

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

STATE OF WISCONSIN

Date: August 2, 1985

File Ref: 3600

To: James R. Huntoon - AD/5

From: James T. Addis 

Subject: Benson Creek Implementation Element

RECEIVED
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REAL ESTATE

The Master Plan Implementation Element for the Benson Creek Fishery Area, Sawyer County, has been submitted for approval.

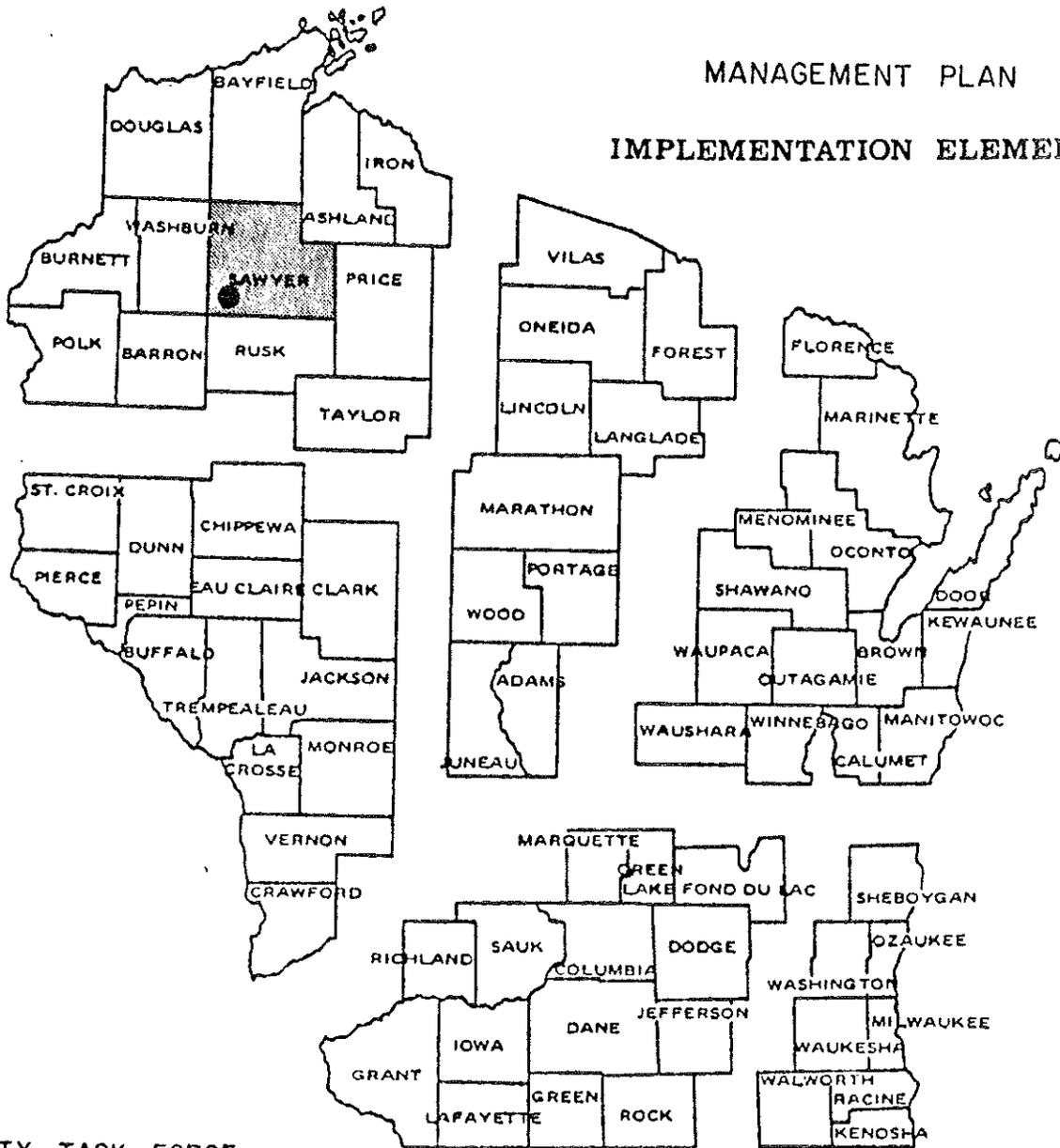
We feel this plan has been very well prepared. The text has followed the goals and objectives of the Management Plan Concept Element and the guidelines of the Master Plan Handbook. It was not necessary to alter any of the action recommendations and, therefore, we recommend approval of this plan.

RB:mg
Attach.

cc: James Addis - FM/4
David Jacobson - Spooner
→ Carl Evert - OL/4
Craig Karr - AD/5

BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA SAWYER COUNTY

MANAGEMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION ELEMENT



PROPERTY TASK FORCE

LEADER - Frank Pratt, Fish Management
Sam Moore, Wildlife Management
Gordon Christians, Forest Management
Lynn Thompson, Law Enforcement

APPROVED BY:

J. R. Huntoon, Administrator,
Resource Management

DATE: 8/5/85

BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN

SAWYER COUNTY

ACQUISITION

Only two parcels must be acquired to accomplish property objectives (Figure 1). The tracts are listed by priority.

The 40-acre parcel (A) at the headwaters should be acquired immediately for watershed protection. Fee title acquisition will be necessary to impart the necessary degree of conservancy.

Parcel (B) is presently zoned Forest Crop so its acquisition schedule is less urgent. Here, management objectives could be achieved with as little as a streambank and access easement. Some type of permanent, public land control is needed to guarantee access for fishing, beaver control, and vegetation management.

DEVELOPMENT

1. Zoned streambank brushing (Objectives 1 and 2): Remove tag alder canopy from four, 500' sections of streambank by 1990 on one state-owned portion and as soon as control can be obtained on the others (Figure 2).
2. Channel dredging to remove siltation (Objectives 1 and 2): Remove accumulated silt due to beaver damage, when appropriate land control and technology become available.
3. Inventory and dredge spring ponds (Objectives 1 and 2): Inventory chemical, physical, and biotic parameters by 1990. Dredge when appropriate technology becomes available.
4. Avian nesting structures (Additional Annual Benefits 1 and 2): Construct 10 waterfowl nesting boxes, 10 cavity nest structures, and one osprey platform by 1990.

