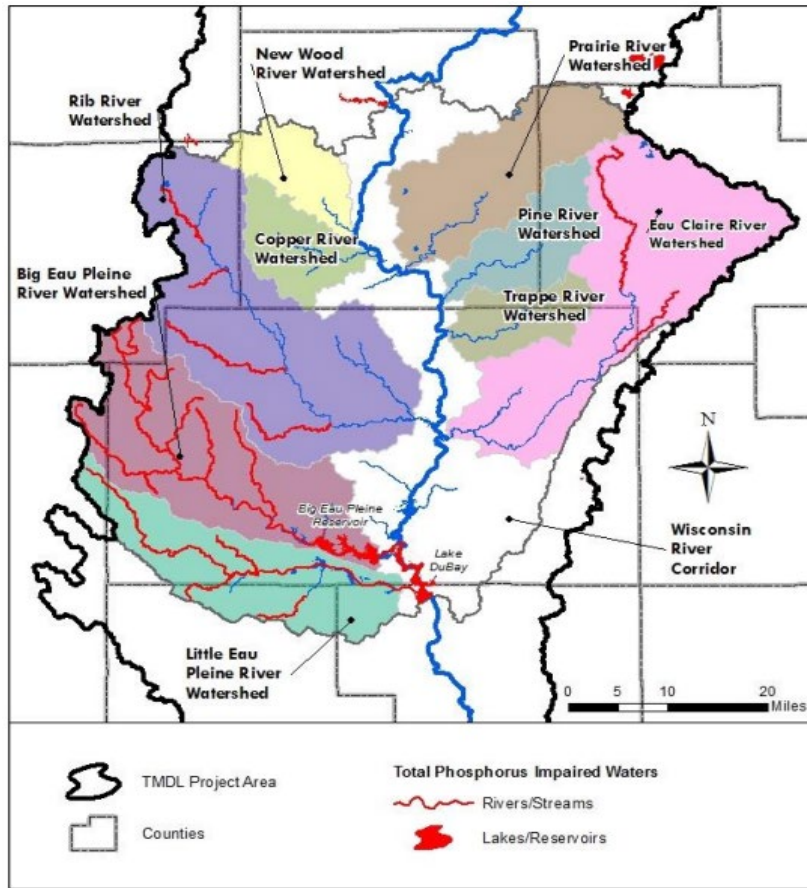
- Goal 1: Land resources are improved and protected county-wide.
- Goal 2: Surface water quality is improved and protected.
- Goal 3: Groundwater quality and quantity is improved and protected.
- Goal 4: Actively educate and engage all community stakeholders to develop an understanding of land, surface water, and groundwater quality concerns.

Total Maximum Daily Load Program – 2019 & 2020

Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act established the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program. TMDLs must be developed for water bodies impaired by point sources and/or nonpoint sources. The TMDL program identifies and restores polluted rivers, lakes, streams, and other surface waterbodies by detailing in a quantitative assessment the water quality problems and contributing sources of pollution. The TMDL determines how much a pollutant needs to be reduced to meet water quality standards and provides the foundation for taking actions locally to restore a waterbody to fishable and swimmable standards.

On April 26, 2019, the U.S. EPA approved the Wisconsin River TMDL. The Fox-Wolf River TMDL was approved on February 27, 2020. The TMDL studies provide a strategic framework and prioritize resources for water quality improvement in the Wisconsin and Fox-Wolf River Basins.

Figure 6-1: Total Phosphorus Impaired Waters in Central Wisconsin River Basin (Source DNR)



Stormwater Quality Management Plan - 2023

Marathon County is considered to have the reasonable potential to contribute to an exceedance of water quality standards via nonpoint stormwater pollutant discharge into waters of the state. The county addresses this discharge through its Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit with the State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. As part of the permit, the county must comply with Impaired Waterbodies and Total Maximum Daily Load requirements. Where not in compliance, the county is required to submit a written plan to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources describing actions the county will pursue to achieve compliance. Marathon County first completed the Stormwater Quality Management Plan in 2011, updating it in 2023. The plan includes:

- Recommendations and options for stormwater control measures that will be considered to reduce discharge of each pollutant of concern.
- A proposed schedule for pursuing the options identified.
- A cost-effective analysis for implementation of the recommendations and options identified.

With the plan update complete, Marathon County will now explore options to begin implementing recommendations. All recommendations in the Stormwater Quality Management Plan will require further analysis, discussion, and decisions by the county before implementation.

Groundwater Plan - 2026

The Groundwater Protection Guide was first developed in 1988. In April 2001, the plan was updated to reflect the changing programs and policies within the county, as well as to acknowledge the increased level of regulation by state agencies to protect the groundwater resources of Marathon County. The Groundwater Plan was then updated between 2024 and 2026. The update included collecting baseline data from 1001 private wells in the county. The plan identifies sources of groundwater in the county as well as some conditions, trends, and existing programming related to water quality management. It also identifies strategies for the region that should be prioritized to continue to improve and protect water quality and resources in the county.

USGS Protecting Wisconsin's Groundwater Through Comprehensive Planning

In a joint effort, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the University of Wisconsin System, and the U.S. Geological Survey Cooperative Water Program worked together to build a website of data and information on geology, general hydrology, and groundwater quantity and quality. The website was developed to help government officials and planners in Wisconsin address groundwater in their comprehensive plans. The most recent data available for Marathon County was published in 2007. The full Marathon County report can be found on their website: wi.water.usgs.gov/gwcomp/find/marathon.

Central Wisconsin River Basin Plan

The Central Wisconsin River Basin Plan was updated in 2010. Findings from the Basin Plan were used to ensure that the LWRM Plan addresses those impacted waters and targeted activities of the county with the greatest need. The Basin Plan identifies:

- a. Impacted Watersheds,
- b. Exceptional waters and outstanding waters,
- c. 303(d) waters,
- d. Significant sources of pollutants or activities impacting the waters.

Strategic Plan for the Big Eau Pleine River Watershed and Reservoir

In 2009, Marathon County convened a meeting between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, livestock producers, Big Eau Pleine Organization, and Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company in response to recurring fish kills in the Bid Eau Pleine Reservoir. In 2009, the Big Eau Pleine Task Force completed the short-term strategic plan, which included the following:

- a. Historic Case Study of the Big Eau Pleine Watershed and Reservoir
- b. Action plan to upgrade the 1981 Aerator system
- c. Long range “plan of work” to address the water quality and quantity of the Big Eau Pleine River System

The strategic plan identifies the roles and commitments of governmental agencies, sportsmen and citizen groups, educational institutions, agricultural groups, and the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company to address the water quality concerns of the reservoir. The log range plan includes the

development of the Fenwood Creek pilot watershed project as a means to begin educational and landowner outreach efforts before completion of the TMDL plan. The pilot project will create landowner awareness of agricultural contributions to water quality degradation.

Marathon County Aquatic Invasive Species Plan (AIS) – A guide for Proactive AIS Management – 2018

In 2010, Marathon County CPZ collaborated with Golden Sands Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc. (RC&D) to acquire grant funding from the DNR to support a Regional AIS program. Through the AIS Program, information was gathered about the status of AIS infestations in Marathon County, volunteer activity levels, training and education needs, and other information regarding AIS in Marathon County. The purpose of the AIS plan is to identify short-term and long-term goals toward establishing a coordinated, county-wide approach to protecting Marathon County's lakes.

The AIS Plan was revised in 2018 and contains the following recommended actions:

- County-wide promotion of native vegetation,
- Implement and enforce shoreland regulations,
- Provide technical assistance to shoreland owners for native shoreland buffers and invasive species removal,
- Apply for grants to fund lake protection projects,
- Review annually the funding for cost-sharing incentive programs,
- Continue to distribute informational packets to new lakeshore property owners, and
- Continue to promote native vegetation through news articles, social media, educational handouts/resources, citizen organization newsletters, Lake District and Lake Association meetings, and press releases.

Big Eau Pleine Reservoir Lake Management Plan: Strategies for Reducing Fish Kills in the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir - 2017

The Big Eau Pleine Citizens Organization (BEPCO) developed a plan using extensive scientific data and stakeholder engagement to outline a framework and strategies for improving land management, habitat, and water quality within the watershed. The Plan includes the following goals:

- Goal 1 - Sustain and Improve the Fishery of the BEP Reservoir,
- Goal 2 - Improve Water Quality in the BEP Reservoir and Watershed, and
- Goal 3 - Develop, Engage & Sustain Partnerships Necessary to Implement the Plan for Reducing Fish kills in the BEP.

Marathon County Eastern Lakes Project – 2013 through 2015

The Eastern Lakes Project is a partnership of citizens, Eastern Marathon County communities, Marathon County government, and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. This project effort created lake studies, lake management plans, and final summary lake reports for Bass Lake, Big

Bass Lake, Lilly Lake, Lost Lake, Mayflower Lake, Mission Lake, Mud Lake, Norrie Lake, Pike Lake, Rice Lake, and Wadley Lake.

The three common land and water goals for the Eastern Lakes Management Plans include the following:

In-Lake Habitat and a Healthy Lake

- Fish Community – fish species, abundance, size, important habitat, and other needs
- Aquatic Plant Community – habitat, food, health, native species, and invasive species
- Critical Habitat – areas of special importance to the wildlife, fish, water quality, and aesthetics of the lake

Landscapes and the Lake

- Water Quality and Quantity – water chemistry, clarity, contaminants, lake levels
- Shorelands – habitat, erosion, contaminant filtering, water quality, vegetation, access
- Watershed Land Use – land use, management practices, conservation programs

People and the Lake

- Recreation – access, sharing the lake, informing lake users, rules
- Communication and Organization – maintaining connections for partnerships, implementation, and community involvement
- Governance – protection of the lake, constitution, state, county, and local municipalities

Fenwood Creek Watershed Management Plan

The Fenwood Creek watershed is representative of the larger Big Eau Pleine (BEP) River watershed relative to resource concerns and is impacted primarily by nonpoint agricultural runoff. The Fenwood Creek watershed drains approximately 39 square miles (24,958 acres) of land into the BEP reservoir. All studies, research, and monitoring efforts point to two primary causes of water quality degradation: soil erosion and nutrient runoff, mainly phosphorus, from agriculture.

In 2014, Marathon County initiated a pilot project for the Fenwood Creek watershed, which is a representative Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 12, dairy-based watershed within the BEP River watershed. The project involved working with WDNR to develop a watershed-based plan consistent with the USEPA's 9 key elements. This plan was completed and approved by WDNR and USEPA in 2015 and has since secured some WDNR funds for implementation. Implementation of the pilot project started in 2016 and will end in 2026. Ultimately, the Fenwood Creek watershed-based pilot will help determine whether county nonpoint strategies to address impaired waters are effective and, if so, transferable to other impaired watersheds within the county. If not, the county will need to reassess and evaluate non-point strategies until they are successful in the Fenwood Creek Watershed before expending additional resources in new watersheds.

Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Plan 2040 - 2018

The Marathon County Metropolitan Planning Commission adopted the Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Plan in May 2018. This report is intended to update and replace the previous 2025 Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Plan for the City of Wausau and the surrounding urban area. These types of plans are also known as area-wide water quality management plans.

The general purpose of this area-wide water quality management plan is to maintain a twenty-year sanitary sewer service boundary for the Wausau Urban Area and an institutional structure for implementing the Plan and managing the extension of sanitary sewage services within this urban area.

The urban sanitary sewer service area boundary identifies the geographic land area within which sanitary sewer service could be made available by the year 2040 in a cost-effective, environmentally acceptable manner.

In addition to delineating an urban sewer service boundary, the Sewer Service Area Plan provides a framework for future planning at each individual municipal level. The data, trends, projections, and findings developed in this Plan are consistent with detailed community plans for the Cities of Mosinee, Schofield & Wausau, the Villages of Kronenwetter, Maine, Rothschild, Weston, and Rib Mountain. The goals and policies developed throughout this planning process will also be applicable and useful in the development of local policy direction with respect to land use decisions within these communities.

Surface Water Resources

Marathon County has 202 lakes with a total surface area of 28,322 acres. Big Eau Pleine Reservoir is the largest body of water with a potential area of 6,830 acres when full. Many lakes lie in kettle holes left by the retreat of the glaciers. Seepage lakes are the most common type of lake in the County.

These lakes do not have any surface outflow but depend on underground movement of water through highly permeable glacial soils for drainage. Most lakes are quite shallow, with depths ranging from less than one foot to a maximum of 34 feet. The largest “lakes” in the County have been formed behind river dams, including the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, Lake Wausau, Half Moon Lake, and Lake Du Bay. Like other water resources, lakes provide flood retention, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and scenic amenities.

The county has 356 rivers and streams with a surface area of 3,748 acres. The interconnected network of rivers and streams that cross Marathon County is characteristic of a landscape influenced by glacial impacts. The Wisconsin River flows south through the county. The river is regulated by several dams on the mainstream and tributaries, which are controlled by the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Corporation (WVIC). Major tributaries flowing from the east to west include the Trappe, Eau Claire, Little Eau Claire, and Plover Rivers. The major tributaries flowing from west to east are the Little Rib, Big Rib, Big Eau Pleine, and the Little Eau Pleine Rivers.



Surface Water

Surface water is the water on the surface of the planet, such as in a stream, river, or lake.

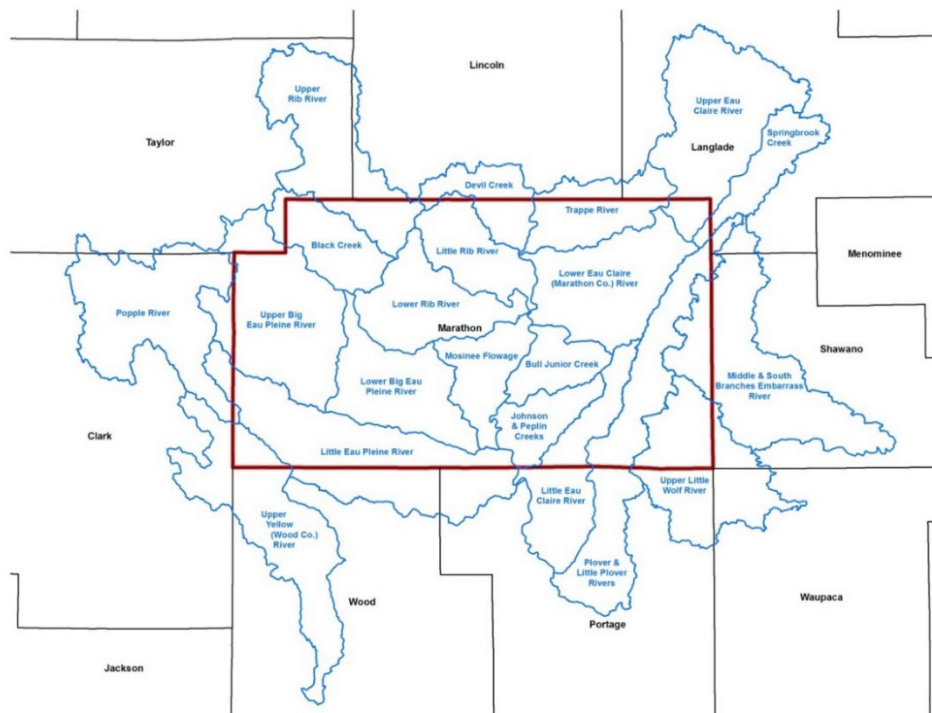
Watersheds

Marathon County is geographically located in what the Wisconsin DNR has named the Central Wisconsin Basin, which is a subset of the entire Wisconsin River corridor located in Central Wisconsin. The Central Wisconsin Basin extends south from the Merrill dam located on the Wisconsin River in Lincoln County to the Castle Rock Flowage Dam in Juneau and Adams Counties. The Central Wisconsin River Basin comprises of 29 watersheds, 22 of which are all or part of Marathon County. A watershed is an area of land that is drained by a waterway that flows to a lake, reservoir, or river. The watershed boundary line is defined as a topographic dividing line from which surface streams flow in two different directions.

Watershed
A watershed is an area of land where all of the water that drains off of it or is under it goes into the same place. The watershed consists of surface water and all the underlying groundwater.

The watersheds in Marathon County contain numerous scenic vistas, including rock outcroppings and flowages. They are also characterized by diverse agricultural activities throughout the basin. The last glaciers created a network of warm and cold-water streams fed by surface and groundwater sources that all connect to the Wisconsin River, except for the two sub-watersheds in the southeastern part of the County, which flow into the Fox-Wolf Basin.

Figure 6-2: Watersheds in Marathon County



Wetlands

Wetlands consist of transitional areas between uplands and open water. Wetlands perform important ecological functions such as flood retention and water quality improvements. They provide valuable wildlife habitat as well as recreational opportunities.

From the 1940s through the 1970s, many natural wetland areas on the west side of the county were drained for cropland through constructed “w”-shaped surface ditches. These long, narrow drainage channels improved crop production but also increased runoff rates and the flashy nature of the streams. The majority of these drainage ditches still function in agricultural areas. The drainage system, although an effective crop production enhancement, contributes to the rapid transport of nutrients and sediment from the landscape into surface waters. The TMDL plan will prescribe best management practices at the edge of cropland fields to reduce the runoff potential of these drainage ditches, as well as to enhance the wetland capacity of the watershed.

Wetlands that remain in the County are generally located adjacent to rivers, creeks, and floodplains as shown on the Natural Resources Map. Most are wooded, although several types of WDNR classified wetlands can be found throughout the County.

Programs in three levels of government - local, state, and federal - regulate activities in wetlands. Permits are required for activities that impact wetlands, such as land and road development. In some cases, wetland replacement or mitigation is required. While the State policy does not mandate wetland mitigation on non-federal wetlands, it does encourage efforts to minimize loss through the use of “best management practices” (BMPs), which include a variety of techniques and approaches aimed at minimizing the impacts of construction and development on the natural environment.

Floodplains

As defined in the County Floodplain Code, the floodplain is land that has been or may be covered by floodwater during the regional flood. It includes the floodway and the flood fringe and may include other designated floodplain areas for regulatory purposes. The “Floodway” is defined as the channel of a river or stream and those portions of the floodplain adjoining the channel required to carry the regional flood discharge. “Floodfringe” is defined as the portion of the floodplain outside of the floodway that is covered by floodwaters during the regional flood and associated with standing water rather than flowing water.

Floodplain

A floodplain is an area of land that is prone to flooding, usually located adjacent to a stream or river.

In Marathon County, areas within the 100-year floodplain are typically located immediately adjacent to rivers, streams, and creeks. In some flatter areas, such as around the Big Eau Pleine River, the floodplain extends some distance from the water’s edge.

Floodplains are subject to potential flooding and/or intermittent wetness, and therefore, they are not generally appropriate for development. Like wetlands, floodplains provide areas where water from swollen rivers and streams can overflow. They also provide valuable wildlife habitats.

Lakes of Marathon County

Marathon County has numerous lakes, which provide wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and aesthetic enjoyment. Several lakes have citizen organizations or sports clubs that work to

protect and preserve the water resources, such as the Big Eau Pleine Citizens Organization (BEPCO), DuBay Property Owners Association, Lake Wausau Association, and Pike Lake Sportsmen Club. Marathon County also has two lake districts: the Big Bass Lake Rehabilitation District and the Mayflower Lake Improvement District. A lake district is a special-purpose unit of government established to maintain, protect, and improve the quality of a lake and its watershed.

Many of these lake groups have adopted lake management or improvement plans. These plans, developed and driven by the communities around a given lake, outline a common vision for the lake. The plans are meant to be dynamic documents that identify goals and action items for the purpose of maintaining, protecting, and/or creating desired conditions in each lake within a given period of time. They can be used to help correct past problems, improve current conditions, and provide guidance for future boards, lake users, and technical experts by identifying which issues have been addressed and how successful previous efforts were. Each plan is unique, dependent upon the conditions of the lake, its watershed, and the interests of the stakeholders involved. The actions identified in a lake management plan serve as a gateway for obtaining grant funding and other resources to help implement activities outlined in the plan.



Mission Lake

Groundwater Resources

Groundwater is a primary source of all water consumption by the residents and businesses of the county. It also sustains surface waters, supports agricultural productivity, and supports industrial and commercial activity. The need for clean groundwater is both a health and economic issue. Groundwater quality and quantity, in both rural and urban areas, can vary in any location at any time. Where groundwater becomes polluted or otherwise depleted, property values drop, and a natural resource is diminished from its full potential. For this reason, local land use activities can significantly influence groundwater quality and quantity in terms of whether a valuable resource is protected and how all key stakeholders have an important role in its protection. This section and the Groundwater Quality section of the chapter summarize the state of groundwater resources and groundwater quality in the county.

Groundwater

Groundwater is water present beneath the earth's surface in soil pore spaces or fractures of rock formations.

Groundwater Availability

The availability of groundwater in Marathon County varies considerably based on local geology. While some regions benefit from naturally abundant aquifers, others struggle with limited groundwater access due to shallow bedrock and poor infiltration conditions. Areas along the Wisconsin, Rib, and Eau Claire Rivers typically have an ample water supply, thanks to the presence of alluvial aquifers. These regions are dominated by the Mahtomedi-Fordum-Sturgeon soil

association, which features coarse-textured soils with high permeability and infiltration rates. This soil structure allows water to pass quickly through the ground, replenishing aquifers and supporting reliable well yields.

In contrast, areas where dense crystalline bedrock lies close to the surface often face limited groundwater availability. This condition is especially prevalent in the central and eastern parts of the county, where aquifers consist of fractured crystalline rock formations. Wells in these zones frequently yield less than two gallons per minute, making them unsuitable for large-scale use. Southern and western areas underlain by sandstone, and regions to the north and west of the Marshfield moraine covered in glacial till, tend to produce slightly higher yields. Approximately 90 percent of wells in sandstone, and most in glacial till, provide between five and twenty gallons per minute.

Access to groundwater also depends on well depth and site-specific conditions. In regions with high bedrock, some wells must extend over 50 feet to reach usable groundwater. Despite these limitations, water supplies in the Wisconsin River Valley are generally adequate. However, concerns about groundwater quantity are growing. According to the Wisconsin Water Use 2023 Withdrawal Summary, Marathon County ranked eighth in the state for groundwater withdrawals, reflecting increasing demand on its aquifers.

This concern extends beyond the river valleys. Many rural communities and towns, particularly those with large-scale livestock operations, are experiencing pressures on their groundwater supplies. Some municipalities already face inadequate water availability, while others are just meeting current needs and may not be able to support future population growth or development. In much of central Wisconsin, including parts of Marathon County, groundwater resources are insufficient for large public or industrial uses. Low aquifer yields and diminished natural stream flow during dry periods further exacerbate the problem.

The number of high-capacity wells, those capable of pumping 70 gallons per minute or more, has steadily increased in Marathon County to support municipal, agricultural, and industrial demand. As a result of this growing usage, compounded by persistent drought conditions, certain parts of the county are beginning to experience the consequences of groundwater depletion. While high-capacity wells support economic activity, their proliferation highlights the need for careful water management.

The western half of Marathon County presents unique challenges due to its limited groundwater storage potential and high surface runoff. Soils in this area often have low permeability, impeding the downward movement of water and promoting rapid runoff instead of recharge. Additionally, crystalline bedrock near the surface—covered only by thin, low-permeability soils—further restricts the area's groundwater storage. Consequently, this region can be described as a water-poor area within an otherwise water-rich state.

Given these challenges, education about groundwater conservation is currently the most effective strategy to promote sustainable water use. At the state level, Wisconsin has introduced legislative initiatives aimed at better regulating groundwater use, especially in areas where competition and overdraw are significant concerns. Marathon County will need to stay informed about these evolving regulations and continue to adapt its programs and policies to support long-term groundwater quality and availability.

Most water used in Marathon County is drawn up from groundwater via high-capacity wells. A high-capacity well system is a water supply system that has the potential to draw over 100,000 gallons per day or 70 gallons/minute. The largest number of wells are found in the Wausau metro area and in the agricultural area in the southeastern portion of the County. The four largest wells reported quantities of water higher than most wells by several million gallons. These highest use wells are the Weston Power Plant, the Domtar Mill, the Mosinee Paper Mill, and the City of Wausau.

High Capacity Wells

High capacity wells are one or more wells, drill holes, or mine shafts on a property that have a combined approved pump capacity of 70 or more gallons per minute.

Surface Water Quality

Water quality concerns take on many forms. Contributions to degradation can either be by point source (industrial discharge pipe or direct discharge from an animal lot) or by the less obvious nonpoint sources. The Central Wisconsin River Basin Plan recognizes cropland runoff and animal waste runoff as the most significant sources of pollutants to the watersheds of Marathon County.

The nonpoint sources associated with the agricultural livestock industry are increasing relative to both the scale of runoff events and frequency. Since 2003, the Conservation, Planning, and Zoning staff has documented several significant discharges in the County associated with agricultural livestock waste, mostly in the late winter-early spring season. These runoff events, in many cases, caused either fish kills or well contamination.

Nonpoint sources, including soil erosion, animal waste runoff, pesticide runoff, and urban runoff, have been identified as significant sources of pollution that need to be controlled to meet State water quality goals. The impact of these pollutants includes eutrophication, well contamination, fish kills, algae blooms, beach closings, high bacteria count, turbidity, and loss of aquatic habitat. Most surface waters designated as 303d impacted waters are impacted by phosphorus. To a large degree, the Upper Wisconsin TMDL will focus on the reduction of phosphorus delivery to surface water.

Public awareness of wetlands as a valuable resource continues to increase. However, as with other counties, Marathon County has seen a net loss in wetland acreage. Minimizing the loss of wetland with its buffering capacity is a high priority for the enhancement of water resources in Marathon County. Building wetland function adjacent to cropland is an important element in the reduction of nonpoint runoff and promotion of groundwater recharge, two important resource concerns in

Marathon County. Wetland restoration and sediment control are important water quality tools that should continue to be promoted.

Designated Waters

Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters

The U.S. Clean Water Act states that waters identified as largely unaffected by pollution should be kept that way, establishing the designations of Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters to classify protected waters. An Outstanding Resource Water (ORW) is a lake, stream, or flowage having excellent water quality, high recreational and aesthetic value, and high-quality fishing. ORWs are free from point source or nonpoint source pollution. An Exceptional Resource Water (ERW) is a lake, stream, or flowage exhibiting the same high-quality resource values as outstanding waters, but may be affected by point source pollution. Several streams in the County are classified as ORW or ERW. A complete listing of these high-quality surface waters can be found on the WI DNR website.

Impaired Waters

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) identifies “impaired waters” that belong on the “303(d) list” of the U.S. Clean Water Act. This list, maintained by the EPA, identifies waters that do not meet current water quality standards and merit water quality improvement and protection. Some of the pollutants and impairments measured include phosphorus, sediment (total suspended solids), bacteria (E.coli), and mercury. A complete list of impaired waters is on the WI DNR website. Water impaired due to low dissolved oxygen and phosphorus associated with agricultural nonpoint runoff includes the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir and the Big Eau Pleine River Watershed.

303(d) Waters

A list of impaired or threatened waters, referencing Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. These waters do not meet water quality standards due to excessive pollution.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) include geographic areas of the landscape encompassing high-quality or environmentally important resource features such as lakes, rivers, streams, wetlands, undeveloped shoreland, floodplains, and areas of steep slopes. These areas are particularly vulnerable to degradation or destruction from development and other impacts and therefore should be protected from intensive disturbances.

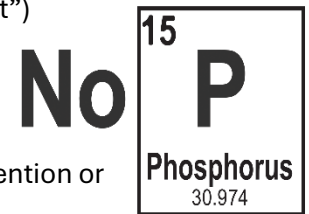
Water Quality Management Area (WQMA)

One shoreline protection designation is the Water Quality Management Area (WQMA). WQMAs are defined as a) an area located within 1,000 feet from the ordinary high-water mark of navigable waters; b) an area located within 300 feet from the ordinary high-water mark of navigable waters. Marathon County has delineated the WQMA’s areas greater than five acres in size. Due to the highly developed drainage systems in the County, the WQMAs are extensive and widespread.

Marathon County has a shoreland zoning ordinance that protects all the water quality management areas within the County. The ordinance protects 1,000 feet from the ordinary high-water mark of a lake, pond, or flowage and 300 feet from the ordinary high-water mark of a river or stream, or the extent of the floodplain, whichever is greater.

Stormwater Management

Surface water management (also referred to as “stormwater management”) is one of the key components in efforts to improve water quality. It primarily involves controlling the volume, quality, and storage of runoff. Stormwater management facilities in urban areas generally consist of a network of curbs, gutters, catch basins, and pipes to collect water and retention or detention ponds to hold the water until it can seep into the soil or evaporate. Stormwater management also typically involves regulating control over development and/or construction practices to minimize runoff and erosion. These are often referred to as “best management practices” (BMPs) and may include restrictions on the amount of impervious area allowed on a parcel, limits on removal of vegetative cover that protects against erosion, and restrictions on building on steep, highly erodible slopes.



in the water.

Northcentral Wisconsin Stormwater Coalition
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NCWSC Public Service Announcement

Requirements for surface water management planning stem from the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972, which had the objective to improve water quality. All levels of government, from federal to local, get involved in the management and regulation of surface water, depending on the size of the area, its incorporation status, and the specific activities or use of the land that could affect surface water quantity or quality. Stormwater management at the local level typically occurs through site development standards and erosion control regulations. In Marathon County, these standards are found in the Zoning Code (Chapter 17) and Land Division Regulations (Chapter 18). Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permits are required for large and certain smaller municipalities or urbanized areas. In addition, WPDES permits are required for paper mills, treatment plants, and several of the large dairies and animal operations in Marathon County. These permits regulate discharges to surface waters or waters of the state.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) deals with flood control and requires municipalities to perform floodplain mapping and develop management plans in order to receive federal flood insurance. Areas within the designated 100-year floodplain are discussed in greater detail in the Natural Resources section. The County administers land use and development control in areas identified as shoreland, floodplains, and wetlands in accordance with the Zoning Code (Chapter #22). Generally, new development is not allowed in these areas, although there are structures that were built prior to current development restrictions that remain in the floodplain.

The County is particularly concerned about non-point sources of pollution, including failing septic systems, urban runoff, and issues often identified with rural areas such as soil erosion, animal

waste, and pesticides. Nonpoint source pollution is best addressed at the watershed level. Marathon County encompasses portions of 22 watersheds, as shown in the image on page 8.

Efforts to Reduce Salt Application

Salt commonly enters our waters via roadway salt applications or dust suppression, fertilizer applications, or the use of water softener systems in homes. The widespread use of salt has led to the steady salinization of surface water and groundwater, threatening freshwater resources and our drinking water.

Once salt enters the waters, it is very difficult and costly to remove. Preventing and reducing the use of salt entering our resources remains the most cost-effective approach. In recent years, the county has increased its efforts to prevent and reduce the use of salt, especially on roadways, driveways, and sidewalks. The Highways Department continues to evolve its use of alternative methods for managing ice and snow on winter roads, including the use of brine mixtures versus just salt. The county is also part of the statewide Wisconsin Salt Wise group that promotes education and workshops, and best-practice forums for municipalities and all interested parties to learn and adopt strategies for reducing salt application throughout the state.



An Example of an Oversalted Sidewalk

Aquatic Invasive Species

Prevention through education continues to be an important activity for invasive species control. Clean Boat volunteers are having a positive effect on public awareness. Permits for work in public waterways or in areas of land disturbance near waterways should include provisions to clean equipment before moving to the next site to prevent the unintentional transport of invasive species. In 2010, Marathon County entered into a working relationship with the Golden Sands Resource Conservation & Development agency to conduct an inventory of lakes and flowages unassociated with the Wisconsin River for aquatic species. The inventory efforts will also involve educational outreach efforts for Park Department employees and students. Currently, 29 water bodies are infested with aquatic invasive species.

Pollutant

A pollutant is a substance or energy introduced into the environment that produces undesirable effects or adversely affects the usefulness of a resource.

Beach Monitoring

Natural bodies of water can sometimes contain elevated levels of bacteria due to rain, runoff, or other environmental factors. In 2025, the Marathon County Board approved the implementation of water quality testing at county-owned beaches, including Big Eau Pleine, Dells of the Eau Claire, Mission Lake, and Sunny Vale. Water is tested at least weekly from Memorial Day through Labor Day for *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) and is also visually monitored for the presence of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae). Test results are posted both at the beaches and online to help the public make informed decisions about when and how to safely enjoy the water.



Big Eau Pleine Park

Groundwater Quality

As the county relies almost entirely on groundwater, protecting its quality is essential for public health, economic stability, and long-term environmental sustainability.

Pollution and Contamination Sources

Groundwater originates at the land surface. As it moves through soil and geologic formations, it can dissolve minerals or pick up contaminants. Consequently, land uses across the county play a direct role in determining groundwater quality. Common potential contamination sources include:

- Landfills and waste disposal sites, which may leach contaminants if not properly lined or managed.
- Underground storage tanks, which can leak petroleum products into aquifers.
- Agricultural and lawn fertilizers and pesticides, which can infiltrate through overapplication into soil and drainage pathways.
- Improper handling or disposal of chemicals, including paint, solvents, or used motor oil.
- Failing septic systems, which can release nitrate, bacteria, and other pollutants.

Areas with highly permeable soil, shallow bedrock, or closely spaced and numerous private wells are particularly vulnerable. The Marathon County Health Department, in partnership with the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point (UWSP), routinely monitors public and private drinking water systems, and some recreational waters, for microbiological and chemical indicators.

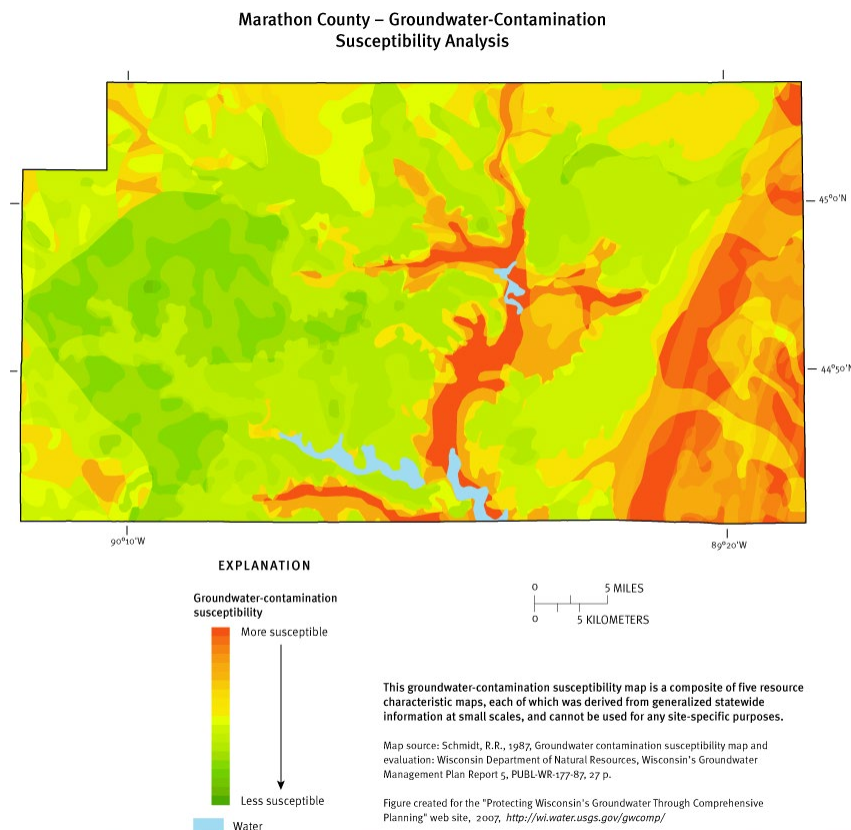
Susceptibility of Groundwater to Contaminants

Groundwater’s susceptibility to pollutants depends on how easily contaminants can move from the surface to the water table. Five physical characteristics influence this vulnerability:

1. Depth to bedrock
2. Type of bedrock
3. Soil characteristics, including permeability
4. Depth to the water table
5. Surficial deposits, such as glacial sediments

A composite countywide susceptibility map (see below) integrates these factors. Areas of red and orange represent where contaminants migrate quickly to groundwater, while green indicates more natural protection from overlying materials. Areas with shallow bedrock, sandy soil, or proximity to rivers and wetlands tend to be more sensitive.

The map does not show areas that will or will not be contaminated; rather, it can help guide decisions about where to study in more detail, potential groundwater problems. It can also be combined with other planning tools such as land use maps, groundwater quality data, and contamination source information to help make sound groundwater management and land use decisions.



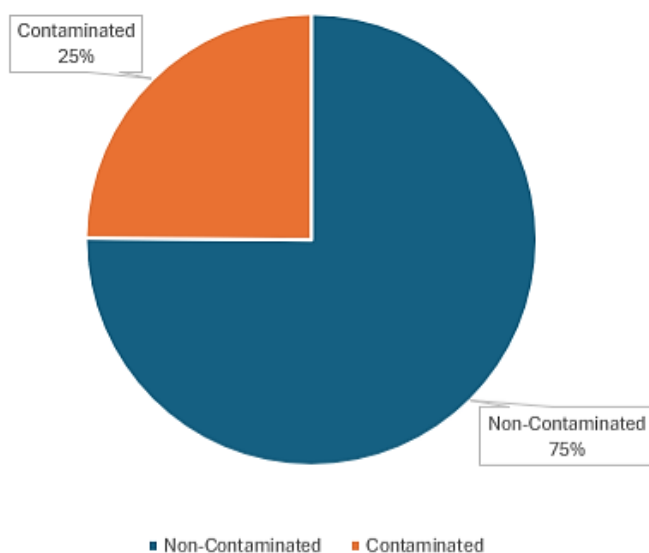
2023-2024 Countywide Water Quality Assessments

In 2023 and 2024, Marathon County worked with the UWSP Center for Watershed Science and Education (CWSE) to conduct a countywide well water quality sampling program as part of the

update to the Groundwater Management Plan. One thousand and one samples from across the county were collected from private well owners for analysis. Sampling was coordinated within consistent timeframes and methods, enabling comprehensive spatial analysis and laying the groundwork for future trend assessments.

The sampling looked at levels of lead, manganese, copper, arsenic, chloride, and nitrates in private wells. Overall, twenty-five percent of wells sampled in the county were found to contain one or more contaminants that exceeded recommended safe drinking water standards. The most common contaminants found, in order, were nitrates, manganese, and lead.

Marathon County Total Well Contamination



The most common groundwater contaminant in Marathon County and Wisconsin groundwater are elevated nitrate-nitrogen concentrations. The state of Wisconsin has a drinking water standard of 10 mg/L for nitrate-nitrogen in drinking water. This drinking water standard was set based on the risks of methemoglobinemia or “blue baby syndrome” in infants and young children. Other studies have shown that exposure to high levels of nitrate may increase the risk of certain birth defects, types of cancer, and thyroid disease. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) advises that infants, small children, and women who are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant should not consume drinking water with nitrate-nitrogen concentrations above 10 mg/L, and it is highly recommended that no one consume drinking water with concentrations over 10mg/L.

Typically, naturally occurring nitrate-nitrogen concentrations in groundwater are below 1 mg/L. If concentrations occur above 1 mg/L it is likely that land uses, such as agricultural and lawn fertilizers, animal waste that is stored, stacked, or spread on the land, septic system drain fields, and/or other bio-solids (ex., municipal waste or industrial byproducts) that are spread on fields, are contributing to the increase in nitrate levels.

Statewide, about 10% of private wells exceed this standard. In the 2023 and 2024 sampling, 11% of wells tested exceeded the standard. Follow-up testing with homes around those found to be above 10mg/L indicates this percentage is likely larger than the initial sampling showed. Public water supplies, tested annually, show that 12% of systems in Marathon County have increasing nitrate trends, 5% decreasing, and 83% are stable.

Where natural water quality problems exist in the county, they include aesthetic concerns, such as hardness, and health concerns, such as manganese. Long-term consumption of drinking water with manganese above 0.300 mg/L should be avoided due to potential harm to the nervous system that can result in a disorder like Parkinson's disease and can cause adverse effects on learning and behavior in children. Six percent of the wells tested in 2023 and 2024 sampling exceeded this advisory level.

Lead is a drinking water contaminant that has been associated with health risks. However, lead does not occur naturally in groundwater at levels of health concern. Elevated values typically reflect plumbing corrosion, especially in homes with older fixtures. While the 2023 and 2024 sampling found 3.5% of wells tested presented with elevated lead levels, follow-up testing confirmed the contamination was related to plumbing.

Pesticides

Pesticides are a large group of products that include insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and other products that are used to control pests. Pesticides are used primarily on agricultural lands to maximize yields on the acreage planted. Pesticides are also used around homes, on lawns, and in gardens. Pesticides can enter groundwater depending on soil permeability, pesticide chemistry, and use practices. Atrazine and similar triazine herbicides have been widely used on cornfields. West-central Marathon County includes 4,395 acres designated as an Atrazine Prohibition Area. The 2023 and 2024 sampling used a diaminochlorotriazine (DACT) screen to detect triazine residues. Ninety-nine percent of samples were below detection, with all remaining samples being below 1.0 mg/L. Although current results show minimal detections, monitoring should continue as farming practices and pesticide products evolve.

Emerging Contaminants

The National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science describes emerging contaminants as “a wide range of chemicals that are broadly defined as any synthetic or naturally occurring chemical that is not commonly monitored in the environment but has the potential to enter the environment and cause known or suspected adverse ecological and/or human health effects. In some cases, release of emerging contaminants to the environment has likely occurred for a long time but may not have been recognized until new detection methods were developed. In other cases, synthesis of new chemicals or changes in the use and disposal of existing chemicals can create new sources of emerging contaminants.

As these contaminants are considered “emerging,” understanding of their sources, health effects, environmental behavior, and effective treatment methods remains limited and continues to evolve.

One of the most widely recognized emerging contaminants in drinking water is per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), which have been detected in public water systems, surface waters, and private wells across numerous communities. Early detections have occurred through voluntary monitoring efforts. In response to PFAS concerns, some municipalities and water utilities have begun adopting more protective local policies, expanding testing and public communication, and investing in advanced treatment technologies such as ion exchange and granular activated carbon to reduce concentrations to low or non-detectable levels. As regulatory standards continue to develop, addressing PFAS contamination will require ongoing monitoring, adaptive management, infrastructure investment, and collaboration among local governments, state and federal agencies, and affected communities.

Private well owners face additional challenges due to limited guidance and testing, and financial resources. There are only a couple of labs that conduct PFAS testing, and it can often be cost-prohibitive. Point reverse osmosis and activated carbon filters can be highly effective in removing PFAs from a home drinking source.

In April 2024, the U.S. EPA finalized national PFAS drinking water standards at 4 ppt each. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is in the process of updating rules and guidance to comply with these new standards. How and when municipal water suppliers will need to come into compliance is still being developed, though it is expected they will need to begin monitoring for PFAs by 2027.

Other emerging contaminants that are being watched in Wisconsin include neonicotinoids, which are a type of pesticide, pharmaceuticals, and microplastics. There is almost no groundwater or drinking water data on most of these contaminants in Wisconsin.

Public Perception and Well-Owner Behavior

Approximately 26,000 private wells serve rural residents, agriculture, and industry. Although groundwater is generally safe, contamination can occur quickly and unpredictably. Routine testing is strongly recommended, yet actual testing rates remain low. A 2024 study, conducted by the Medical College of Wisconsin and Marathon County in conjunction with the well water sampling, revealed that many respondents worry about contaminants (nitrate, bacteria, agricultural runoff, heavy metals). However, 90% do not test their well annually, despite state and county guidance. Common barriers identified include testing cost, lack of awareness, and reliance on taste or appearance, neither of which accurately reflects safety. Participants expressed interest in low-cost or fully funded testing programs, clearer guidance, and stronger outreach.

Water Uses

Water and Industry

Marathon County is home to several industries that are heavy water users. Using the water for transportation in industry was a driving factor in settlement in the area. Today, water is used in the manufacturing of several types of industries.

Paper Mills

Two paper mills continue to operate in Marathon County, both along the Wisconsin River. The mill in Rothschild originally opened in 1909 and is operated by Domtar. This facility has one paper machine and one pulp line and has the capacity to produce 136,000 short tons of paper and 65,000 tons of pulp annually. The mill in Mosinee, originally founded in 1910, is currently operated by Ahlstrom. Two of the four high-capacity wells in Marathon County, which draw the most water, are these two mills.

Paper mills use vast quantities of water every day in their operations. According to a 2009 report sponsored by the

Environmental Protection Agency, the average water use within pulp and paper mills is approximately 17,000 gallons/tons of paper. Water is necessary in most stages of the pulp and paper-making process, including raw materials preparation, pulping, chemical recovery, bleaching, and papermaking. Mills also



Domtar Paper Mill in Rothschild

discharge wastewater and often have their own wastewater treatment plants to minimize impacts on local water sources.

Power Plant

The power plant in Weston is operated by Wisconsin Public Service. At this site, three fossil-fueled electric generating units make electricity. Weston 4, the newest unit, began operating in 2008 and is one of the cleanest power plants of its kind in the United States, and uses clean coal technologies. Electricity generated at this site is split between Wisconsin Public Service customers (70%) and Dairyland Power Cooperative of La Crosse (30%). The Weston power plant is one of the largest water users in Marathon County.

Thermoelectric power plants, like the facility in Weston, use large amounts of water. As of 2010, more water was required to run power plants than any other industry in the United States, accounting for 49 percent of total industrial water use. Thermoelectric power plants boil water to create steam, which spins turbines to generate electricity. The steam must then be condensed back into water before it can be reused to produce more electricity.

Food Production and Processing

Marathon County has a strong industry in dairy production and is one of Wisconsin's leading milk producers. Animal products require a large quantity of water to produce, in both the raising and feeding of the animals and in the production of consumer products such as milk, cheese, and meat.

Water is used in milk and cheese processing to clean equipment and to cool products during production. Dairy processing also produces wastewater, which must be treated. It requires approximately 4.5 gallons of water to produce one gallon of milk, including both raising the cow and processing the product.

The meat processing industry is a high-water user. Meat processing plants primarily use water for sanitizing animal holding areas, meat washing, chilling, waste fluming, and cleaning and disinfecting equipment. Typical water use in the processing of pork and cattle varies from around 1,000 to 10,000 gallons per ton of product. Meat processing also generates wastewater, which must be treated before leaving the facility.

Water and Agriculture

Farms are major users of water, accounting for 70 percent of freshwater use worldwide. Crop farming in the eastern half of Marathon County requires irrigation and accounts for most of the high-capacity wells found in that area.

On dairy farms, water is used for animal consumption, milk cooling, cleaning and sanitizing equipment, cow cooling, irrigating crops, producing value-added products, moving manure, and cleaning barns through flush systems. The average dairy cow drinks 43.6 gallons of water per day and requires 6.3 gallons per day for cleaning, a total of almost 50 gallons per cow.

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs)

Marathon County is home to 14 permitted CAFOs as of 2024, according to WDNR. CAFOs congregate animals, feed, manure and urine, dead animals, and production operations on small land areas. These operations require large quantities of water for animal consumption, cleaning, and other uses. Runoff from CAFOs can have negative impacts on water quality due to the amount of animal waste on-site.

Residential Use

Water is also used directly by people for drinking, bathing, washing, and other regular activities. Most incorporated municipalities in Marathon County have a water utility that provides water to residents; see the Infrastructure chapter for more information on water utilities. High-capacity wells in the City of Wausau account for one of the top four largest drawing well areas.

Residents in rural areas rely on private wells for their water.