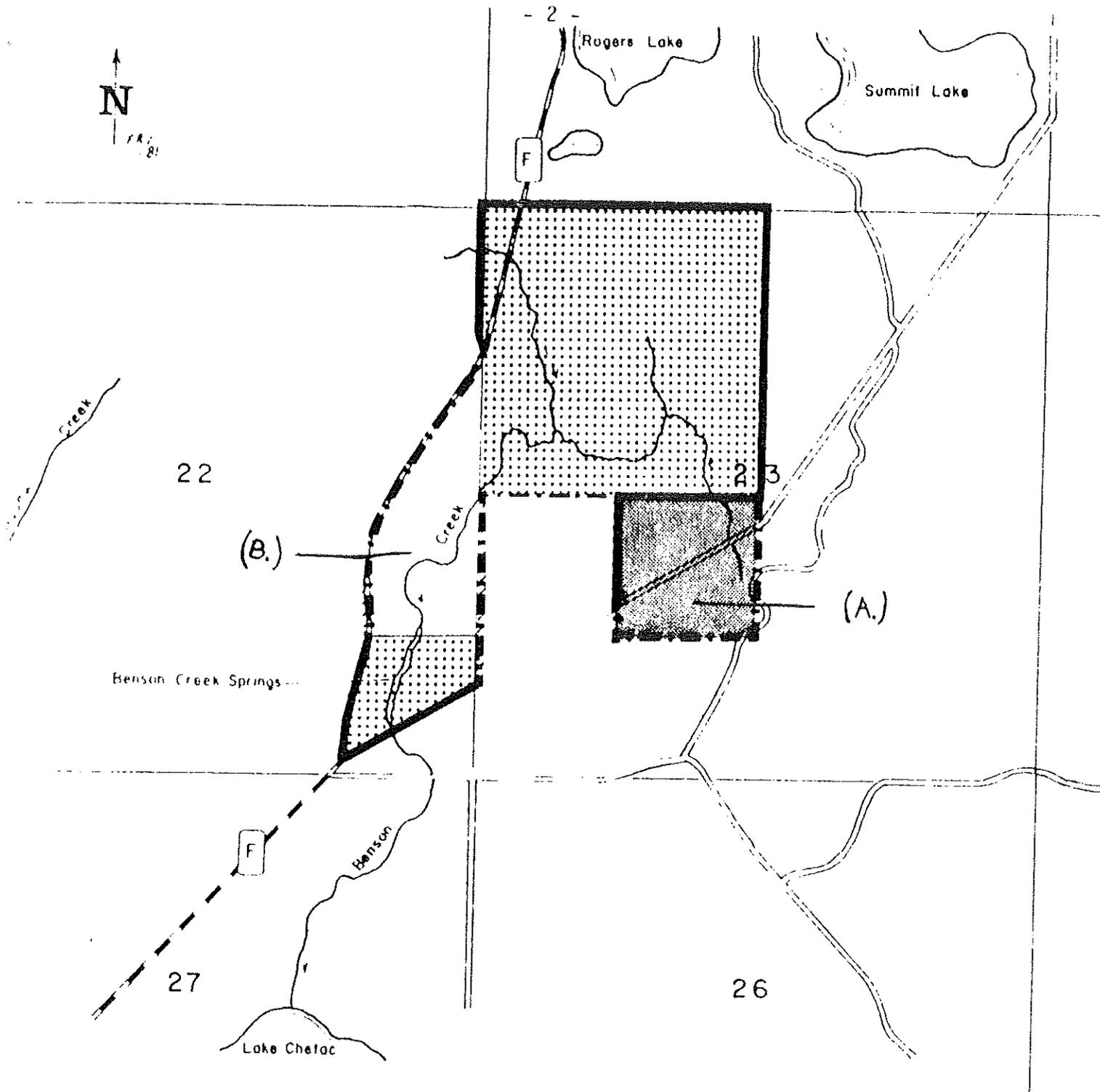
OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

The following activities will be routinely accomplished to achieve property objectives:

1. Remove beaver and beaver dams, as needed.
2. Posting: Annually check and maintain property and property boundary signs.

VEGETATIVE MANAGEMENT

Based on Figure 3, by stand, the following is recommended:



BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA

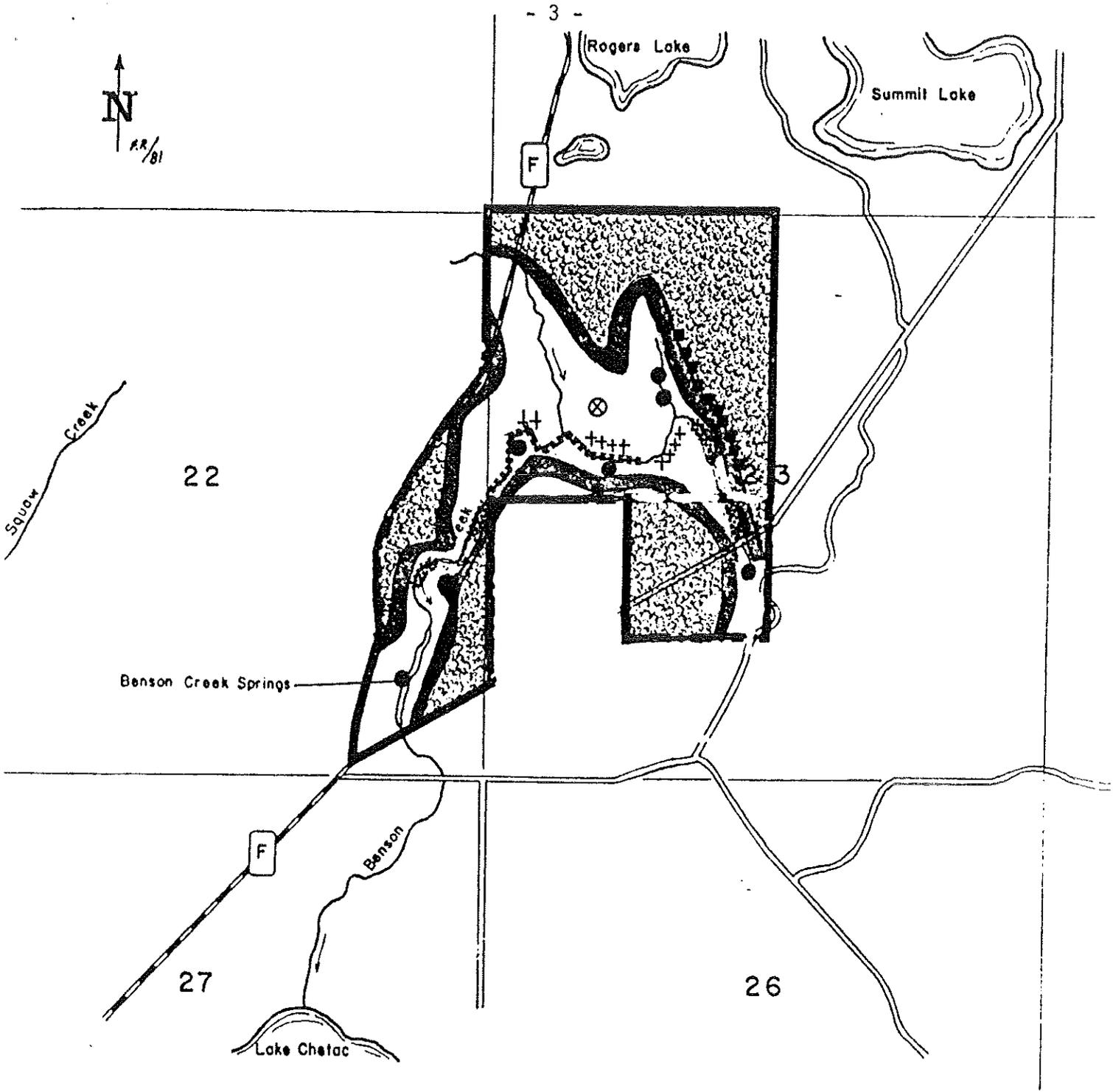
Figure 1 Property Ownership Map.

Scale Feet

138N-R9W
(Lower Quadrangle Map)

LEGEND

- Property Boundary
- State Land
- Private Land A, B.



BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA

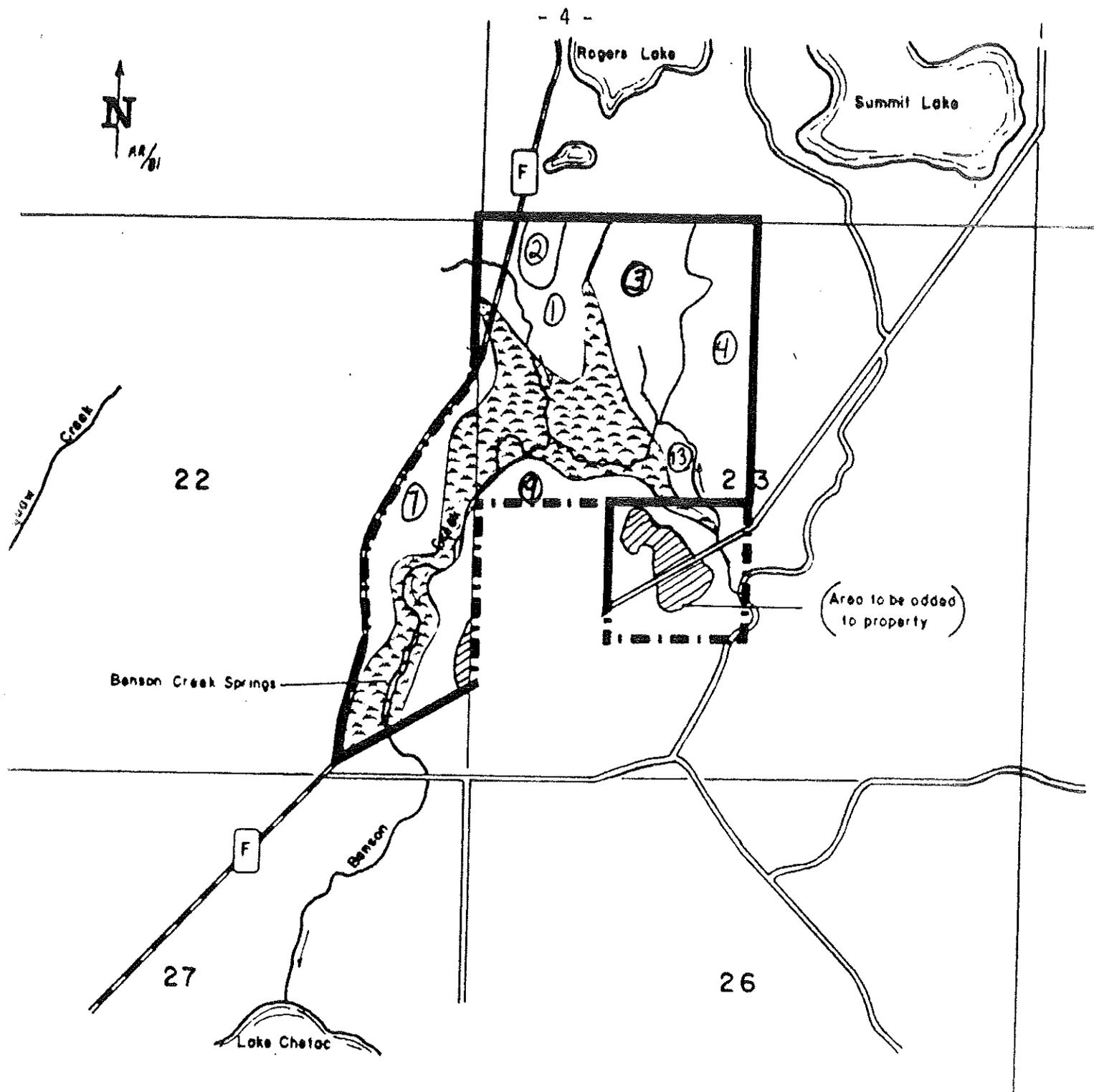
Figure 2 Planned Development Map.

Scale Feet
0 1320 2640

LEGEND

- | | | | | |
|---|-------|------------------------------------|-------|---|
| Property Boundary | ----- | Waterfowl Nesting Boxes (10) | ----- | + |
| Non-Aspen Zone | ----- | Cavity Nesting Boxes (10) | ----- | ■ |
| Zoned Streambank Brushing | ----- | Osprey Nesting Platform (1) | ----- | ⊗ |
| Channel Dredging to Remove Siltation | ----- | Spring Pond Inventory and Dredging | ----- | ● |
| Timber Mgt. for Wildlife Habitat Maintenance-Emphasis Aspen | ----- | | | |

(T.38N-R9W.
Hauer Quadrangle Map.)



BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA

Figure 3 Forestry Compartment Boundary

Scale 0 660 1320 Feet

LEGEND

- Property Boundary - - - - -
- Farmland - - - - -
- Marsh - - - - -
- Forest tracts - (see Text) - - - - - 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 13

T 38N-R9W
Hauer Quadrangle Map.)

<u>Stand No.</u>	<u>Cover Type</u>		<u>Acres</u>	<u>Year of Treatment</u>
	<u>Primary</u>	<u>Secondary</u>		
1	A 5-11''''		19	1987 (harvest cut)
2	FS 5-9''		10	2003 (harvest cut)
3	A 5-11''''	BW 5-11''''	23	1993 (harvest cut)
4	A 5-11''''	BW 5-11''	51	1983 (harvest cut)
7*	A 5-11''	BW 5-11''	32	1982 (harvest cut)
9*	S 5-11''''	BW 5-11''	55	1999 (harvest cut)
13	LBA		88	1990 (brush strips)

*Mostly out of state ownership at this time.

Specific treatments are as follows:

1. Aspen Pole Stand

Regeneration harvest in 1987 followed by removal of nonmerchantable stems. Leave all swamp conifers uncut. Road edge will be managed as a Class A aesthetic zone and will be managed according to DNR aesthetic handbook MC 2431.5. Hardwoods other than aspen will be encouraged along the creek.

2. Swampy Fir-Spruce Stand

Carry type as long as possible for aesthetics and for use as deer winter cover. Remove balsam before rotation date if damage from spruce budworm or storms occur.

3. and 4. Aspen and White Birch Pole Stand

Most of these stands are presently part of an active timber sale. Cutting should be completed by 1986 and should be followed by cutting of nonmerchantable stems except for oak and conifers. Parts of this area may be suitable for tree planting which would add species diversity to the property and discourage beaver activity if situated near the stream. Logging roads may be developed as game trails after the sale is completed.

7. Aspen and White Birch Pole Stand

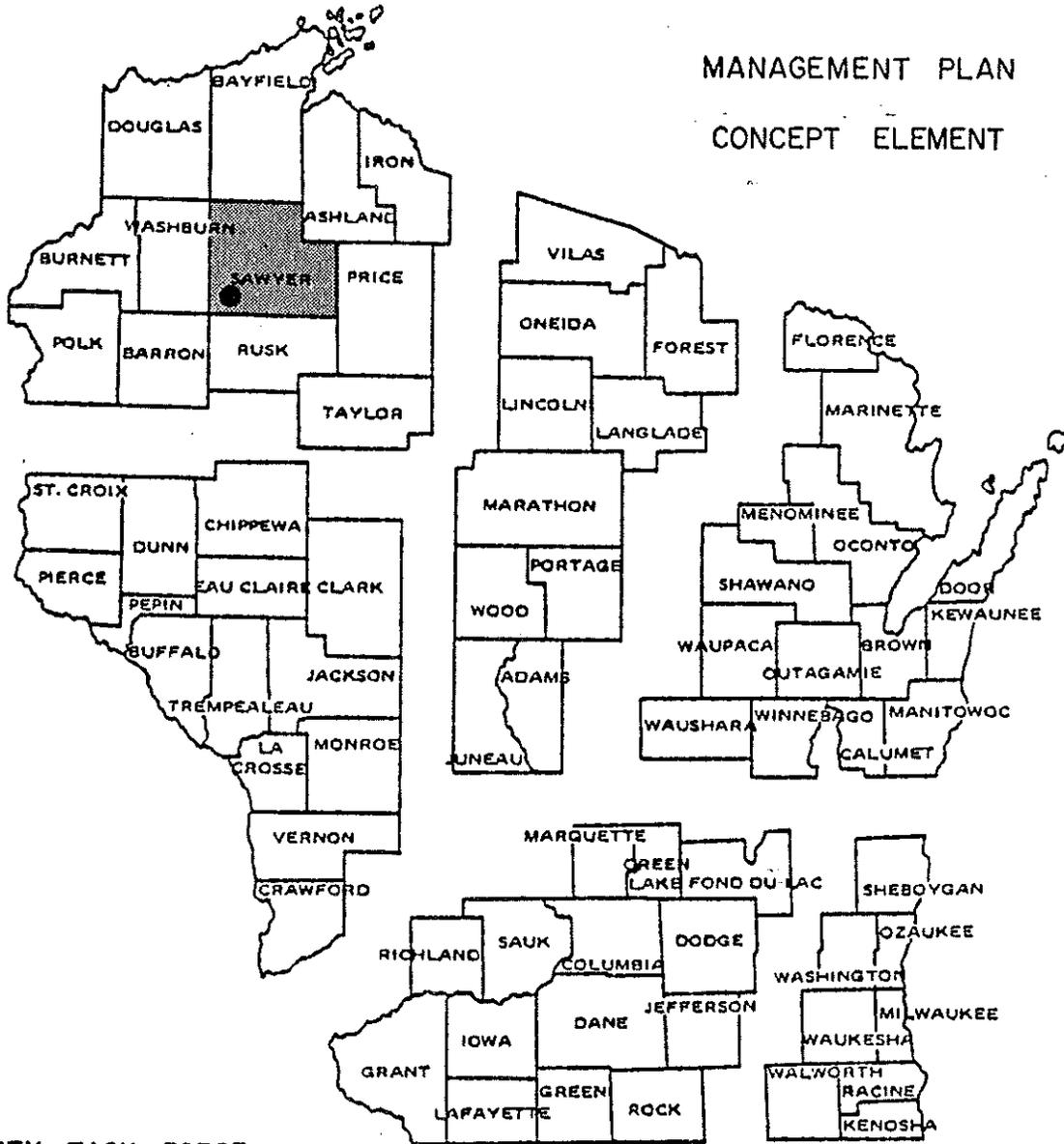
Only about two acres of this stand is in present state ownership. When and if state ownership is completed, this stand will be managed as a Class A aesthetic zone with regeneration cuts modified accordingly.