Water-based recreation and tourism

Marathon County is the home of many popular water-based outdoor recreation activities, including boating, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, and fishing. The County is a destination for these activities, with people traveling from around the region to participate in them. Water-based recreational activities depend on safe, clean County lakes and streams for their continued success.

The surface waters of Marathon County are used recreationally by fishermen. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) notes fishery areas and the locations of waters for

popular fish such as musky and trout. Marathon County has five identified fishery areas and one rearing station. The fishery areas are located on the Big Rib River, Four Mile Creek, Freeman Creek, Plover River, and Spranger Creek. These areas are noted for their fish populations, including brook trout, brown trout, smallmouth bass, and forage species. Marathon County has hundreds of miles of classified fishing rivers and streams and thousands of acres of designated fishing lakes.

Issues

Protect Water Quality at a Regional Level with a Set of Common Goals– Good water quality is something that everyone agrees is a common goal, but solutions to achieving and/or maintaining it can be complex. They will not come from just one area or sector, and working collaboratively throughout the region will be necessary. There is a need to come together behind a water ethos and work within our county and region to align groups and goals to work holistically and collaboratively toward those goals. The need for clean water is both a health and economic issue. Maintaining good water quality is essential to Marathon County achieving its vision of being the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in the state.

The biggest areas of concern for water quality remain threats from non-point sources of pollution, including failing septic systems, urban runoff, soil erosion, manure runoff, nitrates, and other chemicals in runoff. There are many regulations and/or incentive programs at the county, state, and Federal level aimed at protecting water resources from contamination from non-point sources. Examining how to use these existing tools most effectively as a region will be necessary, including ensuring coordinated and consistent enforcement of the various regulations.

Further, development in areas without sufficient infrastructure, in municipal well recharge areas, or shoreland areas should be carefully controlled to minimize additional impacts to water resources.

Water Quality Education & Need for Ongoing Monitoring – One of the biggest observations from the 2023 2024 private well sampling effort and survey was that there was a lack of awareness from many residents on the need to routinely sample their water. Clean, safe drinking water is one of the most important elements of good health. Testing well water on an annual basis is one of the easiest things a private well-owner can do to take care of their health and the health of their loved ones. The 2023 and 2024 well water sampling initiative substantially improved local understanding of groundwater conditions and provides a strong foundation for trend analysis in future years. Strengthening public education and improving access to testing will be critical strategies for ensuring safe, clean drinking water in our region.

Evaluating County Roles in Emerging Water Treatment Challenges - Communities across the country face increasingly complex decisions regarding water treatment and management, particularly related to the removal of chemical substances such as PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), and in agricultural regions, nitrates are also a common concern. PFAS, known as “forever chemicals,” are persistent in the environment and have been linked to serious health

concerns, prompting calls for their regulation or removal from public water systems. Nitrates, commonly introduced into groundwater through fertilizers and human or animal waste, pose risks including: elevated exposure can cause blue baby syndrome and increase likelihood of certain birth defects and cancers.

The county will continue to support local communities in making informed choices about water quality management and treatment. This includes evaluating the county role in setting water quality priorities, supporting infrastructure investments, aligning with state and federal regulations, and engaging the public in transparent decision-making. Because land use practices influence how contaminants enter both private wells and public water supplies, the county will also need to remain involved in land-use policy development, regulation, and implementation.

Maintaining Access to Safe Drinking Water – Marathon County faces risks to its clean drinking water supply due to potential natural disasters and the potential for environmental contamination from multiple sources. To ensure long-term public health and safety, there is a need to strengthen preparedness and resilience strategies that protect and maintain access to safe, reliable drinking water for all residents.

These strategies could include the identification and development of centralized locations where residents can access clean drinking water during emergencies, increased coordination amongst the water districts to develop contingency plans, investments in water infrastructure improvements, expanded water quality monitoring, and the development of contingency plans that address both short- and long-term disruptions.

Water Quality Goal and Objectives

Water Quality Goal: The water resources in Marathon County are of the highest quality, for the safety of residents and the health of aquatic ecosystems and are protected from damaging behaviors like overuse and pollution.

Objectives:

1. Support protection and enhancement of the quantity and quality of potable groundwater and potable surface water supplies.
2. Coordinate with regional partners to promote efforts that protect municipal and private well water recharge areas.
3. Reduce agricultural nonpoint runoff to surface water (soil sediment, organics, and nutrients), in an effort to reduce impaired river miles in Marathon County.
4. Manage lake and reservoir resources to balance concerns of shoreland residents, users, local businesses, and protect natural resources.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Section Two

Safest



Chapter Seven

Public Safety

Chapter Eight

Infrastructure

Chapter Nine

Land Use

Chapter Seven

Public Safety



The welfare and protection of the general public is the goal of public safety. Organizations that deal primarily with public safety issues are covered in this chapter, including law enforcement, fire departments, emergency medical services, and emergency management departments. Due to its size and central location, Marathon County is seen as a leader and strong partner in many public safety initiatives throughout northern Wisconsin.

Previous Plans and Studies

Marathon County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2022)

The Marathon County Hazard Mitigation Plan was adopted in 2022 and will be updated in 2026. The plan discusses the planning process involving many different municipalities and agencies in drafting the plan and provides an overview of the planning area, including land use, transportation system, and critical community facilities. The plan then conducts a risk assessment of the hazards that could affect Marathon County and provides mitigation strategies to reduce the impact that hazards could have. The hazards which pose the greatest risk to Marathon County include winter storms, tornadoes, floods, fires, transportation accidents, hazardous materials incidents, and groundwater contamination.

Integrated Preparedness Plan

This plan, updated annually, engages stakeholders to establish preparedness priorities for the area and activities over a multi-year schedule. The activities are designed to test the capabilities of the stakeholders to meet the priorities identified.

Public Safety Services

Law Enforcement Services

Sheriff's Office

The Sheriff's Office consists of more than 200 employees working in five different Divisions that include Administration, Communications, Corrections, Investigations, and Patrol. In addition to the five divisions, the Sheriff's Office also has several special teams with special duties that are not specifically assigned to any division. These specialized units are the S.W.A.T. Team, the Dive Team,

the Bomb Squad, Mobile Field Force Team, Tactical Communications, Viper (Drone), and the Crisis Negotiation Team. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office has several special assignments, including the K-9 Program, the Honor Guard, the Forensic Mapping team, Animal Investigations, Commercial Motor Vehicle Inspections, and others.

The Office takes charge and custody of the jail and inmates therein, and keeps records of all prisoners committed, charged, and/or convicted of any crime. The Office enforces state laws and county ordinances pertaining to traffic and crimes.

Administration Division

The Administration Division is the Sheriff's Office headquarters and includes the office of the Sheriff and Chief Deputy. The division provides the direction, coordination, and control necessary to ensure the successful accomplishment of the Office's mission and vision. This division oversees the office-wide budget and assists in the strategic planning of resources and services across the office. All office records are stored in the Administration Division. The Administrative Division also oversees Courthouse Security.

Investigations Division

The Investigations Division is comprised of sworn law enforcement officers and is responsible for conducting criminal investigations within the jurisdiction of the Marathon County Sheriff's Office. Encompassed within the realm of the Investigations Division are six entities with specific roles.

Detective Bureau

Detectives are cross-trained between general investigations and sensitive crimes investigations. General investigations assigned to detectives involve felony-level crimes against persons or property and usually require extensive investigation and/or collaboration with other entities in the criminal justice system that are too time-consuming or specialized to be handled at a Patrol level. Sensitive crimes investigations involve crimes against children (sex crimes, abuse, neglect, internet crimes), adult sex crimes, elder abuse, and human trafficking. Many sensitive crimes investigations are a joint effort and team approach with investigative social workers from the Marathon County Department of Social Services.

Central Wisconsin Narcotics Task Force

The Central Wisconsin Narcotics Task Force is a multi-agency team led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Marathon County Sheriff's Office, focused on disrupting and dismantling organized drug trafficking networks operating in Central Wisconsin and beyond. The team is comprised of investigators from the FBI, Marathon County Sheriff's Office, Wausau Police Department, Mountain Bay Police Department, Wisconsin DOJ - Department of Criminal Investigation, Wisconsin State Patrol, Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, Portage County Sheriff's Office, and the Wisconsin National Guard Counter Drug Program.

Physical Evidence Unit

The Evidence Technician's duties include control of the intake, processing, and disposal of property and evidence in possession of the Marathon County Sheriff's Office, processing crime scenes for the collection of evidence, and coordinating the processing of evidence with other law enforcement agencies. The Evidence Technician works closely with the Marathon County District Attorney's Office and the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory to ensure evidence is analyzed, a chain of custody is maintained, and evidence is available to present at trial.

Warrant/Identification Unit

The Warrant/Identification Unit's primary functions are the management of the Marathon County Sheriff's Office warrant files and records, and the transportation of inmates between jails and prisons to facilitate sentencing orders, court hearings, and changes in supervision.

Civil Process Unit

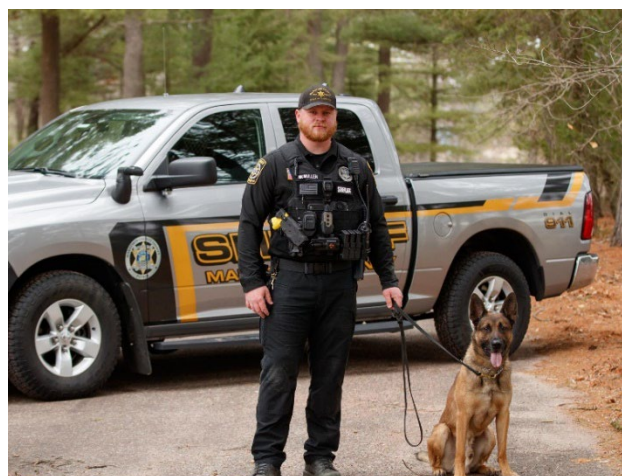
The Civil Process unit's primary function is the service of civil process. Civil Process is the writ or mandate that serves as the means used for bringing a defendant to court to answer in an action or proceeding, civil or criminal. The Civil Process Unit also conducts Sheriff's Sales.

Wisconsin River Valley Regional Forensics Laboratory (WRVFL)

The WRVFL is responsible for digital forensics and is led and staffed by the Marathon County Sheriff's Office and the Wausau Police Department. Several other Central Wisconsin agencies have investigators assigned on a part-time basis. Investigators assigned to the WRVFL assist with the investigation of crimes involving electronic devices, including computers, cellular phones, tablets, and other electronic devices and media storage. They recover, preserve, analyze, and store digital evidence for criminal investigations and prosecutions.

Patrol Division

The Patrol Division is responsible for the protection of life and property, and the enforcement of federal, state, and county laws and ordinances. The patrol function involves the prevention and intervention of adult and juvenile crime, rendering assistance to citizens in need of service, apprehension of law violators, and traffic enforcement. Patrol responds to calls for services as dispatched, and prepares reports on action taken or other documentation, for use in recording keeping and prosecution purposes.



Marathon County K-9 Unit

Additional functions of the Patrol Division include K-9, ATV, Boat, and Snowmobile Patrol; and safety programs for youth and adults in ATV, Boat, Hunter, and Snowmobile safety. The Patrol Division also has a Reserve Deputy Program, which assists the regular force during peak activity on weekends and holidays.

Local Police Jurisdictions

The incorporated communities in Marathon County are mostly patrolled by their own police departments. Most of the unincorporated towns utilize the services of the County Sheriff's Department for law enforcement.

Communications Division

Communications systems are vital to public safety, especially regarding 911 communications. The primary issues regarding public safety communications include the use of mobile data, next-generation 911 technology, and uniform addressing.

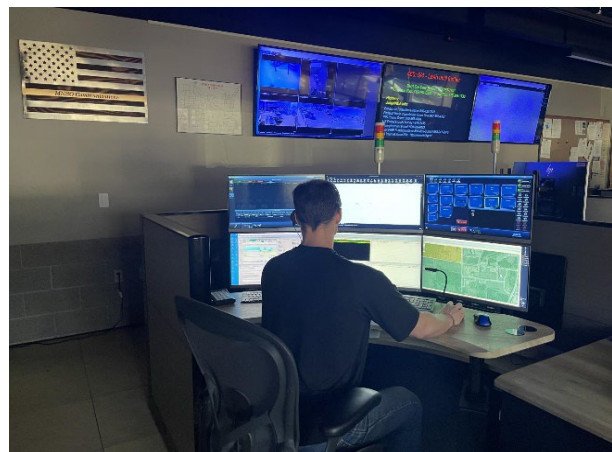
Emergency Response

Emergency response is the organizing, coordinating, and directing of available resources in order to respond to the event and bring the emergency under control.

Communications Center

The Marathon County Sheriff's Department Communication Center is the primary communications Center for all police, fire, and emergency medical services (EMS) agencies in Marathon County. All 911 calls for Marathon County are handled by this center. The Communications Division services 84 user agencies, 38 EMS agencies, 33 fire departments, and 12 law enforcement agencies, and also provides alert paging support for the Emergency Management Office, District Attorney, and Medical Examiner's Office. The dispatch center is a 24/7 operation and has a minimum of 5 personnel on duty at all times. In 2024, the Communications Center received over 166,000 calls for service and 27,312 emergency 911 calls.

Marathon County Communication Center operates 12 positions, of which 5 to 7 are normally manned. The communication system consists of 20 towers, 19 towers are linked by microwave and one tower is linked with fiber optic cable. The towers not only provide radio service but also provide high speed connectivity to the county's computer and phone network. Additionally, five P25 digital radio channels also have encryption to provide service for 12 law enforcement agencies. While Wausau Fire has a dedicated dispatch and operations channel, a radio channel for paging, and another channel for fire and EMS are simulcast countywide to emergency services agencies outside the City of Wausau.



Marathon County Communications Center

The Communications Center is responsible for activating public warning systems. The choice to install a warning siren is strictly a local decision made by a city, village, or town.

Dispatch has the ability to communicate over 26 radio channels. Some additional radio channels not listed above are for County Highway, City-County Park Department, North Central Health Care, Wausau DPW, County Jail, Children Secure Detention, and the Central Wisconsin Airport.

Many additional radio channels are maintained and operated for interagency use and others for agencies outside the County's dispatch reach. All law enforcement radios have an emergency button that gives officers information when activated. This, coupled with the GPS location system, provides an extra layer of protection.

Marathon County's radio system consists of subscriber equipment manufactured by Tait, Harris, and Motorola. The microwave equipment is supplied by Alcatel, Exalt, Motorola, and GE MDS. The Sheriff's Department has a radio technician on staff to maintain the equipment.

The Future of Emergency Communications

Public safety officers, especially police officers, need high-speed mobile data to do their job well. Using the general data network can be problematic if it goes down or if it is overloaded due to high use in emergency situations. Other technological advances use mobile data. The future solution is to have a dedicated mobile network for public safety use. FirstNet is the First Responder Network Authority, authorized by Congress to "build, operate, and maintain the first high-speed, nationwide broadband network dedicated to public safety." Planning is underway for FirstNet to fulfill its mission across the United States.

Traditional 911 dispatches rely exclusively on spoken descriptions provided by callers. In March 2025 Marathon County Sheriff's Office went live with Next Generation 911. This new technology has the potential to dramatically alter the way dispatchers and public safety officers do their jobs. It allows digital information to flow seamlessly from the public, through the 911 network, and on to emergency responders. Dispatchers will have much more information to distill rapidly to provide to police, fire, and EMS officers. In the future, Next Gen 911 dispatches may be equipped to receive other types of media from callers, including text messages and images.

Next Generation 911

Next Generation 911 (NG911) is an Internet Protocol (IP) based digital system that allows information, such as voice, photos, videos, and text messages to flow seamlessly from the public, through the 911 network, and on to the emergency responders.

Citizens expect the County and its emergency response partners to get the right response to the right location, at the right time, to protect people, property, and our environmental resources. Marathon County has nearly 62,000 address points, including households and businesses.

Partnerships

Individual government resources alone cannot meet all the needs of those impacted by crime, disasters, and other events. There are times when the assistance of partners is needed. Partnerships around public safety cross county departments, local municipalities and organizations, nearby counties, and state and federal organizations. In some emergency situations, non-governmental agencies such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army also play a role. Many public safety partnerships are found in the Marathon County Sheriff's Office, including:

- SWAT – includes members from the Sheriff's Office, other metro area police departments, Fire/EMS
- Bomb Team – Marathon and Oneida Sheriff's Office staff; responds to all Northern WI
- Crisis Negotiation Team – 911, Detective Bureau, Jail, Patrol
- Dive Team
- Crash Reconstruction Team – includes Sheriff's Office, Wausau, and Everest Metro PD
- Central Wisconsin Narcotics Task Force – Sheriff's Office, National Guard, Wausau PD, Everest Metro PD
- Crisis Assessment Response Team (CART)
- North Central Emergency Response Team (NCERT) – preplanned response team
- Drug Cases – FBI, HIDTA, DEA, DCI, US Attorney's Office
- Rib Mountain Deputies
- Recreational Deputies

Marathon County is part of the Northeast Wisconsin Public Safety Communications group (NEWCOM). NEWCOM identifies the communication needs of northeast Wisconsin to allow the 500+ law enforcement and public safety organizations in the region to communicate effectively with one another. Marathon County is one of 16 counties involved in NEWCOM and has been a member since 2006.

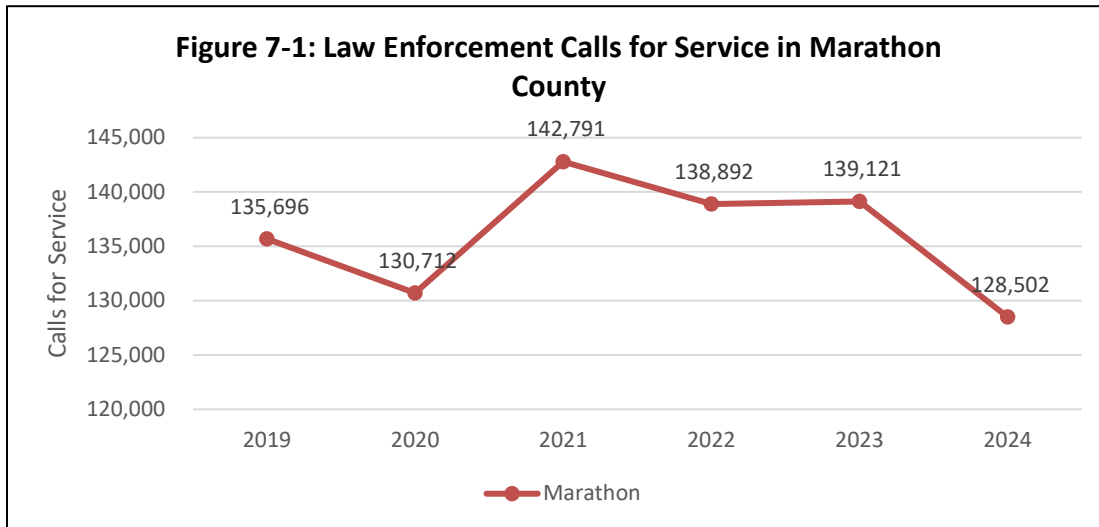
Crime and Corrections

Crime and Drugs

Demand for law enforcement and emergency services continues to be high in Marathon County. Calls for emergency medical services (EMS) and fire calls have reached particularly high levels, with 2024 recording the highest number of calls in the last five years. Law enforcement calls remain historically high in Marathon County, but there has been a reduction in calls over the past several years.

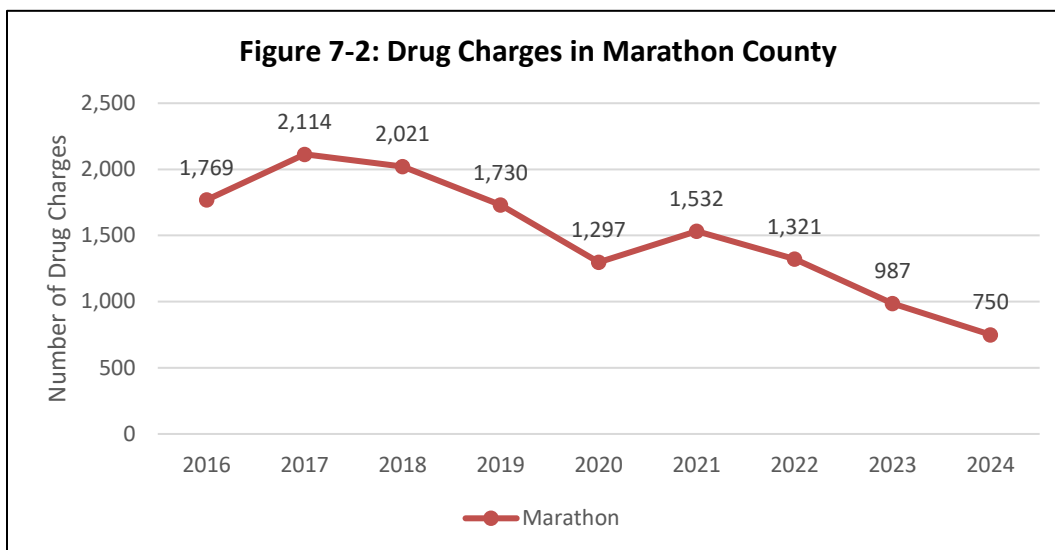
2023 Marathon County Life Report

For the most complete and latest data, please visit:
<https://www.marathoncountypulse.org/>



Source: Marathon County Pulse

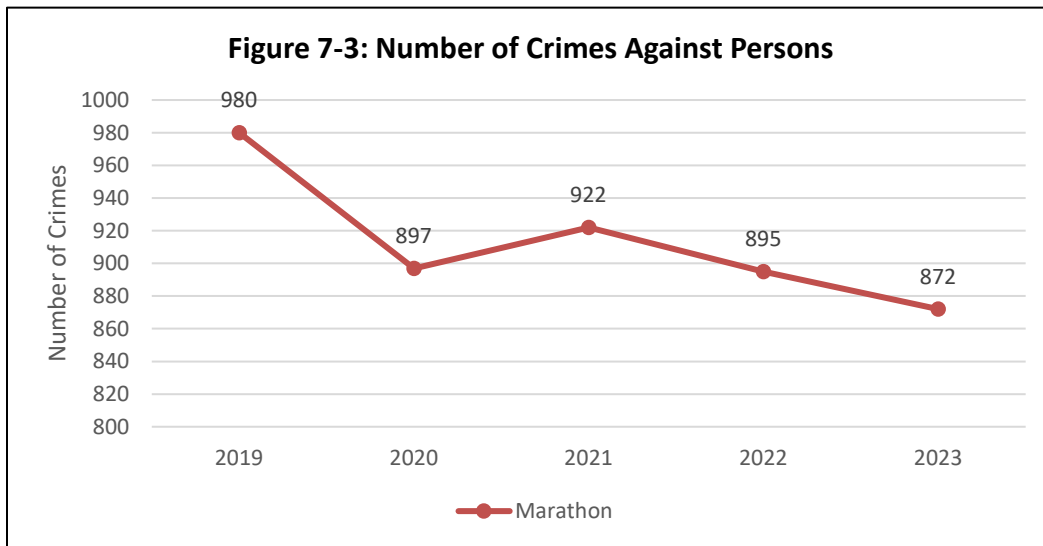
Drug charges account for a significant share of all arrests made in Marathon County and the United States. According to the Marathon County Pulse Report, a majority of arrests are the result of the consumption, rather than the production and distribution, of illicit substances. Drug charges commonly include possession of drug paraphernalia, possession of a controlled substance, maintaining a drug trafficking place, possession of THC, possession of methamphetamine, manufacturing or delivering a controlled substance, possession of narcotic drugs, and possession with intent to deliver a controlled substance. Overall, drug charges in Marathon County have been declining in recent years.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

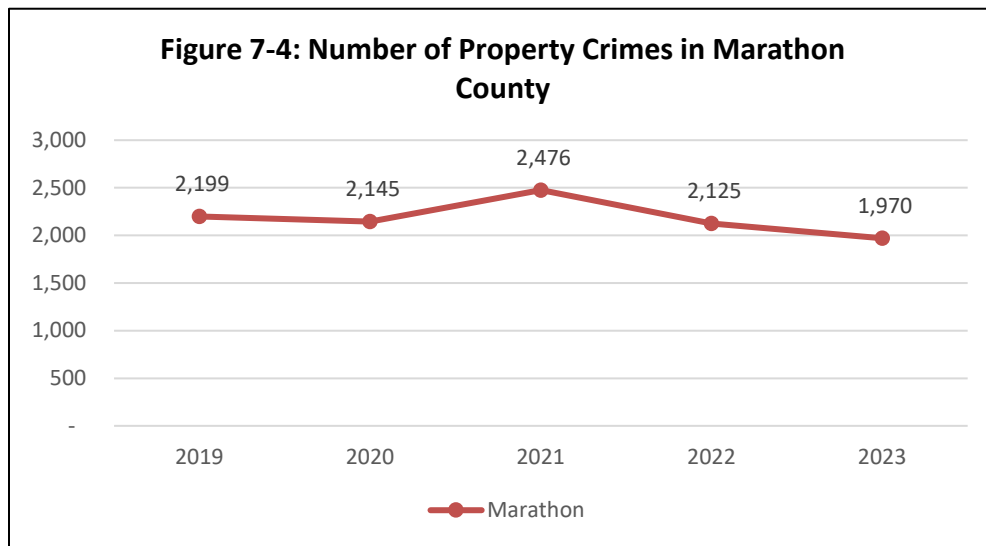
Crimes against persons include crimes such as simple assault, aggravated assault, human trafficking, incest, intimidation, kidnapping, murder, and sexual assault. In Marathon County, simple assault and aggravated assault are the most frequent crimes against persons. Marathon County

averages over two incidents of crimes against persons every day, though the number has declined in recent years.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Property crimes commonly include arson, burglary, theft, motor vehicle theft, fraud, and vandalism. Theft is the main type of property crime committed in Marathon County. In recent years, the number of thefts has decreased in Marathon County.



Source: Marathon County Pulse

Crime-Related Factors

Prevention and intervention of crime is a responsibility of the Patrol Division of the Sheriff’s Office, and the Investigations Division conducts criminal investigations of major crimes and other cases referred by the Patrol Division. The most common crime incidents that lead to arrest include theft, assault, and disorderly conduct.

The ever-increasing presence of digital evidence in all types of cases led to the formation of a regional digital forensics laboratory in 2018. Nearly all criminal cases involve some type of technological component, the most common being cell phones used for voice and text communications, location tracking, internet/social media/messaging activity, and digital photographic/video evidence. In 2024, the Wisconsin River Valley Regional Forensics Lab, housed in the Marathon County Sheriff's Office, processed 380 cell phones for criminal cases.

Drug-Related Factors

The investigation of controlled substance crimes within Marathon County is the primary function of the Central Wisconsin Narcotics Task Force, formed in 2018. The Task Force investigates distribution network-level cases related to heroin and other opioids, methamphetamine, marijuana, cocaine, pharmaceuticals, and other controlled substances. The Task Force will route prosecution through state or federal courts, whichever will be most effective for each case. Typical cases span three to eighteen months and yield several indictments. One notable case, which spanned from 2021-2023, yielded 13 federal indictments of people involved in the distribution of narcotics. The final sentencing hearing for that case occurred in early 2025, and the convicted drug dealer received 14 years in prison.

Over the past decade, methamphetamine and heroin have been the two most prevalent drugs seized by task force investigators, with few exceptions. However, during 2024 and early 2025, there has been a resurgence in the prevalence of cocaine and crack cocaine. Cocaine has supplanted much of the local methamphetamine market and accounted for approximately 60% of all Task Force drug seizures in 2024.

While cocaine and methamphetamine use and distribution are contributing factors to a wide array of crimes, opioids, like heroin and fentanyl, continue to be the most lethal.

Wausau Crime Laboratory

The State of Wisconsin Department of Justice has three crime labs located around the State. Wausau is home to the Wausau Crime Laboratory and serves all of northern Wisconsin. The lab provides quality forensic analyses in the interest of criminal justice. Areas of analysis include blood alcohol analysis, controlled substances, crime scene response, fingerprint identification, and forensic imaging. The Wausau Crime Lab opened in 1991.

Courthouse

The Marathon County Courthouse is located in downtown Wausau and is the home of Marathon County's six courtrooms, the Clerk of Courts, the County Clerk, the District Attorney, the Treasurer, the Register of Deeds, Sheriff's Office, Jail, and Marathon County's Corporation Counsel.



District Attorney

The District Attorney is the prosecutor in all cases of crime or county traffic ordinance violations committed in Marathon County. The District Attorney staff works with the Sheriff's Office to ensure the effective, efficient, and uniform enforcement of the criminal laws and the administration of criminal justice throughout Marathon County.

Jail Facility and Adult Detention

The Marathon County Jail serves all law enforcement jurisdictions within Marathon County and also secures inmates who are apprehended for other law enforcement agencies throughout Wisconsin and the U.S. The jail facility in downtown Wausau opened in 1988, was renovated in 2000, and currently has 279 beds. The maximum capacity of the jail is 279 inmates, but the Wisconsin Department of Corrections recommends that the average daily population stay within 80 of total capacity, which would be 223 inmates. In recent years, the jail has been at capacity and the Sheriff's Office has had to house inmates in facilities in Barron County, Lincoln County, Marquette County, and Taylor County. The Sheriff's Office has also recently contracted with Waupaca County for inmate housing.

The demographics of the jail population consisted of 76% male and 24% female inmates in 2024. The racial breakdown of inmates in 2024 consisted of 75% Caucasian, 14% Black, 7% Asian, and 4% Native American.

The average length of stay for an inmate in the Marathon County Jail is considerably long. In recent years, the Deputy Jail Administrator began compiling statistical data several times a year. This statistical data is called the "Hot Sheet." The Hot Sheet tracks all inmates who have been incarcerated for 200 days or more. Most of these inmates have felony charges. The data on the Hot Sheet contains the number of days a person has been incarcerated, their next court date, the date they last appeared in court, the case numbers they are incarcerated for, and the court branch handling their cases. To keep cases moving forward and to decrease the average daily stay for an inmate, this data is then sent to each Judge, the District Attorney's Office, the County Administrator, the Sheriff, the Jail Administrator, and the 9th District Court Administrator.

Juvenile Detention

Marathon County's Juvenile Facility is located on Packer Drive on Wausau's westside. The Secure Detention Center is located within this facility and is considered a secure placement for juveniles, like the adult jail. Reasons for being admitted to a secure facility generally include criminal activity. The facility can house up to 20 children aged 10-17 years old, which includes boys and girls.

Jail Diversion Programs

The Electronic Monitoring Program is a jail diversion program that removes minimum risk inmates from the jail and electronically monitors their location while under in-home detention. In addition to prosecuting cases in court, the District Attorney's office runs several court diversion programs. These programs afford low-risk, first-time offenders the opportunity to avoid criminal charges and/or convictions if they agree to successfully complete a customized agreement that the District Attorney

believes will be beneficial to them, in hopes that they will not repeat criminal behavior in the future. The two types of agreements are Deferred Prosecution Agreements and Deferred Entry of Judgment Agreements. The conditions of the deferred agreements are often counseling, programming, education, and community service.

Recidivism

Recidivism is a relapse into criminal behavior, measured by criminal acts that result in rearrest, reconviction, or a return to jail within a three-year period following initial release. Mental health, often untreated, continues to contribute to many individuals reoffending.

Recidivism

A person’s relapse into criminal behavior often occurs after the person receives sanctions or undergoes intervention for a previous crime, resulting in rearrest, reconviction, or a return to prison.

Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

In 2021, Marathon County formally created, through an amendment to our code of Ordinances, a Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), with membership from across the justice system and with representatives from the County Board, specifically, the Board Chair and the Chairpersons of both the Public Safety and Health & Human Services Committees. The formal creation of our CJCC should help us build upon our past success in implementing numerous initiatives, including:

Drug Recovery Court – aimed at providing a structured environment, coupling intense treatment options and court oversight, to rehabilitate justice system-involved county residents that would otherwise be facing significant terms in the State Prison system. Our program works closely with our child protection system to identify individuals with children in out-of-home care, which offers another significant benefit in the form of reducing long-term care costs and returning children to their parents.

Crisis Assessment Response Team – CART was developed to work with individuals in the community who are in crisis to build rapport and make connections with resources in order to maintain the individual’s wellbeing without the use of emergency detention or jail. CART includes one Marathon County Sheriff’s Deputy and one Wausau Police Officer, teamed with crisis counselors from NCHC. To learn more about CART, you can access this article on our online newsletter <https://wisconsincentraltimenews.com/2018/05/22/respondingto-mental-health-crises-in-a-new-way/>

Crisis Intervention Training / Crisis Intervention Program - CIT is a community-based approach to improve outcomes for officers responding to mental health crises. CIT provides 40 hours of training for law enforcement to improve responses to and reduce arrests of people with mental health issues. CIP is a 16-hour training designed for a wide range of audiences interested in better understanding and improving interactions with people experiencing a mental health crisis. Participants may include correctional officers, dispatchers, emergency personnel, medical staff, and more. CIP can improve overall safety for individuals and staff, as well as improve identification, referral, and treatment services of individuals with mental illness.

Hot Sheet Case Tracking – As described in the previous section, the hot sheet case tracking was developed as a way to reduce case disposition times for individuals detained in the Marathon County Jail. Defendants incarcerated and awaiting court activity for cases for more than 200 days are identified and reported to the judicial branch responsible for processing. Hot sheet tracking keeps the courts focused on issues related to the case that need addressing in order for the case to move more quickly to sentencing. Quicker sentencing leads to a reduction in jail stays.

Courtroom Audio/Video – all eight courtrooms received audio/video system upgrades in 2023, allowing courts to conduct proceedings and remove a potential barrier more efficiently for attorneys from outside our area to appear before the Court.

Corrections Staffing - In 2024, Corrections Staffing was listed as a focus to decrease overtime and reduce inmate housing costs by being better staffed. This has been instrumental in reducing the amount of overtime being forced on staff and has allowed us to bring some inmates back to our facility. However, the overall census, due primarily to unsentenced inmates, still requires us to utilize other correctional facilities to house inmates.

There are many aspects that impact our inmate housing; it is rarely, if ever, a singular cause. These past successes are important; however, we need to further expand our efforts should we desire to improve public safety and control costs.

Emergency Services

Emergency services in Marathon County consist of a very large framework of Fire Departments, Police Departments, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Most of the cities and villages in Marathon County maintain their own police and fire departments. Towns and small municipalities rely on the Marathon County Sheriff's Department for law enforcement services.

The local hospitals also provide advanced life support via ambulance and helicopter. Training and coordination with local fire departments aid in the fast response to critical incidents with the latest technology and life-saving equipment.

Fire Services

The cities, villages, and towns of Marathon County each have their own fire department, are part of a multi-jurisdictional fire department, or contract with another municipality. Most fire departments also provide emergency response service, hazardous materials response, and public education, among other public services. Many of the fire departments in Marathon County are made up of volunteers, except for the City of Wausau and a few other municipalities in the metro area. Many volunteer fire departments, especially those in the rural areas of the county, are struggling with staffing.

Emergency Medical Services

Emergency medical service is provided by most municipalities in conjunction with fire services. In addition to professional emergency medical responders, many municipalities have volunteer

Emergency Medical Responders who are trained to provide immediate lifesaving actions in their community or neighborhood while waiting for an ambulance or emergency response team to get there.

Air transport teams can pick up patients from health care facilities and incident sites and get them to appropriate care as quickly as possible. The two major hospitals in Marathon County, Aspirus and Marshfield Medical Center-Weston, each have air transport capabilities for emergency medical needs. Aspirus's MedEvac Transport helicopter at Central Wisconsin Airport in Mosinee. Marshfield Clinic, in partnership with Life Link III, also maintains a transport helicopter in Marshfield.

Hazardous Materials Spill Response

The Wausau Fire Department's Regional Response Hazardous Materials Team provides hazardous materials response, along with technical rescue capability, to supplement local fire department responses to structure collapse, trench collapse, ropes, and confined space incidents.

Rescue Services and Other Services

The Sheriff's Office's Dive/Rescue Team is the only dive team in Marathon County. The Team provides dive support to all fire and law enforcement agencies in Marathon County. The Dive team is capable of diving in all weather conditions to perform search and recovery, surface rescue, and underwater investigations.

Marathon County has Search and Rescue (SAR) capabilities through different departments and agencies to locate, extricate, evacuate, provide medical care for, and reunite persons in distress or imminent danger from a variety of environmental or man-made causes. The scope of SAR may include ground, wilderness, urban search and rescue, and technical rescue using boats, fixed and rotary wing aircraft, underwater diving equipment, and other specialized resources.

Regional Forensics Center

In August 2025, Marathon County opened the Regional Forensic Science Center at Northcentral Technical College in Wausau, marking the first such facility in northern Wisconsin. The center provides local forensic autopsy services, reducing the need for law enforcement and medical examiners to travel long distances. In addition to the core services required of coroner/medical examiner offices, which include forensic autopsies, consultation services, and expert testimony, the facility features a dedicated tissue donation suite, a family consultation room, and a community grief garden. The facility also houses the Marathon County Medical Examiner's office.

The new center, on Northcentral Technical College’s Wausau campus, provides critical support to law enforcement and coroner/medical examiner offices across at least 28 counties in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

The center also serves as a cornerstone for education, in partnership with Northcentral Technical College and the Medical College of Wisconsin. It plays a vital role in addressing workforce needs in forensic science, public safety, health care, and funeral services.



Vehicle and Road Safety

A strong transportation system must be safe for all users, including cars, trucks, and pedestrians. This section addresses a few highway safety issues dealing with interchanges, access points, speeds, railroad crossings, and vehicle crashes.

Freeway Interchanges

The major freeway interchanges in Marathon County are found where USH 51 and STH 29 intersect in the Wausau metro area. In the past, these interchanges have been the location of several high-profile crashes. Both interchanges were recently redesigned and reconstructed to make several safety improvements.

Highway Access

Access points are locations where major roads are intersected by minor roads or driveways. The main safety concern with access points regards entering and exiting traffic and higher speeds on major roads. Some issues that should be addressed include the higher accident rate at at-grade intersections, such as are found along rural segments of STH 29, the multitude of driveways and cross-streets along busy commercial roads.

Vehicle Speeds

The primary safety concern regarding vehicle speeds comes when drivers are moving at a very different speed, either faster or slower than most traffic. These dramatic variations create an unpredictable driving environment. Very high speeds are a regular concern in both urban and rural environments. The farm equipment or horse and buggies found in the rural areas of Marathon County travel at very low speeds. Where high-speed traffic and slow farm traffic meet, safety is a concern.

Railroad Crossings

Safety is a major concern where vehicles cross railroad tracks. Marathon County has 98 public, open, at-grade road-rail crossings. Trains require long stopping distances and are often unable to stop before hitting a vehicle that stops over the tracks. A few problem rail crossings are found in the

Village of Kronenwetter and the City of Mosinee. In both instances, railroad tracks run parallel to a major road, and traffic sometimes waits on the track crossing to merge onto another road. Numerous safety concerns occur in the Town of Knowlton, where trains block roads that provide access to emergency services for residents. Residents, town officials, and law enforcement continue to try to work with the railroad to solve this safety problem.

Vehicle Crashes

According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, a crash is “an occurrence that originates or terminates on a traffic way, which involves at least one motor vehicle in transport, and results in injury or death to any person or damage to any property.” Crashes can involve automobiles, motorcycles, trains, bicycles, and pedestrians.

The 2023 Marathon County LIFE Report identified 2,849 traffic crashes that took place in 2023. Motorcycles were involved in 57 crashes, bicycles in 25, and pedestrians in 18. The report also noted that there were 485 operating-while-intoxicated (OWI) arrests that year.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services publishes Public Health Profiles for all counties. The 2023 Marathon County report shows that 704 persons were injured in motor vehicle crashes in 2023, including 53 impaired-driving-vehicle crash injuries. Two bicyclists and five pedestrians were seriously injured. In addition to the persons injured, eight persons were killed, including five people in alcohol-related crashes and one pedestrian.

Hazard Mitigation

The Marathon County Emergency Management department is responsible for the development, upkeep, and implementation of the Emergency Response Plans for the County. These plans deal with preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation of natural and man-made hazards.

Hazard Mitigation

Hazard mitigation is any action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural hazards.

Hazard mitigation is defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as “any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to life and property from natural hazards”. Hazard mitigation is the preventative component of the responsibilities of the Marathon County Emergency Management department. Mitigation activities are actions that will prevent or eliminate losses, even if an incident does occur. Mitigation can reduce or eliminate the need for an emergency response and greatly reduce the recovery period.

The Marathon County Emergency Management department is responsible for the development, upkeep, and implementation of the Emergency Response Plans for the County. These plans deal with preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation of natural and man-made hazards.

According to the National Climatic Data Center, between 1950 and 2024, Marathon County experienced 321 weather-related hazards. The most common hazards were hail, snow or ice,

tornadoes, extreme temperatures, floods, and lightning. Tornadoes, lightning, and hail hazards caused over \$12 million in property damage each. Floods caused over \$56 million in crop damage, and snow or ice caused over \$15 million in crop damage.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is responsible for forest and wildfires in most areas of Marathon County through five wildfire districts. On average, Marathon County has 21 forest fires every year, with an average of 19 acres burned per year.

Marathon County Hazard Mitigation Planning

Although Marathon County has the potential to experience a myriad of different risks from both natural and manmade hazards, the Hazard Mitigation Plan concentrates on those hazards that have the greatest potential to impact people in Marathon County and focuses on impacts to vulnerable structures/facilities and vulnerable populations. The hazards of little or no risk to Marathon County include earthquakes, land subsidence, and landslides. Potential hazards addressed by the plan include winter storms, tornadoes, flooding, dam failure, fire, transportation incidents, severe thunderstorms, agricultural/hydrologic drought, hazardous materials incidents, and groundwater contamination.

The Hazard Mitigation Plan includes a comprehensive table of goals and possible mitigation actions to achieve those goals for each of the jurisdictions involved in the Plan, which is most of Marathon County. The mitigation actions are intended to be carried out by Marathon County and its cities, villages, and towns. The Marathon County All-Hazard Mitigation Plan was updated in 2022, and the next update of the plan is underway, with an implementation target date of 2027.

The development of the Marathon County All Hazards Mitigation Plan Update is a response to federal regulations requiring the update of a local hazard mitigation plan every five years. The plan summarizes each mitigation action, parties responsible for its implementation, and approximates the cost and timeframe for each action. Actions are prioritized as high, medium, or low based on level of need, available staff and funding, cost, and other factors.

Local hazard mitigation plans form the foundation of a community's long-term strategy to reduce disaster losses and break the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repetitive damage. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) supports local mitigation planning to foster partnerships among all levels of government, to develop and strengthen non-governmental and private partnerships, to reduce the costs associated with disaster response and recovery by promoting mitigation activities, and to promote more disaster-resilient and sustainable communities.

Many grant programs have hazard mitigation plan adoption requirements, including Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Public Assistance Grant Program (PA), Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC), Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA), Fire Management Assistance Grant Program (FMAG), and Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dams Grant Program (HHPD).

Community resilience is the ability of a community to prepare for anticipated hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and withstand and recover rapidly from disruptions. Activities such as disaster preparedness (which includes prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery) and reducing community stressors (the underlying social, economic, and environmental conditions that can weaken a community) are key steps to resilience.

Integrated Preparedness Planning

The creation of an effective capabilities-based preparedness program begins with an Integrated Preparedness Plan (IPP), which establishes overall preparedness priorities and outlines a multi-year schedule of preparedness activities designed to address those priorities and validate capabilities. The Integrated Preparedness Planning Workshop (IPPW) provides an interactive forum for stakeholders to engage in the creation of the IPP. The IPPW also serves to coordinate preparedness activities across organizations to maximize the use of resources and prevent duplication of effort. With limited resources and budget constraints, it is acknowledged that not all prioritized activities will be able to be accomplished. As such, it is imperative that all appropriate stakeholders attend the workshop to facilitate the required coordination.

Issues

Jail Population – The maximum capacity of the Marathon County Jail, based on Department of Corrections regulations, is 252. Based on the need to allow for sufficient ability to segregate inmates based on classification, the realistic maximum census estimate is 225. Jail population is the product of numerous factors within a public safety system, where multiple players (Judges, the District Attorney’s Office, Public Defenders and other defense counsel, Clerk of Courts, Community Corrections and other state agencies, Justice Alternatives, NCHC, Police Agencies, etc.) need to work together to achieve any objective, including controlling jail population. Reducing the census in isolation is easy; however, doing so in a manner that strengthens public safety requires a thoughtful approach that focuses on the best interests of County residents, not just cost reduction. Marathon County has understood the complex nature of the public safety (justice) system for decades. Continuing to identify efficiencies to process housed inmates through the justice system, with consideration for public safety and due process, will be an issue the County continues to navigate in trying to reduce jail population.

Drugs – The drug unit is never caught up, due to the high number of cases. The volume of work is taxing resources. Drug cases are closely linked with property crimes. Marathon County continues to be a hub for methamphetamine and also sees many marijuana, heroin, and cocaine cases.

Volunteer Emergency Services – Many of the fire and EMS services in Marathon County are staffed by volunteers. These agencies are struggling to respond to emergency calls due to fewer new volunteers, aging existing volunteers, and a larger percentage of volunteers who work full-time jobs outside the community and thus are unable to respond to calls during the day. There should be a focus on continuity of operations plans for local government and agencies. Marathon County should study the County’s role in supporting or coordinating EMS and Fire services.

Recidivism – The Sheriff’s Office and County Administration continue working together to curb recidivism in Marathon County. Marathon County has known for years that a significant factor in recidivism rates in Marathon County is the result of serious, untreated Mental Health issues that affect our community and the Jail population. The Sheriff’s Office, County Board, and County Administration have taken steps to provide higher levels of service in the Marathon County Jail in an effort to curb recidivism rates. The addition of a Social Worker, Mental Health professionals, and a psychologist has already proven beneficial.

Public Safety Goals and Objectives

Public Safety Goal: Marathon County is a safe and secure community for all residents and visitors through cost-effective and high-quality public safety services.

Objectives:

1. Provide cost-effective and high-quality public safety services.
2. Mitigate the impacts of drug and alcohol abuse in Marathon County through evidence-based practices.
3. Promote efforts to reduce recidivism.
4. Improve road safety.
5. Plan for and identify appropriate measures to be taken related to disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Eight

Infrastructure



Infrastructure includes the essential physical structures and facilities required for a community to operate and thrive. These structures and facilities include the transportation network or roads, rail, and other means of moving people and goods, as well as the public and private utility systems for water and sewer, power, and telecommunications, among others.

Previous Plans and Studies

Marathon County Highway System Study – 2022

Marathon County manages an extensive roadway system with about 614 miles comprising the county truck highway system. The County Highway Department maintains this system, including resurfacing and reconstruction, to enhance safe traffic flow, ease congestion, and ensure efficient mobility. These efforts also protect the investment of taxpayers by extending pavement life. However, the current fiscal climate dictates that Marathon County plan for funding roadways to achieve a financially sustainable transportation network for the County. To assist in this process, this study looks at issues impacting long-term sustainability to guide the decision-making process for future resurfacing and reconstruction projects, as well as best practice maintenance work. The study aims to determine the level of investment necessary to sustain a safe, reliable, and well-maintained County Highway System.

Marathon County Roadway Safety Plan – 2021

This report identifies safety concerns and location specific low-cost high impact suggested improvements that the County can implement. The plan focuses on engineering-related roadway concerns and how to improve the infrastructure. The goal of the safety plan is to reduce fatal and serious injury crashes on County roads by providing Marathon County with a list of prioritized locations that have safety issues and guidance on specific safety strategies to implement.

Highway Department Policies and Procedures Manual – 2007; Revised 2017

This manual outlines specific transportation policies and procedures as they relate to the Marathon County Highway Department. The manual is intended to provide important information to the public and to serve as an internal manual providing clear direction to department staff and decision makers.

Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan – 2024 -2028

This plan analyzes service gaps and needs in public transit and human services transportation, then proposes strategies to address the gaps and needs. A five-year work plan was written to cover 2024 through 2028.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Wausau Area Metropolitan Planning Organization – 2015; Revised 2021

This 20-year comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian plan provides a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional strategy for enhancing conditions and providing inter-city links for biking and walking in support of the Wausau area's transportation, quality of life, and tourism goals. It does this by addressing all types of biking and walking trips—from a short walk across the street, to a longer bike trip to rural Marathon County or Rib Mountain, or across the Wisconsin River. This plan also incorporates the 5 E's concept of planning for non-motorized transportation in the Wausau metro area, which are: Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation. These are then used to create a list of improvements for the metro communities to develop and enhance their non-motorized transportation network.

Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the Wausau Metropolitan Area – 2022

One of the requirements of the MPO by the federal legislation is the development of a LRTP for the urbanized area. The LRTP is prepared every five years by the MPO, the County, and WisDOT. The plan identifies the current conditions in the area and identifies and recommends solutions to the issues regarding the deficiencies of the roadways in the metro area. The LRTP recommendations are based on the relationship between land use policy and transportation facilities and services, including roadways, transit, bikeways, pedestrian ways, air, inter-city bus, and the movement of goods by air, rail, and truck. The current LRTP was adopted in 2022 with a planning horizon of 2050.

Transportation Improvement Program – 2025

The current Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) was created in 2025 by the Wausau MPO and is updated annually. The TIP is developed by the MPO in cooperation with the State, affected transit operators, and local communities within the MPO planning boundary. The plan identifies transit and highway projects to be funded over the next four-year period.

Metro Ride Transit Development Plan (TDP) – 2022

This plan evaluates transit service and how it is performing within the residential, employment, and fiscal areas, to better improve the service to meet the changing mobility needs within the greater Wausau Area. The TDP creates a service plan and a set of operating recommendations to be phased in over the five-year period and is supported by a financial plan and ancillary recommendations. The Final Report addresses the socioeconomics and land use characteristics to better understand developing trends that will impact the overall efficiency, level of service, and financial viability of the transit system.

Connections 2050

This is Wisconsin's latest long-range, statewide multi-modal transportation plan, written by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). This is an update of Connections 2030, which identifies a series of system-level priority corridors that are critical to Wisconsin's travel patterns and the state's economy.

The following priority corridors have been identified with routes through Marathon County:

- The Marshfield/Rapids Connection from Stevens Point to Abbotsford utilizes STH 13 on the west side of the County.
- The Northwoods Connection from Oshkosh to Rhinelander includes USH 45 just outside Marathon County's boundary in Shawano County.
- The POW/MIA Remembrance corridor from Abbotsford to Ashland uses STH 13 on the west side of the County.
- The Wausau Metropolitan Planning Area is overseen by the Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization and includes all or portions of 17 contiguous villages, cities, or towns in the Wausau Metro area.
- The Wisconsin Heartland corridor from Eau Claire to Green Bay traverses Marathon County from east to west along STH 29.
- The Wisconsin River corridor from Madison to Ironwood, Michigan, runs through Marathon County from north to south on I-39/US 51.

Wisconsin 2003 Trails Network Plan

This Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) plan identifies a statewide network of trails and guides the DNR for land acquisition and development. Many existing trails are developed and operated in partnership with counties. By agreement, the DNR acquires the corridor, and the county government develops, operates, and maintains the trail. Two trails are planned, which will run through Marathon County: Segment 18 – Tomahawk to Wisconsin Dells, following a power line corridor near Wausau, as an extension of the Hiawatha/Bearskin Trail, and Segment 52 – Wausau to Marshfield, along an abandoned rail corridor with significant trail potential.

Central Wisconsin Airport Master Plan – 2019

The Central Wisconsin Airport completed a Master Plan in 2019 to ensure the short, medium, and long-term needs of the airport are met. The key planning areas studied included: Runway intersection, passenger terminal concourse, general aviation facilities, and snow removal equipment storage and maintenance facilities. The final plan included an FAA-approved Airport Layout Plan.

Central Wisconsin Airport Terminal Master Plan – 2023

This plan re-evaluates airport landside needs based on evolving activity trends, identifies proposed short- and long-term landside facility needs, prepares a practical and feasible capital improvement

plan, applies sustainable practices to future airport construction, operations, and maintenance, and positions the airport to tap new and emerging capital funding sources.

2040 Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Plan – 2018

The sewer service area plan helps communities look at wastewater collection systems to adequately accommodate growth, to protect the communities' sanitary sewer service through sound planning, and to ensure that growth occurs in a cost-effective manner. The plan was updated in 2018.

Stormwater Quality Management Plan – 2023

In 2019, via a WDNR grant, Strand Associates Inc. was brought on board to model and analyze where the county was not in compliance with pollutant discharges, and model alternatives that could help achieve compliance over time. This plan was an update to the previous plan completed in 2011. WDNR was also involved in the review of the analysis and recommendation development.

Solid Waste Management Board Strategic Plan – 2020-2025

The Solid Waste Strategic Plan sets the direction and work plan of the Solid Waste Department for the three to five years following adoption of the plan. The Plan is designed to make the Marathon County Solid Waste Department the “integrated waste management system of choice, fostering economic development while protecting human health and the environment,” and in helping Marathon County be the “healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in the State.” The following goals are identified in the Plan:

- Goal 1: Protect and enhance Groundwater and Air Quality.
- Goal 2: Maximize economic opportunities from landfill and solid waste operations.
- Goal 3: Build relationships with community, haulers, municipalities, businesses, and organizations.
- Goal 4: Provide Leadership on Waste, Recycling, Diversion, Environmental Education, and Outreach to begin the transition from Waste Management to Resource Management.
- Goal 5: Sustain safe and productive materials management.

Transportation

Transportation Organizations

Marathon County Highway Department

The Marathon County Highway Department is responsible for operation, maintenance, and improvements to the County Road system. This system currently includes over 600 miles of roadways. Additional major activities of the Highway Department are administration, planning, design, construction, and traffic operations. The Department's function is critical to the provision of the County's transportation facilities.

Marathon County Metropolitan Planning Commission

Transportation planning in Marathon County is coordinated between the Marathon County Department of Conservation, Planning and Zoning (CPZ) staff and the Marathon County Metropolitan

Planning Commission, which is the Wausau Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO); the body designated by the Federal Department of Transportation to be responsible for transportation planning in the metropolitan area. CPZ provides staff for the MPO and also does transportation planning for areas outside the metropolitan area.

In urbanized areas with populations over 50,000, Federal highway and transit statutes require, as a condition for spending federal highway or transit funds, the designation of MPOs that have responsibility for planning, programming, and coordination of federal highway and transit investments. The Marathon County Metropolitan Planning Commission is composed of the chief elected official of the communities that make up the Wausau urbanized area, which include the cities of Mosinee, Schofield, and Wausau; the villages of Maine, Kronenwetter, Rib Mountain, Rothschild, and Weston; and the towns of Mosinee, Stettin, Wausau, and Weston. Also represented are the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WDOT), the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, and the Marathon County Highway Committee.



Interstate 39 South of Wausau

Road Network

Marathon County is bisected by two major highways: north-south by I-39/USH 51 and east-west by STH 29. The Wausau metropolitan area is located at the crossing of these two major roadways, which provide excellent access to the County. The road network includes over 600 miles of County Roads, 300 miles of State Highways, nearly 100 miles of US Highway, and over 2,500 miles of local and other roads. See **Figure 8-1. Map 8-1** illustrates the road system in Marathon County and identifies the MPO boundary.

The Wausau metro area is the location of the major traffic generators in the County. Much of the remainder of the County consists of rural agricultural lands and small villages generally served by two-lane state and county highways and local roadways. Local roads in villages are mostly paved, while local roads in rural towns may consist of both paved and gravel roads.

Functional Classification

A functional classification system groups streets and highways into classes according to the character of service they provide. The five classifications are principal arterial, minor arterial, major collector, minor collector, and local road.

Figure 8-1: Road Network*	
Road Type	Miles
County	614
Forest	6
Local	2,544
Park	3
Private	16
State	309
Federal	97
Total Miles	3,607

*Source: NCWRPC GIS * Numbers Rounded*

The transportation system map, **Map 8-1**, illustrates the state highways, county highways, and local roads in Marathon County. By the rural system, principal arterials and minor arterials in Marathon County are all state and federal highways, while major collectors are a mix of state and county highways. In the urban areas, arterials also include a few county highways and even several high traffic local roads. Major collectors consist mostly of County roads outside of the City of Wausau. The classification of minor collector is only used in rural areas. Minor collectors make up a relatively small percentage of roadways and generally consist of county roads and some town roads.

Roadway Level of Service (LOS)

Level of Service refers to the amount of traffic and congestion on a roadway. There are six levels of service, from A to F. A road operating at LOS A has virtually no congestion, and traffic moves freely. At LOS F, the worst classification, traffic congestion results in stop-and-go conditions. The amount and type of traffic on a road at any point in time relate to the land uses the roadway serves.

The 2022 Long Range Transportation Plan’s 2050 Capacity Deficiency Analysis uses LOS, among other methods, to forecast traffic and vehicle miles traveled. Most of the roadway network in place has adequate capacity to accommodate anticipated growth through 2050. The exception is County Road X (Camp Phillips Road) in the sections around Highway 29. Roadway capacity in this section is limited, and the LOS will need to be monitored; and capacity expansion will likely be needed here in the next 5-10 years.

Level of Service

Level of service (LOS) is a qualitative measure for the flow of traffic service on a highway, using the scores of A through F. It measures speed and density of traffic.

Roadway Improvements

The State, County, and MPO keep records of planned roadway improvements that have been identified for implementation and for which funding commitments are likely. WisDOT prepares a statewide Six-Year Highway Improvement Program; the current plan covers 2023-2028. The MPO prepares a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) every year, identifying projects within the urban area for the next four years. It is important to remember that continually changing needs, funding availability, and political climate affect the ultimate implementation of improvement plans on a year-to-year basis. See those plans for more information.

County Road Maintenance

In Wisconsin, PASER ratings (Pavement Surface Evaluation and Rating) are used to assess the condition of roads and help guide maintenance and investment decisions. Every odd-numbered year, Marathon County must rate their entire paved road network and submit the data to WisDOT’s WISLR system (Wisconsin Information System for Local Roads). **Figure 8-2** is the rating system that determines when maintenance or repair of a surface is necessary. Roads rated 8-10 typically require little to no maintenance, roads rated 5-7 should receive routine maintenance or preservative treatments (sealcoating), and roads 1-4 should be

Figure 8-2: PASER Scale	
1 & 2	Very Poor
3	Poor
4 & 5	Fair
6 & 7	Good
8	Very Good
9 & 10	Excellent

structurally improved or totally reconstructed. **Figure 8-3** examines the number of miles of Marathon County highway by biannual cycle and pacer rating.

Figure 8-3: Marathon County Highway - PASER Data (2015–2024)

PASER Rating	2015 (Miles / %)	2017 (Miles / %)	2019 (Miles / %)	2021 (Miles / %)	2023 (Miles / %)	2024 (Miles / %)
1	- / -	- / -	- / -	- / -	- / -	- / -
2	- / -	- / -	- / -	- / -	- / -	- / -
3	0.00 / 0.00%	0.00 / 0.00%	0.79 / 0.13%	0.00 / 0.00%	0.00 / 0.00%	0.00 / 0.00%
4	81.69 / 13.29%	28.55 / 4.62%	15.09 / 2.44%	42.36 / 6.86%	54.46 / 8.87%	20.44 / 3.33%
5	96.16 / 15.64%	129.26 / 20.92%	124.28 / 20.13%	100.73 / 16.31%	91.13 / 14.84%	104.47 / 17.01%
6	99.46 / 16.18%	92.44 / 14.96%	109.34 / 17.71%	76.97 / 12.46%	99.41 / 16.19%	92.93 / 15.13%
7	107.24 / 17.44%	94.91 / 15.36%	81.87 / 13.26%	132.62 / 21.47%	97.99 / 15.96%	105.66 / 17.21%
8	162.58 / 26.44%	146.50 / 23.72%	163.98 / 26.55%	155.76 / 25.22%	122.68 / 19.98%	129.80 / 21.14%
9	37.07 / 6.03%	71.78 / 11.62%	77.55 / 12.56%	65.66 / 10.63%	90.77 / 14.78%	85.52 / 13.93%
10	30.60 / 4.98%	54.30 / 8.79%	44.63 / 7.23%	43.49 / 7.04%	57.59 / 9.38%	75.22 / 12.25%
Total Miles	614.80	617.74	617.54	617.59	614.03	614.05
Average Rating	6.66	7.03	7.08	7.02	7.05	7.27

Source: Marathon County Highway Department

Transit Service and Facilities

In Marathon County, the only fixed route transit service is found in Wausau. As of 2025, Metro Ride operates 7 regular bus routes in the City of Wausau. A transfer center is located in downtown Wausau. All Metro Ride buses are accessible to people with limited mobility through wheelchair lifts or ramps. The front of each bus is also equipped with a bike rack that can hold two bikes. During the school year, express routes enhance regular routes to accommodate increased passenger loads. Generally, Metro Ride buses run Monday through Friday from 6:30 am to 6:30 pm and do not run on weekends or major holidays.

Metro Ride also provides paratransit service for persons who, due to a disability, are unable to use the fixed route bus service. Paratransit users must be certified by Metro Ride. Paratransit service is limited to any area within ¾ mile of a regular bus route and must be requested a day in advance. North Central Healthcare (NCHC) provides door-to-door paratransit services for people over 60 and persons with disabilities. Riders are certified through NCHC and can receive rides throughout Marathon County related to nutritional, medical, and work-related activities. Marathon County does not have Amtrak service (the only inter-city rail passenger service in the country). The closest Amtrak station is in Portage, WI, about 100 miles south of Wausau.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Bicycle facilities serve a dual purpose of being used for both recreation and utilitarian transportation. In the denser, urban communities in the County, bicycling is often used as a mode of transportation that is safe and with bike routes that are marked.

Bicycle Facility

A bicycle transportation facility is a new or improved lane, path, or shoulder for use by bicyclists and a traffic control device, shelter, or parking facility for bicycles.

The current Wausau MPO Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan recommended bicycle routes in the metro area, which were implemented in 2013. In the last few years, the MPO updated the bicycle and pedestrian plan, and communities installed new wayfinding signage for most bicycle routes in the MPO area.

In the Wausau metro area, the plan identifies strategies to assist the local communities on how to enhance the infrastructure by building bicycle and pedestrian facilities in areas that have a scientific rationale in the communities, build education and encouragement in the area on the benefits of bicycling and walking, and then how to better enforce the rules of the road with stronger law enforcement practices.

Along with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Metro area, the Metropolitan area has previously been recognized with a Bronze Level Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists. This is an award that signifies the level of involvement the communities have in making the area a better place to be active with walking and biking, along with the transportation facilities needed to give people the options to travel in the community without just using an automobile.

Outside of the Wausau area, several bicycle and pedestrian trails can be found, with a couple more in the planning stages. The Mountain Bay State Trail is an off-road trail on a former railway that runs east from the Village of Weston through Shawano County to connect with Green Bay. The Ice Age Trail is a National Scenic Trail that traverses Wisconsin with a segment running north-south along the eastern edge of Marathon County. The Wisconsin DNR Trails Network Plan is in the process of being updated with more potential trail locations to be identified in Marathon County. Paved road shoulders can also provide important accommodations for cyclists by offering a safer space separated from motor vehicle traffic. Many county and state highways in Marathon County have lighter volumes of vehicle traffic and/or paved shoulders, which are favorable for biking.

The Wausau MPO LRTP also addresses bicycling and pedestrian modes of transportation. This plan stresses that a walkable or pedestrian-friendly community is one that provides a comfortable and safe environment for pedestrians, covering the need for sidewalks and other amenities such as street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, and street furniture, in addition to walkable destinations. The plan also covers both on-street bicycle facilities and multi-use trails, saying that bicycling as a mode of transportation is likely to be most viable within more densely developed urban areas where safe routes are available to desired destinations. Planning for bicycle routes is an ongoing effort, and the long-term goal is to provide bicycle route connections throughout the County.

Some of the schools in the County have also promoted biking and walking for children. One program utilized has been the Safe Routes to School program. This program provides funding for planning and construction projects to promote and enhance biking and walking facilities.

Pedestrian issues are often a low priority due to vehicles being the primary mode of transportation for much of the public. However, in many areas, pedestrian commuters are higher than transit or bicycle commuters. Many vulnerable population groups, such as children and the elderly, are often pedestrian commuters, and thus pedestrian safety is a critical issue.

Little data from countywide is available on pedestrian travel. However, Wausau metropolitan area data suggest that pedestrian commuting in some areas of the City of Wausau is higher. The percentage of people who walk to work is generally a function of land use. Walking is a much more common mode of transportation in older traditional neighborhoods, where residential and employment locations may be close to each other, densities are higher, and sidewalks and streets are typically laid out in a grid pattern.

Airports

Marathon County is home to two public-use airports: Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) in Mosinee and Wausau Downtown Municipal Airport (AUW) in Wausau. Additionally, the county has several small private landing strips.

Central Wisconsin Airport

Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) is a Primary Non-Hub commercial service airport and one of only eight airports in Wisconsin that offer year-round scheduled commercial air service. The airport is an economic development asset for the entire county. The airport features two large concrete runways designed to accommodate aircraft up to and including Design Group C-III.

- Primary Runway (RWY 8/26): 7,723 feet long, oriented east-west.
- Secondary Runway (RWY 17/35): 6,501 feet long, oriented north south.
- Both runways are in excellent condition, equipped with precision and non-precision approaches, and fully illuminated with energy-efficient LED runway and taxiway lighting.

CWA operates 24/7, with air traffic control services provided by a non-federal control tower from 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM daily.

The airport is served by American Airlines and Delta Air Lines, offering daily commercial flights, as well as Sun Country Airlines, which operates unscheduled charter services. United Airlines is also



Central Wisconsin Airport

restoring daily service in 2026. CWA's modern passenger terminal, which opened in 2016, features four gates and offers a seamless travel experience. General aviation and commercial aircraft services are provided by Ovation, a full-service Fixed Base Operator (FBO) that offers aircraft maintenance, flight training, and charter services. CWA is strategically located with direct access to Interstate 39, making it a key transportation hub for travelers from Central and Northern Wisconsin.

CWA is now implementing its 2023 Terminal Area Master Plan, which outlines future General Aviation, airport rescue & firefighting (ARFF) facilities, and snow removal equipment storage facility enhancements. Key upcoming projects include:

- Construction of a large general aviation transient hangar.
- Development of a new Fixed Base Operator (FBO) General Aviation Terminal.

Marathon County is also providing short-term financial resources to a new carrier at the airport. This is a joint effort with Portage County.

Wausau Downtown Airport

The Wausau Downtown Airport (KAUW) is a local airport that provides general aviation services and is fully equipped to receive large corporate jets, charters, and privately owned aircraft. The airport is located in the City of Wausau, along the southern boundary shared with the City of Schofield. US Business 51/Grand Avenue is the primary access route to the airport. The airport is located along the Wisconsin River and occupies a substantial amount of riverfront property. The airport's location to the river provides the Wausau Seaplane Base, which adjoins the Wausau Downtown Airport.

The Wausau Downtown Airport provides general aviation services and is fully equipped to receive large corporate jets, charters, and privately owned aircraft. The airport's two paved runways and instrument approaches make it a viable facility even when weather conditions are marginal. Air charter, flight instruction, aircraft rental, scenic rides, as well as aviation line services such as refueling, transportation, lodging, and catering are some of the services available. The airport provides convenient access in and out of the City of Wausau for many area businesses.

Freight Facilities and Services

Rail Facilities and Service

Shipping freight long distance, especially for bulk commodities such as coal and grain, is most efficient and cost-effective by rail. Railroads are also efficient for moving finished goods due to multimodal shipping and the containerization of freight. Shipping via rail helps to reduce traffic and wear on highways by diverting truck traffic.

Marathon County has 65 miles of active rail lines. The primary rail operators in Marathon County are Canadian National (CN) railroad and Fox Valley & Lake Superior Rail System (FOXY). The only active rail line through the Wausau Metropolitan Area runs along the Wisconsin River and I-39/USH 51 corridor through Marathon County. The tracks are owned and operated by the FOXY railroad. This line also connects to Mosinee, where a rail yard serves the Mosinee Paper Mill.

FOXY indicates they have lines running along a north-south corridor to Spencer, where it diverts north through Unity, Colby, Abbotsford, and terminates in Medford. Marathon County does not have an active rail line running east and west.

Trucking Service and Facilities

Truck freight services are essential to the local and regional movement of goods. Most finished consumer goods arrive by truck, and trucking is very cost-effective for shorter distance shipping. Good truck access to commercial activity centers is necessary for the distribution of goods.

Recommended truck routes are marked in some areas throughout the County, such as the City of Wausau. While trucks cannot be prohibited from state-funded roads, truck routes direct truckers to their destinations on the most appropriate roads in order to minimize truck noise, safety concerns in residential areas, and reduce wear on roads that are not designed for heavy vehicle traffic. State and County highways provide a high LOS throughout most of the County. Still, there may be some instances due to weight limits, particularly on bridges, or at times of spring thaw, where trucks are prohibited. Large trucks on local roads are a concern in some communities because of the road damage created and the resulting need for maintenance.

The Marathon County Highway Department has a policy that defines overweight and oversized vehicles, requiring permits for these vehicles. This policy is in place to ensure the safety of the traveling public and minimize potential damage to County Highways and other infrastructure. The maximum axle weight permitted may not exceed 20,000 pounds.

The County and local communities, specifically in the metro area, need to continuously monitor how and where freight by trucks is being moved. Nationally, the focus of freight hauling is on the concept of the “last mile”. This refers to the proximity of the trucking facilities and their final destinations of the freight being hauled to the freeway system. The costs associated with trucking and the on-demand response from consumers for their goods are making freight haulers evaluate where facilities are located. In the metro area, most industrial parks and trucking transfer stations are located within that “last mile” from the freeways to give them easier and quicker access to their destinations. This gives them an advantage over others that may be located farther from the freeways and must be concerned with traffic congestion and problems with the transferability of their goods in a denser urban area.

Utilities

Public utilities in Marathon County are mostly limited to areas within incorporated municipalities. Residents and businesses in rural, unincorporated townships rely on private utilities, including individual on-site septic treatment systems and private wells. Extension of public utilities into rural, unincorporated townships is generally only done in conjunction with annexation of the served area into an adjacent incorporated municipality.

Marathon County does not get directly involved in municipal sewer and water services, although the County does coordinate planning for the Wausau Urban Sewer Service Area. The Conservation, Planning & Zoning Department also reviews and issues permits for private sewage systems. The WDNR administers the State code regarding private wells. While the County does not provide or regulate the development of storm water management facilities, water quality and soil erosion are managed at the county level through implementation of the Marathon County Land and Water Resources Management Plan, which was updated most recently in 2021.

Sanitary Sewer Utilities

Public sanitary sewer services in most incorporated areas of Marathon County handle sanitary waste disposal. A system of pipes transports sewage from residences and businesses to treatment facilities. In rural areas, most sewage is dealt with on-site through private septic systems.

Municipal Sanitary Sewer Service

Sewer service areas define boundaries where public sewer service may be available, which shows municipal utilities. In order to accommodate future growth, sewer service area boundaries often incorporate areas not currently served by public sewer. Areas currently served by municipal sewer systems are typically incorporated and may require annexation into an incorporated municipality before extension of utilities.

Sewer service area planning helps communities anticipate future needs for wastewater treatment and keep water safe for drinking, recreation, and diverse aquatic life. The Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service area includes most of the cities of Mosinee, Schofield, and Wausau, the villages of Kronenwetter, Maine, Rothschild, Rib Mountain, and Weston, and the Towns of Ringle, Stettin, Texas, Wausau, and Weston. Most other villages in Marathon County have their own municipal sewer service. In 2025, Wausau Water Works provided water and sewerage services to approximately 16,000 homes and businesses and maintained over 250 miles of water and sewer mains in the Wausau and Schofield areas. The Rib Mountain Metropolitan Sewerage District, located in the Village of Rib Mountain, treats wastewater from the Villages of Kronenwetter, Rothschild, Weston, and the Rib Mountain Sanitary District.

WisDNR designated the Marathon County Planning Department as the Sewer Service Area (SSA) Planning Agency for the Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Area in 1978. This designation requires an update to the Sewer Service Plan every five (5) years as per Administrative Code NR 121, based on Federal EPA regulation.

Most of the incorporated areas of Marathon County provide public sanitary sewer service and include the following units of government:

- Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Area (includes the cities of Wausau, Mosinee, and Schofield, the villages of Rothschild, as well as portions of Weston, Kronenwetter, and Rib Mountain, and towns of Stettin and Weston).
- Village of Athens
- Village of Birnamwood
- Village of Maine

- Village of Edgar
- Village of Fenwood
- Village of Hatley
- Village of Marathon City
- Village of Spencer
- Village of Stratford
- Unincorporated Town of Milan (located in the Town of Johnson), and
- Unincorporated Town of Rozellville (located in the Town of Day)

Wastewater Management Facilities Planning

Water quality planning requirements are specified in Sections 205(j), 208, and 303 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). Municipal waste treatment is among the nine elements to be included or referenced as part of the CWA elements - 40CFR130.6(c)(3).

From a historical perspective, one of the objectives of Section 208 of the CWA was to establish integrated and coordinated facility planning for wastewater management. In order to accomplish this objective in urban areas where competition for service areas was expected to be a concern, the CWA called for the designation of area-wide planning agencies to assist in the resolution of such conflicts as they may arise. This is important as two major wastewater treatment facilities are located within the Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Area. The DMA designation process prevents two separate treatment facilities and/or management agencies from planning for the same area. This is important because cost/benefit and feasibility analysis are based on the projected service demand, and the sizing of sewer lines and wastewater treatment plants has to reflect existing and projected populations. If POTWs compete for the same customers, the duplication of service would be cost-prohibitive, could result in plant operation problems, system design, planning, and jurisdictional authority conflicts.

The owners/operators of Publicly-Owned Wastewater Treatment Works (POTWs) were designated to have the authority for sewer-related planning in clearly demarcated boundaries. These boundaries were commonly referred to as 201 boundaries (after Section 201 of the CWA) and are now known as FPAs.

Wastewater management facilities planning areas identify local units of government to be designated as management agencies (DMA) under Section 208 of the Federal CWA for wastewater management planning. It identifies wastewater management options and prescriptions within each facility's planning area that were developed by the DMA. These options represent current judgements about where sewers will be extended and where areas will remain unsewered over the course of the next twenty years. However, planning for future wastewater treatment needs is an inexact science. Assumptions are made relative to the size and extent of population growth.

In the Wausau metro area and other population centers around Marathon County, wastewater treatment facilities appear to be in good repair, with adequate capacity to serve expected development within their respective areas. Local wastewater collection systems (pipe network and

lift stations) are also generally in good condition. Sewer pipes and mains are typically replaced and upgraded in conjunction with road reconstruction or in response to known problems. Most local communities, as a matter of policy, do not extend sewer service without annexation.

Publicly owned wastewater treatment facilities are required to treat waste in accordance with their respective NPDES permit limits. In addition, as the DNR completes the TMDL reports throughout the state, publicly-owned wastewater treatment facilities may be required to upgrade their treatment works based on the results of the TMDL. The TMDL sets the amount of pollutant loading that can be assimilated by a water body without a violation of water quality standards and includes wasteload allocations for point sources for nonpoint sources, and a margin of safety.

Private On-site Wastewater Treatment Systems

Private On-site Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS) for sewage disposal are found primarily in the unincorporated areas of Marathon County. These systems include a septic tank or aerobic treatment tank and some type of absorption field alone or in combination with passive or active treatment components or holding tanks. Areas determined to be unsuitable for septic systems, for reasons such as high bedrock or high-water tables, are not conducive to the installation of conventional, in-ground absorption fields and must use other methods.

Regulation of POWTS

Regulations for POWTS in Marathon County are found in Chapter 15 of the County General Code of Ordinances. All premises intended for human occupancy and not served by a public sewer are required to have a private sewage system. The WDNR reviews septic treatment and dispersal systems that handle over 12,000 gallons per day.

Permit Requirements

Permits for private sewage systems are issued by CPZ. Soil and site evaluations are required to determine if the proposed septic system is suitable for the specific property and location before a permit is issued. Periodic inspection and maintenance of septic systems is required by the State.

Stormwater Management

Marathon County, Wisconsin, is required to obtain a Wisconsin Stormwater Department of Natural Resources Permit to address stormwater issues for purposes of the Wisconsin River Basin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) compliance. In addition, the County is a United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)/Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permitted area. The County is considered a significant contributor under Wisconsin Administrative Code (WAC) NR 216. As a Phase 2 municipality and significant contributor to stormwater runoff in the Wisconsin River Basin, the County must comply with the Wisconsin River Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements. This includes implementing a stormwater management program that addresses public education, community involvement, illicit discharge detection, construction and post-construction runoff control, pollution prevention, water quality management, mapping of the storm sewer system, and annual reporting.

Marathon County's stormwater plan identifies measures to improve the quality of NPS stormwater runoff discharging to the Wisconsin River as well as the Eau Claire River, Cedar Creek, Bull Junior Creek, Lake Wausau, and other County natural resources while being consistent with the requirements of the permit.

Water Utilities

Most residents and businesses in incorporated or urban areas of Marathon County get water service through public water systems, while those in rural areas obtain water through private wells. Groundwater is the primary source of water in Marathon County. The availability of water varies across the County depending on the local geology. Generally, the area surrounding the Wisconsin River Valley has access to an ample water supply from alluvial aquifers along the Wisconsin and Rib Rivers. Groundwater supply is most limited or difficult to access in parts of the County where dense bedrock is close to the surface.

Municipal Water Service

Most incorporated areas of Marathon County provide public water service to properties within their jurisdictional boundaries. Most of the communities that provide public water service treat their water supply. Iron and manganese are the most commonly treated elements in water in the Wisconsin River Valley. Communities' further west, including the villages of Athens and Stratford, add chlorine and fluoride, and sometimes a caustic soda to raise the water pH level.



Water tower in Weston

The EPA and WDNR set standards and test drinking water for municipal water systems. Annual Consumer Confidence Reports are published by municipal water utilities, informing the public of the results of water tests. If any contaminants exceed the standards, the public is immediately notified.

Water Service Areas

Incorporated communities provide public water service within their boundaries and occasionally slightly beyond. Multiple wells are needed to meet the demand for water in most communities, and existing wells sufficiently meet current needs. Groundwater is plentiful beneath most of Marathon County, although in some areas it is deeper than others; see the Depth of Groundwater map in Chapter 6. Some communities with low water flows, such as the Village of Athens, discourage land uses that require high water use from developing there.

Wellhead Protection

Wellhead protection is a preventative program designed to protect public water supply wells. The goal of a wellhead protection plan is for communities to delineate and protect the land area that

contributes water to their wells in order to prevent contamination of their water supply wells. A wellhead protection ordinance is an adopted zoning ordinance that institutes land use regulations and restrictions around wellheads. In 2025, of the 16 municipal water systems in Marathon County, all had a wellhead protection ordinance, and 14 had a wellhead protection plan.

Storage and Distribution Facilities

Water storage facilities include water towers, ground storage reservoirs, and clear wells. Local municipalities report storage facilities in good condition and of adequate quantity to meet present and expected future needs.

Water distribution facilities include networks of mains and pipes to transport water. Municipalities report networks to be in good working condition. When roads are reconstructed, the network of water distribution pipes is replaced, updated, or repaired as needed.

Private Water Wells

Private wells are the primary water source for most residents and businesses located in the towns of Marathon County. The DNR database has almost 28,000 unique well numbers registered in Marathon County for various uses, including human consumption and agricultural activities such as crop irrigation and livestock watering. More information about groundwater and well water quality can be found in Chapter 6, Water Quality and Quantity.

Energy Utilities

Access to energy is essential to support the needs of residents as well as those of commerce and industry. Demand for electricity and natural gas services continues to rise as population and job growth occur. Having a reliable and relatively inexpensive supply of energy is critical to the state and regional economy.

Electrical Power

Most electricity in Wisconsin is produced by coal-fired and nuclear-powered generating plants, although several newer power plants are fueled by natural gas. Other technologies, such as wind power, bio-fuels, fuel cells, etc., are becoming more competitive and are also considered part of the State's long-term strategy to ensure sufficient power generation.

The two key components of electrical power supply are generating capacity and distribution capacity. Power can be generated locally or purchased from generating plants around Wisconsin and in other nearby states. The ability to import power is important to protect against power interruptions, particularly during peak demand periods.

Wisconsin Public Service Corporation (WPS) is the primary supplier of electric power in Marathon County. WPS is based in Green Bay, WI, and serves nearly the entire County. WPS currently operates four power plants (Weston 1, 2, 3, and 4), all located in the villages of Kronenwetter and Rothschild. These plants provide up to 767 megawatts of coal-fired capacity. Weston 1 was retired in 2023. Weston 4, which began operating in 2008, uses clean coal technology and is one of the cleanest

power plants of its kind in the country. Some areas in the County are served by other providers. In 2025, the other providers included Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative (southeast portion of the county), Xcel Energy (northwest portion of the County, Marshfield Utilities, Taylor Electric, Clark Electric, and Alliant Energy (eastern portion of the County).

The American Transmission Company (ATC) maintains a 220-mile electric transmission line, the Arrowhead-Weston Transmission Line, which connects the Village of Weston and Duluth, Minnesota. The AWT is marked on **Map 8-2**.

Natural Gas

Wisconsin Public Service is the County's largest supplier of natural gas, serving over 30,000 customers. In areas without access to municipal gas lines, liquid propane and heating oil are the primary means of natural gas. The ANR Pipeline Company, marked on Map 8-2, provides interstate pipeline service.

Renewable Energy

Renewable energy sources can play a role in supporting economic growth, reducing environmental impacts, and enhancing energy security. Marathon County's power generation is not predominantly driven by renewable energy sources; however, there is a growing interest in renewable natural gas, solar, and wind energy production in the county. In recent years, there have been proposed projects to build wind farms in several rural towns. While some towns have voiced their opposition to certain wind farm projects, state law prohibits local governments from placing restrictions on wind and solar unless those restrictions protect health and safety, do not significantly increase project costs, or allow for an alternate system with roughly the same cost and efficiency.

Telecommunication Facilities and Services

Affordable, accessible, high speed internet service is vital to residents and businesses in Marathon County. Residents utilize high speed internet for communication, education, telemedicine, entertainment, and home businesses, among other uses. Businesses require high speed internet to be competitive in a global economy. Several portions of the county still lack adequate coverage to meet these needs, and rural broadband presents a unique challenge, as the cost of running infrastructure to these locations is high.

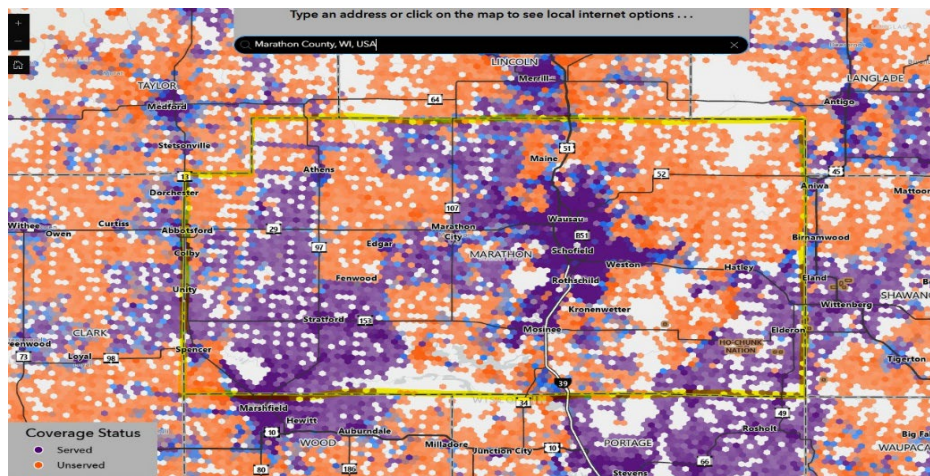
Broadband coverage is available in both fixed and mobile types. Fixed broadband includes all wireline and fixed wireless technologies. In Marathon County, fixed broadband at speeds greater than 100 Mbps can be found in and near most incorporated municipalities. Mobile broadband service is typically used via smartphones. Mobile broadband coverage in Marathon County has slower download speeds than fixed, with most of the County at speeds of 5 megabits per second (Mbps) to 50 Mbps.

Expansion of broadband services often focuses on areas considered to be unserved or underserved. Unserved and underserved areas are defined by people whose service is less than 100 Mbps. As of

early 2026, over 7,500 addresses in Marathon County fall into the category of unserved or underserved. Marathon County has been working to expand internet access since 2009. Since then, Marathon County conducted a broadband study to identify needs and established the Broadband Task Force to facilitate broadband expansion in our county. The goal is to ensure every address in Marathon County has access to reliable and affordable internet. In 2020, Marathon County began working with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to seek state and federal funding to expand internet service in the County. Over the last few years, Marathon County has applied for, or assisted in the application of, numerous grants at the state and federal levels, and the County has provided matching funds and loans to several projects via capital improvement or American Rescue Act Plan funds.

Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act of 2021, the federal government committed over \$1 billion to the state of Wisconsin to assist ISPs in expanding services to unserved and underserved areas. The Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program provides grants to ISPs to subsidize the cost of building the broadband infrastructure. Marathon County endorsed multiple ISP providers to apply for grants to expand access in the County. The endorsements for BEAD grants did not include any matching funds or loans. In 2025, BEAD was revised at the federal level. In December 2025, \$696,592,288 BEAD grants were awarded in Wisconsin, with \$36,393,729 awarded to five ISPs to provide high speed internet to 7,788 homes and businesses in Marathon County. The BEAD-funded projects are to be completed by 2030.

Figure 8-4. Served and Unserved Coverage Status in Marathon County. Current information on Marathon County Broadband Expansion Efforts and Speed Test Results can be found on the Marathon County Broadband High Speed Internet page.



Source: Wisconsin Public Service Commission, Updated June 3, 2025, to show data as of December 31, 2024

Solid Waste Management

The Marathon County Solid Waste Department oversees the collection of solid waste and recycling services in the County. These services include coordinating collection with private haulers and municipalities, waste reduction programming, and running the County landfill in the Town of Ringle. Residents and businesses can bring waste materials to the landfill directly for a small fee. Marathon County has agreements with Portage and Shawano Counties allowing them to dispose of solid waste in the Ringle landfill.

Solid Waste

Municipal solid waste, more commonly known as trash or garbage, consists of everyday items we use and then throw away, such as product packaging, furniture, clothing, food scraps, newspapers, and appliances. This material comes from our homes, schools, hospitals, and businesses.

Waste collection in Marathon County is primarily contracted through private waste management service providers. Most cities and villages, as well as some towns, contract with a private waste hauler for curbside pick-up. This service is paid for by residents through a fee included with their tax or water bill.

The Solid Waste Department also has several programs tailored to K-12 schools. Waste reduction audits and reviews help schools reduce costs and get efficient services. Educational tours of the landfill and recycling process teach students how waste and recyclable materials are handled. Educational presentations teach students about waste reduction, landfills, recycling, composting, and the life cycle of garbage. Finally, the landfill property has many trails open to the public for research and hiking.

The Marathon County Landfill is on 575 acres of county land in the Town of Ringle. The landfill receives approximately 150 vehicles every day, delivering about 800 tons of waste. The landfill is separated into several different areas. Area A opened in 1980 and was closed in 1993 upon reaching capacity with 2.2 million cubic yards of waste. Area B, an area of 31.5 acres with a capacity of 3.35 million cubic yards, closed in 2024. Bluebird Ridge is the current active landfill area. The area is 30 acres, contains 8 million tons of waste capacity and has an expected lifespan of 15 years.

The waste haulers currently working with the Solid Waste Department include B&B Containers, LLC; Evergreen Disposal; GLF Environmental; Harter's Fox Valley Disposal; IDEAL Dumpster Service, LLC; Kittels Kans Dumpster Rental; Tito's Recycling Site, Inc.; The Trash Out Crew; Trash Titans; and Waste Management, Inc. In many communities around Marathon County, haulers use dual collection trucks to pick up trash and recycling at the same time.

Dealing with food and yard waste in a more sustainable manner is a waste issue that needs more attention. Food and yard materials make up approximately 25 to 30 percent of solid waste across the United States. Reducing food waste will require a mix of education, composting, and other tools. Residents and businesses need to be aware of the problem and alternatives to throwing away food; for example, excess food can be donated to food banks and shelters. Food scraps and yard waste

can be composted to break down food into fertilizer. Digester operations turn food and yard waste into energy and can be an option for businesses and other large organizations.

Renewable Natural Gas Plant

The Marathon County Solid Waste Facility is currently in the process of developing an RNG plant to convert landfill gas into energy. Renewable natural gas (RNG), or biomethane, refers to biogas upgraded to a quality similar to fossil natural gas. The biogas used to produce RNG comes from a variety of sources, including municipal solid waste landfills and anaerobic digester plants at water resource recovery facilities (wastewater treatment plants), livestock farms, food production facilities, and organic waste management operations. As a substitute for natural gas, RNG can be used for many uses, such as vehicle fuel, to generate electricity, or as a bio-product feedstock. There are almost two dozen RNG landfill and agriculture (i.e., agricultural digester) projects in Wisconsin.

Recycling

Recycling throughout the County is contracted by residents or municipalities with private companies. Town Halls act as recycling pick-up locations in some rural areas without curbside pickup. Information on recycling for specific types of materials can be found on the Marathon County Solid Waste Department website. The Solid Waste Department recycling accepts co-mingle recycling, cardboard, electronics, appliances, hazardous waste, tires, metal, used motor oil, car batteries, shingles, and other miscellaneous materials.

Infrastructure Issues

Sustainable Transportation System – Maintaining the transportation system in a fiscally sustainable manner is an ongoing issue for the County. Highway facilities and equipment, in most cases, are being used beyond their recommended service life. The Marathon County 2022 Highway System Study provides guidance on best practices and timing of necessary maintenance to facilitate a sustainable highway system. Funding for new facilities, highway equipment, and ongoing maintenance costs is needed. Finding and maintaining a consistent and adequate source of funding for various transportation projects is a continual challenge. It is important to note that the County is only responsible for maintenance on roads under its jurisdiction. Reductions in funding at the state and federal levels and tight County budgets add to the challenge of keeping road maintenance at acceptable levels. Seasonal weight limits can also present challenges by temporarily restricting heavy vehicle traffic to protect roadways, which can disrupt transportation schedules and limit access for certain industries.

Transit – Historically, communities outside the metro-area have expressed some interest in transit and/or paratransit services. The cost-effectiveness of providing such services remains a challenge. To be cost-effective, transit must serve enough people to sufficiently reduce the costs per passenger. That is usually difficult in suburban and non-urban areas, given the lower densities and reduced potential for attracting enough transit riders. Opportunities may exist to provide semi-regular and/or demand-response transit services between towns and villages in the county to the Wausau area;

however, recent discussions with surrounding communities have indicated this is not a funding priority due to anticipated low demand for fixed-route, regular transit services. Further, most routes considered focus on main arterials for cost efficiency, but some surrounding communities desire more neighborhood-focused services. On-demand and microtransit service and options to expand services to seniors outside of Metro Ride’s service area remain a need that surrounding communities are interested in, but again, finding funding to pilot this type of service remains a challenge.

Non-Motorized Transportation Facilities – With the increases in bicycling for both recreation and transportation, with the continual need for pedestrian facilities, the area has seen an increase in the demand for additional facilities and services related to bicycles and pedestrians. The local communities are being asked to provide opportunities to walk and bike that fit all ability levels and all age groups. These come in the forms of sidewalks and crosswalks but also bike lanes and bike paths that connect destinations. People are looking for ways to stay more active in their older years and for their health benefits, as well as younger people are looking for options to move about the community without having to rely on an automobile. The challenges of non-motorized transportation are numerous in developing a system that will benefit all and be accepted by all.

Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) – The vitality of the CWA is essential to the continued economic competitiveness of Marathon County. Airports of similar size nationwide are facing challenges in remaining strong, and regional pilot and aircraft shortages increase competition among smaller airports to attract and retain air services. Some communities are offering revenue guarantees to maintain these services. The CWA provides critical connectivity to larger markets, businesses, and residents throughout Marathon County. For businesses to develop or remain in the area, the CWA must continue to function as a reliable provider of air transportation. As a key link to global markets, maintaining this connection is vital to supporting business growth, retention, and the overall economic competitiveness of Marathon County and central Wisconsin.

Management and Disposal of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) –Contaminant level standards and continued research will play a role in both how the Solid Waste Department disposes of leachate from the landfill and the growing need from municipalities and customers to identify means to dispose of PFAS materials. The cost to treat PFAS remains substantial, often requiring millions of dollars of upfront investment in specialized systems, and additional ongoing large operational costs.

Adequate Internet Coverage – The COVID pandemic further highlighted the need for adequate internet accessibility across the County. Access is strong in the more urbanized areas of the County but is still lagging in the rural areas. It remains important to coordinate and partner with ISPs, such as through agreements and conduit bonding, to be ready to seek and accept state and federal funding opportunities as they are made available.

Infrastructure Goals and Objectives

Transportation Goal: The transportation infrastructure in Marathon County is maintained to the highest standard practicable to allow safe and efficient movement of people, goods, and services in and through the County.

Objectives:

1. Support a safe, efficient, fiscally sustainable multimodal transportation system.
2. Improve access management on major roadways.

Utilities Goal: The utilities infrastructure in Marathon County is maintained to the highest standard practicable to support the residents and businesses of the County.

Objectives:

1. Ensure compliance with state codes for new and replacement of private on-site wastewater treatment systems.
2. Support efforts to provide adequate energy, telecommunications services, and high-speed internet access throughout the County.
3. Provide cost-efficient solid waste management and leadership related to waste management in the region.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Nine

Land Use



Marathon County is located in north central Wisconsin, and is surrounded by the Counties of Clark, Lincoln, Langlade, Shawano, Portage, Taylor, and Wood. In all, the County encompasses over one million acres, which makes it the largest county in Wisconsin based on land mass.

The area was settled in the mid-nineteenth century to take advantage of its abundant pine forests. The Wisconsin River, which bisects the County, provided the waterpower necessary to haul and process the lumber. As the forests declined, Marathon County became a center for agriculture, specifically dairy production, and remains the number one ranking dairy-producing county in Wisconsin.

Today, land use patterns in the County still reflect the original economic base, with farmland, woodland, and water-related resources covering much of the area. While most urban-type development continues to concentrate in the Wisconsin River valley, changes in the agricultural economy and growing pressure for widespread residential development are slowly altering the land use pattern in rural areas across the County.

Previous Plans and Studies

Comprehensive Plan - 2016

The previous County Plan focused on the themes of Healthiest, Safest, & Most Prosperous and became the foundation for the County's Strategic Plan. The thirteen-chapter document covered the required elements outlined in state statute 66.1001, and each chapter provided an extensive inventory of assets, identified issues, and established goals and objectives. Numerous maps were developed as part of the plan as well. The plan concluded with an extensive Implementation Action Plan. This planning effort will replace the 2016 Plan.