9. Most of this type is not yet in state ownership. A regeneration cut will be needed in 1999, followed by shearing to remove nonmerchantable stems. Measures to reduce aspen regeneration could be done along the marsh edge earlier to discourage beaver activity. Brush tag alder from two, 500' zones in marsh area between Stands 7 and 9 when land control is obtained.

13. Lowland brush in this area has no commercial value at this time. This site may be suitable for planting tamarack if sufficient technology is developed. Brush tag alter drom streambank, two 500' zones, by 1990.

BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA
SAWYER COUNTY

MANAGEMENT PLAN
CONCEPT ELEMENT



PROPERTY TASK FORCE

LEADER - Frank Pratt, Fish Management
Sam Moore, Wildlife Management
Gordon Christians, Forest Management
Lynn Thompson, Law Enforcement

APPROVED BY:

J. R. Huntoon
J. R. Huntoon, Administrator,
Resource Management

DATE:
4/10/84

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SECTION I - ACTIONS

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

Goals

To manage, preserve and protect the Benson Creek Fishery Area, in order to enhance trout fishing and other recreational activities.

Annual Objectives

1. Provide opportunity for up to 500 man-days of coldwater angling for brook trout.
2. Maintain a catch rate of one 8" brook trout per visitation.
3. Manage the existing wildlife resource to provide up to 50 man-days of hunting for white-tailed deer, squirrels, cottontails and snowshoe hares, and 50 man-days of trapping for beaver, otter, muskrat and raccoons.

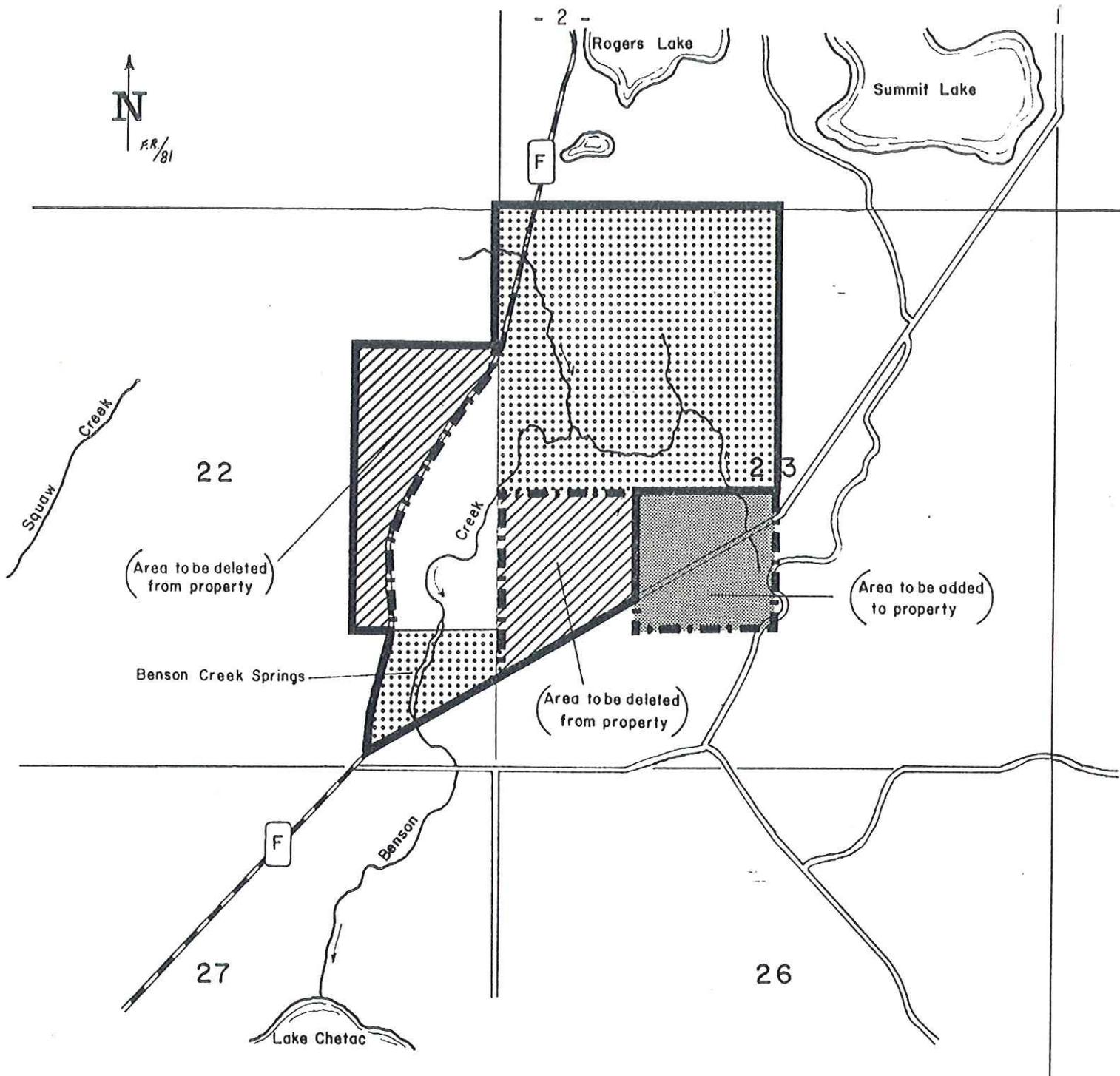
Additional Annual Benefits

1. Provide 200 man-days of other recreational uses, including berry picking, bird watching and photography.
2. Benefit nongame species, including endangered and threatened species that are indigenous or migrate through the area.

RECOMMENDED MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The recommended management program for the Benson Creek Fishery Area (Figure 2) will consist of continued land acquisition, property boundary realignment and acreage goal adjustment, detailed physical inventory of existing water resources and moderately intensive habitat maintenance. Intense aquatic habitat development will occur sometime in the future. Presently, there is insufficient access to state-owned land due to the nature of the surrounding terrain and location of adjacent private parcels. Land acquisition to block in key parcels for stream access and obtain control of headwater springs will be prerequisite to any major aquatic development activities. In the interim, maintenance activities will focus on beaver control and the manipulation of upland vegetation to optimize timber and game values. Physical-chemical surveys will be conducted to delineate the spring pond resource potential. When aquatic development does begin, it will involve streambank brushing and as yet unperfected techniques for deepening small, inaccessible spring ponds and restoring beaver damaged stream channel.

Benson Creek is a low gradient, meadow stream, with numerous small springs and spring ponds adjacent to or on the stream channel. Long-term beaver activity has degraded much of the natural stream channel by siltation and widening. As yet, techniques have not been perfected for restoring trout productivity to low gradient streams impacted by beaver. Until that time, the best strategy to prevent additional damage will be to maintain trout habitat by beaver



BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA

Figure 2. Property Ownership Map.