Other Plans

In addition, the County has adopted numerous plans that have a bearing on land use and development. These are described in more detail under other sections of this comprehensive plan, but the major plans include:

- Marathon County Land and Water Resource Management Plan (LWRMP) - 2021
- Marathon County Farmland Preservation Plan
- Marathon County Forest 10-year Comprehensive Land Use Plan - 2021
- Marathon County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan - 2020
- 2040 Wausau Urban Area Sewer Service Plan - 2018

Beyond County plans, there are numerous local level comprehensive plans. The County Plan incorporates all of the local plans, but it is the responsibility of each community to develop its own plan. Almost all towns, cities, and villages have prepared comprehensive plans. Unfortunately, many of the town comprehensive plans are outdated. Of the 40 town plans, only fifteen are current or being updated, while the other twenty-four are over ten years old. See the Zoning & Comprehensive Plan Status Map.

It is important to note that cities and villages may include areas in adjacent towns in their plans under extra-territorial jurisdiction. Therefore, planning for land uses along jurisdictional borders requires coordination and intergovernmental cooperation.

Pattern of Development

Although it is a large county, some general characteristics differentiate various areas of Marathon County. Most of the County has rolling hills and valleys with numerous rivers and streams. Characteristics such as soils, depth of bedrock, marshland, and woodland reflect the impact of glaciers on landforms. These natural factors have had a direct impact on the type and pattern of development throughout the County.

Marathon County is crossed by two major road corridors, including I-39/USH 51, a major north-south route, and STH 29, a major east-west route. USH 51 has long been a major transportation corridor following the Wisconsin River, connecting communities in the south with the “Northwoods”. The presence of this road corridor also fostered the growth of the various urban centers along its route. The City of Wausau began at Big Bull Falls on the Wisconsin River in 1848 and was one of several sawmill settlements. The City of Mosinee grew in the 1850s at Little Bull Falls farther south, while Schofield was the site of another mill in 1851 at the point where the Eau Claire River entered the Wisconsin River south of Wausau. The villages of Brokaw (1899 and merged with the Village of Maine on October 1st, 2018, and Rothschild (1909) both developed as paper mill towns and, along with the other communities that lined the Wisconsin River, formed the commercial and industrial heart of Marathon County. Several outlying communities in the County began as saw milling sites, or as station stops, as the railroads were built through the area. Most communities became more focused on agriculture by the beginning of the twentieth century as lumbering declined.

A description of the major types of land cover that dominate the overall County landscape follows:

Metropolitan Development

The Wausau area communities along USH 51 have grown toward each other and today function as a contiguous metropolitan area. Wausau has expanded, mostly to the west into Stettin, along STH 29, and the Village of Weston has grown to the east along STH 29. Former rural communities on the edge of Wausau, such as the Village of Rib Mountain (incorporated July 11, 2023) and the Village of Weston, have rapidly urbanized during the last decade. Both communities have followed standard suburban development patterns, with major commercial and/or industrial growth. The Village of Kronenwetter continues to grow as well. Land conversion to residential use has increased at a faster rate than population growth, spurring greater metropolitan expansion.

Rural Community Development

Road improvements have made it easier for residents to live in rural areas by providing an easy commute to job centers in the Wausau metro area, such as the STH 29 upgrades. Thus, convenient access to the urban area has increased demand in many historically rural towns for scattered low-density residential development. Smaller villages in the County continue to function primarily as agricultural service centers, and many have retained viable commercial “Main Street” districts. A few, including Stratford, Spencer, and Athens, have developed industrial parks, and others retain traditional industries such as cheese factories or creameries, often integrated into the village's commercial center. However, most major industrial and commercial activities remain concentrated in communities along the USH 51 and STH 29 corridors around the Wausau metro area.

Agriculture/Cropland

Marathon County's farmers utilize over 400,000 total acres of land. The majority of cropland area is located in the western half of the County and generally coincides with the soils most suitable for sustaining agriculture. To encourage preservation of prime farmland to maintain farming, the County prepared a Farmland Preservation Plan. The purpose of this plan is to guide and manage growth and development in a manner that will preserve the rural character; protect the agricultural base and natural resources; and contribute to the County's overall goal of promoting public safety, health and prosperity within the County. This plan is the primary policy document in directing preservation of agricultural production capacity, farmland preservation, soil and water protection, and future land development while respecting private property rights and individual units of government. A major component of this plan is the designation of Agricultural Enterprise Areas (AEA). Two such areas are identified, the Heart of America's Dairyland in the western portion of the County and the Antigo Flats in the northeast corner of the County.

Open Space

Marathon County is rich in land set aside both in County and state-owned park and wildlife land. Marathon County has 18 County parks that encompass over 3,100 acres, of which Big Eau Pleine Park is the largest at 1,450 acres. County forestlands also provide a significant amount of public open space. The State of Wisconsin manages two large wildlife areas in the County. The 33,000-acre George W. Mead Wildlife Area, south of the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir along the County's southern border, is a major public open space in the towns of Green Valley and Bergen. The McMillan Marsh

Wildlife Area, in the towns of Spencer and McMillan, carves out 4,172 acres along the Little Eau Pleine River. State-owned wildlife properties, as well as Rib Mountain State Park (1,182 acres) contribute large amounts of public open space in the County.

Woodland

Marathon County was once covered in woodlands. Today, there are about 403,000 acres of wooded lands, with the larger segments concentrated in the eastern half and along the northern border of the County. An estimated one-third of County land area is forested; some is in public ownership, and some is owned by private landowners and/or companies such as paper mills. Marathon County owns about 30,000 acres of forestland, the majority of which is located in several forest units on the eastern side of the County. Other woodland areas tend to be along rivers and creeks. Much of the woodland throughout the County is in 30-40 acre tracts adjacent to individual farms. Approximately 100,000 acres of private woodlands have been set aside under the Managed Forest Law or Forest Crop Law programs administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Marshland

Another significant land cover characteristic in the County is the amount of marshland (sometimes identified as wetlands and vacant/barren land). These areas generally flank the numerous rivers and streams and broaden out in flat, low areas. Because these areas pose development constraints, they sometimes function as large natural areas essentially protected from development. Major marshland areas run along the Little Eau Pleine River (George W. Mead Wildlife Area), the McMillan Marsh, Nine-mile Creek, and along the glacial moraine that separates the southeast from the rest of Marathon County in the vicinity of the Eau Claire and Plover Rivers.



McMillan Marsh Wildlife Area

Existing Land Use

Identifying how land is used is a critical component of a Comprehensive Plan. All land is used in some manner, be it developed for residential or industrial uses, or used for passive activities such as woodlands or open lands. As such, a detailed land use analysis was completed as part of this planning effort using existing County data, airphotos, and other information. Generalized existing land use categories include: Agriculture, Commercial, Industrial, Residential, Governmental, Open

lands, Outdoor Recreation, Transportation, and Woodlands. This information was then mapped, and various calculations were made to arrive at the 2020 generalized land use.

Agriculture and woodlands are the dominant land uses by type in Marathon County, accounting for over 80 percent of the total land area. Each makes up about 40 percent of total land use. All other uses make up about 20 percent.

Overall, the amount of land developed with residential, commercial, or industrial land uses is relatively small, accounting for about six percent of the land area. Of the developed land use types, residential land uses account for the vast majority of acreage, but still only represent about 4.8 percent of the land area in the entire County. While the Wausau metropolitan area continues to expand, Marathon County remains predominantly rural in character.

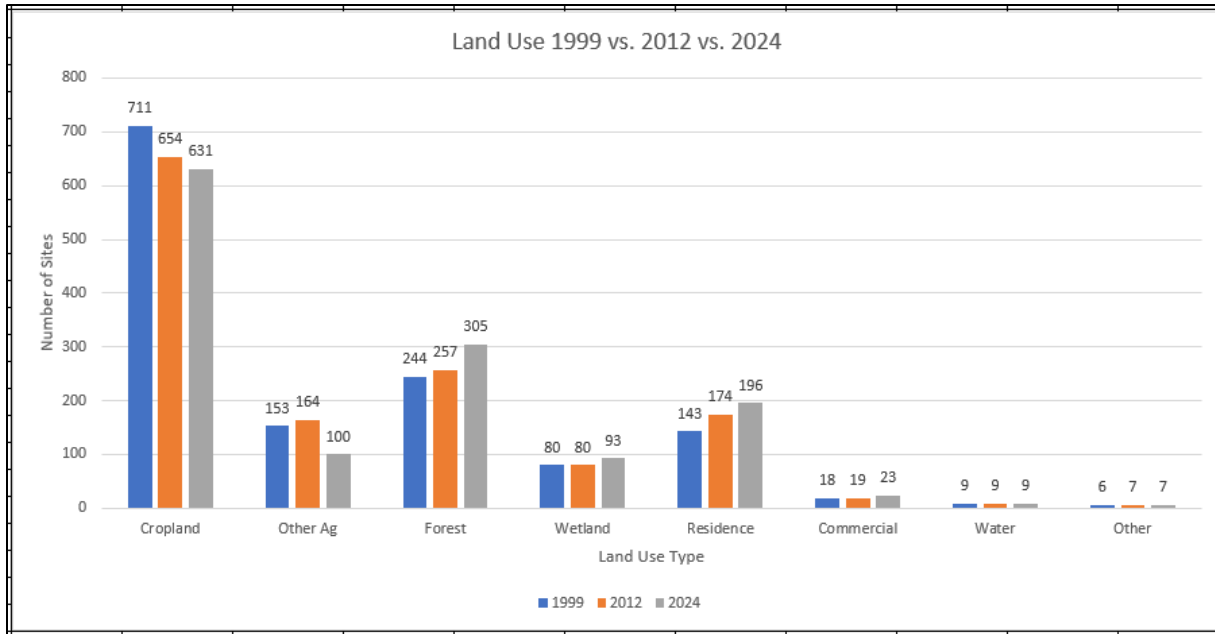
Figure 9-1: Existing Land Use 2020 (2025)

Land Use	Acres	Percent
Agriculture	409,526	40.62%
Commercial	6,080	0.60%
Governmental / Institutional	2,587	0.26%
Industrial	6,003	0.60%
Mobile Home Park	68	0.01%
Multi-Family	231	0.02%
Open Lands	64,678	6.42%
Outdoor Recreation	3,864	0.38%
Quarry	870	0.09%
Residential	48,856	4.85%
Transportation	32,803	3.25%
Utility	27	0.00%
Water	28,588	2.84%
Woodlands	403,978	40.07%
Total Acres	1,008,158	100%

Source: NCWRPC GIS

Changes in Land Use

From 1999 to 2024, there has been a decline in cropland and other agricultural uses, while forest, residential, wetland, and commercial land uses have increased. The major land use type in Marathon County remains cropland.



Source: Marathon County Conservation, Planning, and Zoning

Land Values

Between 2010 and 2024, equalized real estate property values across Marathon County have increased by over 80 percent. The State of Wisconsin increased by 88 percent over that same period. Approximately half of this growth was between 2020 and 2024. Overall, the villages of Marathon County grew the fastest as a percentage of value, followed by towns and cities. See **Figure 9-2**.

Figure 9-2: Equalized Real Estate Values by Government Type

	2010	2020	2024	Change 2010-2024	Change 2020-2024
County	\$9,550,655,600	\$12,377,596,900	\$17,264,936,400	80.8%	39.5%
Cities	\$3,191,479,700	\$ 4,184,739,600	\$5,618,024,100	76.0%	34.3%
Villages*	\$2,341,624,600	\$3,439,210,700	\$5,963,887,600	154.7%	73.4%
Towns	\$4,017,551,300	\$ 4,753,646,600	\$5,683,024,700	41.5%	19.6%
State Total	\$483,966,688,200	\$613,136,907,500	\$907,414,717,000	87.5%	48.0%

*The significant increase in 2024 is partially due to the Village of Rib Mountain and Maine Incorporating Source: WI DOA & NCWRPC

Property values are grouped into several categories by the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. Residential land represents the largest proportion of value in villages, cities, and towns, totaling over 11.6 billion dollars in the County. Commercial land has the second-highest proportion of value, and the growth rate was second to that of residential land, see **Figure 9-3**.

Figure 9-3: Equalized Real Estate Values by Category

	2010	2020	2024	Change 2010-2024	Change 2020-2024
Residential	\$6,221,435,400	\$7,919,069,400	\$11,692,886,800	87.9%	47.7%
Commercial	\$1,950,493,000	\$2,670,611,600	\$3,382,358,500	73.4%	26.7%
Manufacturing	\$398,810,600	\$557,157,100	\$850,205,200	113.2%	52.6%
Agricultural	\$70,038,400	\$71,356,900	\$88,272,600	26.0%	23.7%
Undeveloped	\$70,494,900	\$72,926,900	\$91,223,600	29.4%	25.1%
Ag Forest	\$150,001,300	\$169,767,500	\$213,605,300	42.4%	25.8%
Forest	\$311,826,400	\$295,744,000	\$360,560,500	15.6%	21.9%
Other	\$377,555,600	\$348,355,800	\$575,418,800	52.4%	65.2%
County Total	\$9,550,655,600	\$12,377,596,900	\$17,264,936,400	80.8%	39.5%

Source: WI Department of Revenue & NCWRP

Land Demand

Over the next twenty years, there will be changes across the County as the population, households, and employment opportunities increase. Every new housing unit and every new business location will use land. Much of that land is currently in use for agriculture or forestry. Land demand is based on the population, household, and employment projections. Based on existing local comprehensive plans, it appears there is more than sufficient acreage throughout the County to meet estimated demand for new residential, commercial, and industrial development. See individual local comprehensive plans for more detailed information and locations identified for various types of development.

Future Land Use

Each town, village, and city prepares its own comprehensive plan. Part of those local efforts is the creation of a future land use map. These maps, when joined together, create the County’s Future Land Use. Note that some of these local plans have recently been updated, while others are dated. Over the summer of 2025, towns were provided the opportunity to review and update their future land use maps and make changes. The County Future Land Use Map represents the preferred long-term land uses.

Urbanization

Urbanization is a population shift from rural to urban areas and the ways in which society adapts to that change.

A major planning effort impacting land use is the County Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP). When the most current FPP was adopted, that plan became part of the County Comprehensive Plan. The FPP identified farmland preservation areas in each town and also established agricultural enterprise areas. Both of these have impacts on future development. See the FPP for more information.

Current Land Use Regulations

Zoning

The current County zoning code identifies 13 zoning classifications and three overlay zoning districts. For each zoning classification, the code identifies permitted uses, conditional uses, and height, yard, and area requirements. The zoning code can be found in Chapter 17 of the Marathon County Code. Local communities in Marathon County may adopt their own zoning code, adopt the County zoning code, or choose to have no zoning. Incorporated municipalities adopt and enforce their own zoning regulations. Currently, there are 18 towns that have adopted County Zoning. Following the completion of the Comprehensive Plan, the County will be preparing a comprehensive update of the zoning ordinance. At that time, towns can decide to stay with County Zoning or consider other options.

The County Board has the authority to review and approve or deny zoning requests in those unincorporated towns that adopt County zoning. The County Board takes the local town's recommendations into account when it takes final action. While the County Board generally follows the recommendations of the local Town Board, they are not required to concur with the town's recommendations. However, towns have veto authority if the County Board approves a zoning amendment over the town's recommendation to deny. On the other hand, the County Board can deny a request that a town recommends for approval, in which case the town has no recourse and the County Board's decision is final.

In towns with local zoning, the local officials adopt, administer, oversee, and ultimately enforce the town zoning code. As in towns with County zoning, the County Board has review authority over zoning ordinance amendments (map and text); however, the County Board cannot approve an amendment if the town recommends denial. But the County Board can deny an amendment that the town recommended for approval. In towns with County zoning, decisions regarding variances, conditional use permits, and the like are made by the County Board of Adjustments. In towns with local zoning, a local board of adjustment has authority over such requests.

In unincorporated towns without any zoning, the County does not have any zoning review authority but is involved in land development through its role in land division/plat review, septic systems, shoreland, and floodplain regulations. While the County has jurisdiction over land division, septic systems, shoreland, and Floodplain regulations in all unincorporated areas, incorporated municipalities are responsible for adopting and enforcing subdivision, shoreland, and floodplain regulations within their jurisdiction.

Since 2016, several significant amendments have been made to the zoning code to better address local needs while remaining consistent with state law. A metallic mining section was added in response to the 2017 Wisconsin Act 134, which reopened the potential for metallic mining in the state. This legislation directly impacts areas such as the Reef deposit in Marathon County, which may now be subject to future mining proposals.

The zoning code was also updated to reflect state requirements for wind and solar energy systems. Specifically, the ordinance was revised to comply with Wis. Stat. 66.0401, which limits the ability of local governments to impose restrictions more stringent than those established by the Public Service Commission (PSC), except where necessary to protect public health and safety, prevent significant cost increases, or provide feasible alternatives. In addition, the ordinance now incorporates the PSC's Chapter PSC 128 (Wind Energy Systems) siting rules, created under 2009 Act 40, which establish statewide standards for setbacks, noise, decommissioning, and review timelines for municipal permitting.

A wetland boundary policy was also adopted to safeguard critical environmental resources while providing clear guidance to property owners. This policy ensures wetlands are properly identified and protected under state wetland regulations, preventing disturbance without the appropriate permits and balancing environmental stewardship with property rights.

In addition to these major revisions, numerous smaller edits were made throughout the zoning code to clarify language, correct cross-references, simplify processes, and ensure the ordinance is better tailored to the unique character and needs of Marathon County's towns.

Under current law, a town that has previously opted into County zoning may withdraw from County zoning only when the county undertakes a comprehensive revision to the county zoning ordinance. Wisconsin Act 264 (2023) creates a new alternative process by which a town may withdraw from county zoning. Via the Act 264 process, a town board adopts a resolution stating its intent to begin the process. Then, between two and three years later, the town board must adopt a second resolution that informs the County of the town's withdrawal from county zoning. Before adopting that second resolution, the act requires a town to have enacted a town zoning ordinance, adopted a comprehensive plan, and officially adopted a zoning map. A town may then enact an ordinance to withdraw from county zoning.

Shoreland and Floodplain Zoning

Shoreland, shoreland-wetlands, and floodplain regulations are applicable in all geographic areas of the County. Wisconsin law mandates that counties adopt and administer a zoning ordinance that regulates land use in shoreland, shoreland-wetland, and floodplain areas for the entire area of the County outside of villages and cities. This ordinance supersedes any town ordinance, unless a town ordinance is more restrictive. The shoreland, shoreland-wetlands area covered under this zoning is the area that lies: 1,000 feet from a lake, pond, or flowage; and 300 feet from a river or stream, or to the landward side of



the floodplain, whichever distance is greater. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) designates floodplain areas to support the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and manage flood risks effectively. Most of the development regulations are aimed at establishing buffers and minimizing runoff to protect water quality. While the County enforces shoreland and floodplain regulations within Marathon County, the WDNR maintains oversight responsibilities to ensure compliance with State Statutes.

Incorporated villages and cities are required to adopt and enforce their own shoreland zoning covering the same defined shoreland/ wetland and floodplain areas described above.

Nonmetallic Mining Reclamation Regulations

Marathon County adopted a Nonmetallic Mining Ordinance in 1989. The ordinance was adopted in response to the approximately 400 operating or abandoned excavations of sand, gravel, decomposed granite, and stone. The ordinance requires restoration of the site to a purposeful and acceptable landscape appearance and use. Mining activities at active mining sites are administered through the collaboration of DNR and County regulations to prevent sediment delivery to surface waters and to protect groundwater.

The County has a few hundred additional abandoned or closed non-metallic mining sites. A non-metallic mining ordinance requires reclamation of mining sites to a purposeful and acceptable landscape appearance and use. Today, the County and DNR collectively oversee the reclamation of 154 active non-metallic mines.

Land Division Regulations

The County regulates the division of land in accordance with Chapter 18 of the Marathon County Code. The County's land division regulations apply in all unincorporated areas of the County. However, where a town has land division regulations that are more restrictive than the County's, the local regulations apply. Chapter 18 includes regulations for minimum lot sizes, street design and access requirements, land dedication, surface drainage, and erosion control. The County also has permitting authority over private septic systems, which are addressed in Chapter 15 of the County Code. As with shoreland zoning, incorporated villages and cities adopt and enforce their own land division regulations.

Private Onsite Waste Treatment Systems (POWTS)

Marathon County oversees permitting for POWTS (septic systems), as outlined in Chapter 15 of the County Code. With approximately 21,000 septic systems in the County, officials are responsible for ensuring proper installation, tracking system maintenance, and assisting property owners in repairing failing systems. These efforts help protect both surface and groundwater quality in the county.

In addition to the development-related regulations described above, Marathon County administers several programs aimed at preserving certain types of land uses and resources. These include:

Farmland Preservation Program

The State of Wisconsin has a Farmland Preservation Program. The goals of the program are twofold: to preserve Wisconsin farmland by means of local land use planning and soil conservation practices, and to provide property tax relief to farmland owners. Landowners keeping land in agricultural use can claim a credit on their state income tax by obtaining a zoning certificate (if the land is zoned “exclusive agriculture”) or by signing a contract with the State. The program has several requirements. See the Marathon County Farmland Preservation Plan for more information.

Forest Crop Law (FCL) and Managed Forest Law (MFL)

In Wisconsin, over 2.5 million acres are enrolled under the FCL (enrollment closed in 1986) and the MFL programs. Land set aside under the FCL required at least 40 acres in one quarter-quarter section, and the MFL requires at least 10 acres of contiguous forest land. Landowners may close to the public up to 80 acres of their forest lands set aside under MFL. The remaining program acres must be open to public access for hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, and cross-country skiing. Landowners choose a 25- or 50-year contract and pay an Acreage Share Amount as part of their tax bill in lieu of taxes.

Consistency between Plan and Zoning

Under the Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning law, land use and zoning designations are related, but not necessarily identical. Land use categories tend to be fairly general, whereas zoning districts regulate specific land uses and development requirements. Because the land use categories are general, it is common for more than one zoning district to correspond to each land use category. It is also possible that some zoning districts might be consistent with more than one land use designation.

Achieving consistency between land use and zoning is required by State Statutes. This generally occurs when a community is considering a proposed zoning change. The decision to approve a zoning change must be based on the adopted comprehensive plan, and specifically, the future land use map. Generally, if the requested zoning is consistent with the land use designation on the property, it should be approved, unless unique circumstances indicate the rezoning would negatively impact surrounding properties or the community. If a rezoning request is not consistent with the land use designation, the community should consider denying the rezoning request.

In situations where a rezoning request is not consistent with the land use designation, but the community believes the requested zoning is appropriate in the specific location and would benefit the community, the zoning change can be approved; however, the land use map should be amended accordingly to establish land use and zoning consistency. The process for amending the land use map is discussed in greater detail in the Implementation Chapter.

Issues

Managing Growth While Preserving Rural Character - County residents highly value the preservation of the area's rural character. With an anticipated population increase over the next two decades and a goal of expanding the economic tax base, balancing growth while protecting agricultural land and natural resources presents a significant challenge.

Currently, 18 towns operate under County zoning regulations, 13 have their own zoning ordinances, and 8 lack general zoning altogether. While there are similarities among these regulations, coordinating land use and development across multiple jurisdictions with differing rules remains complex. Although nearly half of the towns have adopted County zoning, achieving consistent alignment across all municipalities continues to be a challenge.

A major concern is the increasing trend of scattered residential development in agricultural areas. As more homes are built in these regions, agricultural land becomes fragmented, altering the rural landscape. Additionally, the rise in rural residences increases demand for public services, placing added strain on already limited local government resources.

Compounding these challenges is the growing interest in developing land that is less suitable for construction, such as wetlands and floodplains. These areas pose environmental and safety risks, yet pressure to expand into them continues. Managing growth in a way that maintains the rural character while preventing development in sensitive or high-risk areas will be critical in shaping the County's future.

Decline in Agriculture - Non-farm growth pressures have increased financial opportunities to repurpose or develop farmland. The increasing costs of farming and labor shortages require more substantial investment for farmers, often resulting in a choice to consolidate or discontinue active farming. There is also a continuing shift to row crop farming, resulting in the loss of forage crops and an increase in soil erosion. All these factors are contributing to a decline in productive farmland and active farming. The continued support of programs like the Farmland Preservation Program and other cost-sharing programs and promotion of conservation farming practices will be vital to maintaining productive, active farmland. Furthermore, continuing to coordinate with federal, state, and local partners and policymakers on policies that promote the preservation of agricultural land and conservation-informed farming practices will also be important to the future of farming in the county.

Housing Supply - Housing costs remain high in some communities, making it challenging to find housing that is affordable for people at all stages of life. These costs result from multiple factors, including land prices, building materials, insurance, code requirements, and labor. Taxes and municipal service costs (e.g., utilities, public protection) also affect overall housing affordability. While the county cannot control all these factors, it can continue to examine how county policies and ordinances may assist in improving affordability. This could include ongoing evaluation of the

county's zoning code to balance rural character while creating new housing stock and looking at government-owned lands adjacent to sewer and sanitary systems that could possibly be swapped with other land to allow for housing development.

Land Use Goal and Objectives

Land Use Goal: Marathon County makes sound land use decisions which balance the needs of agriculture, recreation, economic development, and growth to wisely maximize the land's potential.

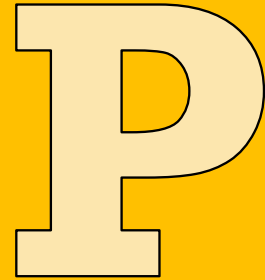
Objectives:

1. Promote the preservation of agricultural land.
2. Promote practices that preserve soil health and land productivity.
3. Encourage revitalization of former residential properties in rural areas.
4. Provide tools for managing and coordinating growth.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Section Three

Most Prosperous



Chapter Ten	Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development
Chapter Eleven	Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources
Chapter Twelve	Intergovernmental Cooperation

Chapter Ten

Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development



One of the goals of Marathon County is to be the most prosperous County in the State. This chapter addresses three key elements necessary to achieve that goal: education, workforce development, and economic development. Education spans the lifespan from K-12 schooling to higher education and technical training. Workforce development looks at the labor force and programs to assist job seekers, workers, and employers to be successful. Economic development encompasses job creation, economic growth, and quality of life.

Previous Plans and Studies

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS):

Marathon County is one of ten counties included in the North Central Wisconsin Economic Development District as designated by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission is the agency that is responsible for maintaining that federal designation. As part of maintaining that designation, the NCWRPC annually prepares a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report. The report serves to summarize and assess economic development activities of the past year and present new and modified program strategies for the upcoming year.

Key components from this regional level plan include an inventory of the physical geography of the Region and its resident population. Labor, income, and employment data are reviewed, as well as an in-depth analysis of the economic status of the Region.

Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP):

The Regional Comprehensive Plan, formerly known as the Regional Livability Plan (2015), is a comprehensive plan for the 10-county Region by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. This document identifies ways to address the region's opportunities and weaknesses to increase the region's ability to become more livable for all residents. The Plan addresses ten specific areas, including economic development. The economic development goals of the plan are:

1. Support infrastructure needed for economic development.
2. Ensure the future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce.

3. Support and develop a diverse economic base, ensuring economic growth and resiliency.
4. Develop tourism and the knowledge-based economy into leading economic sectors.
5. Support economic development that ensures a living wage for the Region's residents.

LIFE Report:

The LIFE Report is a joint effort of Marathon County and the United Way. Its purpose is to provide a reference for the community to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and identify priority issues. The report, which is published every two years, serves as a tracking vehicle to show how the community has changed over time. Two of the sections of the report focus on Education and on the Economic Environment.

The Education report tracks Childcare, Enrollment by Racial and Economic differences, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics Proficiency, High School Graduation Rates, and Higher Education. Challenges facing education, according to the 2023 report, include limited access to child care caused by a broken business model, school district revenue cuts, an increase in economically disadvantaged students, and fewer residents attaining post-secondary education relative to state averages.

The Economic Environment report tracks many economic indicators, including Labor Force, Regional Labor Shed, Homeownership and Rent, Wage and Income, and Living in Poverty. Challenges facing the economic environment, according to the 2023 report, include a tight labor market resulting in many open jobs, significant household income disparities, and housing values increasing greatly.

Marathon County: A Next Generation Talent Magnet:

This report, developed by Next Generation Consulting, addresses the question, "What will it take for Marathon County to be a destination for top talent?" As part of the research process, a "Handprint" for Marathon County was developed to contrast the County's assets with other communities. According to the study, Marathon County meets or exceeds the standards of its peer regions in five of the seven measured indexes – Vitality, Earning, Cost of Lifestyle, After Hours, and Around Town. The County falls short in two categories – Social Capital and Learning. The report also identifies Nine Priority Areas of Focus to address moving forward. The top four priority areas were: 1) Engage emerging leaders, 2) Create a green economy, e.g., industries, 3) Create "next generation" businesses, and 4) Develop a long-term funded plan.

Marathon County Westside Master Plan:

The Marathon County Westside Master Plan Project spans three areas of interest for future improvements: Marathon Park, University of Wisconsin Stevens Point – Wausau Campus, and a redevelopment area south of the park. The area covered in the plan is located centrally in the City of Wausau, surrounded by a mix of residential neighborhoods and retail and industrial uses, and easily accessible from the regional highway system. The Marathon County Westside Master Plan Project was conceived to identify and prioritize investments into this high-profile, high-use area through a

public process that engaged all interested stakeholders. Over the next 15 years, this document is intended to help the County and other stakeholders make decisions about when, where, and how to invest in the continued success of these sites and the activities and users they support.

University of Wisconsin -Stevens Point-Wausau Campus Space Utilization Study:

The University of Wisconsin examined space utilization across all campuses, finding that space needs on campus are shifting. The Wausau report noted that currently 21% of the Wausau campus is used for core operations, or instruction and student support. The theater on campus remains a commodity for community rental use, and another 5% of the campus is being used via memorandums of understanding for non-profits and UW partners. Overall, the report noted future need for education will require less space, more focused on core classroom needs and student services, and the UW system will continue to work with Marathon County to identify appropriate future use of the UW-Stevens Point -Wausau Campus space.

Education

Early Childhood Development:

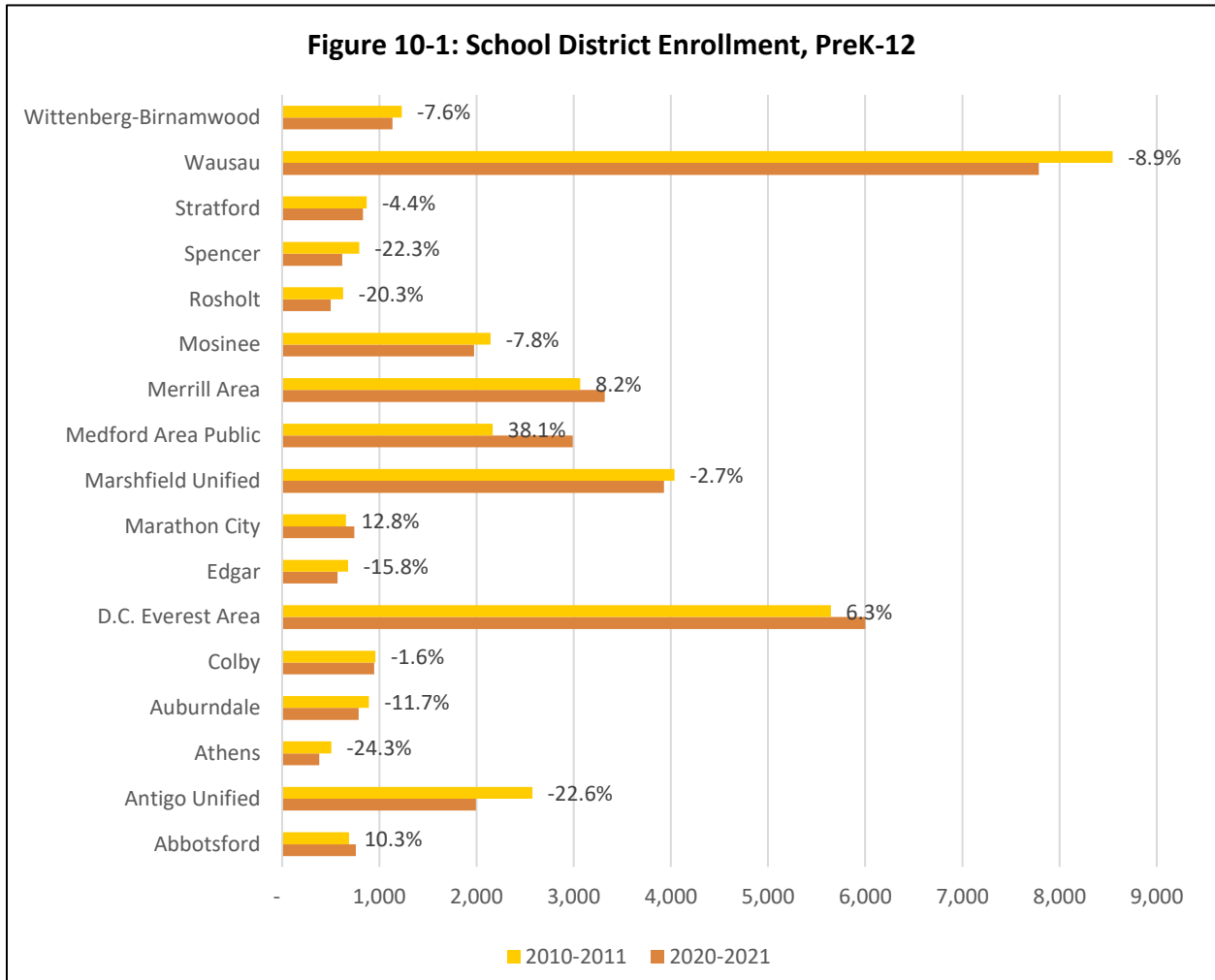
Early childhood education has far-reaching effects on the lives of students. The experiences children have during their first five years of life have dramatic effects on their abilities to learn, to interact socially, and to attain lifelong success. Achievement gaps are often ascribed to deficits in learning acquired during pre-school years that then follow students and grow throughout their education.

The LIFE Report states that Marathon County is facing significant child care challenges. The number of regulated child care providers continues to decrease rapidly, losing over 60% of its regulated providers over the past decade. This shortage is having severe impacts on the labor force when parents are forced to quit their jobs to remain at home during a child's early years, or many parents have to rely on others for child care. Many families are left to make difficult choices between maintaining employment and staying home to provide care themselves. Staffing shortages are leading to child care slots not being filled, meaning child care availability is even lower than the regulated capacity in the county. At the same time, child care affordability is also a major barrier for many families, with the annual cost being between \$9,000-\$14,000 a child.

The Marathon County Early Years Coalition was formed in 2012 to serve young children and their parents in the hopes of improving early childhood development in Marathon County. The coalition seeks to recognize and strengthen the role the community plays in helping children grow and learn by supporting the development of pre-birth through school-age children. In 2024, Marathon County allocated \$200,000 in ARPA funds to support a training program aimed at increasing the supply of child care by preparing more individuals to become child care teachers.

K-12 Education:

Marathon County has 17 public school districts with approximately 70 schools. This includes a mix of public, private, and parochial schools. Enrollment statistics for each county school district for 2010 and 2020 are shown in **Figure 10-1**. Five schools have seen increases in enrollment during the past decade, while the other twelve have seen enrollment decrease. Small and large districts alike experienced significant changes in enrollment.



Source: Wisconsin Department of Instruction

Of the five school districts that increased, the D.C. Everest Area School District had the greatest increase in net enrollment, with 357 more students, or 6.3 percent. This district serves Schofield, Rothschild, Weston, Ringle, Easton, and Hatley, which are some of the developing areas in the county. Medford Area Public School had the greatest percentage increase, with a 38.1 percent increase. Marathon had an increase of 12 percent; with Abbotsford and Merrill each had an increase of 10 percent and 8 percent, respectively.

Over half of the school districts in the County experienced decreases in the double digits between 2010 and 2020. Wausau had the greatest net decrease, losing 760 students, and Athens had the greatest percent decrease, losing 24.3 percent of students enrolled.

The number and type of schools in each district are presented in **Figure 10-2**. Together, all public school facilities in the County (i.e., a portion of the district is in the county) currently include 19 high schools, 15 middle/junior high schools, and 48 elementary schools.

Figure 10-2: School District Facilities

School District	Elementary Schools	Middle/Junior High Schools	High Schools
Abbotsford	1	-	1 (6-12)
Antigo Unified	3	1	1
Athens	2	1	1
Auburndale	1	-	1 (6-12)
Colby	2	1	1
D.C. Everest Area	7	2	1
Edgar	1	1	1
Marathon City	1	1	1 (6-12)
Marshfield Unified	6	1	1
Medford Area Public	3	1	1
Merrill Area	4	1	2
Mosinee	1	1	1
Rosholt	1	1	1
Spencer	1	-	1 (6-12)
Stratford	1	1	1
Wausau	11	2	3 (1, 6-12)
Wittenberg-Birnamwood	2 (K-8)	-	1
Total:	48	15	19

Source: Wisconsin Department of Instruction

Eighteen private and parochial schools offer County residents an alternative to public schools for elementary and secondary education. Over half of these schools are affiliated with the Catholic Church, while another 10 percent are affiliated with the Lutheran Church. In terms of location within the County, approximately half of private and parochial schools are located in the Wausau area, with the rest of the schools scattered in communities around the County.

Schools of Higher Education:

Opportunities for post-secondary education in Marathon County are provided by two state schools, the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at Wausau and Northcentral Technical College, and one private school, Rasmussen University. The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is the closest university, located about 40 minutes from Wausau, offering a full range of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Map 10-1 shows the location of the colleges and technical schools in Marathon County.

The University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point at Wausau (formerly named University of Wisconsin-Marathon County) is located in the City of Wausau and offers lower-level (freshman and sophomore) college classes, leading to a baccalaureate degree. Associate Degrees are offered in Arts & Sciences, and a couple of Bachelor's Degrees (through collaborative degree programs with UW Oshkosh and UW Stevens Point) are offered in hybrid and online class formats. In 2018, the college became a branch campus of UW-Stevens Point and changed its name to its current one. Enrollment in 2023-2024 was approximately 364 students. Beginning in the Fall of 2026, UW-Stevens Point at Wausau will relocate its branch campus to the campus of Northcentral Technical College. This partnership will allow for more joint programming, enhanced faculty collaboration, streamlined transfer processes, and operational cost savings.

Northcentral Technical College (NTC), also located in Wausau, has over 190 program offerings, including two-year associate degrees that combine technical skills with general education, one and two-year technical diplomas that provide hands-on learning, and short-term certificates to improve job skills. Programs focus on business, technical, health, and industrial fields. Approximately 3,400 full- and part-time students attend classes.

Rasmussen University, a for-profit post-secondary education institution, develops students by providing them with the practical, relevant, and in-demand skills they need to confidently start or advance a successful career. The Wausau campus of Rasmussen College offers on-campus and online bachelor's degrees, associate's degrees, certificates, and diplomas in programs in business, design, education, health sciences, justice sciences, nursing, and technology.

Over the last decade, in Marathon County and across the country, the type of higher education students are seeking has changed. There continues to be a decline in the number of students at traditional college-going age pursuing any kind of higher education. Those who do are increasingly using hybrid formats for completing degrees. It does remain that most students enrolled in higher education in Marathon County grew up in Wisconsin and remain in Wisconsin after completing their studies.

Libraries

Libraries promote lifelong learning, supporting populations not reached by traditional education, including very young children and older adults. Libraries also increase access to computers and technology.

The Marathon County Public Library (MCPL) system offers service to residents at its headquarters library in Wausau and at branches throughout the County. Other library branches are located at Athens, Edgar, Hatley, Marathon City, Mosinee, Rothschild, Spencer, and Stratford. Several library facilities are relatively new or recently expanded. The MCPL is a member of the Wisconsin Valley Library Service.



MCPL Athens Branch

Residents near the boundaries of Marathon County may be closer to libraries in other communities. Several such libraries include Abbotsford, Antigo, Birnamwood, Colby, and Marshfield.

Workforce Development

Workforce development, according to the Urban Institute, provides a broad range of employment and training services to job seekers, as well as targeted assistance to employers. Strategies for workforce development can be found in formal education systems, such as technical schools and colleges, within businesses to assist their employees, and through public organizations, such as a local chamber of commerce. Workforce development covers the breadth of a career, from training for individuals preparing to enter the workforce, to on-the-job training to improve workplace performance, and to career transitions later in life.

Working Population:

The first step in any workforce development strategy is an understanding of the local workforce. Knowledge of the local population informs workforce development by elaborating on the number of people of working age, the labor force participation rate, and the education levels of workers, among other important factors. See the Demographics chapter of this Plan for more details on the population of Marathon County.

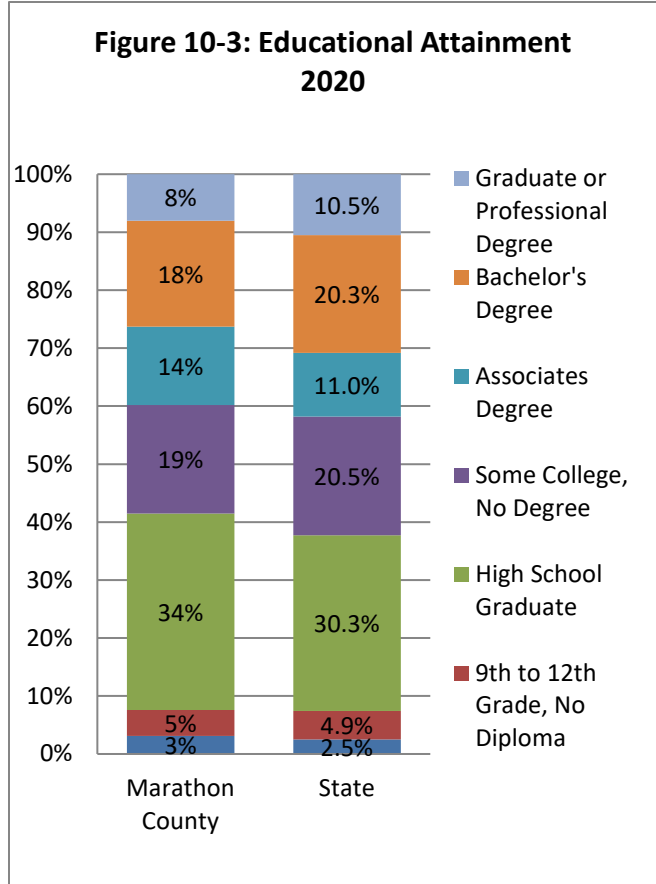
The population of Marathon County grew from 134,063 in 2010 to 138,013 in 2020, an increase of 2.9 percent compared to a 3.6 percent increase in the State. Population growth has been concentrated in the urban areas of Marathon County, particularly in the cities and villages extending along the corridors of Highway 51 and Highway 29.

Working Age Population – The primary working ages are between 25 and 64 years old. In 2020, 51.7 percent of the Marathon County population and 51.7 percent of the Wisconsin population were of prime working age. Generally, this bodes well for worker availability in the years to come, but because younger workers are quite mobile, the supply of workers is not guaranteed. Continuing retirements of baby boomers will reduce the supply of available workers more quickly than in the past. The Regional Comprehensive Plan has identified a need for more people of primary working age to meet job demand over the next decade.

Labor Force Participation – The labor force consists of civilians who are at least 16 years old and who are not incarcerated or institutionalized, who are working, and people who are looking for work. Most people of working age who are not in the labor force are students, at-home parents, or retirees. The labor force participation rate in Marathon County in 2020 was 68 percent compared with 66 percent statewide. The Marathon County labor force in 2020 was 73,362 persons according to the U.S. Census’ American Community Survey and was 73,628 persons according to the Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis FRED database.

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Educational Attainment - Compared to Wisconsin, Marathon County has a higher percentage of people who have a high school diploma or greater, and a lower percentage of people with a bachelor’s degree or greater, as shown in **Figure 10-3**. Educational attainment in Marathon County is lower than the State as a whole, particularly in post-high school education, although it is higher than in most northern Wisconsin counties.



Income - Marathon County has a varied income distribution. The median household income in 2023 was \$76,185 and the per capita income was \$39,970. Per capita income in the metro Wausau area exceeds the per capita income in the Nation and compares favorably to most areas of the State. Rural areas of Marathon County are typical of rural areas throughout the State where per capita income is lower than the national average. Per capita income grew 54 percent at the county level and 57 percent at the state level between 2010 and 2023; with county per capita income remaining lower than state levels. See **Figure 10-4**.

Figure 10-4: Household Income in Marathon County, 2023		
Income	Number of Households	Percent
Less than \$10,000	1,828	3.2%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	1,581	2.8%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	3,304	5.8%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	4,497	7.9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	6,142	10.8%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	10,749	18.9%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	8,527	15.0%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	11,554	20.3%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	4,643	8.2%
\$200,000 or more	4,048	7.1%
Source: American Community Survey, 2023		

Commuting Patterns – More people enter Marathon County for work than commute from Marathon County to other counties for work, resulting in a net gain of 3,626 workers, according to 2020 Bureau of Labor Statistics data. About a quarter of all workers who live in Marathon County commute outside the County to a job travel to Wood County; see **Figure 10-5**.

Figure 10-5: Commuting Patterns, 2010 and 2022						
County	2010			2022		
	Commute		Net Commute	Commute		Net Commute
	Into	From		Into	From	
Wood	5,406	1,852	(3,554)	5,011	3,060	(1,951)
Portage	1,823	2,005	182	2,395	2,937	542
Lincoln	1,113	2,682	1,569	1,325	3,238	1,913
Clark	1,129	921	(208)	1,042	1,285	243
Shawano	603	1,150	547	511	1,233	722
TOTAL	10,074	8,610	(1,464)	10,284	11,753	1,469
Work within Marathon County	61,483			68,695		
Source: US Census On the Map						

Employment by Occupation – Occupation is about the tasks that an employee does, while industry is about the final product or service a business produces. The Bureau of Labor Statistics explains that employees who perform essentially the same tasks are in the same occupation, whether or not they work in the same industry. For example, businesses as varied as hospitals, retail stores, manufacturing firms, and transportation companies may all have employees in the occupation of

accountant. **Figure 10-6** shows occupations by sector in Marathon County. In 2023, the County had an employed population of 72,092. The largest occupation sectors are management, professional and related occupations (37.0%) and sales and office occupations (19.8%).

Figure 10-6: Occupation by Sector, Marathon County 2010 & 2023

Sector	2010		2023		2010 to 2023% Change
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Management, professional, and related occupations	22,048	31.8%	26,665	37.0%	20.9%
Service occupations	9,731	14.1%	10,749	14.9%	10.5%
Sales and office occupations	16,596	24.0%	14,242	19.8%	-14.2%
Construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations	6,497	9.4%	6,473	9.0%	-0.4%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	14,376	20.8%	13,963	19.4%	-2.9%
Total Employed*	69,248	100%	72,092	100%	4.1%

Source ACS 2010 & 2023, NCWRPC

* "Total Employed" represents employed civilian population 16 years and over

Living Wage:

While income is a measure of how much money people working in Marathon County earn, the living wage takes a different view and asks how much do people working in Marathon County need to earn to maintain a normal standard of living. The state minimum wage is the same for all individuals, regardless of how many dependents they may have, and the poverty rate is typically quoted as gross annual income. The living wage, however, takes into account the expenses a family of different sizes will have, including food, child care, medical, housing, transportation, and taxes.

Living Wage
 A living wage is the hourly rate an individual must earn to support their family, if they are the sole provider and are working full-time (2080 hours per year).

For single adult families, the adult is assumed to be employed full-time. For two adult families where both adults are in the labor force, both adults are assumed to be employed full-time. For two adult families where one adult is not in the labor force, one of the adults is assumed to be employed full-time while the other non-wage-earning adult provides full-time child care for the family’s children. Full-time work is assumed to be year-round, 40 hours per week for 52 weeks per adult (2080 hours per year). Families with one child are assumed to have a young child (4 years old). Families with two children are assumed to have a ‘young child’ and a ‘child’ (9 years old). Families with three children are assumed to have a ‘young child’, a ‘child’, and a ‘teenager’ (15 years old).

The living wage in Marathon County ranges from \$14.29 per hour for a two-adult two-income household to \$60.42 per hour for a one-adult household with three children, see **Figure 10-7**. In general, households with two working adults require lower per-hour salaries to meet the living wage

threshold. The state minimum wage of \$7.25 does not meet the poverty wage threshold for all households, even with no children.

The biggest increase in salary required to meet the living wage threshold is between a one-adult household and a household with one adult and one child. The addition of one child increases the necessary annual income before taxes from \$42,528 per year to \$76,420 per year, a difference of \$33,892. Two adult households (both working) with three children require the highest annual salary to meet the living wage threshold, requiring a salary before taxes of \$132,160 per year. A one adult household with three children requires an annual salary of \$125,670 per year to meet the minimum living wage threshold. Childcare is the highest typical expense, ranging from \$11,974 per year for a single child to \$32,176 per year for 3 children. Two adult households with only one working adult have a significant advantage in meeting the living wage threshold due to the elimination of childcare costs.

Typical annual salaries in Marathon County range from \$31,110 for people in food preparation and serving-related occupations to \$132,440 for people in management. Healthcare Support, Food Preparation & Serving Related, Building Cleaning & Maintenance, and Personal Care & Service are the occupations that do not meet the lowest living wage threshold of \$20.46 per hour for a single adult household. Management occupations are the only occupations that meet the living wage threshold for all categories.

Overall, minimum wages or even typical wages for certain professions are often not enough to cover the cost of living in Marathon County. The addition of children puts an additional burden on households, significantly increasing the minimum hourly wage necessary to meet the minimum living wage threshold. This additional burden may help explain the national trend of smaller household sizes and smaller average household sizes.

Figure 10-7: Living Wage

Hourly Wages	Living Wage	Minimum Wage	Poverty Wage
1 Adult	\$20.46	\$7.52	\$7.25
1 Adult, 1 Child	\$36.74	\$10.17	\$7.25
1 Adult 2 Children	\$47.56	\$12.81	\$7.25
1 Adult, 3 Children	\$60.42	\$15.46	\$7.25
2 Adults (1 Working)	\$28.84	\$10.17	\$7.25
2 Adults (1 Working), 1 Child	\$35.04	\$12.81	\$7.25
2 Adults (1 Working), 2 Children	\$39.13	\$15.46	\$7.25
2 Adults (1 Working), 3 Children	\$44.78	\$18.10	\$7.25
2 Adults	\$14.29	\$5.08	\$7.25
2 Adults, 1 Child	\$20.84	\$6.41	\$7.25
2 Adults, 2 Children	\$26.34	\$7.73	\$7.25
2 Adults, 3 Children	\$31.77	\$9.05	\$7.25

Source: MIT Living Wage Calculator

Workforce Programs:

Workforce development is a vital part of any local economy, and especially in Marathon County, with its large manufacturing sector. Many state, regional, and local organizations and educational institutions work together to promote workforce development in Marathon County.

State of Wisconsin Programs:

Department of Workforce Development:

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) is a state agency whose mission is “advancing Wisconsin’s economy and business climate by empowering and supporting the workforce”. They provide job services, training, and employment assistance to people looking for work, at the same time as working with employers on finding the necessary workers to fill current job openings.

Wisconsin Fast Forward Program:

Wisconsin Fast Forward grant program is a nationally recognized, innovative talent development solution driven by Wisconsin businesses to train and retain highly skilled workers. The standard grant program’s objective is to award funds to businesses from all Wisconsin industry sectors that reimburse the costs of customized occupational training for unemployed, underemployed, and incumbent workers. The objective of the Wisconsin Fast Forward (WFF) expanded grant program is to award funds that reimburse the costs of workforce development activities. Wisconsin Fast Forward also includes resources to develop a labor market information system in the future to provide real-time labor intelligence and connect job seekers with employers with available jobs.

Workforce Development Board:

Marathon County is one of nine counties served by the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board (NCWWDB) in Stevens Point. The mission is to cultivate a skilled and competitive workforce that meets the demands of employers in the region. NCWWDB guides workforce development by engaging and connecting local employers, educators, and community organizations to more effectively align workforce resources; identifying, obtaining, and directing resources toward skilling, re-skilling, and building a future pipeline of workers to meet regional demands; identifying and disseminating regional labor market data and trends which impact short-term and long-term development of a skilled labor pool; and overseeing publicly-funded Workforce Investment Act programs and the One-Stop Job Centers in the region.

County Programs:

Greater Wausau Chamber of Commerce:

Greater Wausau Chamber of Commerce and the Marathon County Development Corporation (MCDEVCO) both play a role in workforce development. They work together to nurture collaborative partnerships between educational institutions, businesses, community organizations, and the community itself.

Next Wave Program:

Next Wave is a workforce development initiative of the Greater Wausau Chamber of Commerce designed to help attract, retain, and meet the unique needs of young professionals (ages 21-45) throughout the Wausau region. The purpose of E3YP is to engage young professionals with each other, the community, and businesses; to empower young professionals with leadership opportunities and development tools to grow; and to excite young professionals to work, play, and stay in the Wausau region. Next Wave offers bi-monthly events for its members, ranging from professional development and training on topics of interest to young professionals to social networking opportunities.

Marathon County Job Center:

The Marathon County Job Center, in Wausau, is a comprehensive job center through the Job Center of Wisconsin, a program of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. The purpose of the Wisconsin Job Center system, a Wisconsin-centered employment exchange, is to link employers in all parts of the state with anyone looking for a job. The Marathon County Center provides many services, including job seeker assistance, career planning, resources, skills and education, workshops, recruitment assistance, and youth services. Located in Wausau, this Job Center serves all of Marathon County as well as several counties to the north, as the primary comprehensive job center in north central Wisconsin.



Marathon County Job Center in Wausau

Workforce Education

Technical Schools:

Marathon County is home to several schools of higher education, including UW-Stevens Point at Wausau, Northcentral Technical College, and Rasmussen University. Additionally, Mid-State Technical College has a campus in Marshfield, which is just outside of Marathon County’s boundaries. All of these institutions are involved in workforce development to some degree. They offer technical and skills-based training, certificates, and degrees for in-demand careers in manufacturing, technology, and health sciences, among others. These training services are available for young adults new to the workforce, as well as vocational adults interested in furthering their education in their current career or beginning a new career track.

High School Programs:

High Schools, including D.C. Everest, Wausau East, and Wausau West, have Career and Technical Education Departments that provide opportunities for all students to acquire and apply academic, technological, employment, and life skills in order to ensure success in an ever-changing global society. These Departments offer classes in agri-science, business and technology, engineering

technology, construction, energy and transportation, manufacturing, and marketing. A wide variety of career pathways are available to help students plan to succeed beyond high school.

High Demand Manufacturing Training

The need for new workers in the manufacturing sector is great, due to general growth and the prospect of many current employees retiring in the next decade. This need is the impetus for local programs designed to get high school students interested in careers in manufacturing. The Wausau Region Chamber of Commerce, McDEVCO, local school districts, and Northcentral Technical College have come together to develop career paths for the growing number of advanced manufacturing job openings created by growth and baby boomer retirements. Technical colleges and universities have built or are developing programs to train workers in the latest developments in welding, robotics, and computer-operated machinery, but local businesses want to see students begin preparing for careers in manufacturing before they get into college.

One of the primary goals of organizations like Manufacturing Works, which runs the Gold Collar Careers program, a partner on the Heavy Metal Bus Tour, is to bridge the gap between students and manufacturing. By providing awareness and outreach, they are working to dispel the myths that manufacturing is a dangerous, dirty, unrewarding career. They provide opportunities such as job shadowing, job co-ops, and internships; matching students with manufacturers to learn about careers in electromechanical technology, mechanical design, nano and biotechnology, robotics and automation, and welding and fabrication, among others. Northcentral Technical College is part of the Manufacturing Works organization and the primary connection point in Marathon County for students interested in learning more about manufacturing careers.

Economic Development

According to the International Economic Development Council, economic development encompasses the creation of jobs and wealth, the improvement of quality of life, and the policies and programs that enhance the economic wellbeing of a community. The economy in Marathon County has a division that falls along the urban and rural divide, with urban communities having a wide array of industries, including manufacturing, retail, and health care, while rural communities are more based on agriculture and forest products.

Key Economic Sectors:

To gain an understanding of the economy in Marathon County, the key economic sectors in the County are examined. Employment numbers and growth give context to the size of an industry within Marathon County, and location quotient analysis illustrates industries with a local concentration.

Employment:

In 2023, just over 72,000 people were employed in Marathon County. This is a 3 percent increase in employment since 2010. The two largest industries by employment are Manufacturing with 20.5 percent of all employment and Educational Services and Health Care with 24.2 percent. Together, these two industries represent almost half of all employment in Marathon County. Three industries

had growth of more than 500 employees between 2010 and 2023: Educational Services and Health Care; Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Other Services except Public Administration. Two industries lost more than 300 employees: Manufacturing and Information. **Figure 10-8** shows employment by industry in 2010 and 2023.

Figure 10-8: Employment by Industry 2010-2023

Industry	2010		2023		2010-2023	
	Employees	Percentage	Employees	Percentage	Net Change	Percent Change
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Mining	2,231	3.2%	2,106	2.9%	-125	-5.6%
Construction	3,891	5.6%	4,029	5.6%	138	3.5%
Manufacturing	16,870	24.1%	14,814	20.5%	-2,056	-12.2%
Wholesale Trade	2,369	3.4%	2,629	3.6%	260	11.0%
Retail Trade	7,697	11.0%	7,604	10.5%	-93	-1.2%
Transportation and Warehousing, and Utilities	3,116	4.5%	3,247	4.5%	131	4.2%
Information	1,026	1.5%	649	0.9%	-377	-36.7%
Finance and Insurance, and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	5,471	7.8%	5,544	7.7%	73	1.3%
Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative Services	3,865	5.5%	4,576	6.3%	711	18.4%
Educational Services, and Health Care	14,895	21.3%	17,437	24.2%	2,542	17.1%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services	4,702	6.7%	4,703	6.5%	1	0.0%
Other Services, except Public Administration	2,454	3.5%	3,105	4.3%	651	26.5%
Public Administration	1,393	2.0%	1,649	2.3%	256	18.4%
Civilian Employed Population 16 years and over	69,980	100%	72,092	100%	2,112	3.0%

Source: American Community Survey, 2010 and 2023

In 2023, according to the U.S. Census’ American Community Survey, Marathon County had an unemployment rate of 2.9%. The unemployment rate in Wisconsin was 3.3% and in the United States it was 5.2%. In Marathon County, the unemployment rate means that approximately 2,140 people were unemployed. According to the American Community Survey, in 2020, Marathon County had 2,140 unemployed persons in a labor force of 72,092 persons for an unemployment rate of 2.9%.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development’s 2025 Marathon County Workforce Profile, the four largest private employers in Marathon County, Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Inc., Greenheck Fan Corporation, Kolbe & Kolbe, and Regal Rexnord Corp, each have over 1,000 employees. The next eight largest employers have between 500 and 999 employees. **Figure 10-9** is a list of the top ten large employers in Marathon County in 2025.

Figure 10-9: Large Employers in Marathon County, 2025

Establishment	Service or Product	Number of Employees
Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Inc.	General medical and surgical hospitals	1000 or more
Greenheck Fan Corp	Industrial and commercial fan and blower manufacturing	1000 or more
Kolbe & Kolbe Millwork Co Inc	Wood window and door manufacturing	1000 or more
Regal Rexnord Corp	Motor and Generator Manufacturing	1000 or more
Marathon Cheese	Dairy product merchant wholesalers	500 to 999
Apogee Enterprises (i.e., Linetec & Wausau Window & Wall)	Architectural framing and paint finishing	500-999
North Central Health Care Facilities	Psychiatric and substance abuse hospitals	500 to 999
Marathon County	Public Administration	500-999
Marshfield Clinic	General medical and surgical hospitals	500 to 999
Northcentral Technical College	Junior colleges	500 to 999
Land O'Lakes Inc	Cheese processors	500 to 999
Wausau School District	Public School	500-999

Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and NCWPRC

Location Quotient Analysis:

The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines location quotients (LQs) as ratios that allow an area’s share or concentration of employment by industry to be compared to a reference or base area’s share. The reference area used here for comparison to Marathon County is the United States. LQs are useful for finding areas that have high concentrations of jobs in certain occupations. If an LQ is equal to 1, then the industry has the same share of its area employment as it does in the reference area. An LQ greater than 1 indicates an

Location Quotient

The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines location quotients (LQs) as ratios that allow an area’s share or concentration of employment by industry to be compared to a reference or base area’s share. The reference area used here for comparison to Marathon County is the United States.

industry with a greater share of the local area employment than is the case in the reference area. For example, Manufacturing in Marathon County in 2025 had an LQ of 3.22, which indicates that for every 3.22 people employed in Manufacturing in Marathon County, 1 person is employed in Manufacturing in the United States.

Industries that have a high location quotient (LQ) and employ a large number of people reflect both significant size and importance as businesses that export a product or service and bring new wealth to the region. Industries with high location quotients and a large number of employees in Marathon County are shown in **Figure 10-10**.

Figure 10-10: Top 10 Economic Sectors By Location Quotient 2025

Industry	Location Quotient	Total Employment
NAICS 322 Paper Manufacturing	12.16	1,967
NAICS 321 Wood Product Manufacturing	9.71	1,932
NAICS 332 Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing	6.66	4,395
NAICS 112 Animal Production and Aquaculture	6.57	1,341
NAICS 333 Machinery Manufacturing	6.49	3,338
NAICS 327 Nonmetallic Mineral Product Manufacturing	5.30	1,029
NAICS 311 Food Manufacturing	4.56	3,736
NAICS 337 Furniture and Related Product Manufacturing	3.69	615
NAICS 457 Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers	2.10	1,007
NAICS 335 Electrical Equipment, Appliance, and Component Manufacturing	2.10	407

Source: Bureau of Labor and Statistics

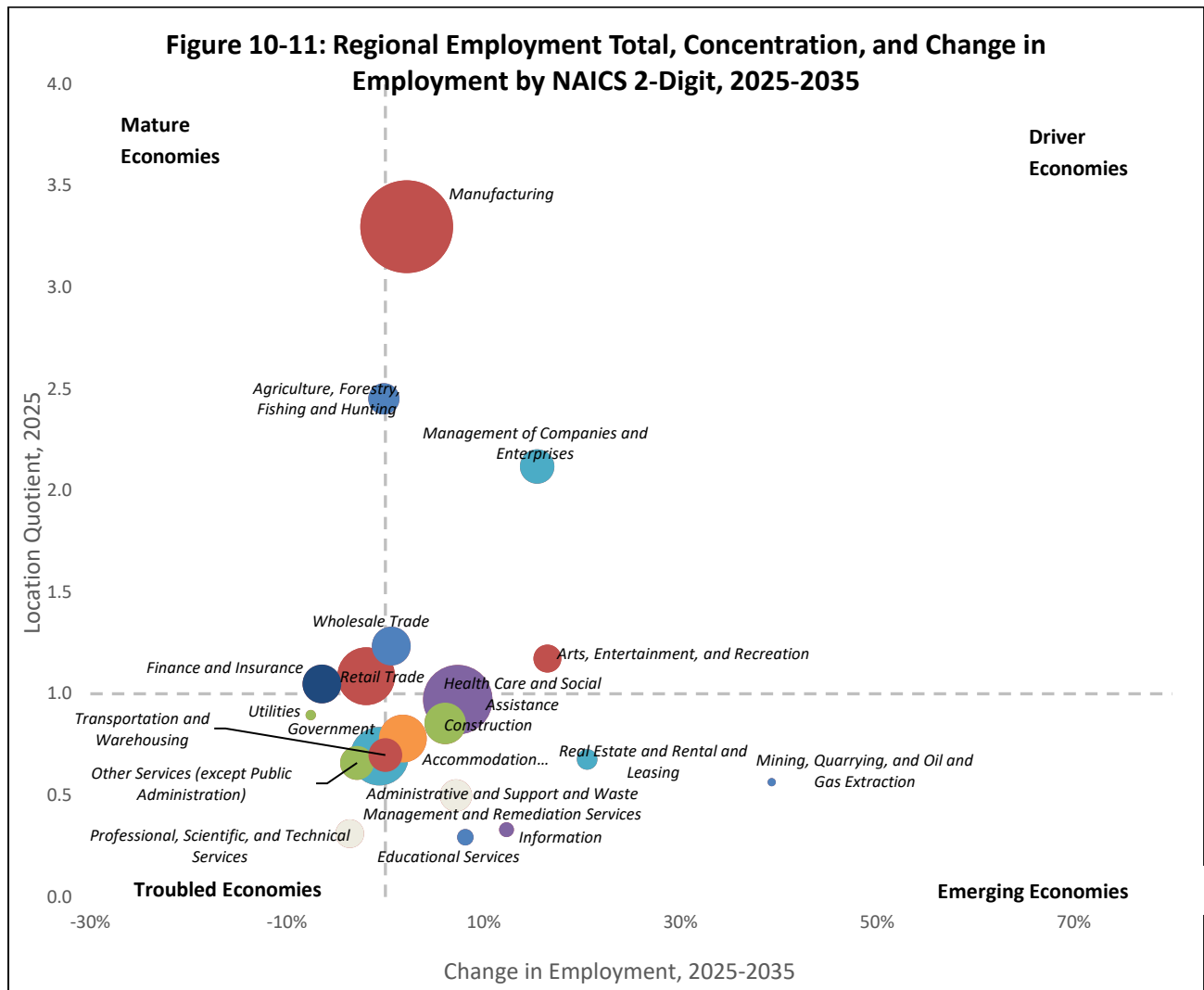
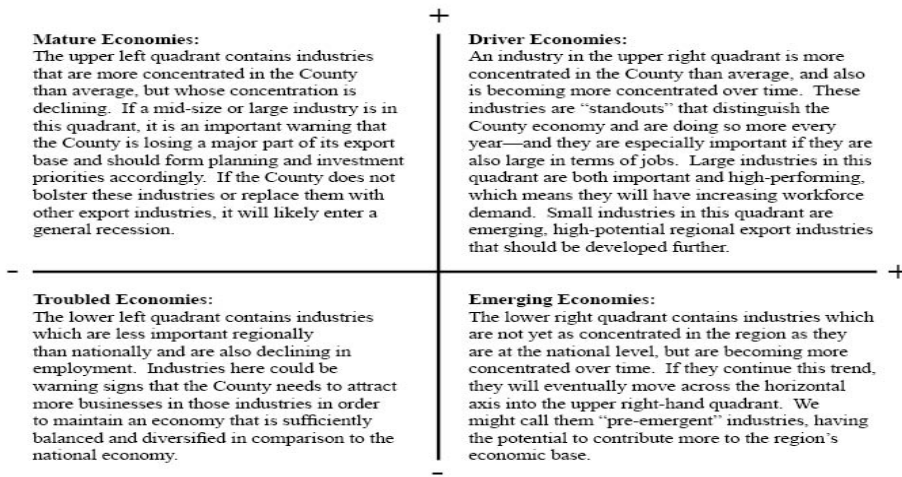
Location Quotient Projections:

Location quotient projections come from analysis provided by Lightcast, a leading organization for labor market analysis. Location quotient analyses can be visualized in a “bubble graph”. In the Marathon County projections, the vertical axis has the 2025 LQ measurement, while the horizontal axis shows the projected percent change in LQ between 2015 and 2025. Industries are plotted as circles, with the circle size corresponding to their relative size as the number of jobs. See below for an explanation of what the location by quadrant says about the industries.

The Marathon County Industry report compares 2025 industry jobs with projected 2035 jobs, identifying which industries will gain and lose jobs and the projected change in location quotients, see **Figure 10-11**. Marathon County is projected to add 1,963 new jobs between 2025 and 2035 due to job growth, a 3 percent increase in jobs. The industries projected to grow the most between 2025 and 2035 are Health Care and Social Assistance, Manufacturing, Management of Companies and Enterprises, and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation.

Industries with high location quotients are those in which the county is strong; these driver industries should be supported and helped to grow. The five industries with the highest location quotients are Manufacturing (3.30), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting (2.45), Management of Companies and Enterprises (2.12), Wholesale Trade (1.23), and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (1.17).

Location Quotient “Bubble Graph” Explanation:



Source: Lightcast, 2025

Occupations Projections Analysis

The Regional Comprehensive Plan has identified the workforce as an issue that must be addressed in the near future, as the region will have many more job openings than available workers due to job growth, retirements, and a lack of young workers choosing to live in the region.

An occupations projections report from Lightcast compares 2025 jobs with projected 2035 jobs, see **Figure 10-12**. All but three occupations are projected to increase in the number of jobs between 2025 and 2035. The three projected to lose jobs are Legal Occupations, Office and Administrative Support Occupations, and Military Occupations.

The occupations projected to increase the most in number of jobs are Healthcare Support Occupations (329), Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (298), Management Occupations (234), and Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations (227).

Figure 10-12: Occupation Projections, 2025-2035

SOC	Description	2025 Jobs	2035 Jobs	2025 - 2035 Change	2025 - 2035 % Change
11-0000	Management Occupations	4,600	4,835	234	5%
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations Occupations	4,198	4,242	44	1%
15-0000	Computer and Mathematical Occupations	1,407	1,503	96	7%
17-0000	Architecture and Engineering Occupations	1,298	1,345	47	4%
19-0000	Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations	441	472	30	7%
21-0000	Community and Social Service Occupations	1,227	1,348	121	10%
23-0000	Legal Occupations	357	330	(27)	(8%)
25-0000	Educational Instruction and Library Occupations	3,474	3,555	81	2%
27-0000	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations	804	852	49	6%
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	4,866	5,163	298	6%
31-0000	Healthcare Support Occupations	2,987	3,316	329	11%
33-0000	Protective Service Occupations	1,081	1,087	6	1%
35-0000	Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	5,118	5,260	143	3%
37-0000	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations	2,101	2,193	92	4%
39-0000	Personal Care and Service Occupations	1,414	1,497	83	6%
41-0000	Sales and Related Occupations	6,588	6,651	63	1%
43-0000	Office and Administrative Support Occupations	8,978	8,550	(428)	(5%)
45-0000	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations	946	1,000	54	6%
47-0000	Construction and Extraction Occupations	3,221	3,412	191	6%
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Occupations	3,735	3,962	227	6%
51-0000	Production Occupations	11,885	11,955	69	1%
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	7,256	7,430	174	2%
55-0000	Military-only occupations	156	142	(14)	(9%)
99-0000	Unclassified Occupation	0	0	0	0%
	Total	78,136	80,099	1,963	3%

Source: Lightcast, 2025

Key Industries

A description of the key industry sectors and employers in Marathon County follows, organized by industries that are resources based, manufacturing based, and service based.

Resource Based Industries:

Agricultural Production and Processing – According to the UW-Extension Economic Impact of Agriculture report for 2019, Marathon County agriculture generates \$2.8 billion in economic activity, about 20 percent of the county’s total economic activity. Agriculture provides 11,021 jobs, or 14 percent of the county’s jobs, and farms pay approximately \$71.3 million in sales, property, and income tax. Marathon County’s top agriculture commodities in 2022 by dollar value were milk with \$363 million, corn with \$70 million, and soybeans with \$40 million.

According to the 2022 USDA Census of Agriculture, Marathon County has 2,059 farms, encompassing over 477,000 acres of farmland. The average farm is 231 acres in size. Marathon County ranks second in Wisconsin in milk production, with over 65,000 dairy cows producing over 1 billion pounds of milk annually. The County also leads the United States in ginseng production, accounting for over 90 percent of the U.S. crop. Ginseng production brings approximately \$15 million in revenue per year to farmers in Marathon County.

Forest Products and Forest Products Processing – Marathon County has approximately 29,937 acres of county-owned forest, which represents approximately 3 percent of all land in the County. County forests are established primarily for timber production and secondarily for recreation. In addition to publicly owned forests, Marathon County has approximately 112,400 acres of private woodland enrolled in the WDNR Managed Forest Law programs. See the Marathon County Forest Ten-Year Comprehensive Land Use Plan for more details on forests in Marathon County.

Many of the strongest industries in Marathon County rely on forest products as a primary or secondary material. WDNR and UW-Extension maintain an online database of the wood-using industries in Wisconsin, including firms that manufacture logs and pulpwood into value-added products, such as sawmills and pulp mills, as well as firms that manufacture dimensional and reconstituted wood products into value-added products, such as furniture manufacturers. Examples of a few companies included in the database are Award Hardwood Flooring, Central Wisconsin Lumber, Kolbe & Kolbe, Wausau Paper, and Wisconsin Box Co.

Manufacturing Based Industries:

Nationally, in 2023, manufacturing employment represented 10 percent of all employment, and in Wisconsin, it represented 18 percent. In Marathon County, manufacturing represented 20.2 percent of all employment, the largest industry by employment in the County. Manufacturing is also a high-wage sector in Marathon County with a median annual wage of \$65,094 in 2023, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, which is higher than the County’s median annual wage for all industries of \$54,912.

Marathon County has a strong and diversified manufacturing base with a concentration in metal working industries, including:

- aluminum extruded products;
- cutlery;
- fabricated structural metal;
- metal doors; sash and trim;
- metal stamping; plating and polishing;
- powder coating;
- automotive;
- transportation and construction machinery;
- blowers and fans;
- industrial machinery;
- fabricated wire products; and
- fabricated pipe and fittings.

A number of the manufacturing operations in the County are related to the construction industry, including wood and metal products with commercial and residential applications, such as venetian blinds; glass for windows; wood or metal windows, doors, and millwork; and prefabricated homes.

Key Service Based Industries:

Health Care—Over 8,200 people in Marathon County are employed in the health care industry, primarily in nursing homes, clinics, and hospitals. Major employers in health care include Aspirus, North Central Health Care, and Marshfield Clinic. See the Health and Human Services chapter for more details about health care infrastructure in Marathon County.

Finance and Insurance – In 2025, over 3,407 people were employed in Marathon County in the Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate industries, many of them employed by direct property and casualty insurance carriers in Marathon County. Major employers include the Liberty Mutual Group and Wausau Benefits. In addition to the insurance industry, Wausau Financial develops and markets a wide variety of software applications and hardware equipment for the financial industry and other commercial businesses. As a regional center for northcentral Wisconsin, the Wausau metro area includes a concentration of banks and other financial institutions, many of which are located in downtown Wausau.

Retail – The retail sector is not considered critical to economic development because retail sales are dependent upon those businesses, such as manufacturing and insurance carriers, that export a product or service and import dollars to the region. The retail sector accounts for 10 percent of total employment in the U.S., in Wisconsin, and in Marathon County. The Wausau metro area serves as a regional center for retail activity. Major retail centers in the metro area are located in downtown Wausau, Rib Mountain, Cedar Creek in Rothschild, and the commercial corridors extending along most highways, particularly Business 51. The retail sector is recognized as a low-wage sector offering limited benefits.

Visitor Industry – The Wisconsin Department of Tourism published a report on the economic impact of expenditures by travelers on Wisconsin in 2024. Visitor spending includes food, shopping, entertainment, lodging, and recreational expenditures by travelers and second-home owners.

Marathon County had just over \$490 million in expenditures in 2023. The direct impact of tourism in Marathon County accounted for 3,574 jobs in 2023, providing over \$132 million in resident incomes and almost \$30 million in state and local taxes.

A strong tourist industry highlights the unique assets of a community, making the area more attractive to residents and people being recruited by area employers. Marathon County has a broad range of recreational amenities like Rib Mountain State Park and Granite Peak Ski Area, the Mountain-Bay State Trail and the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, the Wausau



Whitewater Kayak Park, and water resources such as Lake Wausau, Lake DuBay, and the Big Eau Pleine Reservoir, as well as arts and culture amenities like the Grand Theater and the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum, both in Wausau.

Development and Redevelopment Areas:

Companies have different needs and preferences for business sites depending upon transportation, utility, and labor force considerations, so it is desirable to have land available for new development or redevelopment throughout the County, rather than concentrated in a few locations. It is also important to recognize that opportunities for new commercial and/or industrial development will likely occur in existing or planned business or industrial parks and through the redevelopment of underutilized land. **Map 10-1** illustrates the location of existing business and industrial parks in Marathon County.

An adequate supply of well-located business and industrial parks with good transportation access is critical to the economic health of the region. The business and industrial parks must be served with good sewer and water services, as well as energy and telecommunications infrastructure. In order to maintain diverse options to meet site location criteria of different companies, such as location, lot size, and transportation access, metropolitan regions typically maintain an inventory of 5 - 8 years of developable land.

Due to the costs of developing land and holding it, developers and communities may choose to invest in infrastructure on a phased basis. Communities identify land with critical highway access and other features well in advance of development in order to create competitive business and industrial park options in their region. Land for business or industrial park purposes can be controlled through planning and zoning, purchasing land, or holding options. Local units of government generally control this, although the County may have some influence with regard to County roads and in communities with County zoning.

Two important factors that can influence the amount and location of new commercial and industrial development are the allowable development density and safe, convenient transportation access. Development Density – The amount of land required for individual building sites is regulated by zoning and varies by community. Optimizing the density of development in business and industrial parks helps a community secure the greatest return on its investment in infrastructure, and in the case of municipally owned industrial parks, it also impacts the community’s return on investment in land. Industrial site location professionals and private business park developers typically look for an initial building coverage of 20-25 percent because this will generally allow a company to double in size on-site.

Access - Industrial parks are typically located along major transportation corridors, often separated from residential areas. One reason for the separation is to avoid land use and transportation conflicts, as residential streets are not designed for heavy truck traffic, and businesses do not like residential traffic or children playing in areas where they are moving heavy trucks and materials. It is also cost-effective to concentrate roads with heavy load limits in industrial parks close to major highways. In addition to accommodating truck traffic, access for employees should be safe and convenient.

Wausau Metro Area Business and Industrial Parks

Within Marathon County, there are twelve industrial and/or business parks located in the Highway 51 Corridor, in Mosinee, Kronenwetter, Maine, Wausau, Rothschild, and Weston. No industrial park sites or land available in the Wausau metro area have rail access. Lack of rail access can increase transportation costs for a company, increase truck traffic in the community, or cause the company to relocate to another area. Currently, the only industrial park in the County with rail access is located in the Village of Spencer.

Industrial Park

An industrial park is an area of land developed as a site for manufacturing and other industrial businesses.

Rural Community Industrial Parks

Several rural villages in Marathon County have created industrial parks, including Athens, Maine, Colby, Edgar, Spencer, and Stratford. The average building density is lower in these rural communities compared to development in business and industrial parks in the Wausau metro area. Lower density is common in more rural communities because land costs are lower, and rural communities often have plenty of available land with good highway access. However, such low building densities can create higher infrastructure costs (sewer, water, roads) for each lot.



Stratford Business and Industrial Park

Redevelopment Areas

Buildings that house manufacturing operations have evolved over the years to meet changing space needs. Manufacturers today typically prefer clear-span buildings (no posts) and higher ceilings. Changes in technology, process flow, and warehousing systems make some older industrial buildings obsolete or limit their use to activities such as long-term storage. A decline in productive use of these buildings may lead to building deterioration, creating blight and a decline in tax values. Likewise, these older industrial areas no longer provide significant employment opportunities. In some cases, older industrial properties may have soil or water contamination. Given the high costs associated with property clean-up and reuse, market conditions will have a significant impact on a community's ability to redevelop an area. For example, older buildings located along a commercial corridor experiencing development demand may require less public investment to foster redevelopment than areas that have contaminated soils or limited existing transportation access.

Most opportunities for redevelopment in Marathon County will occur in incorporated cities and villages. Old or obsolete commercial and industrial properties along the Wisconsin River and older highway corridors are the most likely candidates for redevelopment, and several municipalities in the Wausau metropolitan area are beginning to redevelop these properties. In areas with water frontage, redevelopment often involves the conversion of obsolete industrial uses into mixed commercial, residential, and recreational uses.

Downtown Revitalization

The primary central business district in Marathon County is downtown Wausau, but numerous other downtowns are found within the county. A healthy downtown is characterized by a diverse economic base, good access and parking, a clean, safe, and attractive environment, and activity day and night.

Historically, downtown Wausau has served as the center for government, finance, lodging, dining, entertainment, legal, retail, and most commercial activities. As the region has grown and formats for retail, lodging, and other businesses have changed, downtown Wausau, like many older downtown areas, has evolved and adapted. The recent demolition of Wausau Center Mall has led to ongoing redevelopment of the site with green space, mixed-use developments, and streetscape enhancements. As a result of the mall closure and other changing shopping habits, retail shopping centers have developed in other metro area communities.



As part of a broader downtown *Redevelopment in Downtown Wausau in Progress* redevelopment strategy, the City of Wausau has been implementing long-term plans to transform areas along the river. This work has included remediation of contaminated parcels, enhancements

to riverfront access with trails and recreational amenities, and infrastructure improvements such as street extensions and utility upgrades. In recent years, both commercial and residential developments have taken shape, mixed-use projects have been planned or built, and public spaces are being activated to support a vibrant downtown environment.

Economic Development Organizational Framework

There are a number of entities in Marathon County that participate in economic development-related efforts. Some of the primary organizations include:

Marathon County Development Corporation (MCDEVCO) – MCDEVCO is an economic development organization focused on growing business, building communities, and improving the quality of life in Marathon County communities. It is funded by a variety of sources, including funding from Marathon County. MCDEVCO serves all businesses and communities in Marathon County and has identified the following priorities:

- Sustain economic prosperity by helping existing businesses prosper and by attracting target industries.
- Building powerful regional partnerships.
- Foster a strong entrepreneurial climate that creates a competitive advantage.
- Providing infrastructure systems that stimulate quality economic growth.

Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) – The CVB promotes the area to business and leisure travelers and provides information on the area to visitors and residents. Five communities, including the Cities of Schofield and Wausau, and the Villages of Rib Mountain, Rothschild, and Weston, work together to promote the area by contributing room tax revenues to the CVB.

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) - In addition to land use and transportation planning services, NCWRPC provides technical assistance and compiles economic development data for its members.

The ten counties the NCWRPC serves have also been formally designated as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the State of Wisconsin and by the U.S. Department of Commerce and its Economic Development Administration. Under this designation, the NCWRPC maintains a continuous process of planning assistance that supports the formulation and implementation of economic development programs designed to create or retain full-time permanent jobs and income. The NCWRPC provides services such as economic research, marketing, financial packaging, evaluation, and analysis of public infrastructure needs that support private economic development activity and working with local units of government to maintain eligibility for certain grants. It is the responsibility of the NCWRPC staff to initiate, facilitate, assist, and coordinate the region's economic development activities.

North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Board – As stated in the Workforce Development section of this chapter, NCWWDB has many programs to effectively align workforce resources, meet employment demands, and develop a skilled labor pool. NCWWDB also works directly with employers to develop customized training to help improve productivity, efficiency, and performance. These programs help companies find and maximize workforce talent to grow their business and ultimately grow the local economy.

Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) – Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) is a vital regional asset, connecting Central and Northern Wisconsin to the national air transportation system. It supports business growth, tourism, healthcare access, government operations, and talent attraction across the region.

The reality of today’s airline industry is that airlines favor low-risk routes and increasingly expect proactive community investment before committing to new or expanded service. While CWA already provides incentives such as fee waivers and marketing support, federal regulations prevent the airport from using its own revenues for Minimum Revenue Guarantees (MRGs). That makes a community-driven Air Service Development Fund not just helpful—but essential.

An MRG is a proven tool to attract new routes by reducing the financial risk airlines face when launching service. Communities that provide this support see measurable results:

- New Service & Expanded Connectivity – Airlines respond to reduced risk by adding routes.
- Economic Growth – Stronger air service drives investment, tourism, and workforce mobility.
- Strategic Leverage – Demonstrated community commitment strengthens negotiations for future routes.
- Quality of Life – Improved connectivity benefits residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

In 2025, the county committed \$150,000 to a regional Air Service Development Fund to help secure sustainable, long-term air service at CWA. With this investment, the county hopes to contribute toward protecting and growing regional connectivity while enhancing economic vitality and quality of life for the communities we serve.

Local Activities – Many municipalities have local economic development staff and programs to address these issues at a community scale. An example of what local economic development activities can include is found in the Wausau Entrepreneurial and Education Center. This center, located in the Wausau industrial park, helps businesses with business development by offering resources for entrepreneurs to establish and accelerate their growth. The center provides a one-stop service center for startup and existing businesses throughout the region to access trusted advisors, educators, and capital in order to establish critical business practices that should lead to the success of business owners.

Issues

Talent Attraction – Employment and population projections forecast a disparity between available jobs and the labor force. High employment projections, combined with an older workforce preparing for retirement, will result in a labor force shortage and an inability to meet the workforce needs of the business community. The future availability of a quality labor force is a major concern for the business community.

Higher Education – Shifts in what students and families seek from higher education are beginning to reshape both the talent pipeline and the broader economy. Traditional four-year degrees are no longer the default path for many residents; instead, there is growing demand for flexible, career-oriented programs, shorter degree or credential options, and online or hybrid learning opportunities. At the same time, rising costs of higher education, demographic changes (including a shrinking youth population), and competition pose challenges for local institutions such as UW–Stevens Point at Wausau and Northcentral Technical College.

Technology – Access to technology and the increased use of AI and automation will continue to be things that impact our workforce and our ability to foster economic growth. Broadband connectivity continues to be important for residents and businesses to fully engage in the digital economy. At the same time, industries such as advanced manufacturing, logistics, agriculture, and health care are adopting advanced technological tools to improve efficiency, safety, and productivity. While this can enhance Marathon County’s competitiveness and attract investment, it also changes the nature of work, with some lower-skilled jobs being reduced or eliminated, while demand for higher-skilled technical and analytical positions grows.

Child Care Challenges – Marathon County, like much of Wisconsin, faces a significant shortage of affordable child care options. Many families struggle to find available slots, particularly for infants, and waitlists for providers are usually long. The high cost of care, combined with limited supply, creates barriers for parents seeking to enter or remain in the workforce. As a result, businesses have experienced employee and recruitment challenges, reduced productivity, and higher turnover.

Developing a Collaborative Approach to Economic Development – Communities in Marathon County need to look at themselves as a region and not simply a collection of separate municipalities. Efforts should focus on working together to attract development and jobs to locations that best benefit the region. Municipalities must work together to promote and enhance the region’s assets because, increasingly, economic competition occurs between regions more than between local communities. Working together to strengthen the region is the most effective way to remain competitive amongst the various other regions in the State.

Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development Goals and Objectives



Education Goal: Every child and adult in Marathon County can get a high-quality education.

Objectives:

1. Support initiatives that expand access to education and employment opportunities, helping individuals gain the skills and resources needed to become self-supporting.
2. Redevelop the current University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point-Wausau campus.
3. Support the UW, NTC, and other higher education institutions in Marathon County.
4. Provide high-quality library service.

Workforce Development Goal: Marathon County is a community where every person can find a family supporting job and every business has a strong, skilled workforce.

Objectives:

1. Support efforts to ensure future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce that is prepared to meet the needs of both existing and emerging industries and technologies.
2. Support a framework to enhance business climate and retain and expand businesses and jobs.
3. Promote and increase communication between economic development, workforce development, and other organizations.

Economic Development Goal: Marathon County has a diverse economy with opportunities for people and businesses to grow and be successful.

Objectives:

1. Encourage development and redevelopment of key employment centers in areas that possess strong market potential, provide good transportation access for workers, and promote the efficient movement of goods.
2. Contribute to a collaborative regional approach to economic development.
3. Support an innovative atmosphere to foster an entrepreneurially supportive environment.
4. Support the adoption and growth of technology-enabled businesses and workforce skills to strengthen Marathon County's economic competitiveness, productivity, and ability to attract and retain employers and talent.
5. Maintain infrastructure to support economic growth.
6. Support the Central Wisconsin Airport.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Eleven

Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources



This chapter describes the recreation amenities, tourism and visitor facilities, and cultural resources in Marathon County. The recreation amenities consist primarily of a strong county park and forest unit system, as well as several prominent state and private facilities. Tourism is an economic driver in Marathon County, so attention is paid to current tourist attractions and expansion opportunities. The cultural resources section includes a history of Marathon County and catalogues the historic properties and sites within the county, as well as arts and performing arts spaces.

Previous Plans and Studies

Marathon County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2020-2024

The Marathon County Board, Wausau/Marathon County Park Commission, and the Environmental Resources Committee developed the plan. It is effective through the years of 2020-2024 and will be updated in 2025. The overall goal of the plan is to “adaptively manage our park and forest lands for natural resource sustainability while providing healthy recreational opportunities and unique experiences, making Marathon County the preferred place to live, work, and play”. The plan serves as a guide to continually improve the County’s recreation amenities and park and trail system. These amenities have significant effects on image, ecological health, economic prosperity, and physical and social connections. Ultimately, this plan aims to cohesively address needs and identify opportunities and improvements that will continue to position Marathon County in successfully attracting and retaining residents and tourists alike.

City of Wausau Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2022-2027

Similar to Marathon County’s plan, the City of Wausau’s plan serves as a guide to continually improving the City’s park, forest, and trail systems. It lays out a vision for a connected system throughout Wausau and identifies conceptual ideas for achieving this vision. Finally, it also focuses on making sure the City’s park and outdoor assets maintain eligibility for State and Federal grants.

County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2021-2035

The Marathon County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan is a management guide for the Marathon County forests through the year 2035. The mission of the plan is to manage and protect natural

resources on a sustainable basis for the ecological, economic, educational, recreational, and research needs of present and future generations.

Marathon County Westside Master Plan - 2023

The Marathon County Westside Master Plan Project spans three areas of interest for future improvements: Marathon Park, University of Wisconsin Stevens Point – Wausau Campus, and a redevelopment area south of the park. The area covered in the plan is located centrally in the City of Wausau, surrounded by a mix of residential neighborhoods and retail and industrial uses, and easily accessible from the regional highway system. The Marathon County Westside Master Plan Project was conceived to identify and prioritize investments into this high-profile, high-use area through a public process that engaged all interested stakeholders. Over the next 15 years, this document is intended to help the County and other stakeholders make decisions about when, where, and how to invest in the continued success of these sites and the activities and users they support.

City of Wausau River Edge Master Plan – 2020

This Plan is an update to the City’s prior River Edge Master Plan, which was adopted in June 1995. The 1995 plan laid the foundation for future bike route and trail development within the City. The original and updated plans identify short- and long-term strategies for improving public access to the City’s most important natural resource – the Wisconsin River. The updated plan also puts forth a vision to connect people to the river, the city, and each other as pedestrians, cyclists, and neighbors.

LIFE Report

The LIFE Report is a joint effort of Marathon County and the United Way and is produced every two years. The purpose of the report is to acknowledge community strengths, identify community challenges, and serve as a catalyst for change by advancing community conversations and partnerships around the Calls for Action. This report covers a wide range of topics and specifically addresses the impact tourism has had on Marathon County.

Wisconsin Land Legacy Report - 2006

The Wisconsin Land Legacy Report was created by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. This plan was adopted in 2006 and will be active for 50 years. The report specifically identifies 229 natural areas that meet the needs of Wisconsin’s conservation and recreational needs. The report identifies a number of areas in Marathon County with recreational opportunities.

Ice Age National Scenic Trail Corridor Plan and Environmental Assessment - 2013

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail Corridor Plan was prepared in 2013 by the Ice Age Trail Alliance, North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the National Park Service. The purpose of the document was to create and establish a 40-45 mile corridor running through Marathon County for the Ice Age National Trail.

Marathon County Rural Bike Network and Technical Guidance - 2022

This plan analyzed rural ridership, infrastructure, and public input to identify priority bike networks on County highways that can safely connect people and places (parks & communities) via biking. This information will assist the Highway Department in planning future roadway improvements on these routes and consider and include elements that would increase rural bicycle connectivity between recreational areas and communities in the county.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan for the Wausau Area Metropolitan Planning Organization – Updated 2021

This 20-year comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian plan provides a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional strategy for enhancing conditions and providing inter-city links for biking and walking in support of the Wausau area’s transportation, quality of life, and tourism goals. It does this by addressing all types of biking and walking trips—from a short walk across the street, to a longer bike trip to rural Marathon County or Rib Mountain, or across the Wisconsin River. This plan also incorporates the 5 E’s concept of planning for non-motorized transportation in the Wausau metro area, which are: Education, Encouragement, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation. These are then used to create a list of improvements for the metro communities to develop and enhance their non-motorized transportation network.

Wausau to Merrill Trail Master Plan - 2025

This plan outlines a vision, alignment options, and development considerations to create a 15-mile corridor trail from the River Bend Trail in Merrill to the River’s Edge Trail at Gilbert Park in Wausau, via a route largely parallel with the Wisconsin River. The future trail would potentially be part of the DNR Trail Network of state trails connecting the Mountain Bay State Trail to the Bearskin State Trail and becoming part of the bigger network to connect Wisconsin to Michigan and Illinois. The trail would also provide an opportunity to link multiple County assets. The River District Development Foundation funded the master plan, with Marathon County and Lincoln County contracting to complete the Master Plan from 2024 to 2025.

The plan was adopted by the Marathon County Board of Supervisors in July 2025. This is a long-term project that would need to secure further funding for design and construction to continue development.

Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan – Updated 2022

The Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan addresses continuing much of the park’s current recreation management while expanding recreational opportunities and managing habitat for native plant and wildlife species. The 2022 update is meant to be a holistic evaluation of the full range of recreational and habitat opportunities at Rib Mountain to ensure that the park continues to help support the ecological, social, and economic needs of the area. It includes several proposed changes to recreational opportunities, including upgrades to existing facilities and adding more facilities to continue year-round access. The trail plan includes concepts for a multi-use community path, shared use trail, hiking trail refinements, bike-optimized trail, ski area expansion, and snowmobile trail realignment.

Cultural Resources Plan with City of Wausau Comprehensive Plan – 2017

In 2017, the City Council adopted the City of Wausau Comprehensive Plan, including a Cultural Resources Chapter establishing the cultural resources goal that the City of Wausau will continue to preserve historic sites and support cultural opportunities for community residents. The City Historic Preservation Commission is established under municipal code 2.82.030.

Historic Preservation Plan for Wausau City, WI, 1999

In 1999, the Historic Landmark Commission of the City of Wausau adopted the Historic Preservation Plan. The intention of the plan was to preserve historical sites and buildings in Wausau. The goals proposed in the plans focus on preservation, education, and awareness.

Recreation

Marathon County has a substantial system of County parks, with a history dating back to the early decades of the twentieth century of providing well-designed and maintained parks for the enjoyment of County residents. The system consists of seventeen County parks with a total of over 3,400 acres administered and maintained by the Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department. Marathon County also owns and maintains ten County forest units, all of which are open to the public for recreational purposes. The County forest covers a total of 30,714 acres of land.