Scale Feet

LEGEND

- Property Boundary
- Proposed Boundary Change
- State Land
- Private Land
- Area to be Added
- Area to be Deleted

(T.38N-R.9W.
Hauer Quadrangle Map.)

control and dam removal. Techniques established by the beaver-trout committee will be utilized. An effective beaver control removal program will require the continued cooperation of adjacent private landowners in the Benson Creek drainage.

Little is known about the adjacent system of spring ponds, especially their potential for dredging. Existing dredging techniques using a large hydraulic dredge are not applicable due to access, terrain and the relatively small size of the ponds. The ponds should be mapped and inventoried to determine surface acreage, depth contours, volume, bottom type, sediment depths and discharge rates.

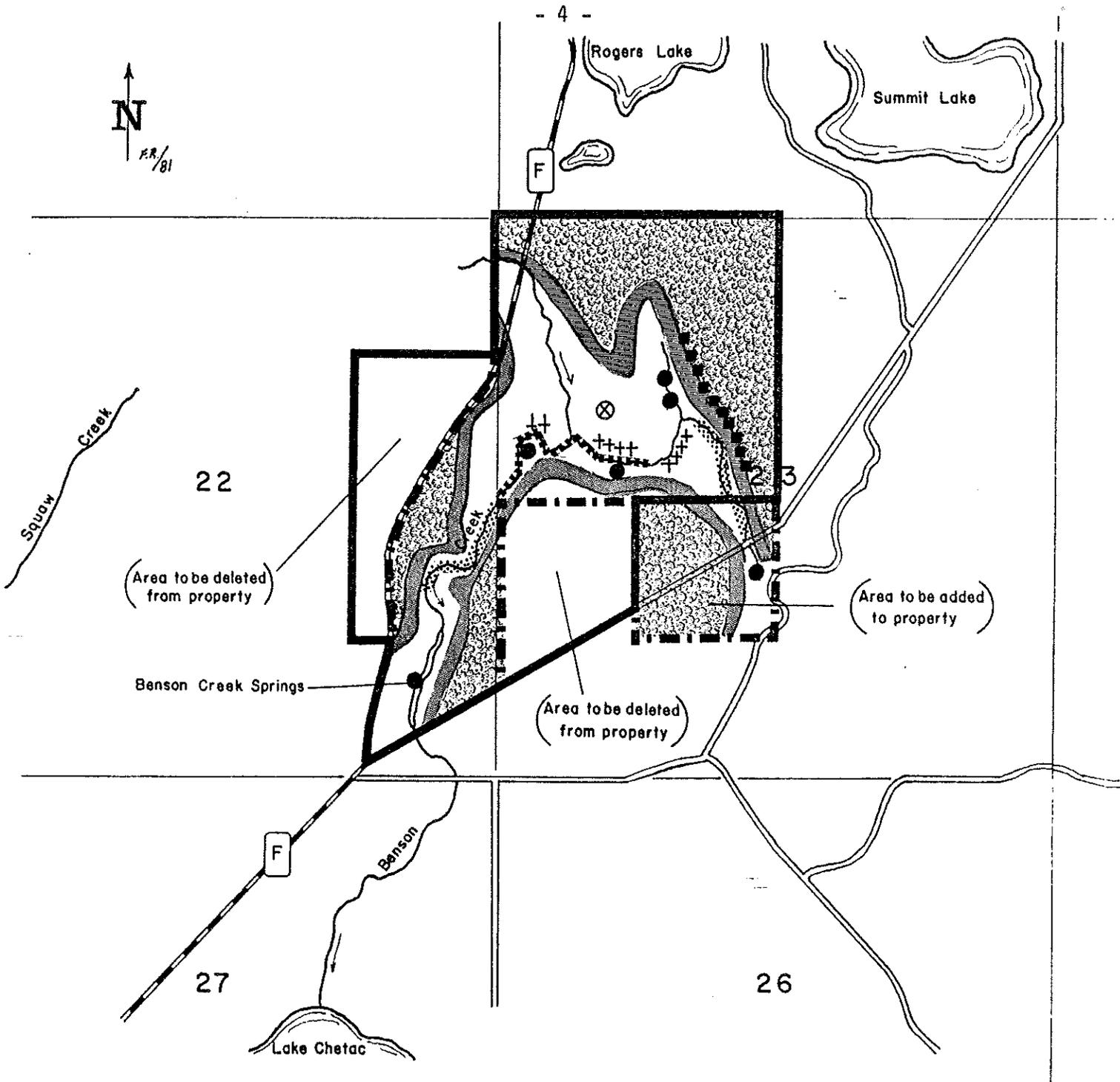
Two stream sections are canopied by a dense growth of tag alder which limits trout production and inhibits angling. A program of zoned streambank brushing (Figure 3) will improve productivity and angling. Half of the streambank tag alder canopy will be left as is, and half will be restored to open meadow conditions. Mechanical, chemical and other proven techniques will be utilized. The unbrushed sections will provide cover for grouse and woodcock and refuge for the angler who prefers solitude and difficult fishing. The brushed sections will provide better stream habitat for large trout and additional habitat for meadow and meadow-edge wildlife communities.

Long-term vegetation management of the upland zone will be directed toward timber management practices that select against aspen close to the water's edge, and for aspen in areas away from the stream. Presently, there is a supply of aspen in areas accessible to beaver and only long-term timber management will reverse this trend. Until the immediately accessible food supply (aspen) is reduced, beaver colonization will be a continuing problem - requiring short-term, periodic, beaver removal efforts.

A severe windstorm in 1977 blew down a large percentage of the aspen along the east edge of transition zone between the wetland and upland. This has allowed a heavy stand of hazel and dogwood to develop. Natural succession to a brush community may eventually be sufficient to eliminate aspen from this zone. If not, an active program of underplanting with spruce followed by girdling and release of mature aspen will be necessary to achieve the desired elimination of beaver food species from that zone.

Recommended timber management on the upland will include clearcutting 108 acres for upland zone aspen regeneration during 1982-99 and salvaging 10 acres of budworm damaged spruce (as soon as possible). When completed, a diversity of aspen stands will result. The estimated gross return from timber management should exceed \$10,000 at today's market value and with present volumes.

The recommended wildlife management program will include managing the uplands for forest game, and erecting of nesting structures for waterfowl, raptors and cavity dwelling birds. Only a minimum of intensive zone management is planned with no special accommodations for the nonconsumptive user. Commercial timber harvest will be used as the primary management tool. Resulting "disturbed" habitat will benefit all wildlife present, both game and nongame, and will be available for use by all visitors. Specific game management, other than



BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA

Figure 3. Planned Development Map.

Scale 0 1320 2640 Feet

(T.38N-R.9W.
Hauer Quadrangle Map.)

LEGEND

- | | | | | |
|---|-----------|--|-------|-------|
| Property Boundary | ----- | Waterfowl Nesting Boxes (10) | ----- | + |
| Proposed Boundary Change | - - - - - | Cavity Nesting Boxes (10) | ----- | ■ |
| Non-Aspen Zone | ----- | Osprey Nesting Platform (1) | ----- | ⊗ |
| Zoned Streambank Brushing | ----- | Spring Pond Inventory and Dredging | ----- | ● |
| Channel Dredging to Remove Siltation | ----- | Continued Beaver Control & Dam Removal | ----- | ----- |
| Timber Mgt. for Wildlife Habitat Maintenance-Emphasis Aspen | ----- | | ----- | ----- |

timber management, will include the following: 1) Erection of waterfowl nesting boxes in the wetland; 2) Erection of nest boxes for cavity dwelling birds on the upland; 3) Maintenance of forest openings on 3% of the total land area and 4) Erection of an osprey nesting platform in, or immediately adjacent to the wetland. Cost of recommended game management will average \$400 per annum.

Further acquisition and boundary realignment will be crucial to effective land control and watershed management. Presently, the most productive portion of stream channel and the headwater springs are privately owned. The current boundary includes an intermittent warmwater tributary but fails to include the headwater spring pond. A boundary realignment is recommended to include the headwater springs and eliminate two parcels not contiguous to Benson Creek.