Recreation

Recreation is any activity done for enjoyment when one is not working. It provides refreshment through a pastime, exercise, or diversions.

The Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department is organized in partnership with the City of Wausau to plan and maintain the City's system of 37 park facilities. The County system also works in partnership with private recreational leagues and organizations to coordinate the use of County facilities for active recreation and provide active recreational programming. During the 1990s, the County transferred ownership and responsibility to local units of government for some parks that served specific community needs in Weston, Athens, Elderon, Easton, and the Town of Eau Pleine.

The County plans to concentrate its efforts and resources on fewer, larger parks, having either exceptional natural features or special use facilities. The primary mission of the Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department is to adaptively manage our park and forest lands for natural resource sustainability while providing healthy recreational opportunities and unique experiences, making Marathon County the preferred place to live, work, and play.

Parks, Trails and Open Space

The primary components of the parks and recreation lands in Marathon County include County parks and forest units, State parks, trails, wildlife areas, and municipal parks. Combined, these add to the outdoor recreation opportunities available to residents and visitors. See the Recreation Areas Map.

County Parks

Marathon County parks have a unique style that reflects the geology and geography of the County, and the history of the park system. Many of the County parks are built along rivers or river impoundments, which form reservoirs that provide opportunities for swimming and fishing. The first director of the Marathon County parks department was a Landscape Architect and possessed the talent for designing harmonious wilderness structures for the county parks, characterized by the use of materials common to the area (e.g., timber and granite) and rustic designs. Many of the system's parks still have vintage CCC-era shelters, which the department works to maintain. In fact, some buildings at the County fairgrounds in Marathon Park are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Parking lots are often surrounded by small granite boulders.



Marathon Park in Wausau

Figure 11-1 provides details about all of the parks and forest units in the County system, including their locations, size, and key features. Parks and forest units are also displayed on the Recreation Areas map.

County Forest Units

Marathon County owns and maintains ten County forest units; all are open to the public for recreational purposes. The forest units are popular for timber management, hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, hiking, bird watching, and camping. The County seeks to balance the recreational uses of its forests with timber production. See the Recreation Areas Map.

Marathon County has a Comprehensive Land Use Plan to guide management of the County's forests through the year 2035. The mission of the plan is to manage and protect natural resources on a sustainable basis for the ecological, economic, educational, recreational, and research needs of present and future generations. See the Natural Resources chapter for more information on County Forest management.

Figure 11-1: Marathon County Parks and Forest Units			
Marathon County Parks	Location	Acreage	Key Features
Amco Park	379 CTH, Athens	39	Fishing, Picnic, Play Equipment, Shelter
Ashley Park	1600 Sandy Credd Road, Mosinee	160	Fishing, Boat Access
Big Eau Pleine Park	3301 Eau Pleine Park Road, Mosinee	1,453	Beach, Boat Landing, Camping, Trails, Cross Country Ski Trails, Disc Golf
Big Rapids Park	EP1806 Big Rapids Street, Stratford	33	Fishing, Picnic, Play Equipment, Shelter
Bluegill Bay Park	3800 Bluegill Avenue, Wausau	98	Boat Landing, Pier, Trails, Volleyball Court
Cherokee Park	H2700 CTH N, Colby	69	Fishing, Picnic, Play Equipment, Shelter, trails
Courthouse Square Park	500 Forest Street, Wausau	0.42	Open Area, Plants/Wildlife
D.C. Everest Park	1800 S 3rd Avenue, Wausau	12.1	Boat Landing, Pier, Restrooms
Dells of Eau Claire Park	P2150 CTH Y, Aniwa	274	Beach, Camping, Picnic, Swimming, Trails
Duane L. Corbin Shooting Range	2173 Rifle Road, Mosinee	100	Restrooms, Shelter, Shooting Range
Peoples Sports Complex	602 East Kent St, Wausau	54	Field Sports Facility, Concessions, Play Equipment
Marathon Park	1201 Stewart Avenue, Wausau	78	Baseball, Basketball, Camping, Pickleball, Sports Field, Tennis Court, Trails, Volleyball, Splash Pad
Mission Lake Park	400 County Park Road, Wausau	93	Beach, Boat Landing, Swimming, Trails, Volleyball
Mountain-Bay Trail	Trailhead-Municipal Street, Weston		Picnic, Restrooms, Trails, Cross Country Ski Trails
45 x 90 Geological Marker	5651 Meridian Road, Athens	0.1	Historic Site, Open Area
Rib Falls Park	1725 CTH S, Edgar	315	Fishing, Picnic, Play Equipment, Restrooms, Trails
Sunny Vale Park	1000 S 72nd Avenue, Wausau	300	Beach, Boating, Fishing, Picnic, Swimming, Trails, Volleyball
Sunny Vale Softball Complex	1000 S 66th Avenue, Wausau	72	Baseball, Picnic, Restrooms, Shelter, Sports Field
Marathon County Forest Units	Location	Acreage	Key Features
Bern Wetland Forest	Town of Bern	269	Hunting, Open Area, Trails
Burma Road Forest	Town of Mosinee	1,480	Hunting, Restrooms, Trails, ATV Trail
Elderon Forest Unit	Town of Elderon	280	Hunting, Open Area, Trails
Harrison-Hewitt Forest	Town of Harrison	9,874	Hunting, Open Area, Restrooms, Trails, Wildlife Refuge
Kronenwetter Forest	Town of Kronenwetter	5,176	Hunting, Open Area, Trails
Leather Camp Forest Unit	Town of Guenther	5,248	Hunting, Open Area, Trails
Miller Forest Unit	Town of Easton	80	Hunting, Open Area, Fishing
Nine Mile Forest Recreation Area	Village of Rib Mountain	4,897	Hunting, Restrooms, Shelter, Trails, Cross Country Ski, Mountain Bike Trail
Ringle Marsh Forest	Town of Ringle	3,108	Hunting, Open Area, Trails
Wisconsin River Forest	Town of Maine	303	Boating, Fishing, Hunting, Open Area, Trails

Source: Marathon County Park Department

State and Federal Park, Trail, and Wildlife Areas

In addition to the parks and forest units owned and maintained by the County, there are several State-owned recreation facilities and natural areas in Marathon County.

Rib Mountain State Park

Rib Mountain State Park, located in the Village of Rib Mountain, features picnic areas, hiking trails, cross-country ski trails, hunting, and two observation decks. Following the adoption of the Rib Mountain State Park Master Plan in 2022, the Wisconsin DNR has begun conceptual trail planning to expand trails and possibly trail uses within the park. Trails may include designs to support different skill levels, including everything from mountain bike, bouldering, snowshoeing, and hiking trails to more leisure strolling trails.

Near the State Park, at the former State Park Speedway, groups are working to create an outdoor recreation hub for mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and other active sporting activities. The facility would ideally link outdoor recreationists to the State Park and other community amenities.



The Entrance to Rib Mountain State Park

The Ice Age National Scenic Trail

The Ice Age Trail travels through the eastern side of the County, with about 35 miles of completed trails and connecting to the Dells of the Eau Claire County Park.

Wildlife & Fishery Areas

The McMillan Marsh Wildlife Area covers approximately 6,500 acres and contains bicycle and hiking trails. The George W. Mead Wildlife Area is a conservation and recreation area of over 33,000 acres along the Little Eau Pleine River and is open for public hiking, hunting, and fishing. The Plover River State Fishery Area consists of 1,443 acres of land along the Plover River, providing public access for fishing.

Special Regional Recreation Facilities

There are several unique recreational facilities, mostly located in the Wausau metro area, that serve the larger region and County. These include:

Wausau Whitewater Kayak Park – Located along the downtown riverfront, it utilizes the east channel of the Wisconsin River that includes natural rapids and dam-controlled water flow as a whitewater kayak race course. The course has developed into one of the best slalom and freestyle courses in the nation, and Wausau’s whitewater program has been named a Center of Excellence by the United States Canoe and Kayak Team, making it a top U.S. Training site. Spectator seating and trails have been developed along the course, which is within easy walking distance from downtown Wausau.

Historic Athletic Park – Located in a residential neighborhood in the City of Wausau, the original CCC-built granite perimeter stadium wall dates to 1936. The stadium was renovated with a new grandstand, retail store, and luxury suites in 2014. A new third base line and first base line seating area, restrooms, concessions, a party deck, upgraded field lighting, and a synthetic turf infield from 2016-2025. The park is the home of the Wausau Woodchucks, a summer collegiate baseball team, and the Wausau Ignite, a summer collegiate softball team, both within the Northwoods League.

Great Pinery Heritage Waterway – State Water Trail

The Great Pinery Heritage Waterway is a navigable water trail located in Northcentral Wisconsin. Situated on the Wisconsin River and its tributaries, the trail spans several counties and is 108 miles long from the Hat Rapids Dam in Oneida County to the Lake Dubay Dam in Portage County. In 2021, it was proposed to create this project and give it the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway name. The trail includes numerous educational and access points to highlight the many ways this waterway enriches life in central Wisconsin. 21 Miles of the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway was designated as a National Recreation Trail by the Department of Interior in June 2025.

Granite Peak – This private downhill skiing area, located within the Rib Mountain State Park, includes numerous runs, six lifts, a renovated chalet dating from 1938, a contemporary chalet, and a ski school.

Nine Mile County Forest Recreation Area – This is the most popular unit in the county forest system, with just under 4,900 acres. Nine Mile accommodates multiple uses, including sustainable timber harvests, hunting, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, horseback riding, hiking, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing. It also contains the Duane L. Corbin Shooting Range Park for target and trap shooting as well as archery. Nine Mile also hosts recreational competitions each year, including summer and winter mountain bike races, cross-country ski races, and local school cross-country races.

Rivers Edge Parkway – A master plan to establish a bicycle/pedestrian trail along the banks of the Wisconsin River through the City of Wausau was updated in 2020. The Rivers Edge Master Plan outlines a long-range (20-30 year) framework for improving access to the riverfront and enhancing the riverfront environment. While the master plan technically only includes the City of Wausau, interest is growing in communities throughout the Wausau metro area to work cooperatively to establish a connected trail system that will eventually extend the length of the Wisconsin River valley through the metro area and beyond. To date, slightly over 3 miles of trail have been constructed, mostly along the downtown riverfront. There is also broad community support for connecting the riverfront trail system with the Mountain-Bay state trail and other local municipal trail systems.



Rivers Edge Parkway in Wausau

Forest Tax Law Land

An estimated one-third of Marathon County land area is forested. Approximately 115,000 acres of private woodlands are set aside under the Managed Forest Law or Forest Crop Law programs administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WisDNR). Under the Law, some of this private land can choose to be open to the public. Open lands under the Managed Forest Law program allow hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, and cross-country skiing. Open lands under the Forest Crop law allow for public hunting and fishing. Not all land under these laws are open to the public. The WisDNR website has a mapping application which displays open lands.

Park System Needs

The Marathon County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is intended to provide guidance to County staff and officials in the acquisition, development and programming of County parks, forests, and special recreation areas. The plan provides recreational needs analysis, recreation issue identification, and an action plan for development to meet the needs of the residents of Marathon County. The Plan makes the County eligible for various state and federal grant and aid funding programs.

The current plan identified several needs related to parks and recreation and outlines several actions to address those needs. The identified needs are summarized below.

- **Acreage Needs** – According to the plan, add 320 acres of park and forest land per year. Adding this amount of acreage would offset the projected deficit by the year 2030. The County does not actively seek land to purchase; however, based on the county growth projection and the goal for public land, the County will pursue the purchase of park or forest land that is presented to the County from a willing landowner that is contiguous to current public lands or serves a public benefit and/or protects natural resources.
- **New or Expanded Park Facilities**- The County should develop new parks in areas that are underserved by existing facilities, where future residential expansion is expected to occur, or where the acquisition of park and open space will advance the goals and policies of this plan or the Marathon County Comprehensive and/or Strategic Plan. While there is currently adequate geographic coverage of County parks, population projections anticipate additional park land requirements in developing and growing areas due to increased demand. The County should also focus on expanding, where possible, existing parks to increase acreage and use. The County should plan for improvements or new construction of park facilities that are highly used, serve the residents of Marathon County, and provide an economic impact for the region. The Westside Master Plan identified facilities to be improved or reconstructed within Marathon Park such as the Ice Arena and Grandstand. Improvements to campgrounds, SunnyVale Softball Complex, and the Peoples Sports Complex would fall under this category.
- **Park Acquisition/Development**- The County should also acquire and develop additional specialty use park or recreation land to meet identified needs such as multi-purpose trails; boat launches on the Wisconsin River Forest Unit and Lake DuBay; kayak launches at Sunny Vale and Rib Falls,

development of Rib Falls Park, protection of historic/cultural/natural features; and, expanded campground facilities (including equestrian campgrounds).

- Trail Improvement- The County should develop, in conjunction with other agencies, a County-wide trail system that optimizes year-round, multi-use activities including interpretive, wildlife viewing, hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling/ATVing, mountain biking, running, and walking. Accessible (ADA-compliant) trails are also important throughout the County-wide system.
- Ongoing Recommendations- The Marathon County Outdoor Recreation Plan highlights additional recommendations that provide a basis for important updates, environmental protections, user engagement, and access that do not specifically require easement. Many of these recommendations are best programmatic practices the County should implement within the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry agency itself, while others require annual review of trends in use and detail specific classes of users (ADA access, etc.).

Areas of High Demand

High demand for certain recreation facilities or opportunities underscores the need to balance the desire to meet growing demands, given limited budgets, while minimizing use conflicts and resource impacts.

Water Based Recreation

Participation in water-based recreation continues to grow with the enhancements and state trail designation of the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway. Providing more access or improving existing access to water resources will continue to be a desire throughout the region.

Trail Development

There is strong public support for the development of more trails for year-round recreational activities. The Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan recommends that trail development be given high priority. Balancing the needs of a wide variety of trail users can be a challenge. Issues can arise regarding trail damage by higher intensity users such as mountain bikers and ATVs, safety concerns, particularly where motorized and non-motorized users share trails, and conflicts with hunting in joint use areas. In addition, trail maintenance and enforcement of trail use rules are common concerns of the various trail user groups, requiring coordination.

Rural Bicycling Network Development

Marathon County is well-positioned to develop rural bike routes. The county has a significant number of natural amenities, especially close to Wausau, and as bicycling access in these areas expands, the desire to bike between these destinations grows. The topography of the surrounding region is also encouraging for cycling, with rolling hills, visually attractive landscapes. The area is also home to a couple of active cycling clubs and Amish and Mennonite populations who will commute by bicycle. Rural cycling routes can also play significant roles in growing rural tourism and further connecting isolated communities.

With the creation of the Marathon County Rural Bike Network and Technical Guide, the county now has a framework to install more robust on-road cyclist facilities as part of planned roadway improvement projects. The guide identified priority routes for rural cyclist facilities and design considerations and amenities for those routes. Elements of design that may be addressed for cyclists in future roadway improvements would include signage, pavement markings, shoulder widths and paved shoulders, where to use rumble strips, use of safety rails on slopes, and installation of bike maintenance stations on County-owned lands throughout the County.

ATV/UTV Facilities

Demand for all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and utility-terrain vehicle (UTV) facilities has grown in Marathon County. Due to the nature of ATV and UTV use, there are a few other recreational uses that ATVs and UTVs are compatible with besides other motorized uses. Marathon County offers more winter ATV opportunities than any other County in the state by making the majority of its 863 miles of snowmobile trails available to ATVs with some restrictions based on temperature. However, UTVs are not allowed on snowmobile trails due to their weight and trail funding limitations. Summer ATV opportunities are limited to the Burma County Forest Unit and the Edgar-Stratford Trail. In general, private landowners have not been willing to open their lands to public ATV/UTV use. There are presently no other public lands in Marathon County that can physically accommodate ATV/UTV use due to environmental limitations or other existing recreation uses that are incompatible with ATV/UTV use. To accommodate additional ATV/UTV connections, some towns have opened their roads.



Edgar-Fenwood Trail in Edgar

Recreational Activities

Competitive Activities

Team sports are a major element of recreation. Many county parks and other recreation facilities include spaces for team sports. Baseball, softball, and soccer fields, volleyball, tennis, and pickleball courts, an ice arena, and other team sports facilities are popular recreation amenities within the County Park system. Most notably, Marathon



Pickleball Courts at Marathon Park in Wausau

County manages and maintains a best-in-class sports complex with 15 soccer fields, a 5-field softball complex, an ice arena, 9 designated pickleball courts, and a world-class whitewater kayak

course. Athletic Park is the home of the collegiate league Wausau Woodchucks baseball team and Wausau Ignite softball team. The ice arena houses youth, high school, and adult ice sports, and is the home of the NH3L Wausau Cyclones Hockey Team. In addition to many public facilities in parks and at schools, some team sports have private facilities. Examples of private facilities include the curling center, gymnastics facilities, golf courses, tennis clubs, and others.

Silent Sports

Silent sports are outdoor activities that are human-powered and aerobic, where movement does not require motors or fossil fuels. Silent sports include activities like hiking, cycling, running, paddling, cross country skiing, backpacking, snowshoeing, and multi-sport races like triathlons. Silent sports embrace the peacefulness of being in the middle of nature while being active. These aerobic outdoor activities take place on the rivers, roads, and trails across the County. Marathon County has approximately 22 miles of groomed cross-country ski trails, 120 miles of hiking trails, 46 miles of mountain bike trails, and 8 miles of snowshoe trails. Numerous competitive events occur on these facilities.

Motorized Activities

Motorized recreation activities involve the use of a vehicle such as a snowmobile, all-terrain vehicle (ATV), utility-terrain vehicle (UTV), off-road motorcycle, or watercraft. These vehicles not only provide a form of recreation for many users but are often used as a local and regional mode of transportation. Marathon County has approximately 863 miles of snowmobile trails; 696 miles of these are also open to winter ATV use. Of the 863 miles of snowmobile trails (Note: this includes state-funded and unfunded trails), only 54 are on public land. The remaining miles are on private property, belonging to over 1,800 landowners. Marathon County also has 21 miles of joint summer ATV and UTV trails, all of which are on County land. There are no public off-road motorcycle facilities in Marathon County. Watercraft have access to approximately 32,055 acres of water in Marathon County, including acreage on 18 lakes, 6 major flowages, and many of the 643 miles of rivers or streams. Marathon County has approximately 3,365 miles of roadway that are frequently driven simply for pleasure and sight-seeing. Pleasure drives are a popular recreational activity enjoyed by motorists of all ages.

Electric bicycles, or ebikes, are becoming increasingly popular throughout the county. In Wisconsin, ebikes are largely regulated like human-powered bicycles. Like many other states, Wisconsin uses a three-class system for ebikes. These classifications determine where and how individuals can ride an ebike, based on the motor assistance or speed. Generally, lower class ebikes are allowed on bike paths, multi-use trails, and roads, but local ordinances or unit regulations may have specific restrictions.

Other Recreational Activities

Not all recreational activities fall neatly into one of the above categories. Other outdoor recreational activities include those that interact more directly with nature. Nature-based outdoor activities include camping, birdwatching, viewing or photographing nature, and hunting and trapping. Fishing

and ice fishing are popular recreation activities on the rivers and lakes in Marathon County. Many public and private spaces across the county are open to hunting during the various hunting seasons. Other winter recreation activities present in Marathon County include downhill skiing, snow tubing, sledding, and ice skating.

Tourism

According to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Marathon County ranked 12 out of the 72 counties in the state for total economic impact from tourism. This is shown through the wide array of attractions located in Marathon County. Each year, people come from all over the state and country for the local attractions and shopping districts. In 2023, Marathon County had over \$270 million in visitor expenditures. See the Economic Development section of Chapter 10 for more information on the economic impact of the Tourism industry in Marathon County.

Tourism

Tourism is the industry of providing information, accommodations, transportation, attractions, and other services to tourists.

Marathon County has several organizations that promote and support tourism. The Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention and Visitors Bureau provides information to people visiting Wausau and Central Wisconsin about accommodations, activities, shopping, food, and events. The Visitor's Bureau is also highlighted on the state's tourism website, travelwisconsin.com. The Wausau River District is a non-profit that enhances and markets downtown Wausau. Wausau Events is another local non-profit organization that markets and runs events in and around Wausau to create community.

As weather patterns change, Marathon County facilities are seeing changes in recreation patterns, especially during the winter months. While the average season is still about 76 days of open ski trails a year, looking at the open days from 2005 through the 2015 season, the average was almost 86 days a year, whereas the average in the last 10 years has only been 66 days a year.

Key Attractions

Currently, there are a number of attractions in Marathon County, WI. There is an array of museums, breweries, aquatic centers, splash pads, cafes and restaurants, and a snow tubing hill. The Grand Theater in downtown Wausau is a major event center hosting a variety of local and national productions and concerts.

Key attractions and special use owned and/or operated by Marathon County include Sylvan tubing hill and mountain bike area, whitewater kayak course, 45X90 Geographic Marker, Marathon County ice arena, People Sports Complex, Sunnyvale Softball Complex, Athletic Park, three aquatic centers, splash pad, and skate park.

Marathon County is also home to several regular events. The Wisconsin Valley Fair takes place in Marathon Park in Wausau during the summer every year. The Fair is a six-day event with approximately 150,000 visitors each year. Weekly concerts, waterski shows, and outdoor movie nights draw people from beyond Marathon County to the Wausau area in the summer. Marathon County is also the location of events such as the Chalkfest, Bull Falls Blues Fest, the Wausau Festival of the Arts, Artrageous Weekend, balloon festivals, quilt festivals, and an airshow.

Marathon County is also home to the annual Badger State Games. The Badger State Games are an Olympic-style competition that began in 1985. The Wausau/Central Wisconsin Convention and Visitors Bureau took over the Games in 2011, after the Wisconsin Sports Development Corporation decided to discontinue them. The summer games take place primarily in June, and the winter games take place primarily in January. Over 15,000 athletes participate each year.

Agri-tourism

Another area to develop in the tourist industry is Agri-tourism. Agri-tourism is based on utilizing existing farms and agricultural areas as a form of tourism. Currently, in Marathon County, there is minimal agri-tourism occurring. However, there are a number agri-tourism opportunities in the county such as Pizza on the Farm, Farmers Markets, rent a cabin on a farm, tours, orchards, pumpkin patches, corn mazes, and berry picking. These events take place on farms around the Wausau area as well as in the smaller communities of Marathon County, such as Edgar, Ringle, and Athens.

Sport Tourism – Up and Coming

Much of the growth experienced in the tourism industry was due to investment opportunities in sports tourism. The sport tourist industry has contributed significantly to Marathon County tourism revenues. It has accounted for a 14.5 million dollar increase in tourism. The trend should continue for years to come due to the Athletic Park Renovations, Wausau Curling Center, Peoples Sports Complex, and Granite Peak Improvements.

The Wausau Whitewater Kayak Course is a third of a mile park located in downtown Wausau. The park has a whitewater ride for anyone from beginner to expert paddlers. The lower section of the course is beginner-friendly with a terrain of holes and waves. The Class II+ is the portion for more advanced paddlers. The main attraction of the park is Big Drop, shortly after is Little Drop. Regional, national, and international competitions are held at Whitewater Park.

The International Mountain Bike Association established the Ride Center Program in 2007. A Ride Center consists of a variety of trails, from backcountry trails to gravity trails to urban mountain bike trails. The Central Wisconsin Offroad Cycling Coalition has developed a master plan to develop the Wausau area as an IMBA Ride Center, which would contribute substantially to tourism related to mountain biking. There are currently 20 miles of 12' wide trails and over 13 miles of single-track mountain biking trails in the Nine Mile County Forest Recreation Area. There is a trail for everyone, from advanced to beginners. Sylvan Hill Park in Wausau includes a bike park, including gravity trails, a pump track, and a skills area. Multiple looped trails offer a variety of mountain biking experiences.

Mountain biking is also available at Big Eau Pleine Park and Ringle trails. Fat tire snowbiking trails are available at Big Eau Pleine, Ringle trails, and Nine Mile County Forest. In addition, Marathon County has purchased land in Brokaw for possible future mountain bike facility development.

Sustainable Tourism for the Future

Sustainable tourism takes into account the wants and needs of the tourists and the host area while protecting and developing opportunities for years to come. Marathon County has the potential to develop sustainable tourism in the forested region of the county. In the county, there are almost 470,000 acres of forested land. The forested lands can be utilized to develop hiking, camping, and biking areas. Developing these areas in a sustainable manner would promote a healthy environment, preserve natural areas, and increase tourism. However, care should be taken to measure the carrying capacity of the region.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources is a broad term that can encompass many aspects of heritage, including archaeological sites, historic buildings and landscapes, historic transportation routes, or traditional cultural properties important to American Indians or other cultural groups.

Cultural resources are those elements around us that signify our heritage and help to evoke the sense of place that makes an area distinctive. Cultural Resources include buildings, sites, and landscapes that help communities retain their sense of identity in an increasingly homogenized society. The recognition of historic buildings, historic roads, or archaeological sites can provide a basis for towns and villages to preserve some aspects of their rural character. This plan recognizes that not all historic buildings or historic farms can be preserved. However, the recognition of their importance in the collective memory of Marathon County, and the desire to preserve that character as expressed in numerous community meetings, is an important reason to integrate cultural resources into the county planning process.

In Marathon County, residents have expressed a strong desire to preserve the rural character of the County. Increasing urbanization on the fringe of Wausau and scattered residential settlement in towns farther out threaten the rural density and require greater service provision than the rural towns have traditionally provided. Given the changing agricultural economy, however, many towns are unsure how to respond to development and are concerned about over-regulation.

A Brief History of Marathon County

Marathon County is located in the north central portion of the state of Wisconsin, on the edge of the Northern Highland physiographic region. The Northern Highland is a pre-glacial remnant that was worn down by the Wisconsin glaciation about 23,000 years ago. A terminal moraine cut through eastern Marathon County and created the more glaciated southeastern corner of the county. Glacial deposits modified the drainage of the Northern Highland, creating lakes and swamps, waterfalls and rapids, as well as sandy and stone-filled soils. Rib Mountain, rising 1,941 feet above sea level, is also

a remnant of the pre-glacial era. The western half of the county was a product of older glacial drift covered with river deposits, glacial lake deposits, and other glacial drift. Located on the southern edge of the Highland, Marathon County was covered with conifer and hardwood forest at the beginning of large-scale Euro-American settlement in the mid-nineteenth century.

Marathon County had been home to the Ojibwa tribes since they had moved south from Madeline Island by the mid-eighteenth century. Much of Marathon County was taken over by the U.S. government in a treaty with the Western Ojibwa, signed in 1837. The following year, St. Louis lumberman George Stevens traveled north to investigate the newly opened pine and hardwood forests along the Wisconsin River. By 1839, Stevens had built a lumber mill and dams at Big Bull Falls, destined to become the city of Wausau. Development was rapid along the river, and by 1847, there were 45 sawmills on the upper river, and all suitable mill sites were taken.

The Economics of Settlement

The lumbering industry dominated the development of Marathon County through the next half-century. Community development was led by men in the lumber business: Walter McIndoe, who purchased the Stevens Mill at Big Bull Falls in 1848; Dr. William Scholfield, who arrived in 1851 and whose family operated the Martin mill on the Eau Claire River until the 1880s; Joseph Dessert, who purchased the mill at Little Bull Falls (Mosinee) by the 1850s and operated it for half a century; and Frederick Rietbrock, who developed the mill at Black Creek Falls (Athens) in 1879.

The lumber business provided the foundation for the lumbermen's attempts to construct railroads and create other businesses. McIndoe, elected to Congress in 1860, led the effort to secure a land grant for the Wisconsin Central Railroad. The railroad, however, ran not to Wausau, but along the western edge of the County, serving Spencer, Unity, Colby, and Abbotsford. The Wisconsin Valley Railroad (later part of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific system) arrived in Wausau in 1874. The Milwaukee, Lake Shore & Western (later the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad) went through Wausau on the way to Marshfield by 1880. The arrival of railroads and the growth of the lumber business led to population growth, and Wausau, the largest community, grew from 1,349 in 1870 to 12,354 thirty years later.

While the earliest attraction in Marathon County had been the forests, the soils throughout the western two-thirds of the County were particularly suitable for agriculture. Farming expanded rapidly. In 1860, 156 farms covering 20,366 acres were in operation. By 1900, 4,276 farms on 442,878 acres (43.9% of land area) showed the strength of agriculture. The early settlers grew a variety of crops, including hay, potatoes, peas, oats, rye, barley, and wheat. Corn became established later. Wheat never predominated in Marathon County, since by the time of widespread agriculture there, the primary wheat industry had already moved to the west. By the 1880s, however, the rise of dairying soon dominated agriculture in the County and in the state.

As early as 1885, over 230,000 pounds of butter and over 4,300 pounds of cheese were produced in Marathon County. Over the next decade, creameries developed to take over the home butter-making

activities, and the County had 17 such facilities by 1905. Cheese making also became important, and by the end of the nineteenth century, Marathon County had the only sizeable activity in northern Wisconsin. By the Teens and 1920s, dairying had a strong foothold as a primary economic activity in Marathon County, displacing the lumber industry that had been in decline since the turn of the century.

Development of the Towns and Villages

Marathon County towns and villages generally started either as a lumber and saw milling site, or as a station site when the railroads built into the County in the 1870s and 1880s. Most settlements prospered with the lumber industry, but beginning in the 1880s, as farming and the dairy industry began to expand, villages gradually began to serve as agricultural centers with processing facilities such as creameries, cheese-making factories, or grain elevators.

The transition from lumbering to agriculture was prominent in the area surrounding Frederick Rietbrock's saw milling settlement of Black Creek Falls (later renamed Athens). In the 1870s, Milwaukee attorney Rietbrock purchased the forests covering much of three surrounding towns, including Halsey, Johnson, and Rietbrock. About one-third of the residents of Black Creek Falls were employed in Rietbrock's lumber business. Yet as the lumber business declined, Rietbrock led the way toward diversified farming with his own operation, where he experimented with fertilizer use on crops, raised special breeds of dairy cattle, and encouraged agricultural education. Rietbrock's personal transition from lumber to agriculture typified the changes that occurred throughout Marathon County in the early twentieth century.

Other communities followed the same pattern but were located on the various railroads that crisscrossed Marathon County. The Wisconsin Central, built on the western edge of the County, facilitated the development of the villages of Unity and Spencer in the white pine lumbering belt, and the cities of Colby and Abbotsford in the hardwood and hemlock forest belt. In the 1880s, the Milwaukee, Lake Shore & Western Railroad was built through the County, running through the eastern towns to Wausau and southwest to Marshfield. This line (later Chicago and Northwestern) ran through Norrie, the Village of Hatley, and Ringle on its way toward Wausau, and then west and southwest, where the railroad served Marathon City, Edgar, Fenwood, Stratford, and McMillan on its way to Marshfield. Wausau and towns to the south had previously received service in 1874 from the Wisconsin Valley Railroad (later the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific) when it was built north from Wisconsin Rapids.

Ethnicity and Settlement

The lumber industry and the agricultural development that followed it provided the jobs and land that attracted settlers. While many of the lumbermen were of Yankee heritage, many other settlers were immigrants. Some were recruited from their first homes in Milwaukee and other cities; other residents were new arrivals directly from Europe. In terms of ethnic heritage, Germans have dominated Marathon County over the last century.

Germans from Hesse-Darmstadt arrived as early as the mid-1850s and settled in the towns of Maine and Berlin by 1855. In succeeding decades, other Germans followed, from Pomerania, West Prussia, and Brandenburg. Germans especially concentrated in the northern and central towns, from Marathon, Cassel, and Wien north to the county line. By the late nineteenth century, approximately 75 percent of the Marathon County population was German-born or of German parentage.

Marathon County also attracted immigrants from Poland by the 1870s. Many of the earliest came from Milwaukee, responding to ads about available land. A group settled in Cassel in 1875, and another group relocated to Frederick Rietbrock's lands to establish Poniatoski. After the turn of the century, colonization efforts in the southeast portion of the County attracted additional Polish settlers in Reid, Bevent, Franzen, Guenther, Knowlton, Kronenwetter, and Mosinee.

Smaller colonies of other European settlers were scattered throughout the County as well. Norwegians were prominent in Elderon and in the southeast section. There was an Irish emigration to Emmet, Mosinee, and nearby Cleveland. Bohemians were present in the Rocky Ridge area near Mosinee, and others were located in Johnson and Holton. A Dutch colony formed in Plover, Easton, and Ringle in the early 1900s, with residents who moved from Milwaukee and Sheboygan.

Economic Diversification

While new residents came for land and to settle the outlying portions of Marathon County, the lumbermen who had first come to exploit the pine forests wrestled with change. The depletion of pine forests by 1900 forced lumbermen to accept hemlock and other hardwoods as raw materials. While these forests kept the business going until about 1915, lumbermen increasingly sought to diversify with new ventures. A group of these leaders began meeting informally as early as 1901 and became known as the Wausau Group. Led by Cyrus Yawkey, owner of the Yawkey Lumber Company, the group invested in new sources of lumber supply or new business ventures. The Wausau Group created a new role for Wausau and helped it transition from a lumber milling center into a managerial center for various lumber-related businesses. Although Wausau continued as a production center, under Wausau Group leadership, the city became the home office location for widespread lumber holdings and funneled the profits back into the city.

Men in the Wausau Group were responsible for shifting from lumber production to the creation of paper mills and built the Wausau Paper Mills Company in 1899 at Brokaw. The Group supported the founding of the Wausau Sulphate Fibre Company, a wood pulp and paper operation, located at Mosinee. A third mill was planned in 1909 at Rothschild, with the construction of a 450-foot dam across the river that would create Lake Wausau. The Rothschild plant was called Marathon Paper Mills Company and was led for 40 years by David Clark Everest, who ultimately took over leadership of the Wausau Group after Cyrus Yawkey.

Concern about safety hazards in the paper mills led to the Wausau Group's entry into the insurance business. In 1911, on the day that the Wisconsin Workmen's Compensation law was passed, the Wausau Group formed the Employers Mutual Liability Insurance Company. By 1931, Employers

Mutual had become the leading writer of workmen’s compensation policies in Wisconsin. Later, as Wausau Insurance, this company created a lasting institution that brought a national image to the city through its advertising that featured the old Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad depot (located at 720 Grant Street). With leadership and interlocking directorates in the local banking industry and the street railway company, as well as leadership of local civic and social groups and arts and culture, the Wausau Group was responsible for carrying the city of Wausau and Marathon County into the mid-twentieth century.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Wausau continued to build on the diversified economic foundation created by the Wausau Group. The local control provided by the Wausau Group was clearly important in maintaining the economy of the area, although some have noted that this control prevented the influx of “new blood” or innovative ideas in business and civic leadership. In any event, there has been a strong sense of continuity in leadership in the County over time.

By 2000, the economic foundation retained the same base, but with some diversification. Wood and paper products are still leading industries, but many manufacturing firms also support the economic base. Marathon County is the number one ranking dairy-producing county in the state, although agriculture continues to suffer from a difficult market economy. Major employers, however, are led by the health care industry and insurance. Tourism has become more important, with efforts to enhance the County’s natural features such as Rib Mountain, the development of biking trails, and the parks along the numerous rivers that run through the County.

The population has become somewhat more diverse, although it is still predominantly white. Since the 1980s, large numbers of Asians, particularly Hmong, have settled in the Wausau area and now make up over ten percent of the population. The Hispanic population in the County has also steadily grown over the last few decades. The rural culture embraced by Mennonite and Amish residents in northwest Marathon County also adds a unique quality that distinguishes the County from others.

Existing Cultural Resources

There are two primary methods for official recognition of historic properties—the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and designation by a local Historic Landmarks Commission. The following discussion identifies how these tools have been used in Marathon County.

Historic Places

A historic place or heritage site is an official location where pieces of political, military, cultural, or social history have been preserved due to their cultural historic value. Historic sites are usually protected by law, and many have been recognized with an official national historic site designation.

Organized efforts to preserve historic resources in Marathon County date to the mid-1970s, when several actions were undertaken to preserve the County’s heritage. The first properties were nominated to the NRHP in 1974, and the City of Wausau adopted an ordinance establishing the local Historic Landmarks Commission in 1975. The Marathon County Extension Homemakers compiled a

booklet, “Historic Landmarks of Marathon County,” that identified a wide variety of rural buildings, structures, and archaeological sites throughout the entire County.

Since that time, historic properties throughout the County have been recognized through both the NRHP and by the local Wausau Historic Landmarks Commission for properties within Wausau. Some properties are recognized at both levels. In Marathon County, only Wausau has established local recognition through its Historic Landmarks Commission. As of 2024, the Landmarks Commission had designated 31 individual properties and the Downtown Historic District. The Downtown Historic District encompasses 99 properties in an area bounded by Washington Street, 1st Street, Grant Street, and 5th Street.

The City of Wausau has received several external designations in regard to historic preservation. In 2002, the City became a Certified Local Government in Wisconsin for historic preservation. In 2009, the City was named a Preserve America Community by the Federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. These titles and partnerships encourage further preservation efforts in the City, as well as provide funding opportunities for preservation efforts.

The Marathon County Historical Society, formed in 1952, spearheads many historic preservation efforts in the County. The organization was given the Cyrus C. Yawkey house at 403 McIndoe Street for its headquarters. The Yawkey house, built in 1900 and fully restored, is home to the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum. The Woodson House is the society's headquarters with the research library and archives, administrative offices, storage, and exhibit space.



Cyrus C. Yawkey House in Wausau

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11-2: Properties on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)			
Property Name	Street & Number	City	Listed Date
Andrew Warren Historic District	Roughly bounded by Fulton, Grant, 4th, and 7th Sts.	Wausau	1/5/1984
Bird, C. B., House	522 McIndoe St.	Wausau	5/1/1980
Dells of the Eau Claire County Park	P2150 Cty. Rd. Y	Plover	7/5/2016
Dessert, Joseph, Library	123 Main St.	Mosinee	5/1/1980
Dunbar, C. F., House	929 McIndoe St.	Wausau	5/1/1980
East Hill Residential Historic District	Roughly bounded by North Seventh, Adams, North Tenth, Scott and North Bellis Sts.	Wausau	4/21/2004
Edgar Village Hall	107 W. Beech St.	Edgar	3/31/2000
Everest, D. C., House	1206 Highland Park Blvd.	Wausau	5/1/1980
First Universalist Church	504 Grant St.	Wausau	5/1/1980
Fricke-Menzner House	105 Main St.	Marathon	7/16/1992
Fromm Brothers Fur and Ginseng Farm	436 Co. Hwy. F	Hamburg	11/6/2013
Fromm, Walter and Mabel, House	Off WI 107	Hamburg	6/17/1982
Highland Park Historic District	Generally bounded by Hamilton, Franklin, North 10th, and North 14th Sts.	Wausau	10/17/2022
Hotel Wausau	221 Scott St.	Wausau	4/26/2021
Jones, Granville D., House	915 Grant St.	Wausau	12/7/1977
Maine Site (47MR22) (Additional Documentation)	Address Restricted	Brokaw	7/19/1984
Maine Site (47MR22) (Boundary Increase)	Address Restricted	Brokaw	7/19/2024
Manson, Charles L. and Dorothy, House	1224 Highland Park Blvd.	Wausau	4/5/2016
Marathon County Fairgrounds	Stewart Ave.	Wausau	5/1/1980
Marathon Shoe Company East Side Plant	1418 N. 1st St.	Wausau	1/12/2017
Marchetti, Louis, House	111 Grant St.	Wausau	3/7/1996
Mathie, Karl, House	202 Water St.	Mosinee	5/1/1980
Miller, Henry, House	1314 Grand Ave.	Wausau	6/14/1982
Rothschild Pavilion	1104 Park St.	Rothschild	6/27/2002
Schofield School	1310 S. Grand Ave.	Schofield	3/24/2015
Schuetz, E.K., House	930 Franklin St.	Wausau	5/1/1980
Single, Benjamin, House	W of Wausau at 4708 Stettin Dr.	Wausau	11/24/1980
Stewart, Hiram C., House	521 Grant St.	Wausau	8/30/1974
United States Post Office and Courthouse	317 1st St.	Wausau	5/2/2012
Wausau Club	309 McClellan St.	Wausau	9/14/1989
Wegner, C. H., House	906 Grant St.	Wausau	5/1/1980
Wright, Duey and Julia, House	904 Grand Ave.	Wausau	7/16/1999
Wright, Ely, House	901 6th St.	Wausau	3/1/1982
Yawkey, Cyrus C., House	403 McIndoe St.	Wausau	12/31/1974
Zion Lutheran Church	709 North 6th Street	Wausau	4/11/2024

Source: National Register of Historic Places

The County Historical Society and its staff have nominated properties to the NRHP. Much of their work focuses on education, including programs such as the Little Red Schoolhouse Living History program at Marathon Park, various educational slide presentations, workshops, exhibits, and guest

speakers. The Society has also worked with local communities in the County to preserve their history and has published a self-guided tour of agricultural and rural landmarks, “Discover Marathon County’s Agricultural Heritage” (2000). There is currently not a county-wide group similar to the Wausau Historic Landmarks Commission to recognize and/or designate historic properties outside of Wausau.

Marathon County has 35 listings on the National Register of Historic Places, as shown on **Figure 11-2**. The majority of the NRHP properties are in the City of Wausau, with only ten properties outside the city. Except for the First Universalist Church, the Wausau Club, and the Marathon County Fairgrounds, all NRHP listings in Wausau are residences of former city leaders. Many of these historic residences are in the Andrew Warren Historic District, a district of approximately 10 blocks of homes built primarily between 1868 and 1934. Nine of the NRHP properties were nominated together as part of the Eschweiler Thematic Resources, all designed by Milwaukee architect Alexander C. Eschweiler. One archaeological site in the vicinity of the Village of Maine is also listed on the NRHP (location restricted). Property details can be accessed via the Marathon County Historical Society and the NRHP websites. The Dells of the Eau Claire County Park were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2016. The designation was based on the park’s historical significance, particularly the contributions of the Civilian Conservation Corps in building the infrastructure there in the late 1930s.

Archaeological Sites and Cemeteries

Types of archaeological sites include places where people lived, worked, and worshipped. The following types of sites have been identified in Marathon County:

- Cemeteries (including burial mounds and unmarked graves)
- Cabins and homesteads
- Native American community sites
- Fish/weir/fish trap
- Sugarbush/maple sugaring sites
- Farmsteads
- Logging camps
- Military sites
- Corn hill/ farm fields

Cemeteries, Burial Mounds, Other Burials

Wisconsin Statute 157.70 provides for the protection of all human burial sites, including all marked and unmarked burials and cemeteries. According to the Marathon County records of the Genealogy Trails History Group, there are currently 158 cemeteries and burial areas identified in Marathon County, and it is likely that other cemeteries and burials may be present.

Suspected burial mounds or unmarked burials must be reported to the state Burial Sites Preservation Office. If human remains are uncovered during excavation, all work must cease pending review by the Burial Sites Preservation Office. All cemeteries and burials in Marathon

County should be catalogued under Wisconsin Statutes 157.70 to provide maximum protection of these sites.

Additional Surveyed Properties

The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has conducted architectural surveys in Marathon County to identify historic properties that are believed to be significant. The most recent survey was from the 1970s and thus is somewhat dated. Although the SHPO maintains inventory files, they have not been field checked in recent years. As a result, some properties may no longer be extant, while others may have deteriorated to a point where they have lost their integrity and significance. In general, properties that were identified as significant in that survey included cheese factories, farmsteads and barns, and rural one-room schools. The SHPO property surveys are too long for inclusion in this plan, but they should provide a basis for any additional survey work that the county may undertake in the future.

Opportunities and Challenges

Limited Perception of Landmark Properties – There is a need to survey and recognize a wide variety of buildings and sites, and their contributions to Marathon County’s heritage. The current NRHP listings are almost exclusively devoted to grand residential dwellings and do not reflect the county’s agricultural, industrial, or recreational heritage. For example, some of the parks (Rib Mountain State Park, Elderon Park, Athens Park, Cherokee County Park, and Dells of the Eau Claire County Park) have Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)-era stonework, landscaping, or park buildings that should be surveyed. Bridges and industrial properties should also be evaluated for their historic significance. Roadside religious art and grottos are distinctive regional structures that are related to the ethnic and religious heritage of the county and are worthy of note. Distinctive churches throughout the towns, villages, and cities are important architectural properties that are true landmarks in their communities and should be inventoried.

Symbolic and Financial Value of Historic Properties – All too often, Marathon County’s historic buildings have been viewed as expendable, or as a frill. Renovation or re-use is summarily dismissed as too expensive without even considering such options, even though renovation costs are often significantly lower than demolition and new construction. Buildings that could provide an immediate sense of place in a community are torn down and replaced with nondescript modern concrete, without exploring options for renovation. The Mortenson Stone sawmill’s planning mill, the last remaining original sawmill building in Wausau, has been dismantled and stored awaiting reconstruction by the Marathon County Historical Society.

Rural Character and Historic Resources – In Marathon County, residents have expressed a strong desire to preserve the rural character of the county and raised concerns about increasing ex-urban development and the decline of working farms. An important part of maintaining rural character is maintaining the rural landscape and the rural buildings that convey that sense of place. While it is important to address the location and type of new development, there is also a need to preserve some visible reminders of rural character, including working farms. Without preserving some of the

existing resources, including farmsteads and farmlands, the very characteristics that attract new residents will increasingly be gone.

Protection of Archaeological Sites and Cemeteries – Cultural resources planning includes the identification and protection of archaeological sites and historic cemeteries. The Wisconsin Historical Society maintains a list of reported sites and cemeteries, representing a fraction of sites that are actually present. This information is often overlooked and should be incorporated into the planning process for local communities.

Arts and Performing Arts

There are numerous opportunities in Marathon County to listen to exquisite music and see heart-stopping performances and breathtaking works of art. The Grand Theater, located in downtown Wausau, opened in 2002 and has attracted over 125,000 people each year with its amazing performances. Other performing arts organizations in the County include Wausau Community Theater, the Central Wisconsin Children’s Theater, the Wausau Conservatory of Music, several local dance companies, and several bands and choirs.

Among other local museums and galleries, Marathon County is home to the Woodson Art Museum. This museum has a stunning collection of paintings, graphics, and sculptures consisting primarily of birds. The beautiful gardens are home to a collection of sculptures. Wausau is also the location of the Central for the Visual Arts, a visual arts organization that offers art exhibits, art classes, and an art shop.



The Grand Theater in Wausau

Issues

Intergovernmental Coordination – Currently, recreation facilities and opportunities are offered by a variety of public agencies and private organizations within Marathon County. Since funding for facility operations and development has become more limited due to tighter budgets, it is very important for the different agencies to coordinate their efforts to provide recreational services and opportunities to Marathon County residents. Currently, it is not legal to have a park district in Wisconsin. Marathon County may want to explore working with municipal partners and the State Legislature to make this an option in Wisconsin, as it opens additional funding opportunities and efficiencies for services.

Beginning in 1974, Marathon County and the City of Wausau have exercised State Statute Section 27.075(1), permitting the County to exercise all powers of a local, legislative and administrative character for the purposes of governing, managing, controlling, improving and caring for public parks, parkways, boulevards and pleasure drives within the City of Wausau. The City of Wausau and Marathon County continue to operate in this arrangement, adopting an intergovernmental agreement in November of 2024.

Jurisdictional Roles – Parks under different jurisdictional control traditionally offer different types of facilities to serve different types of recreational needs of the residents of the county. Generally, local or municipal parks are small, highly developed parks that provide active recreation opportunities, while county parks and recreation areas are larger, less developed parks that provide passive recreation opportunities. State parks have unique features that set them apart and attract users from throughout the state. Parks must be owned and operated by the appropriate specialized jurisdiction. Another role for County parks is to provide highly developed facilities that serve large parts of the County, such as fairgrounds, shooting range, softball complex, ice arenas, and Peoples Sports Complex. This role is expanding with increased emphasis on attracting sports tourism.

Trail Development – Hiking/walking/running trails and canoe/kayak trails have repeatedly been identified as a high-priority need. Marathon County should place a high priority on the continued development of trail systems that provide year-round use for a variety of users, including barrier-free trails, trails for the elderly, and trails of differing length and difficulty. Trails contained within a park or forest unit and those that connect parks and forests to other trails are of equal importance.

Marathon County could play a central role in coordinating and providing technical assistance throughout the metropolitan area for a community-wide trail system. The future state trail from Merrill to Wausau, the continued development of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and the Mountain Bay State Trail, and work on the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway are three areas where Marathon County could bring technical resources and coordination support to help further progress on these community assets.

Water Quality and Water Recreation – Water quality remains an issue that occasionally impacts the ability of residents and visitors to recreate in the waters in the county. Concerns like E. Coli and other bacteria have led to ongoing testing of popular beaches like Big Eau Pleine and others.

County Forest Land Acquisition – Lands within the County forest boundaries or areas of special or unique values shall be recommended to the County Board for acquisition as they become available. A target of 200 acres per year was established in the Marathon County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Regardless of the right number of target acres, the focus should be on maintaining the ability to acquire areas of natural resource significance if they become available.

Conservancy – Marathon County currently does not have a conservancy park classification, which would allow the county to designate, acquire, preserve, and appropriately develop lands with unique natural, environmental, geological, cultural, or historic features. The Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department should create a conservancy park classification, actively designate and acquire conservancy park land and easements, and adopt a county-wide conservancy plan.

Historic Park Facilities – Several park shelters and other structures in Marathon County parks were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the 1930s. These facilities are maintained and are historically significant. Marathon County should make an effort to preserve the character of these existing CCC vintage shelters, possibly explore nominating them for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, and develop new park structures in a compatible manner using similar methods and materials for construction.

Enhance Awareness and Access to Visitor Amenities – Marathon County has an abundance of scenic and natural resources, as well as cultural and outdoor recreation opportunities. Such amenities can be enjoyed by area residents and visitors alike and can be an important consideration when companies attempt to recruit technical, professional, and management employees to the area from other parts of the State or country. However, information about and access to some of these amenities need to be improved and/or maintained on an ongoing basis. Likewise, access to visitor amenities could be improved through better cooperation and coordination between the various agencies involved, including the County and local municipal parks and forestry departments, arts and cultural organizations, and promotional groups like the CVB.

Changes in Weather Patterns – With the recent low snow winters, warmer winter temperatures, and very wet, hot summers, recreation offerings and amenities are beginning to be evaluated. These services and facilities will be assessed for potential updates or renovations that would allow the recreation offerings and amenities to be utilized independent of the weather.

Recreation, Tourism and Cultural Resources Goal and Objectives

Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources Goal: Marathon County leverages its many natural and cultural amenities to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to be active and engaged in a wide array of activities and events.

Objectives:

1. Support and promote access to quality, accessible, affordable recreation opportunities.
2. Promote tourism throughout the region, with a strong emphasis on the promotion of outdoor recreational tourism, heritage tourism, and the arts.
3. Encourage the protection of historically significant buildings and sites from development impacts.
4. Increase and expand awareness of cultural resources.
5. Develop a plan to modify recreation offerings in response to weather pattern changes in winter.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Twelve

Intergovernmental Cooperation



This chapter describes existing activities that Marathon County uses to coordinate with other various units of government, including municipalities, school districts, the State of Wisconsin, and the federal government. This chapter will also summarize the major challenges and issues regarding intergovernmental cooperation and identify mechanisms for cooperation and coordination, including intergovernmental agreements, contracts, and regulatory authority. These mechanisms can occur between Marathon County and other local, regional, state, or federal entities.

Intergovernmental Tools and Regulations

This section lists the various tools used related to intergovernmental cooperation.

Annexation – Wisconsin law generally places annexation power in the hands of individual property owners, making it difficult for local municipalities (villages, cities, and towns) to control where or when annexation will occur. Wisconsin Statutes (s. 66.021) outlines three procedures for petitioning annexation. The most common involves a petition signed unanimously by all the electors residing in the territory or all owners of property to be annexed. A petition can also be circulated to initiate annexation. This requires signatures of a majority of electors in the territory and owners of one-half of the property either in value or land area. A petition for annexation can also be requested through a referendum election, but this requires signatures of at least 20 percent of the electors in the territory and is not a process that is often used.

Annexation

Annexation is the incorporation of new territory into the domain of a city or village from another municipality.

Boundary Agreements – Cooperative boundary agreements can reduce some boundary concerns between local governments. Usually these are made to control boundaries over a time period to better allow for service provision to these certain land areas and slow annexation.

Extraterritorial Zoning (ETZ) – Wisconsin Statutes allow cities and villages the authority to assert zoning control over an area extending 1 ½ to 3 miles around their border, depending on their size. In Marathon County, the City of Wausau is the only community large enough to merit the 3-mile

extraterritorial jurisdiction; all other cities and villages are limited to 1 ½ miles. To exercise ETZ, a committee must be formed with members of the affected city/village, and town. This committee is charged with determining land uses and zoning in the extraterritorial area and must approve zoning changes. The committee is given two years to complete its work, although a one-year extension is allowed.

Extraterritorial Jurisdiction

Extraterritorial jurisdiction is the legal ability of a government to exercise authority beyond its normal boundaries.

Extraterritorial Subdivision Review – Cities and villages have the option of exercising extraterritorial plat review authority, which affects the same area defined by ETZ. If they use this authority, they have the right to review and approve land divisions within this area. The purpose of extraterritorial plat review is to give cities and villages some control over development patterns along their borders. Unlike ETZ, extraterritorial subdivision review does not have a time limit.

Subdivision or Plat Review

Subdivision or plat reviews regulate the creation of parcels on subdivision plats and the correction of faulty parcels of record on assessor plats.

Intergovernmental Agreements – Wisconsin Statutes authorize local communities to establish cooperative intergovernmental agreements. These are most commonly used in the context of shared public services such as police, fire, and EMS. Cooperative agreements can also be established regarding revenue sharing and to deal with boundary changes in a coordinated, planned manner.

Shared Services and Facilities

The following section provides a brief description of the various functional areas and services that require intergovernmental coordination at various levels.

Broadband Service – Over the last decade, the county has been working to ensure there is access to reliable broadband throughout the entire county. The urban areas already have access, but some of the rural areas are still in need. The county has been proactive in seeking state and federal funds to expand broadband.

County/City Services - The County and the City of Wausau share several departments and services, including:

- *Health Department* – The City of Wausau Health Department was absorbed into the Marathon County Health Department in the late 1970s.
- *Information Technology* – Marathon County and the City of Wausau cooperate to jointly operate the City-County I.T. Commission, which provides the implementation and operation of cooperative data processing and management information systems. The I.T. Commission provides

information services to all City and County departments, including installing and maintaining computer hardware and software.

- **Parks System** – Marathon County and the City of Wausau jointly operate the Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department that oversees most of the planning, management, and maintenance of both the Marathon County Park system and the local City of Wausau park system. The County system consists of seventeen County parks and nine County forest units. The department receives funding from the Marathon County budget as well as from the City of Wausau budget.

Emergency Response – A number of cities, villages, and towns provide Emergency Response in conjunction with their fire department services. Many communities also have First Responders, volunteers who are trained to provide immediate lifesaving actions in their neighborhood or community before an ambulance or Emergency Response team can get there.

E-911 Dispatch Service - The Marathon County Sheriff’s Department Communications Division provides E-911 Dispatch for all Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical Services agencies in Marathon County. The Communications Division services 85 user agencies and also provides alert paging support for the Emergency Management Office, among others. Users are served by a microwave, linked repeater radio system, consisting of a control center at the Sheriff’s Department, and several remote radio tower sites spread throughout the County. The system is also utilized by the Marathon County Highway Department and the Wausau Fire Department to support their radio communications.

Fire Service – Fire department service in Marathon County is offered through a patchwork of systems operated by cities, villages, and towns. Many of the community fire service providers also provide Emergency Response. Marathon County has multiple fire service providers, many of which encompass more than one municipality, and service is provided through mutual aid agreements between adjacent communities. The bulk of the fire service providers are made up of volunteers unless noted below. EMS service is also typically provided through the fire service provider.



Riverside Fire Department

Law Enforcement – The Marathon County Sheriff’s Department provides law enforcement and police protection to the unincorporated areas of the County. Local police departments generally serve the area within the incorporated boundaries of cities or villages, although some departments provide service to adjacent unincorporated towns through service agreements. In addition, some local police departments provide back-up service to the Marathon County Sheriff’s Department on

an as-needed basis. There are 11 police districts serving cities and villages located in or partially in Marathon County.

Library System – The Marathon County Library system consists of eight-branch facilities located at Athens, Edgar, Hatley, Marathon City, Mosinee, Rothschild, Spencer, and Stratford, and the headquarters facility located in downtown Wausau.

North Central Healthcare - is a tri-county organization that was formed over fifty years ago as a partnership between Langlade, Lincoln, and Marathon counties. NCHC provides community mental health and substance use disorder treatment services pursuant to Wis. Stat. 51.42. Programs offered include mental and behavioral health services for people of all ages in a variety of settings, including outpatient, community treatment, psychiatric hospitals, substance use disorder residential treatment, and 24-hour crisis assessment, including crisis stabilization facilities. NCHC also operates two large skilled nursing facilities. Mouth View Care Center is located on the main campus in Wausau, and Pine Crest Nursing Home, located in Merrill. These facilities serve individuals in need of long-term care, short-term rehabilitation, or post-acute care with complex physical needs, including ventilator-dependent needs. They also provide specialized care for dementia, psychiatric and neurological diseases, and behavioral challenges.

Regional Forensics Center - In 2025, Marathon County will open the Regional Forensic Science Center near Northcentral Technical College in Wausau, marking the first such facility in northern Wisconsin. In addition to the core services required of coroner/medical examiner offices, which include forensic autopsies, consultation services, and expert testimony, the facility will feature a dedicated tissue donation suite, a family consultation room, and a community grief garden. The facility will also house the Marathon County Medical Examiner’s office. The new center will provide critical support to law enforcement and coroner/medical examiner offices across at least 28 counties in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The center will also serve as a cornerstone for education, in partnership with Northcentral Technical College and the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Relationships with Other Governmental Entities

This section identifies the various types of government with which Marathon County maintains relationships.

Economic Development – The Marathon County Development Corporation (MCDEVCO) provides direct assistance to businesses and general support for economic development efforts. In addition, they manage the Wausau Business Incubator. Another organization is Centergy, the Central Wisconsin Alliance for Economic Development, is an economic development group representing five central Wisconsin counties, including Marathon. Together, they work to improve and promote the region’s general business climate.

Housing – The North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP) is an advocate, provider, and facilitator of programs and services for low-income individuals in Lincoln, Marathon, and Wood Counties. NCCAP seeks to create opportunities for people and communities to obtain skills, identify and utilize resources, and explore innovative options necessary to reduce poverty and increase self-sufficiency. Marathon County is also part of the multi-county Central Wisconsin Region for CDBG housing assistance. In 2025, Marathon County, in partnership with the City of Wausau, approved up to \$200,000 to help establish a year-round homeless shelter. The Wausau Police Department and other community organizations will operate the homeless shelter at First United Methodist Church in order to ensure a stable and sustainable emergency shelter can operate in the community.

Local Municipalities – The County provides a variety of services to local municipalities. There are 61 government units in the County (39 Towns, 6 Cities, and 16 Villages). Some specific services include: 911 dispatch service; access permits, maintenance, and improvement of County Highways; planning and zoning; permitting oversight regarding private septic systems, shoreland, wetland, and floodplain regulation; sewer service area planning; and animal waste and manure management. The County also provides oversight on compliance with soil and water conservation policies for the Farmland Preservation Program.

Metropolitan Planning – The Wausau Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is the body designated by the Federal Department of Transportation to be responsible for regional transportation planning in the Wausau metropolitan area. The Marathon County CPZ staff works with the MPO on transportation-related studies and planning efforts. The MPO’s jurisdiction only covers the Wausau metro area; therefore, the County is responsible for regional transportation planning in areas of the County outside the Wausau area.

Regional Planning – The North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) was created in 1973 and is a voluntary association of governments. Its service area encompasses ten counties, including Marathon County. The primary purpose of the NCWRPC is to provide planning services for the region and its member communities and to provide data and research, and other technical services. It provides assistance in the five major areas of economic development, geographic information systems (GIS), land use planning, intergovernmental cooperation, and transportation planning. In addition, NCWRPC provides administrative services to the North Central Stormwater Coalition, the Northwoods Rail Commission, and the North East Wisconsin Public Safety Communications (NEWCOM) group.

School Districts – Marathon County is served by seventeen school districts, some of which also extend into adjacent counties. There are also numerous private and parochial schools located in Marathon County. School facilities can significantly impact surrounding development, traffic patterns and volumes, and utility needs; therefore, it is essential to coordinate planning for school facilities with affected municipalities and the County overall.

Towns & Villages Association – There are two Towns & Villages Association districts in Marathon County, generally split along the Wisconsin River to form the East and West associations. Both hold regular district meetings, participate in an annual statewide convention, and participate in cooperative training programs. Marathon County staff participate in meetings, often providing information on technical matters.

Solid Waste Disposal - Marathon County has entered into a solid-waste handling agreement with Portage and Shawano Counties to coordinate public landfill operations. The agreement designates the Marathon County Landfill in Ringle as the primary public landfill serving these counties. Some County departments (e.g., Highway Department) occasionally contract with other counties for specific services and/or the sharing of machinery.

State and Federal Agencies – The county works with state and/or federal agencies in conjunction with the administration of several state and federal regulatory programs. While the state maintains oversight on many of its mandated regulations, the county administers permit reviews regarding shoreland, floodplain, and wetland zoning, compliance with water quality standards, farmland preservation tax credits, managed forest tax credit programs, and other regulations. The county also coordinates with state and federal agencies on transportation planning, roadway construction, and maintenance.

To ensure consistency and effectiveness in land use and resource management, the county supports a collaborative approach that aligns local, state, and federal efforts. When federal or state agencies, or other entities utilizing public funding, are engaged in land planning or management activities within the county, early and ongoing coordination among potentially impacted communities is encouraged.

Surrounding Counties - Marathon County is surrounded by seven counties: Lincoln, Taylor, Clark, Wood, Portage, Shawano, and Langlade. Marathon County currently has cooperative agreements with some adjacent counties regarding regional facilities and services. Most notably, the Central Wisconsin Airport (CWA) is operated through a joint powers agreement between Marathon and Portage Counties.

Issues

Regionalization – Communities in Marathon County need to look at themselves as a region and not simply a collection of separate municipalities. Efforts should focus on working together to attract development and jobs to locations that best benefit the region. Municipalities must work together to promote and enhance the region’s assets because, increasingly, economic competition occurs between regions more than between local communities. Working together to strengthen the region is the most effective way to remain competitive amongst the various other regions in the State.

Regulatory Structure – The various levels of government involved in the regulation of natural resources and the potential for the rules to change can create confusion, complicate enforcement, and result in citizens sometimes feeling not supported by the County. The various levels of government involved in resource protection will likely continue. While the County has virtually no control over changes in State or Federal regulations or procedures, as the primary local administering body, the County can play an important role in communicating changes and making people aware of current regulations and permitting procedures.

Service Consolidation – Marathon County has multiple jurisdictions for the provision of community needs. There are 17 school districts, 12 police departments (including Marshfield), 31 fire departments, and 16 emergency service providers (most affiliated with fire departments). In some areas of the County, individual community and town service providers are an appropriate service delivery mechanism. In other areas, particularly in the Wausau metro area, where population and density are greater, the patchwork of service providers may be confusing and, in some cases, overlapping. Opportunities for service consolidation in the metro area have been discussed for several years, particularly regarding fire and EMS. Consolidation could reduce overall regional costs through more efficient use of staff and volunteers, sharing of equipment (purchase and maintenance), and facilities, while increasing service efficiency.

Volunteerism – Volunteerism levels are still below pre-pandemic numbers. Barriers include people needing to prioritize paid work, possibly changing generational views related to volunteering, and liability hurdles. There continues to be concerns over the number of people volunteering for local fire departments and other emergency services, particularly in the rural areas of the county. This results in staff shortages and could impact response times and levels of service. Options for more regionalization of these services may need to be considered.

Tax Base Competition – There is some competition between local communities in the Wausau metro area and beyond to attract new development and employment. Protecting the local tax base is driving a lot of competition. As a result, financial incentives, particularly TIF, are used to lure development to a community. This can result in unnecessary public subsidization of development that may have occurred anyway. On the other hand, efforts to improve the quality of life may not be given adequate emphasis, even though quality of life factors tend to play a significant role in business location decisions.

Transportation Coordination – The County maintains a highway network throughout the entire County and needs to maintain communication with each local unit to provide the best service. In addition, coordination needs to be maintained related to bicycle routes and trails.

Zoning Coordination – All incorporated cities and villages in Marathon County have their own zoning. Of all unincorporated towns, 18 have adopted County zoning, 13 have their own zoning, while 8 have no zoning. In addition, the County administers shoreland throughout the entire unincorporated areas of the county. Because of the various levels and types of zoning regulations, the potential for inconsistent and possibly conflicting regulations exists. County Zoning can continue to play a coordinating and educational role throughout the whole county to reduce conflicts and confusion for residents.

Intergovernmental Cooperation Goal and Objectives

Intergovernmental Cooperation Goal: Marathon County is a cooperative and collaborative partner with other municipalities and organizations to most effectively and efficiently provide services to residents.

Objectives:

1. Promote technology and resource sharing.
2. Encourage proactive conflict resolution.
3. Promote cost-effective public services.
4. Provide coordination of regional development and planning activities.
5. Encourage participation in all levels of government.

The Action Plan, found in Chapter 13, builds on the goals and objectives found in the chapters by adding recommended action steps to take to reach the goal of becoming the healthiest, safest, most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

Chapter Thirteen

Implementation



The primary function of this comprehensive plan is to establish a framework to influence future policy decisions with the overarching goal of making Marathon County the Healthiest, Safest, Most Prosperous County in the State. The plan also provides a blueprint for growth and development to maintain rural and community character. In addition, the plan can guide priorities for public expenditures. To be effective, this plan should be actively used as a tool to guide decisions concerning:

1. The development and implementation of programs and support systems that further the goals and objectives set forth in this plan.
2. The implementation of specific strategies and actions identified in this plan.
3. The implementation and enforcement of regulatory ordinances based on the goals and objectives identified in this plan.
4. The establishment of a continued planning process providing for periodic review and updates to this plan.

Implementation Tools

Having the appropriate tools to implement the actions in this comprehensive plan is critical. There are two primary types of implementation tools: Non-regulatory and Regulatory. Non-regulatory approaches generally involve decisions related to policy and about how the county will spend its financial resources. Regulatory approaches involve implementing various rules and regulations, mainly related to land use regulations. In particular, the zoning ordinance and subdivision (or land division) regulations comprise the principal regulatory devices used to protect existing development and guide future growth and development.

Non-regulatory Tools

Marathon County annually prepares both an operational budget and a capital improvement plan. In addition, each county department, as well as agencies funded by the county, sets objectives and prepares work plans. Another major policy effort undertaken by the County is the Strategic Plan.

Annual Operating Budget

Marathon County prepares a budget each year, and it is one of the most important policy documents prepared. It is a statement of the prioritization and allocation of financial resources to achieve certain objectives over a specific time period. The budget is based on the needs of county residents, priorities set by the county board, and the related work plans identified by each County department.

The budget and the services provided by that budget are instrumental in achieving the goals and objectives of the plan. In 2025, the county's operating budget was about \$182 million, which includes funding for over twenty different departments. The largest components of the budget are general government (23.3%), public safety (16.4%), transportation (13.9%), and social services (12.7%). Combined, these four functions comprise over 66% of the budget.

Every year, the County Board of Supervisors reviews the budget development process, providing direction, assumptions, and priorities to the administrator for creating the annual budget. The budget is then prepared by the county administrator in conjunction with department heads. Throughout the budget development process, the Human Resources, Finance, and Property Committee provides oversight, and the Boards' Standing Committees, along with staff, conduct ongoing discussions related to the review of programs, services, and fees. The budget for the next year is adopted by the county board each November

Capital Improvement Plan

A Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is a blueprint for planning the County's major capital expenditures. A CIP is simply a method of planning for and scheduling expenditures for public improvements over a period of several years in order to maximize the use of limited public funds.

Marathon County set up the Capital Improvement Program with the following goals:

- Protect the County's investment in its buildings, equipment, improvements, and infrastructure.
- Recognize the need to preserve and maintain existing assets over acquiring new assets.
- Develop the most cost-effective way to manage the County's assets through a comprehensive process that cuts across departments, boards, and committees.
- Acknowledge that certain services cannot be compromised. The services provided and capital investments made must undergo a rigorous scrutiny to ensure that investments in these areas meet the needs of the County in the most cost-effective manner possible.
- Provide equipment that is essential to do the work of the County.
- Where possible, the County needs to examine the long-term operating and capital costs prior to instituting any new program.

The Capital Improvement Program is composed of two parts-- a capital budget and a capital program. The capital budget is the upcoming year's spending plan for capital items. The capital program is a plan for capital expenditures that extends five years beyond the capital budget. Public improvements or expenditures typically considered in a CIP include:

1. An expenditure that is for a County department, operation or in the best interest of the County
2. Generally non-recurring
3. Has a cost of over \$30,000
4. Has a service life of 5 years or more
5. Rolling stock and equipment replacement that is of critical importance to the functioning of the department involved

Each year, the CIP is reviewed and extended one year to compensate for the previous year that was completed. This keeps the improvement program current and allows for modifications to meet changing needs. It coordinates community planning, financial capacity, and physical development. The preparation of a CIP is a joint responsibility between the County administration and departments. The County Board approves the CIP.

Strategic Plan

The County regularly prepares a strategic plan to focus county work efforts and financial resources for a 3-to-5-year period. The comprehensive plan provides the foundation for the strategic plan process. The strategic planning puts things into action by prioritizing and focusing County efforts, as well as identifying benchmarks and other measurable items to monitor success over time.

Annual Workplans

The Administrator and Department Workplans translate the strategic plan's prioritized goals and objectives into actionable activities. The workplans, updated on an ongoing basis, highlight specific projects, timelines, and anticipated outcomes associated with achieving those goals and objectives. The Strategic Plan defines what the county is aiming to achieve, while workplans help outline more specifically the how, when, influencing factors, and progress toward the what.

Regulatory Tools

The most common regulatory implementation tools are the County's official controls or regulatory codes. As mentioned, zoning and land division ordinances are central to managing growth and development within the county. In addition, the Marathon County General Code of Ordinances, state, and federal law guide the implementation of this plan.

Zoning Ordinance

Zoning is used to manage and control how land is used and developed. The zoning ordinance establishes detailed regulations concerning how land may be developed, including setbacks, the density or intensity of development, and the height and bulk of buildings and other structures. The general purpose of zoning is to minimize undesirable side effects resulting from development by segregating and/or buffering incompatible uses and by maintaining standards that ensure development will not negatively impact the community's character or environment.

The zoning map indicates where specific types of development can and should be located. Zoning districts shown on the zoning map should be coordinated with the land use plan and map. While the zoning map and land use map do not need to directly match at the time the land use map is adopted,

the intent is that the land use map will serve as a guide indicating how the property should eventually be zoned. Changes to the zoning districts should only be made if they are consistent with the adopted future land use map. However, there may be situations where changing the zoning district boundary makes sense and is in the best interest of the community. If changing the zoning would result in a conflict with the future land use map, the land use map should also be changed.

The future land use map should only be changed if it does not accurately reflect the community's desired land use pattern. Achieving consistency between zoning and land use designation is also discussed in the Land Use chapter.

The comprehensive plan, including the future land use map, should be periodically reviewed and updated to adjust for unforeseen changes or events that were not considered at the time the initial plan and land use map were developed.

Land Division Ordinance

Land Division regulations serve an important function by ensuring the orderly development of unplatted and/or undeveloped land. These regulations provide the procedures and standards for dividing a large parcel of land into smaller parcels. Land Division ordinances set forth reasonable regulations for lot sizes, road access and design, public utilities, parks and open space, and other improvements necessary to ensure that new development does not conflict with surrounding land uses and/or cause unreasonable burdens on the provision of services. The way lands are divided plays a key role in the orderly development of a community.

Plan Adoption, Monitoring, and Amendments

While this comprehensive plan is intended to provide a long-term framework to guide both public spending decisions and development, it must also respond to continuous changes that occur that may not have been foreseen when the plan was adopted. It is appropriate that some chapters of the plan are rarely amended while others are subject to updating on a more regular basis. Plan maps should also be updated periodically. In general, key maps, such as the future land use map, should be reviewed annually to make sure they are still current.

Plan Adoption: The first step in implementing this plan involves adoption of the plan by County officials. The Executive Committee will oversee the formal development and public input process for the 2026 update. The formal review and adoption process involves plan review by the Executive Committee, who must adopt the plan by resolution of majority vote. The Executive Committee recommendation is forwarded to the County Board, who must adopt the plan by ordinance (of majority vote). A public hearing is required to allow public comment on the ordinance prior to final action to adopt the plan. Adoption formalizes the plan document as the framework to guide local development decisions over the next 20 years. The adopted plan should also be recognized as a tool for communicating the community's land use policy and goals and objectives regarding coordination of growth and development.

Plan Amendments: The Marathon County Comprehensive Plan may be amended at any time. There should be very few instances in the plan that will need to be amended. However, if circumstances do arise that require policies to change in order to accommodate a proposal that is in the best interest of Marathon County, the amendment will need to be reviewed by the Standing Committees prior to review and adoption by the County Board. Amendments may be appropriate throughout the lifecycle of the plan, particularly if new issues emerge or trends change. These amendments will typically consist of minor changes to the plan text or maps. Large-scale changes or frequent amendments to meet individual development proposals should be avoided, or the plan loses integrity.

The public should be notified of proposed Plan amendments to allow an opportunity for review and comment. For major amendments, the County might consider soliciting public opinion through surveys and/or community meetings with County partners prior to the official public hearing.

Plan Evaluation: This plan should be evaluated at least every 5 years and updated at least every 10 years. Members of the County Board, standing committees, County staff, and any other local decision-making bodies should periodically review the plan and identify areas that might need to be updated. The evaluation should involve first reviewing the goals and objectives to ensure they are still relevant and reflect current community desires. Then the strategies and actions should be reviewed and refined to eliminate completed tasks and identify new approaches if appropriate. The evaluation should also include an updated timetable of actions to clarify priorities.

Plan Updates: According to the State comprehensive planning law, comprehensive plans must be updated at least once every ten years. As opposed to the more routine amendments described above, plan updates often involve rewriting of whole sections of the plan document and significant changes to supporting maps. A plan update should include a thorough examination of the County's goals and objectives based on an analysis of current growth trends and major changes that have occurred since the plan was initially adopted or last amended. Plan updates must be formally adopted following the same procedure described above for initial plan adoption.

Consistency Among Plan Chapters

The State of Wisconsin planning legislation requires that the Implementation Chapter describe how each of the required chapters will be integrated and made consistent with the other chapters of the plan. Since Marathon County completed all planning chapters simultaneously, no known inconsistencies exist. It is noted that some overlap naturally exists between the plan chapters.

This Comprehensive Plan also references previous and concurrent related planning efforts to ensure they are considered in planning decisions in conjunction with the recommendations of this Plan. Recommendations from other plans have been summarized and incorporated in this plan as deemed appropriate to foster coordination and consistency between plans. Some related plans are

incorporated by reference in this plan and are essentially considered appendices of this plan, even though they are separate documents.

Action Plan

The overarching goal of this plan is that “Marathon County is the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous County in Wisconsin”. This goal was used to structure the Comprehensive Plan into three sections, breaking healthiest, safest, and most prosperous into separate chapters. Achieving this big, overarching goal will require many different small steps taken concurrently in a coordinated effort across Marathon County. This Action Plan was designed to help Marathon County improve in the many interrelated areas necessary to become the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin.

The Action Plan is structured into goals, objectives, and actions. The example below explains the differences between the three and illustrates how the Action Plan is structured.

Goal: Goals are statements about Marathon County’s aspirations in the topic area.

1) Objectives are vision statements which provide direction to the subtopics within the areas of each goal.

a. Actions are key steps which should be taken on the road to meeting the objective and reaching the goal.

Each chapter concluded with goals and objectives that address the issues identified in the chapter. The Action Plan compiles the goals and objectives from each chapter and includes a list of action steps that can be taken to reach the goals. The objectives are drawn from the content of the chapters, focusing on the major topics within the chapter that need to be addressed moving forward. Not every topic mentioned in the plan has a corresponding objective in this Action Plan.

The action steps proposed in this plan are recommended steps that will help Marathon County move forward toward becoming the healthiest, safest, and most prosperous county in Wisconsin. Some action steps are recommended continuations of things the County currently does. Others are new plans or updates to plans that the County should develop. Many are taken from various other planning efforts and discussions. Others are new comprehensive approaches that the County should develop that will bring multiple departments together to address complex problems. Note that these actions do not identify measurable benchmarks or timelines. That is the function of more detailed work to be completed by the county administration and the strategic planning process.

Chapter 3: Health and Human Services

Health and Human Services Goal: Marathon County promotes the physical, mental, and social health of the community and takes steps to support healthy living for residents at all stages of life.

- 1. Enable older adults and people with disabilities to live safely and independently in their communities.**
 - a. Encourage an increase in the supply of accessible housing options.
 - b. Support efforts to increase use of assistive technologies and access to supportive services.
 - c. Develop a plan to address how to support persons of all ages with disabilities and the changing demographics of persons with disabilities.
 - d. Coordinate amongst county departments and partner with community agencies on efforts to connect seniors with programs and services that may reduce social isolation.
- 2. Support expansion of access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food.**
 - a. Support efforts to increase participation in nutrition assistance programs.
 - b. Continue to partner with Marathon County Hunger Coalition.
- 3. Support every child in reaching adulthood with health, stability, education and growth opportunities.**
 - a. Provide resources to reduce childhood trauma.
 - b. Create a trauma-informed care system.
 - c. Develop a framework for building resilient children and providing parent resources.
 - d. Continue to work toward truancy reduction.
 - e. Support policies that support affordable, high-quality childcare.
 - f. Coordinate on programs that promote early childhood development, youth mental health, and out-of-school learning opportunities.
 - g. Strengthen cross-sector partnerships with schools, nonprofits, health providers, and social services to align resources and reduce service gaps for children and families.
- 4. Reduce the impact of chronic diseases.**
 - a. Support implementation of community-based strategies that promote healthy behaviors.
 - b. Where appropriate, support increasing access to preventative care.
 - c. Partner with healthcare providers and community organizations to support early identification and management of chronic conditions.
 - d. Support efforts to provide the public with education to make informed choices related to their overall health.
- 5. Reduce injury risks and improve safety across all age groups.**
 - a. Develop and implement innovative approaches to injury prevention using data, community input, and cross-sector collaboration.

- 6. Increase access to timely, affordable, and effective mental health treatment close to home.**
 - a. Develop a continuum of services within a therapeutic community.
 - b. Attract and retain qualified treatment providers and behavior educators.
 - c. Develop a more comprehensive approach to crisis prevention and serving people in crisis.
 - d. Participate in efforts to assess service gaps, shortages, and barriers to mental health care. Or conduct a Community Needs Assessment and create a plan to address identified gaps in service.
 - e. Support efforts to remove barriers and increase access where appropriate.
 - f. Collaborate with providers on ideas to improve efficiency and capacity through shared services, workforce support, and technology investments.
- 7. Foster a welcoming community in Marathon County.**
 - a. Advance policies, practices, and partnerships that promote understanding for all residents and workers.
 - b. Support programs and partnerships that encourage civic engagement and social connections.

Chapter 4: Community Character

Community Character Goal: The local history, culture, social pride, and community character are established and enhanced as defining elements which make Marathon County a vibrant and inviting place to be.

- 1. Promote a variety of safe and affordable housing options that meet the needs of all community members.**
 - a. Support efforts by local municipalities to locate housing for special needs populations within easy and safe access to medical care, shopping, transportation facilities, and other necessary services.
 - b. Assist local governments in evaluating codes related to temporary, manufactured, and/or mobile housing to better serve migrant workers and the agricultural economy.
- 2. Support efforts to reduce homelessness.**
 - a. Maintain regional coordination and approaches to addressing housing supply and homelessness.
 - b. Support, coordination, engagement, and implementation of efforts to address homelessness and its underlying causes.
 - c. Develop an action plan to reduce homelessness and increase homeless prevention services.

- 3. Enhance community livability, including the unique characteristics of all communities, by investing in healthy and safe neighborhoods throughout the county.**
 - a. Encourage communities within Marathon County to update their comprehensive plans, at least every 10 years.
 - b. Promote programs, via information sharing, that support the rehabilitation of older homes, especially those in need of critical repairs such as roofing, weatherization, or private onsite wastewater treatment systems (POWTS).
 - c. Encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures.
 - d. Facilitate connections between homeowners and technical and financial assistance resources to make necessary improvements and maintain safe, livable housing.
 - e. Complete Safe Streets for All Study and identify priorities for regional coordination and implementation.
 - f. Incorporate accommodations for bicycles, pedestrians, and transit into all County Road projects, in accordance with the *Marathon County Rural Bike Network & Technical Guidance* document.
 - g. Support efforts that increase access to green spaces/open spaces.
 - h. Capitalize on our existing local community assets, support placemaking efforts or events to bring the community together around shared places and values.

Chapter 5: Natural Resources

Natural Resources Goal: The natural resources of Marathon County are managed in a balanced way (so they are protected and preserved) for current and future generations' health, enjoyment, and economic benefit.

- 1. Promote sound land use decisions that conserve and preserve natural resources in balance with economic development and growth.**
 - a. Maintain and update existing land use policies to address growth and natural resource protection.
 - b. Promote infrastructure development that protects natural resources.
 - c. Identify and preserve unique regional areas for natural resource protection and environmental remediation.
 - d. Promote programs that support the rehabilitation of older homes, especially those in need of critical repairs such as roofing, weatherization, or private onsite wastewater treatment systems (POWTS).
- 2. Mitigate and adapt county strategies to respond to impacts from changing weather patterns.**

- a. Support landowners, through existing programs and permitting processes, to identify and implement project improvements that enhance resilience to changing weather patterns.
- 3. Support strategies that protect and improve air quality.**
 - a. Support initiatives that reduce air pollution.
- 4. Protect and preserve soil health with a focus on prime agricultural areas.**
 - a. Continue to monitor compliance with the soil conservation standards of the Farmland Preservation Program.
 - b. Develop strategies to encourage best management practices to reduce agricultural soil runoff to protect water and soil quality.
 - c. Encourage the protection of agriculture by continuing to encourage towns to participate in zoning.
 - d. Continue to seek funding mechanisms to provide technical and financial assistance to agricultural landowners and operators to develop nutrient management plans and implement conservation best management practices.
 - e. Work with UW-Extension to meet with local agricultural operators to identify their individual needs and opportunities to best assist them in retaining and improving their farming operations.
- 5. Promote balanced use of non-metallic mineral resources and ensure mine reclamation.**
 - a. Continue to actively enforce the non-metallic mining ordinance.
 - b. Identify and maintain a map of active mining operations and significant non-metallic mineral resources.
 - c. Consider zoning areas around mines and non-metallic mineral resources to restrict residential development or other land uses that might conflict with mining operations.
- 6. Protect and sustainably manage public and private county forest resources.**
 - a. Implement the County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) Strategic Direction for forests.
 - b. Encourage private forest owners to adopt best management practices and sustainable forest management practices.
 - c. Work with UW-Extension and the WDNR to encourage (and increase) sound forest management practices by owners of private forestlands.
- 7. Manage solid waste and contaminants to reduce negative impacts on the environment and on health.**
 - a. Implement best practices for leachate management.
 - b. Provide leadership on waste, recycling, diversion, environmental education, and outreach to begin the transition from waste management to resource management.

Chapter 6: Water Resources

Water Resources Goal: The water resources in Marathon County are of the highest quality, for the safety of residents and the health of aquatic ecosystems and are protected from damaging behaviors like overuse and pollution.

- 1. Support protection and enhancement of the quantity and quality of potable groundwater and potable surface water supplies.**
 - a. Work to implement strategies in the updated Groundwater Plan.
 - b. Continue to develop and implement priority watershed management plans and Targeted Management Plans (TRM) to minimize impacts on water quality.
 - c. Continue to conduct tests and analysis of contaminants in private wells.
 - d. Increase awareness of the importance of testing private wells on a regular basis.
- 2. Coordinate with regional partners to promote efforts that protect municipal and private well water recharge areas.**
 - a. Facilitate discussions between municipalities and landowners around wellhead recharge areas to identify strategies and solutions for long-term land use and management practices that will protect and enhance the drinking water supply.
 - b. Support public water suppliers in finding funding sources to protect and enhance their drinking water supply.
 - c. Continue to promote best management practices with private well landowners to protect and enhance their water supply.
- 3. Reduce agricultural nonpoint runoff to surface water (soil sediment, organics, and nutrients).**
 - a. Develop and maintain policies and programs to promote sustainable soil practices.
 - b. Develop a comprehensive approach to restore riparian wetland and buffer areas to enhance buffering of agricultural runoff.
 - c. Continue to enforce animal waste and manure management regulations to guard against water contamination resulting from livestock facilities.
- 4. Manage lake and reservoir resources to balance concerns of shoreland residents, users, local businesses, and protect natural resources.**
 - a. Support updating floodplain maps.
 - b. Continue to support the efforts of the WDNR and lake district organizations to protect and improve the water quality and habitat of lakes.
 - c. Work with UW-Extension to provide information and education regarding Best Management Practices and other measures local municipalities and property owners can implement to improve water quality.

Chapter 7: Public Safety

Public Safety Goal: Marathon County is a safe and secure community for all residents and visitors through cost-effective and high-quality public safety services.

- 1. Provide cost-effective and high-quality public safety services.**
 - a. Promote coordination amongst public safety departments to identify efficiencies in reducing jail population.
 - b. Continue to evaluate ideas that align or streamline policies and procedures across departments.
 - c. Consider the potential to consolidate emergency service agencies.
- 2. Mitigate the impacts of drug and alcohol abuse in Marathon County through evidence-based practices.**
 - a. Develop a comprehensive approach to address the use of drugs and alcohol in children and young adults of Marathon County.
 - b. Identify and advance public policy and programs that would support the mitigation and prevention of drug and alcohol misuse and abuse among residents of Marathon County.
 - c. Identify and track data points to measure the impact of drug and alcohol abuse among residents of Marathon County.
- 3. Promote efforts to reduce recidivism.**
 - a. Develop a comprehensive (risk-based assessment) approach to address juvenile offenders to reduce the likelihood of recidivism.
 - b. Develop comprehensive forensic mental health treatment options.
 - c. Develop a comprehensive approach to classification and programming for persons in jail.
 - d. Improve the court system to effectively and efficiently serve more people through the process.
- 4. Improve road safety.**
 - a. Improve the infrastructure in areas with high numbers of traffic crashes, especially those involving vulnerable users, including bicyclists and pedestrians.
 - b. Improve signage and speed limits on county roads that see higher volumes of farm vehicles, horse and buggies, and/or bicycle traffic.
 - c. Review system-wide crash data every four years to identify safety issues and problems that need to be addressed.
 - d. Continue to work with federal, state, and regional transportation organizations to maintain a safe and efficient countywide roadway system.
 - e. Complete a Safe Streets for All analysis within the MPO area.

- 5. Plan for and identify appropriate measures to be taken related to disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery.**
 - a. Update the Marathon County All Hazards Mitigation Plan every five years.
 - b. Encourage mitigation and adaptation techniques in County infrastructure projects to reduce disaster losses and break the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction, and repetitive damage.
 - c. Encourage municipalities to either adopt the county mitigation plan or create their own to reduce costs associated with disaster response and recovery by promoting mitigation activities as well as disaster-resilience and sustainability.
 - d. Encourage senior officials to learn more about their role in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Chapter 8: Infrastructure

Transportation Goal: The transportation infrastructure in Marathon County is maintained to the highest standard practicable to allow safe and efficient movement of people, goods, and services in and through the County.

- 1. Support a safe, efficient, fiscally sustainable, multimodal transportation system.**
 - a. Incorporate accommodation for bicycles, pedestrians, and transit into all County road projects, in accordance with the Marathon County Rural Bike Network & Technical Guidance document.
 - b. Provide coordination support to municipalities working to incorporate bicycle and pedestrian accommodations on non-County Road facilities.
 - c. Encourage and support transportation services and facilities that meet the needs of the transportation disadvantaged, including the elderly, children, people with disabilities, veterans, and low-income people, and comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
 - d. Continue monitoring community public transit needs and collaborate with partners to ensure the most effective and efficient use of limited transit resources.
 - e. Support pavement preservation and replacement schedules in accordance with Appendix F of the Marathon County Highway System Study (2050 Plan) completed in 2022.
 - f. Provide a modern Highway Shop and Office Facility designed to enhance safety, optimize storage, streamline maintenance operations, and improve efficiency for the Highway Department's fleet and staff.
- 2. Improve access management on major roadways.**
 - a. Continue to work with federal, state, and regional transportation organizations to maintain a safe and efficient countywide roadway system.
 - b. Work with local municipalities to identify safe and efficient truck routes.

- c. Continue to work with WisDOT and the local communities on right-of-way, access control, and local road crossing issues along State Highway 29.
- d. Preserve and protect existing and potential rights-of-way for transportation facilities at curves, intersections, or areas where line of sight and safety need improvement.

Utilities Goal: The utilities infrastructure in Marathon County is maintained to the highest standard practicable to support the residents and businesses of the County.

1. Ensure compliance with state codes for new and replacement of private on-site waste treatment systems.

- a. Ensure Marathon County General Code of Ordinances Chapter 15 – Private Sewage Systems remains in full compliance with state regulations to protect human health and safety, safeguard environmentally sensitive areas, and preserve water quality.
- b. Continue to track and monitor septic systems to promptly identify failing systems, prioritizing repairs or replacements for those located in environmentally sensitive zones such as shoreland districts, wetlands, and areas near other residential developments.
- c. Facilitate connections between property owners and available resources to support the timely replacement of failing septic systems.
- d. Consistently provide property owners and system installers with current information on regulations and permitting requirements related to on-site wastewater treatment systems.

2. Support efforts to provide adequate energy, telecommunications services, and high-speed internet access throughout the County.

- a. Support energy-saving efforts by working with local communities, utility companies, and other partners, and by encouraging the use of smart practices and technology that use less energy.
- b. Actively review and engage in planning large energy projects, when allowed by state law, to make sure they match county goals, limit harm to the environment and land use, and protect the interests of local communities.
- c. Assist local governments in adopting zoning and land use regulations that are consistent with federal and state telecommunications laws, while balancing community character and the strategic placement of wireless infrastructure.
- d. Encourage and support the expansion of affordable, high-speed broadband access in underserved and rural areas through coordination with internet providers, state and federal grant programs, and local planning initiatives.

3. Provide cost-efficient solid waste management and leadership related to waste management in the region.

- a. Operate the landfill in an efficient manner while striving to cover all expenses and build a model for financial sustainability.
- b. Implement best practices for leachate management.

- c. Build relationships with community haulers, municipalities, businesses, and organizations to demonstrate the value of the services and programs solid waste provides to the community.
- d. Provide leadership on waste, recycling, diversion, environmental education, and outreach to begin the transition from waste management to resource management.

Chapter 9: Land Use

Land Use Goal: Marathon County makes sound land use decisions which balance the needs of agriculture, recreation, economic development, and growth to wisely maximize the land's potential.

1. Promote the preservation of agricultural land.

- a. Evaluate and map prime agricultural soils throughout the county to guide land use decisions, protect the most productive farmland, and incorporate these areas into the Marathon County zoning code to better protect these areas.
- b. Promote the use of farmland preservation zoning by working with towns to adopt Farm Preservation or Exclusive Agriculture zoning that limits non-agricultural development and supports eligibility for state farmland preservation tax credits.

2. Promote practices that preserve soil health and land productivity.

- a. Work with local partners to promote no-till, cover cropping, crop rotation, and other practices that reduce erosion and build soil organic matter.
- b. Work with towns, agricultural stakeholders, and conservation staff to develop county level policy and/or programs that limit or regulate winter manure spreading in high-risk areas to reduce runoff, protect water quality, and preserve soil structure.

3. Encourage revitalization of former residential properties in rural areas.

- a. Identify and map vacant, abandoned, or dilapidated residential properties to prioritize redevelopment.
- b. Evaluate the need for a county-supported program to assist with the removal of abandoned, unsafe, or severely deteriorated structures on residential properties, with the goal of restoring these lots to safe, buildable conditions for future residential use.

4. Provide tools for managing and coordinating growth.

- a. Host workshops or webinars for town boards, plan commissions, and other local officials to explain comprehensive planning requirements, update processes, and explain how to effectively use their plan to guide decisions.
- b. Provide technical assistance, data, mapping, and templates to towns seeking to update their comprehensive plans, ensuring consistency with county goals and compliance with state planning laws.

- c. Continue to routinely update the zoning and subdivision regulations to ensure they support the goals and objectives outlined in the County and local comprehensive plans.
- d. Continue to work cooperatively with municipalities to eliminate conflicts between county and local zoning and development regulations.

Chapter 10: Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development

Education Goal: Every child and adult in Marathon County can get a high-quality education.

- 1. Support initiatives that expand access to education and employment opportunities, helping individuals gain the skills and resources needed to become self-supporting.**
 - a. Support policies that support affordable, high-quality child care.
 - b. Support policies and programs to provide a variety of means for people to access continuous education to be competitive in tomorrow's economy.
 - c. Support policies and programs to increase independent living and self-reliance skills for all.
- 2. Redevelop the current University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point-Wausau campus.**
 - a. Engage local and regional stakeholders to study potential uses of the campus.
- 3. Support the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point at Wausau, Northcentral Technical College (NTC), and other higher education institutions in Marathon County.**
 - a. Maintain collaboration efforts with higher education institutions.
- 4. Provide high-quality library service.**
 - a. Periodically evaluate demand for library services, including resource needs. Use this evaluation to budget for new resources and facility improvements.
 - b. Continue to explore opportunities to use new technologies to increase access to library resources.

Workforce Development Goal: Marathon County is a community where residents can find family-supporting employment, and businesses have access to a strong, skilled workforce.

- 1. Support efforts to ensure future availability of a skilled and flexible workforce prepared to meet the needs of both existing and emerging industries and technologies.**
 - a. Work with the North Central Wisconsin Workforce Development Bureau (NCWWDB) to create job readiness programs aligned with business sector needs.
- 2. Support a framework to enhance business climate and retain and expand businesses and jobs.**
 - a. Consider aligning land use regulations to support business growth, streamline permitting, and encourage redevelopment of underutilized properties.
 - b. Provide access to low-cost capital investment opportunities for businesses.