Watershed management can best be served by purchase of two important parcels totalling 84 acres, one within and one outside of the current boundary. This will require an upward adjustment of the approved acreage goal from 202 to 265.5 acres (Figure 2) with the additional 63.5 acres to be transferred from the Devil's Creek Fishery Area, Rusk County. Fee title acquisition is recommended, but stream and access trail easement would be preferable to complete private control. Purchase should proceed from willing sellers as soon as individual landowners involved are willing to negotiate. (The owner of the headwater springs has expressed interest.)

Benson Creek is Class I brook trout water. Stocking is not necessary. Provided that existing spawning areas and water quality can be maintained, the fishery will continue to be self-sustaining. The present trout population is dominated by small, slow growing fish. Habitat manipulation should improve angling quality (trout populations, size/age structure). Under current levels of angler use and under current population structure, there is no need for specific regulations to maintain or improve angling quality. However, if use levels do increase enough to pose the danger of overfishing, and if habitat improvement does improve trout growth rates and/or longevity, more restrictive regulations could be used to optimize angling quality.

All areas proposed for development will be examined for the presence of endangered and threatened wild animals and wild plants. If listed species are found, development will be suspended until the District Endangered Resources Coordinator is consulted, the site evaluated, and appropriate protective measures taken.

A complete biological inventory of the property will be conducted as funds permit. Additional property objectives may be developed following completion of such an inventory.

The overall cost of all aspects of the recommended management program is estimated at about \$55,000 (1984 dollars) for completion of land acquisition, \$3,000 per decade for habitat maintenance and \$35,000-\$50,000 for long-term development activities. The state is expected to accrue \$10,000 from commercial timber harvest.

SECTION II - SUPPORT DATA

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Benson Creek has its headwaters in a spring seepage in T38N, R9W, Section 23 and flows about 2 miles to Lake Chetac in southwest Sawyer County, in the Town of Edgewater. All of the stream is Class I trout water. There are numerous small springs and spring ponds along and adjacent to the stream so water quality is excellent for a coldwater fish community. Streambank vegetation is about equally divided between open sedge meadow and heavy tag alder.

Since 1960 the state has acquired a 21.5-acre parcel encompassing Benson Springs and a 160-acre block surrounding 0.7 miles of stream and numerous small spring ponds. In 1971, the current property boundary was approved by the Natural Resources Board, with a 202-acre goal. So far, land purchase has cost \$2,150.

Past management has consisted of trout stocking, stream surveys, beaver control and rudimentary lands maintenance (such as signing). There has been no major habitat manipulation. A brushing project was proposed with trout stamp funding in the 1981-83, but was later dropped from consideration due to the current lack of access and adverse logistics.

In 1964-65 a short index station below Benson Springs was electrofished. The only complete stream survey was conducted in 1976. Benson Springs were stocked with spring yearling brook trout until 1977. However, that program was terminated in 1977 in keeping with Benson Creek's Class I rating.

RESOURCE CAPABILITIES AND INVENTORY

Geology and Hydrology

The Benson Creek watershed lies in the St. Croix sandstone geological area. Bedrock thickness varies from 500-1000 feet thick and includes Madison sandstone, Trempealeau, Franconia, Dresbach, Eau Claire and Mt. Simon formations.

A site specific soil survey has been completed for one small part of Section 22. The soil map for the tract reveals fine Omega loamy sand, shallow peat-muck, Chetak loamy fine sand and Warman silt-loam soils. A general soil description for the region reveals Pence, Santiago and Freer soil associations.

Annual precipitation for southern Sawyer County averages 30.1 inches, with a 19"-41" range. Peak run-off occurs in April. Benson Creek has a normal discharge of 6 cfs. Groundwater flow contributes the majority of the stream's water budget followed by run-off and direct channel precipitation.

Very little farming occurs in the watershed and most of the drainage basin is in natural cover. One soil and water district cooperator has a farm in Section 23, which is maintained in good cover and protection.

Fish and Wildlife

The terrestrial wildlife community consists of animals common to upland, wetland and stream edge habitats in northwestern Wisconsin. The list of animals likely to be found here would include (but is not limited to) mammals such as beaver, otter, muskrats, raccoons, gray and red squirrels, chipmunks, cottontails, snowshoe hares and white-tailed deer. Birds would include game species such as ruffed grouse and woodcock, various waterfowl, raptors and songbirds. Amphibians and reptiles common to northwestern Wisconsin probably can be found here. Ospreys have been in the general vicinity of Benson Creek and a nesting platform will be erected in an attempt to create a new nesting territory. An extensive survey of plant and wildlife species has not been made and should be accomplished as soon as funds and manpower are available. In the meantime, observations by trained personnel will continue to be made whenever possible to compile a list of plant and wildlife species on the fishery area. All species, especially the common game species, can be managed via the recommended manipulation of vegetative cover.

Surveys document a coldwater fish community dominated by small brook trout, with a few minnows, sticklebacks and juvenile perch and northern pike (below Benson Springs).

Vegetative Cover

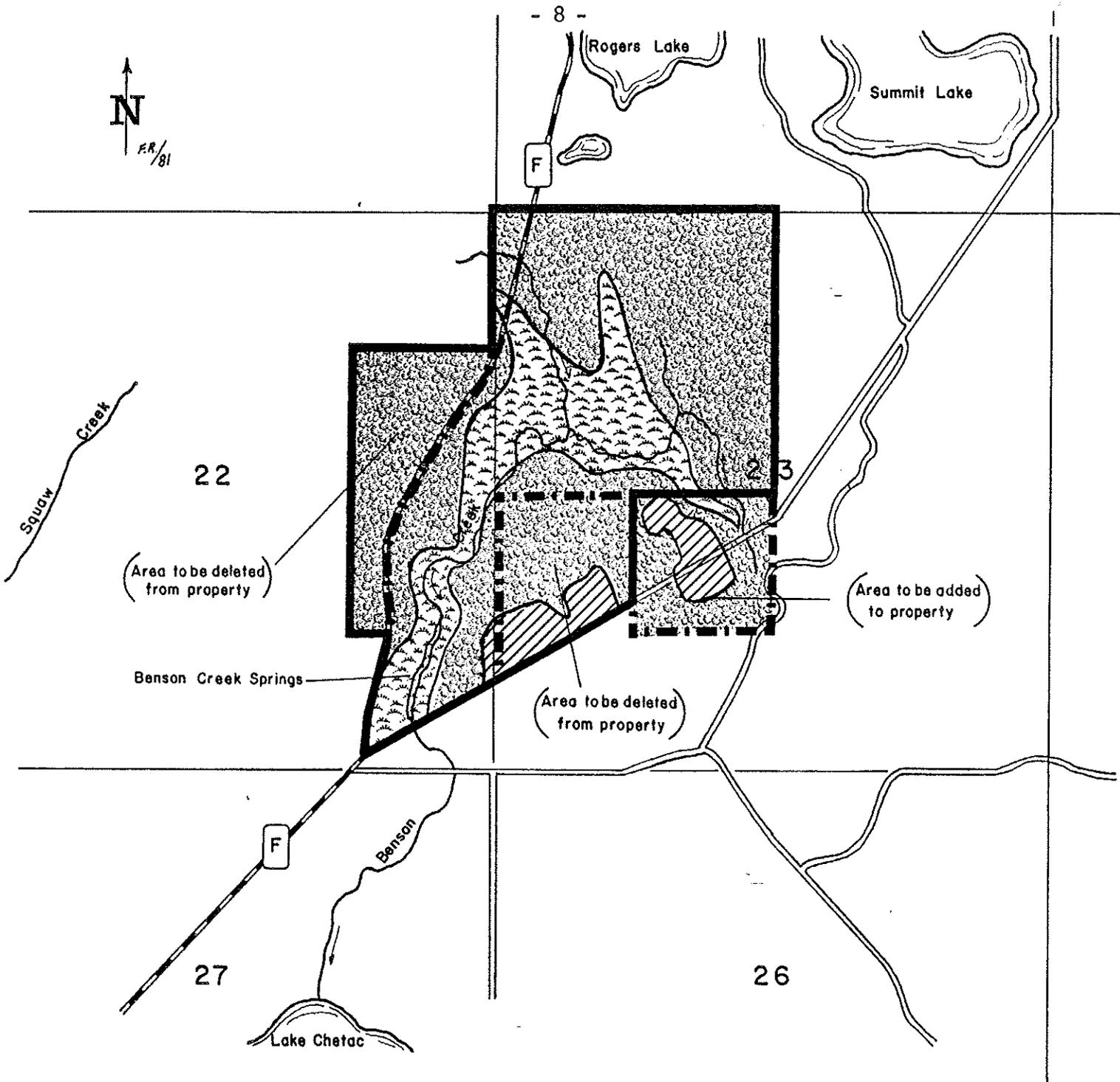
The original timber type on this property consisted of pine on the uplands with swamp conifer and hardwoods on the wetter sites. Past logging and subsequent fires converted the uplands to aspen and other intolerant hardwood species. A severe storm occurred in 1977, blowing down a sizeable number of mature aspen on the upland and transition zones. About 10 acres of spruce and balsam have been severely damaged by budworm. Table 1 lists acreages of the major vegetation types within present and proposed future state ownership.