3. Promote and increase communication between economic development, workforce development, and other organizations.

- a. Continue supporting efforts that improve the quality of life in the County to attract new people to the local labor force.
- b. Encourage and support partnerships between Northcentral Technical College, the University of Wisconsin system, and others to provide a diverse range of high-quality educational services for local and regional businesses.
- c. Encourage communication and cooperation between employers, school districts, and higher education institutions to ensure a well-trained, competitive workforce with skills to meet the needs of a changing marketplace.

Economic Development Goal: Marathon County has a diverse economy, a place of opportunities where people and businesses can grow and be successful.

1. Encourage development and redevelopment of key employment centers in areas that possess strong market potential, provide good transportation access for workers, and promote the efficient movement of goods.

- a. Support efforts to engage the public and private sectors to provide leadership for county economic development efforts.

2. Contribute to a collaborative regional approach to economic development.

- a. Support activities that strengthen Central Wisconsin and the Wausau metro area's position as a regional health care center.
- b. Explore new economic development incentives that create well-paying jobs and career opportunities.

3. Support an innovative atmosphere to foster an entrepreneurially supportive environment.

- a. Respond to changing economic conditions and opportunities through periodic review and updating of economic development strategies, policies, investments, and programs.
- b. Encourage efforts to reinvigorate and rediscover our shared community assets. c. Enhance awareness of MCDEVCO as the primary point of contact for business expansion and start-up information.

4. Support the adoption and growth of technology-enabled businesses and workforce skills to strengthen Marathon County's economic competitiveness, productivity, and ability to attract and retain employers and talent.

- a. Support employer-led upskilling and reskilling initiatives.
- b. Coordinate and align emerging technology training across departments and with other agencies to efficiently grow Marathon County employee skills and capabilities.

5. Maintain infrastructure to support economic growth.

- a. Maintain a safe highway network to provide access to all communities in the County.

- b. Support technology in the workplace, particularly through access to broadband.
 - c. Work with municipalities to maintain a competitive inventory of serviced industrial land and office sites.
 - d. Provide appropriate access for trucks and employees for all business and industrial park sites.
- 6. Support the Central Wisconsin Airport.**
- a. Continue to maintain a partnership between Portage and Marathon Counties to support Central Wisconsin as a regional airport.
 - b. Support CWA efforts to expand service to the area.

Chapter 11: Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources

Recreation, Tourism, and Cultural Resources Goal: Marathon County takes advantage of its many natural and cultural amenities to provide opportunities for residents and visitors to be active and engaged in a wide array of activities and events.

- 1. Support and promote access to quality, accessible, affordable recreation opportunities.**
- a. Recommend that new parks and park renovations be constructed with universal design.
 - b. Maintain and improve the Marathon County park and forest system cost-effectively.
 - c. Establish a consistent source of funding for parks, recreation, and forestry.
 - d. Minimizes use conflicts and resource impacts of recreational activities.
 - e. Balance timber production and recreation uses of County parks and forestlands.
 - f. Support the efforts of volunteer and nonprofit groups to build and maintain trails, parks, and facilities that are consistent with the goals of this plan.
 - g. Work cooperatively with local municipalities to develop extensions and connections to local trail systems.
 - h. Continue to provide quality, affordable, county recreation programs for the community.
- 2. Promote tourism throughout the County region, with a strong emphasis on promotion of outdoor recreational tourism, heritage tourism, and the arts.**
- a. Continue to work with area tourism organizations.
 - b. Evaluate potential investments in County park and forestlands that would draw additional visitors to the area.
- 3. Encourage protection of historically significant buildings and sites from development impacts.**
- a. Support the preservation of historically or culturally significant agricultural operations that contribute to rural character.

- b. Consider identifying especially scenic roads as candidates for preservation in a state rustic road program.
 - c. Support the County Historical Society as it relates to identifying and protecting countywide significant cultural resources.
 - d. Consider the impacts to known cultural resources when reviewing development plans and/or permits involving land disturbance.
- 4. Increase and expand awareness of cultural resources.**
- a. Conduct a county-wide cultural resources study to update the previous one conducted in 1977.
 - b. Work with the County Historical Society, Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WDOT), and local municipalities to establish and install signage identifying historically significant buildings and sites.
- 5. Develop a plan to modify recreation offerings in response to changing weather patterns in winter.**
- a. Evaluate services and facilities for potential updates or renovations that would allow the recreation offerings and amenities to be utilized independent of weather patterns.

Chapter 12: Intergovernmental Cooperation

Intergovernmental Cooperation Goal: Marathon County is a cooperative and collaborative partner with other municipalities and organizations to most effectively and efficiently provide services to residents.

- 1. Promote technology and resource sharing.**
- a. Continue to work cooperatively with the City of Wausau on sharing data services and park and recreation services.
 - b. Continue to provide mapping assistance to local municipalities.
 - c. Leverage cutting-edge technology, advanced systems, and modern infrastructure to address current and future challenges.
- 2. Encourage proactive conflict resolution.**
- a. Work with municipalities to identify and resolve potential conflicts between jurisdictions.
 - b. Work with UW-Extension to provide information and forums to foster intergovernmental communication and encourage local officials to share information related to land use, growth management, and other governmental activities.
 - c. Continue to work with UW-Extension to conduct workshops and/or provide information on conflict resolution techniques.
- 3. Promote cost-effective public services.**

- a. Support efforts by local municipalities to establish cooperative service and joint facility arrangements.
 - b. Continue to provide E-911 Dispatch services for all police, fire, and EMS agencies in Marathon County.
 - c. Work with local municipalities and other government agencies to explore opportunities to share costs and/or consolidate public services.
 - d. Continue to cooperate with other counties on solid waste management.
- 4. Provide coordination of regional development and planning activities.**
- a. Create resources and learning opportunities to assist communities in planning, zoning, and subdivision review.
 - b. Assist efforts by municipalities to implement and update their comprehensive plans.
 - c. Encourage local municipalities to share their plans with adjacent communities.
 - d. Continue to cooperate with other units of government on issues involving natural resources, transportation facilities, and other systems that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- 5. Encourage participation in all levels of government.**
- a. Continue to actively work with the State of Wisconsin and the federal government.
 - b. Continue to actively participate in the Wisconsin Towns Association, League of Municipalities, and other similar organizations.
 - c. Continue to staff and actively participate in the Wausau Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).
 - d. Continue to explore opportunities to enhance awareness of and access to media tools that allow County citizens to become informed about on-going and current County activities.
 - e. Maintain strong relationships with all units of government within the county.

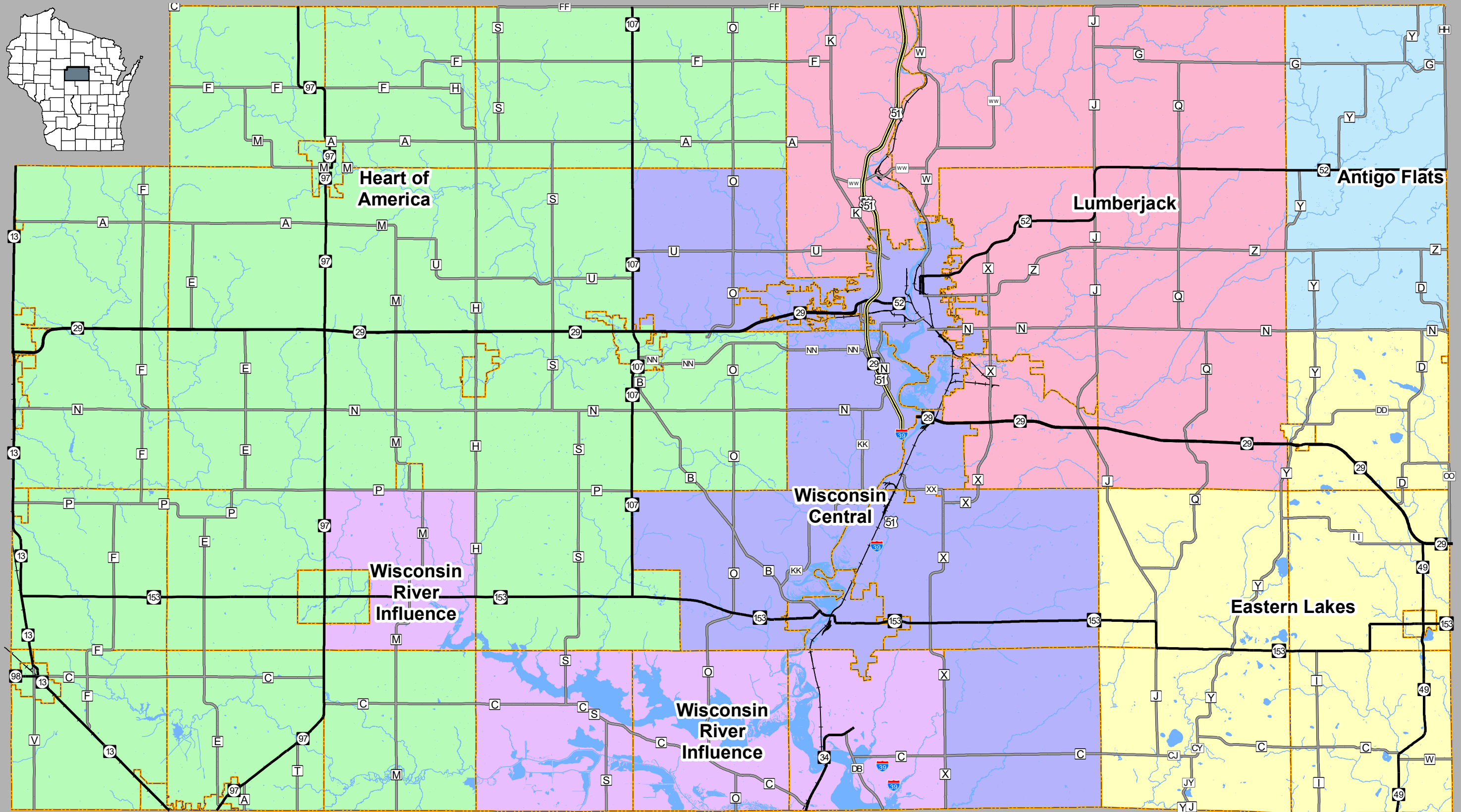


DRAFT

Legend

- US Highway
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Railroad
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water
- Antigo Flats
- Eastern Lakes
- Heart of America
- Lumberjack
- Wisconsin Central
- Wisconsin River Influence

Six Regions Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

Comprehensive Plan

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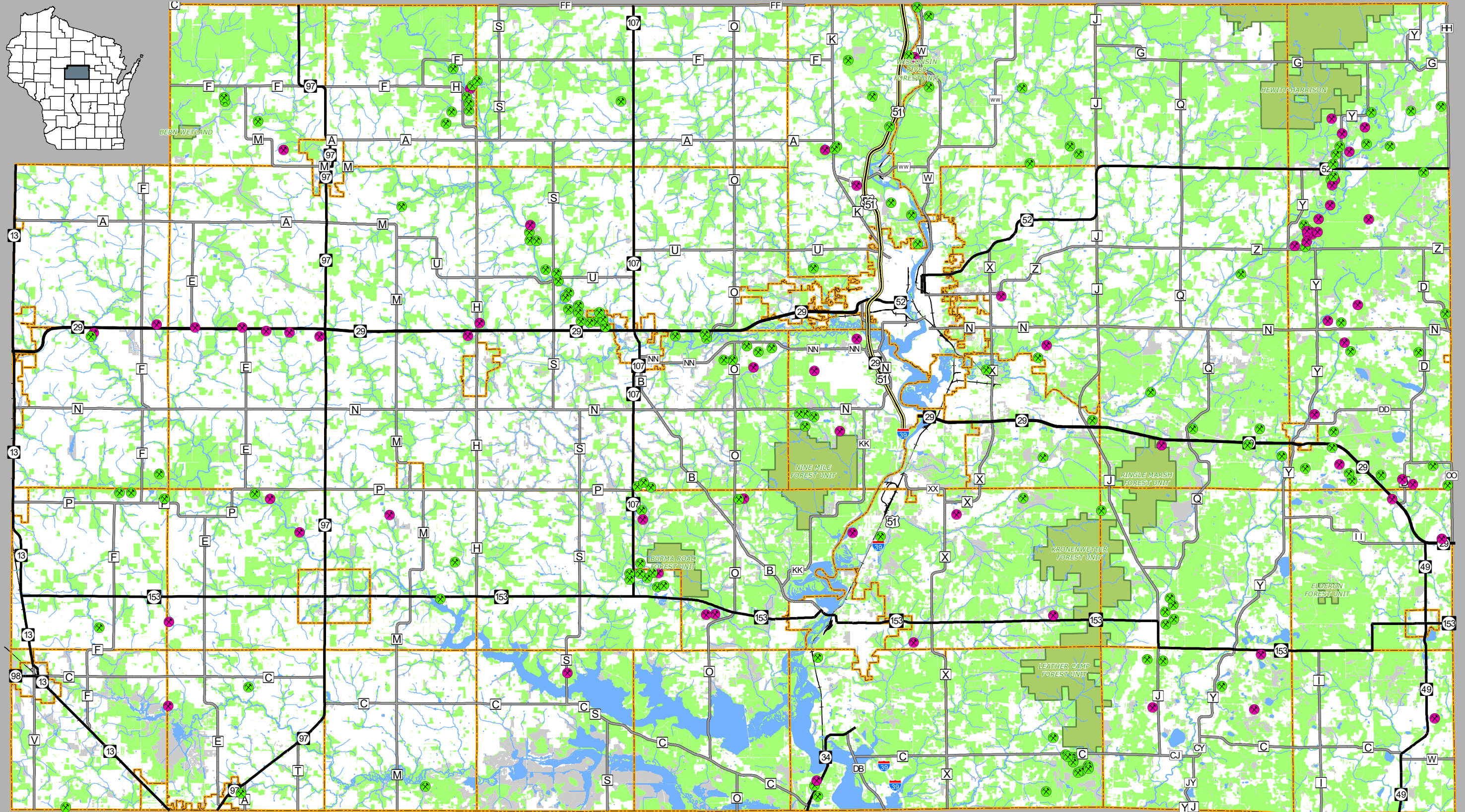
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Legend

- US Highway
- County Highways
- County Forest Units
- Open Lands
- Non-Metallic Mines
- State Highways
- Railroad
- Developed
- Woodlands
- Open
- Closed
- Water

Natural Resources

Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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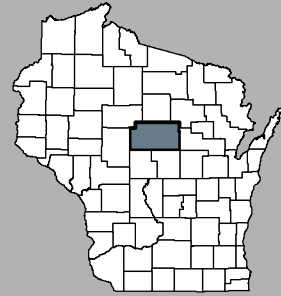
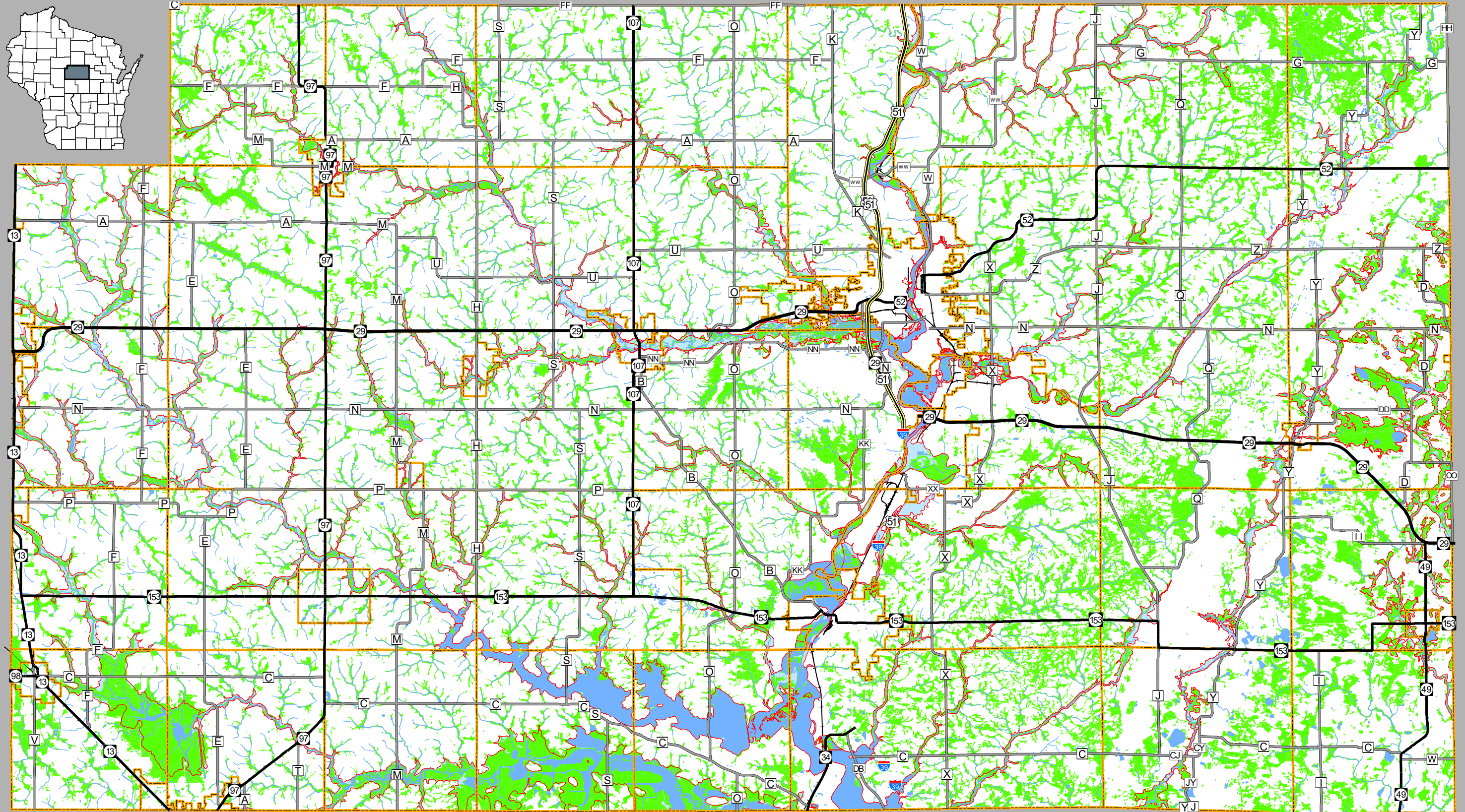
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Legend

- US Highway
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Railroad
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water
- Wetlands
- Flood Plain

Water Resources

Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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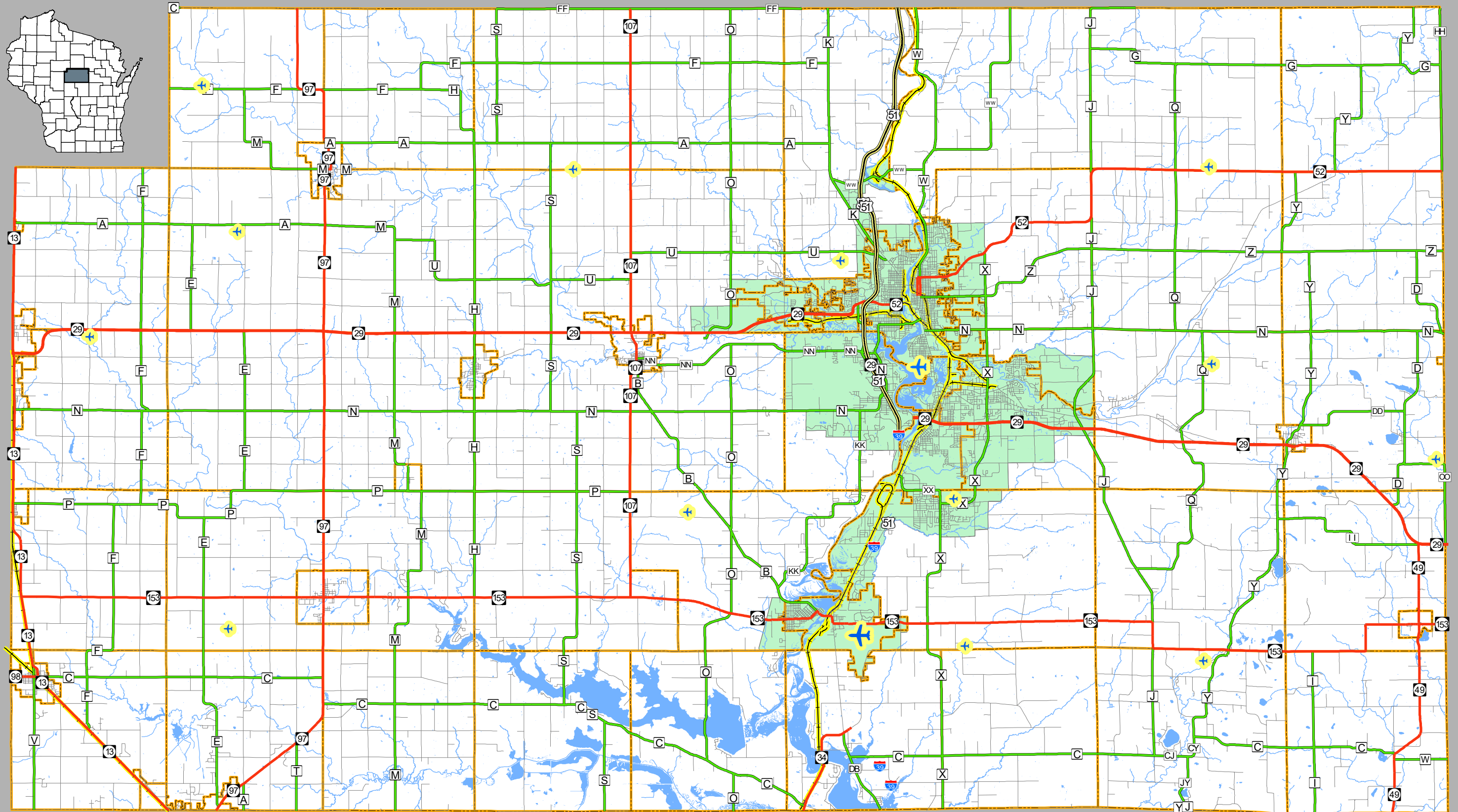
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Legend

US Highway	County Highways	Railroad	Air Carrier / Air Cargo	Transport / Corporate	Grass Strip	Minor Civil Divisions
State Highways	Local Roads	MPO Boundary			Water	

Transportation

Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCWRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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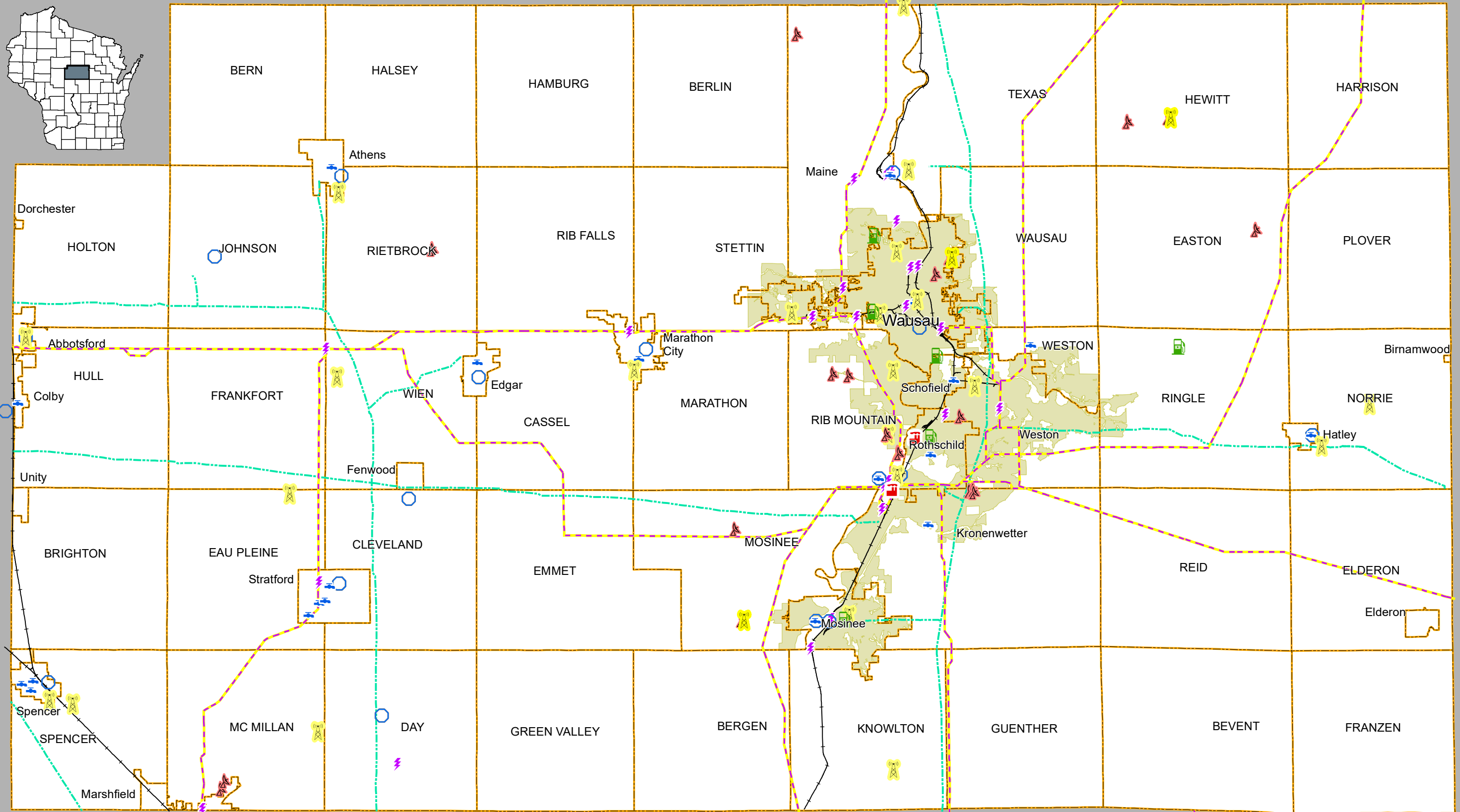
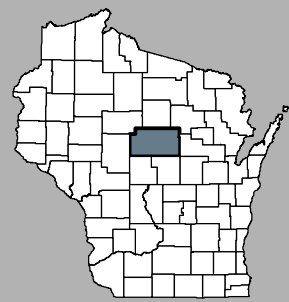
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Legend

- Minor Civil Divisions
- Railroad
- Water
- Alternative Fuel Station
- Other Towers
- Celltowers
- Municipal Water Supply
- Waste Water Treatment Plant
- Sewer Service Area
- High Voltage Powerline
- Electrical Substations
- Gas & Oil Pipeline
- Power Plant

Utilities

Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCWRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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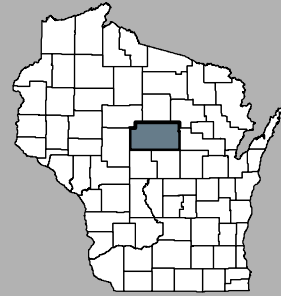
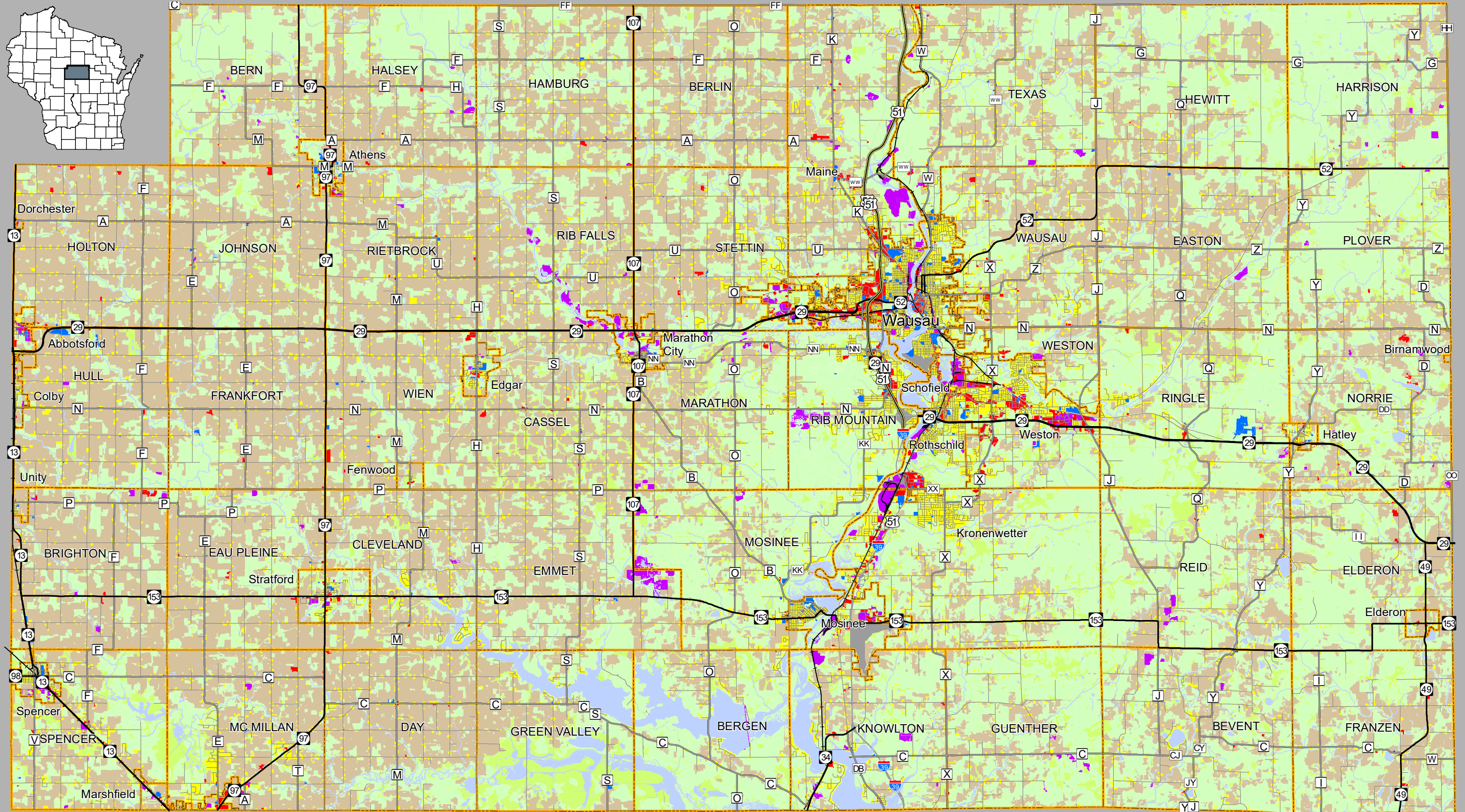


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Existing Land Use - 2020

Marathon County, Wisconsin

Legend			
	US Highway		Minor Civil Divisions
	State Highways		Perennial Streams
	County Highways		Water
	Local Roads		Railroad
	Agriculture		Commercial
	Open Lands		Governmental / Institutional
	Residential		Transportation
	Industrial		Woodlands



SOURCE: NCRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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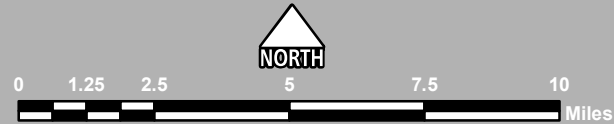
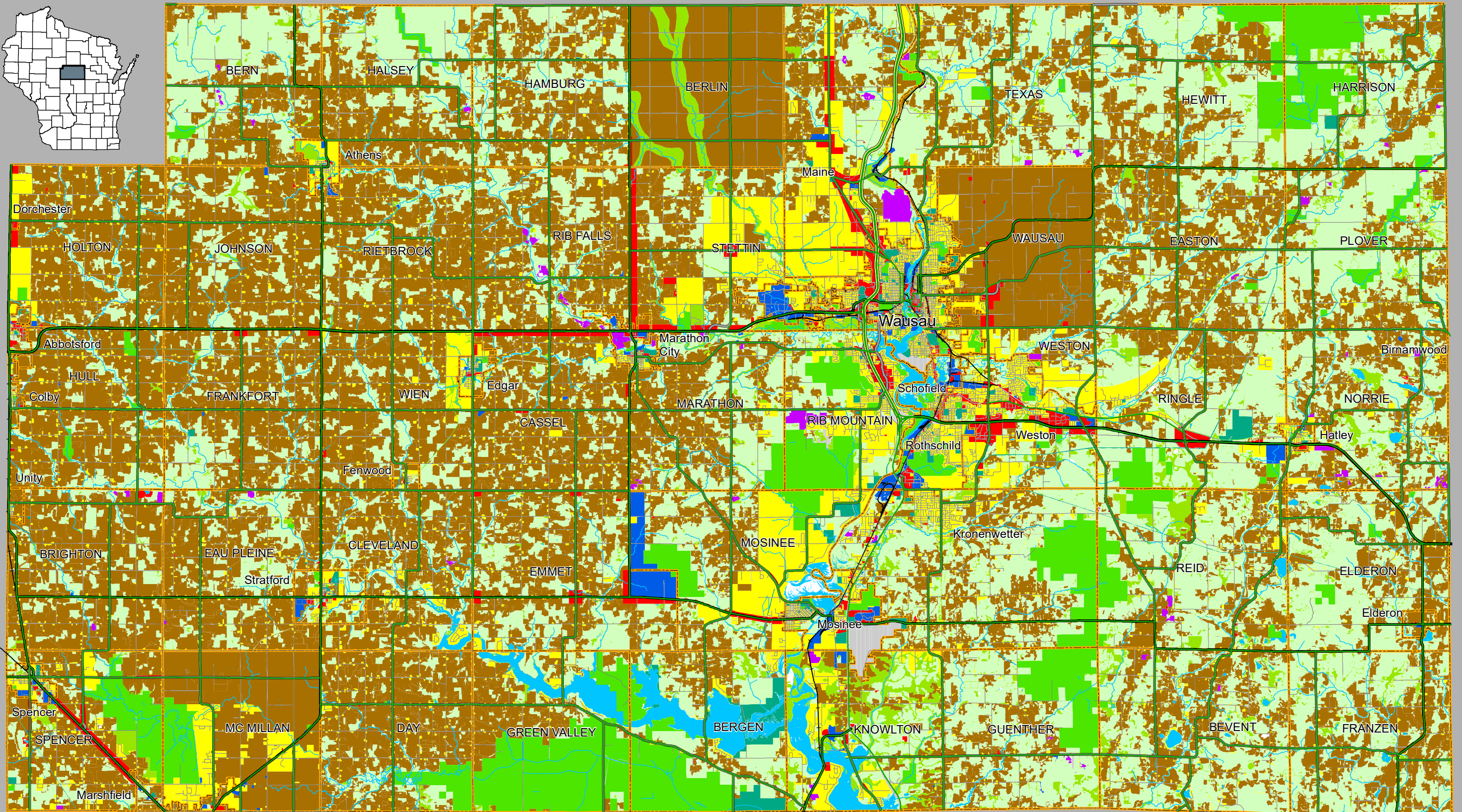
Legend

US Highway	Railroad	GENERALIZED FLU	FORESTRY	PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC	RESIDENTIAL
State Highways	Minor Civil Divisions	AGRICULTURE	INDUSTRIAL	QUARRY	TRANSPORTATION
County Highways	Perennial Streams	COMMERCIAL	NATURAL AREA	RECREATION	Water
Local Roads					

See local comprehensive plans for most current information

Future Land Use

Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCWRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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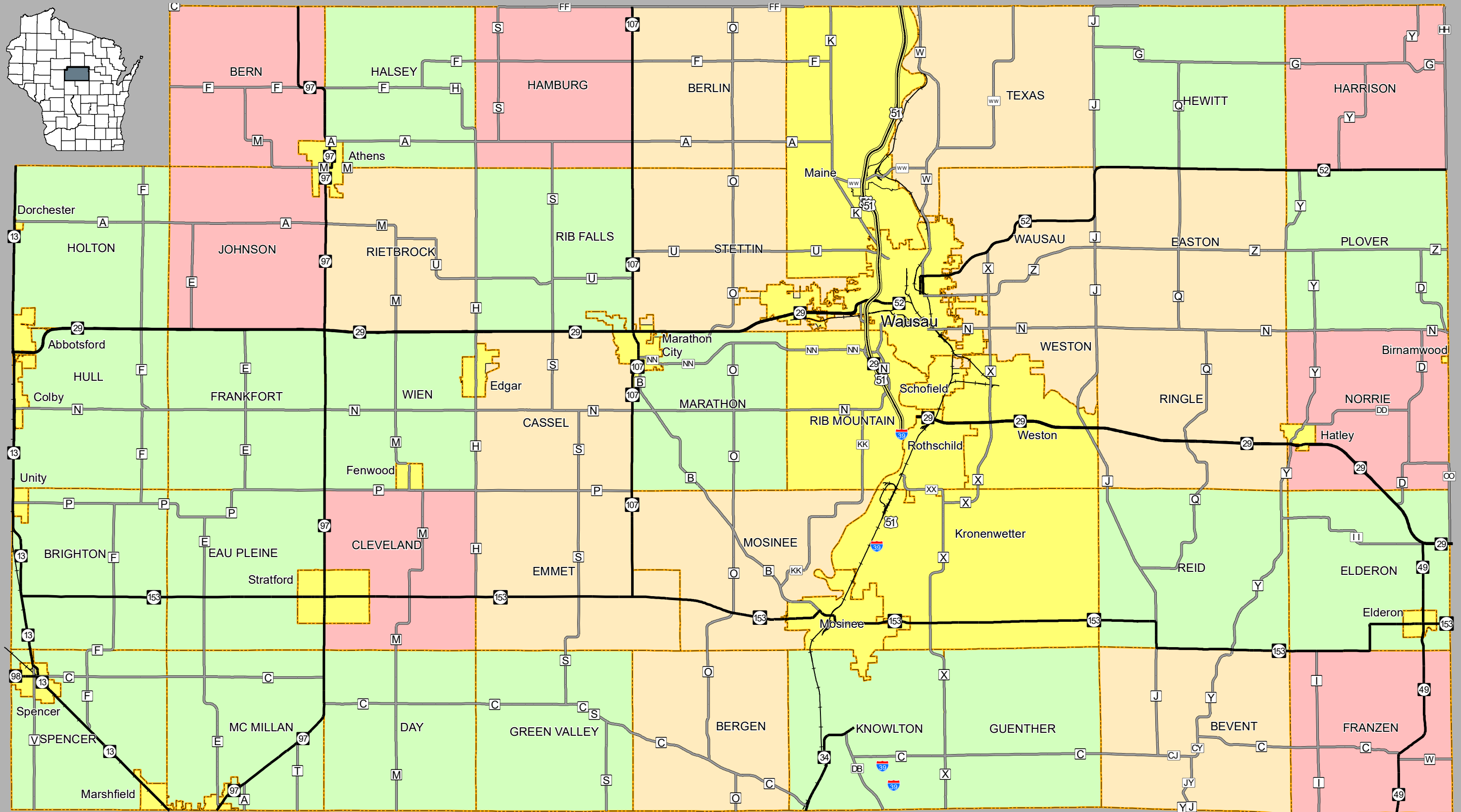


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Legend

- US Highway
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Railroad
- Minor Civil Divisions
- County Zoning
- Municipality Zoning
- Town Zoning
- None

Zoning Status
Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCRPC, NRCS,
Marathon County CPZ

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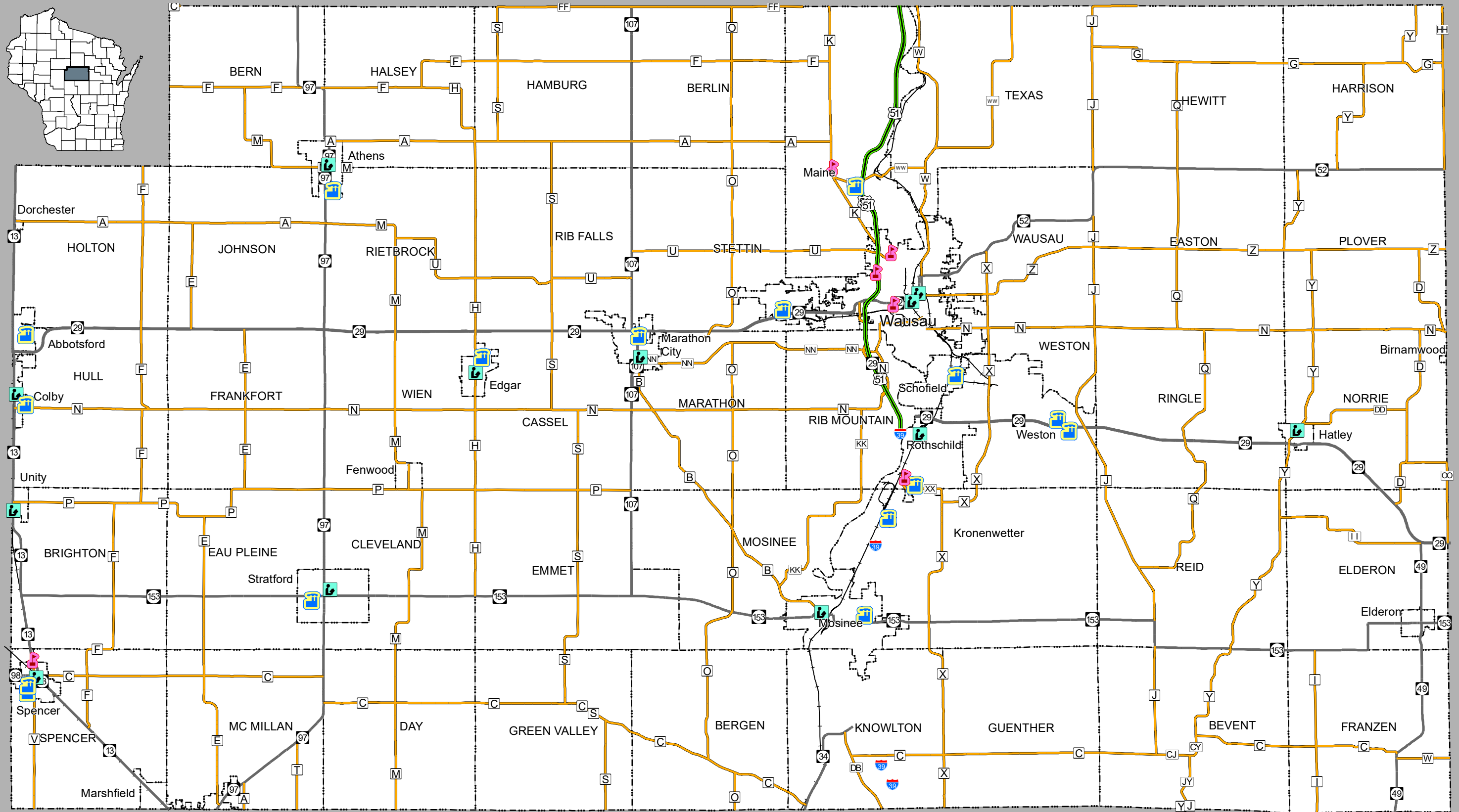
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Education & Industrial Parks

Marathon County, Wisconsin

Legend

- US Highway
- State Highways
- County Highways
- Railroad
- Minor Civil Divisions
- Water
- College
- Industrial Park
- Library



SOURCE: NCRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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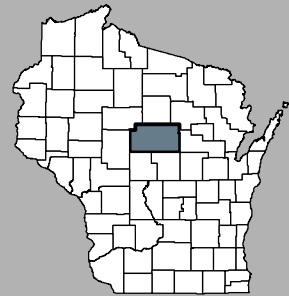
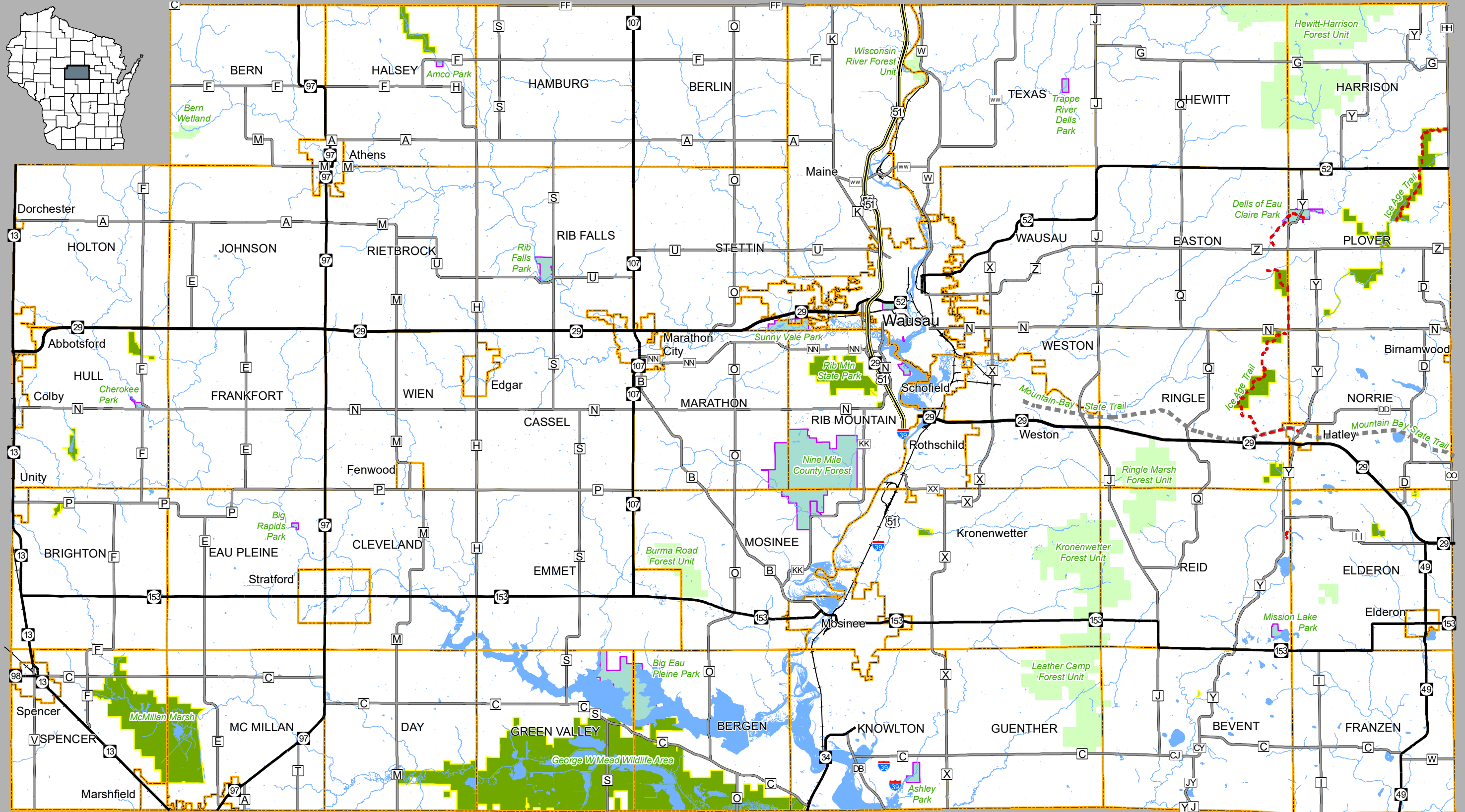
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Legend

US Highway	County Highways	Ice_Age_Trail	Park Owner
State Highways	Railroad	Mountain Bay Trail	County
Water	Forest Units	State	

Recreation Areas

Marathon County, Wisconsin



SOURCE: NCRPC, NRCS, Marathon County CPZ

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