Table 1: Vegetative Cover Types, Benson Creek Fishery Area*

Aspen	- 154.5 acres
Fir-Spruce	- 10.0 acres
Field	- 11.0 acres
Alder	- 43.0 acres
Sedge, Grass	- 43.0 acres
Water	- 4.0 acres
Total	<u>265.5 acres</u>

*Currently owned - 181.5 acres

The main vegetation types on the wetland consist of tag alder and various grasses and sedges common to stream-edge meadow communities. Uncanopied and unsilted sections of the stream channel have heavy growths of Ranunculus and water cress. Shaded and/or heavily silted sections have only sparse growths of Potamogeton and Valisneria. The spring ponds support heavy growths of Lemna and Chara.



BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA

Figure 4. General Cover Map.

(T.38N-R.9W.
Hauer Quadrangle Map.)

Scale 0 660 1320 Feet

LEGEND

- Property Boundary - - - - -
- Proposed Boundary Change - - - - -
- Farmland - - - - -
- Timber - - - - -
- Marsh - - - - -

Endangered and Threatened Species

Other than the osprey previously noted, no other endangered or threatened species of fish, amphibians, molluscs, mammals, birds, reptiles or wild plants are known to be present on the property.

Surface Waters Resources

Benson Creek is the main water resource in the area. Water chemistry in the stream is medium hard (MPA - 88 ppm) and slightly alkaline (pH 7.2). The stream has a low gradient with a normal discharge rate of 6 cfs. Current state ownership encompasses about 0.7 mile of the stream thread. It also includes a small warmwater tributary and two small coldwater tributaries, Benson Springs (1.8 acre) and 4 or more smaller spring ponds (Table 2). The recommended boundary realignment would add an additional 0.1 mile of stream and a 0.5-acre spring pond at its headwaters. About 0.3 mile of Benson Creek is privately owned but lies within the current property boundary.

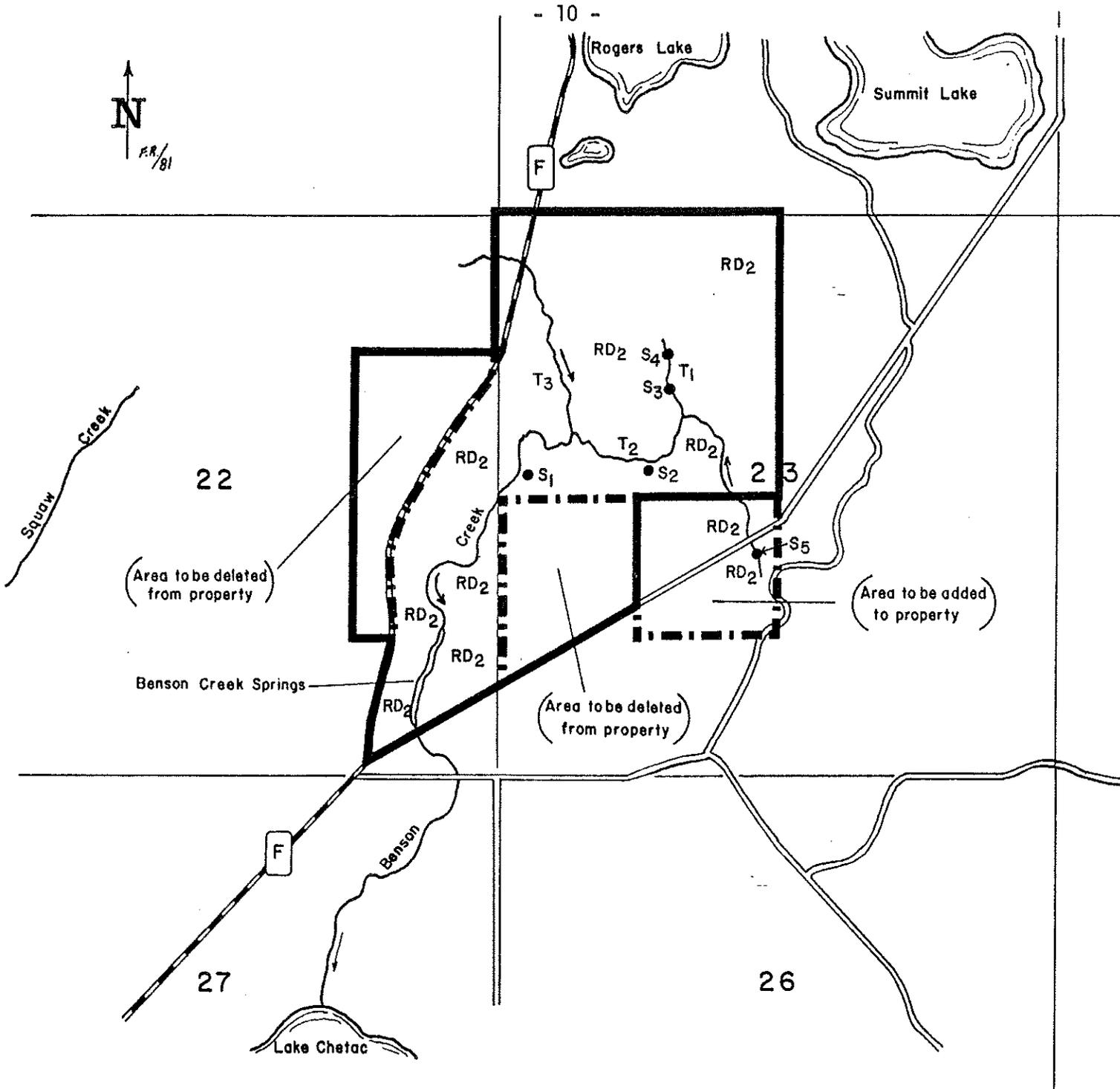
Headwater spring ponds lie within the proposed property expansion. Acreage figures for springs are estimates from aerial photos. A complete physical inventory of springs has not yet been undertaken. See Figure 5 for location and letter coding of unnamed springs and tributaries.

Table 2: Water Areas Included Within Current and Proposed Boundaries, Benson Creek Fishery Area.

<u>Water</u>	<u>Trout Classification</u>	<u>Length (mi)</u>	<u>Area (acres)</u>
Benson Creek	I	1.2	0.9
Unnamed Tributary (T ₁)	I	0.1	0.1
Unnamed Tributary (T ₂)	I	0.1	0.1
Unnamed Tributary (T ₃)	warmwater, minnow (intermittent)	0.4	0.2
Benson Creek Springs	I	---	1.8
Unnamed Springs (S ₁)	I	---	0.1
Unnamed Springs (S ₂)	I	---	0.5
Unnamed Springs (S ₃)	I	---	0.1
Unnamed Springs (S ₄)	I	---	0.1
Unnamed Springs (S ₅)	I	---	0.5
		1.8	4.4

Historical and Archaeological Features

A systematic archaeological survey of southwest Sawyer County has not been made. The State Historical Society knows of no buildings or historical sites on the area but does not discount the possibility of an old mill site. If any



BENSON CREEK FISHERY AREA

Figure 5. Land Use Classification Map.

(T.38N-R.9W.
Hauer Quadrangle Map.)

Scale Feet
0 660 1320

LEGEND

- Property Boundary - - - - -
- Proposed Boundary Change - - - - -
- Fish and Wildlife Management Area - - - - - RD₂
- Five Unnamed Spring Ponds as indexed in Table 2 - - - S₁-S₅
- Three Unnamed Tributaries as indexed in Table 2 - - - T₁-T₃

evidence of such site(s) is discovered, the State Historical Society will be contacted immediately. Also, any future development plans that would be likely to alter the existing ground surface on well drained uplands would be submitted to the society for review of potential archaeological significance.

Ownership

The Benson Creek Fishery Area has a presently approved acreage goal of 202 acres and the state now owns 181.5 acres. The state currently controls 0.7 miles of Benson Creek - 58% of the total within the current property boundary.

Current Use

Trout fishing is the major recreational use. Currently, fishing pressure is estimated at about 50 trips per annum.

Other uses include hunting, trapping, berry picking, and hiking - for which there are no formal survey figures of use. Opening weekend deer hunting pressure, during the deer gun season, averages 9 hunters per square mile in this management unit (19).

In recent years, there has been commercial timber harvest on the area.

Land Use Classification

The entire fishery area is recommended for designation as a Fish and Wildlife Development Zone, RD2 (Figure 5).

MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS

Beaver Damage

Long term beaver activity has widened and silted the stream channel.

Access and Land Control

There is insufficient access and land control to provide effective habitat management or watershed protection. A crucial headwater spring pond lies outside of the approved boundary.

Additional Problems

Tag alder encroachment limits stream productivity. Techniques for dredging low velocity stream channels and small spring ponds have yet to be perfected.

RECREATIONAL NEEDS AND JUSTIFICATION

The Benson Creek Fishery Area is in Planning Region 14 which combines Burnett, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, Taylor and Washburn Counties. The region's 1980 population was 88,551 - only 1.8% of the state's total. However, Region 14's population growth rate is about 20% compared to a 6.5% statewide average.

Benson Creek is within 30 minutes drive of Rice Lake (population 7,691), Spooner (population 2,365), Hayward (population 1,698) and Ladysmith (population 3,826) and within 1-2 hours of Chippewa Falls-Eau Claire (combined population 63,779), Wausau (population 32,426), Duluth-Superior (combined population 132,382) and Minneapolis-St. Paul (combined population 641,181). The region's diverse resource base tends to attract increasing numbers of users from other regions and states. The Sawyer County Recreational Plan estimated weekend fishing pressure at 896,000 trips/year in 1980, increasing 12% to 1,003,520 in 1990. About 75% of the total pressure (warmwater and coldwater) is attributable to nonresidents. In 1981, a creel census on the Namekagon River documented 52 hours/acre trout fishing pressure. About 75% of that demand originated more than 50 miles away and 25% from out-of-state anglers.

Countywide trout fishing demand is estimated at 6,000 trips for 1981 increasing to 6,700 by 1990.* This translates to 37 hours/acre and 42 hours/acre, respectively, which is low by statewide standards.

Region 14 has 782 miles of trout stream of which 310 are Class I, 296 Class II and 176 Class III. Of that total, Sawyer County has 64 trout streams or 208 miles of coldwater resource. The breakdown by stream class is 115 miles of Class I, 71 miles of Class II, and 22 miles of Class III. Thus, the region is reasonably well endowed with trout stream waters and Benson Creek represents only a small portion of the total resource. However, when classification, land control and management potential are considered, Benson Creek can be seen as a relatively scarce and unique local resource. Sawyer County has only about 20 miles of Class I trout water that is publically owned and has management potential for 8-inch plus brook trout. So Benson Creek accounts for about 5% of the "manageable" brook trout water in Sawyer County.

There are 24 lakes or springs (80 acres) that support trout in Sawyer County. The 6 Benson Creek spring ponds (3.1 acres) represent a sizeable portion of the locally scarce coldwater lake resource. That trend is accentuated when land control and dredging potential are considered. There are only 11 publically owned, dredgable, spring ponds (24 acres) in Sawyer County. Thus, the Benson Spring ponds comprise 55% by number and 13% by acreage of the "manageable" county spring pond resource.

*These estimates are derived from the Sawyer County Recreational Plan figures for total weekend fishing pressure, modified by the following conservative assumptions: 1) 25% trout fishermen are nonresidents (Namekagon River creel census); 2) 90% seasonal fishing pressure occurs in May (Namekagon River creel census); 3) 12% May anglers fish trout (county trout stamp sales); 4) 2/3 fishing pressure occurs on weekends (Namekagon River creel census); 5) Mean trip length of 2.8 hours (Namekagon River creel census); 6) 500 acres trout water in Sawyer County (Sawyer County Surface Waters Inventory).

ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

Do Nothing

Suspension of management would lead to a deterioration of fish and game habitat. Beaver activity would continue to cause siltation and degradation of bank cover. Tag alder encroachment will continue to limit productivity and fishability. Limited access and lack of land control on critical parcels will continue to prevent management to obtain optimum benefits to the fishery.

Vegetative cover would eventually reach the climax stage of succession causing an overall deterioration in game and nongame habitat. Animal populations and habitat diversity would decline, thereby reducing recreational opportunity for consumptive and nonconsumptive use.

Enlarge Property

Enlarging of the property (over and above the recommended levels) would not be necessary to meet property goals and objectives and would not be cost effective. Two parcels that are not critical to the integrity of the watershed and the goals and objectives of the property should be deleted from acquisition consideration.

Reduce Property

Attainment of the goals and objectives of the property would not be possible under reduced ownership or development. The development procedures outlined are necessary to preserve and protect the area's aquatic and terrestrial resource. In particular, the integrity of the watershed cannot be preserved without public land control of the critical headwater springs area, and without sustained long-term beaver and beaver habitat reduction.

Property as Proposed

The optimum management of the area includes realignment of property boundaries and acreage goals to permit acquisition of critical parcels, followed by the outlined program of habitat development. This program will insure that the property's goals and objectives will be met and that resource potential will be realized in a cost effective manner as described in Section I. It is therefore recommended that the boundary be revised as shown and that the property acreage goal be increased from 202.0 acres to 265.5 acres.

Appendix: Comments from outside reviewing agencies.

During the period of 45-day review, a number of outside agencies or persons supplied comments to the management plan. Their comments, and DNR responses, where applicable, follow:

Joel Johnson, President, Wild River Chapter, Trout Unlimited, Hayward, WI.

Overall view of management plan: Excellent.

I firmly support the proposed Benson Creek master plan. I am particularly in favor of the proposed vegetation management plan (page 3) which will address beaver control, enhancement of the trout fishing, and improve habitat for various wildlife. The proposed master plan appears to best utilize all resources of the area.

Cynthia A. Morehouse, Director, Bureau of Environmental and Data Analysis, Department of Transportation, Madison, WI.

The Master Plan for the Benson Creek Fishery Area in Sawyer County has been reviewed by this Department. We have determined that the recommended management and development program in the Master Plan would not have a significant adverse effect on the State Trunk Highway System. We recommend that you coordinate with county or township highway officials whenever your proposed land acquisitions abut highways under their jurisdictions.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this Master Plan.

DNR response: Recommendation is well taken. Some future purchases will abut CTH "F" and are on town road.

Forest Stearns, Chairman, Scientific Areas Preservation Council.

We have reviewed the Benson Creek Fishery Area Master Plan and find that the goals, objectives, and proposed management are compatible with our program interests. Thank you for providing opportunity to comment.

Wild Resources Preservation Council

The Council declined comment on this plan, indicating it was too small to provide wild resource designations of Council interest.