

5.0 SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The environmental review process will evaluate the No-Build alternative and the Build alternatives retained for further study in the DEIS. The following social, economic, and environmental issues are expected to require analysis in the DEIS:

- Air quality impacts
- Benefit-cost and analysis
- Bikeways and pedestrians
- Construction impacts
- Contaminated properties
- Cultural resources (historical and archaeological)
- Cumulative Impacts
- Economic impacts
- Environmental justice
- Erosion control and slope stability
- Excess materials
- Farmland impacts
- Fish and wildlife
- Floodplains
- Groundwater and geology
- Handicapped access
- Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources
- Land use impacts
- Noise
- Park, recreational, open space, and Section 4(f)/6(f) public-use land
- Relationship of Local Short-term Uses versus Long-term Productivity
- Right-of-way and relocations
- Secondary Impacts
- Social, neighborhood, and community facility impacts
- Soils (prime and unique farmland, statewide important soils)
- Stream and water body modification
- Threatened and endangered species –state and federal
- Traffic impacts and forecasts
- Vegetation
- Visual impacts
- Water quality
- Wetlands

Based on preliminary review of the corridor through the scoping process, it is anticipated key issues that will need to be addressed in detail in the DEIS include:

Prime Farmland/Statewide Important Soils:

Much of the soil in Nicollet County is designated as prime farmland by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In addition, several soil types that do not have the USDA prime farmland designation are considered important for agricultural production by the state. Each of the proposed improvement alternatives will likely result in the conversion of prime farmland. A quantitative analysis of prime and unique farmland/statewide important soils impacts will be conducted as part of the DEIS. **Figure 3** identifies Prime Farmland and Statewide Important Soil resources.

Erosion Control and Slope Stability

One of the major natural features in the project area is the Minnesota River Valley. At the western end of the TH 14 corridor, the highway descends down the river bluff and follows the river to the TH 14/TH 15 intersection. **Figure 3** identifies steep slope areas. Improvement alternatives in this area may also have impacts to the river bluff.

In addition to the Minnesota River Valley, there are several intermittent streams and drainage ways in the project corridor. These watercourses will be examined during the DEIS process. The impacts of watercourse modifications will be addressed during the DEIS process.

Wetlands and Water Quality

There are a substantial number of wetlands in the TH 14 project area. There is a particularly high density of wetland resources north and northwest of the City of Nicollet; many of these wetlands are associated with the Swan Lake Wildlife Management Area. A large number of wetlands and several watercourses also are designated as Public Waters.

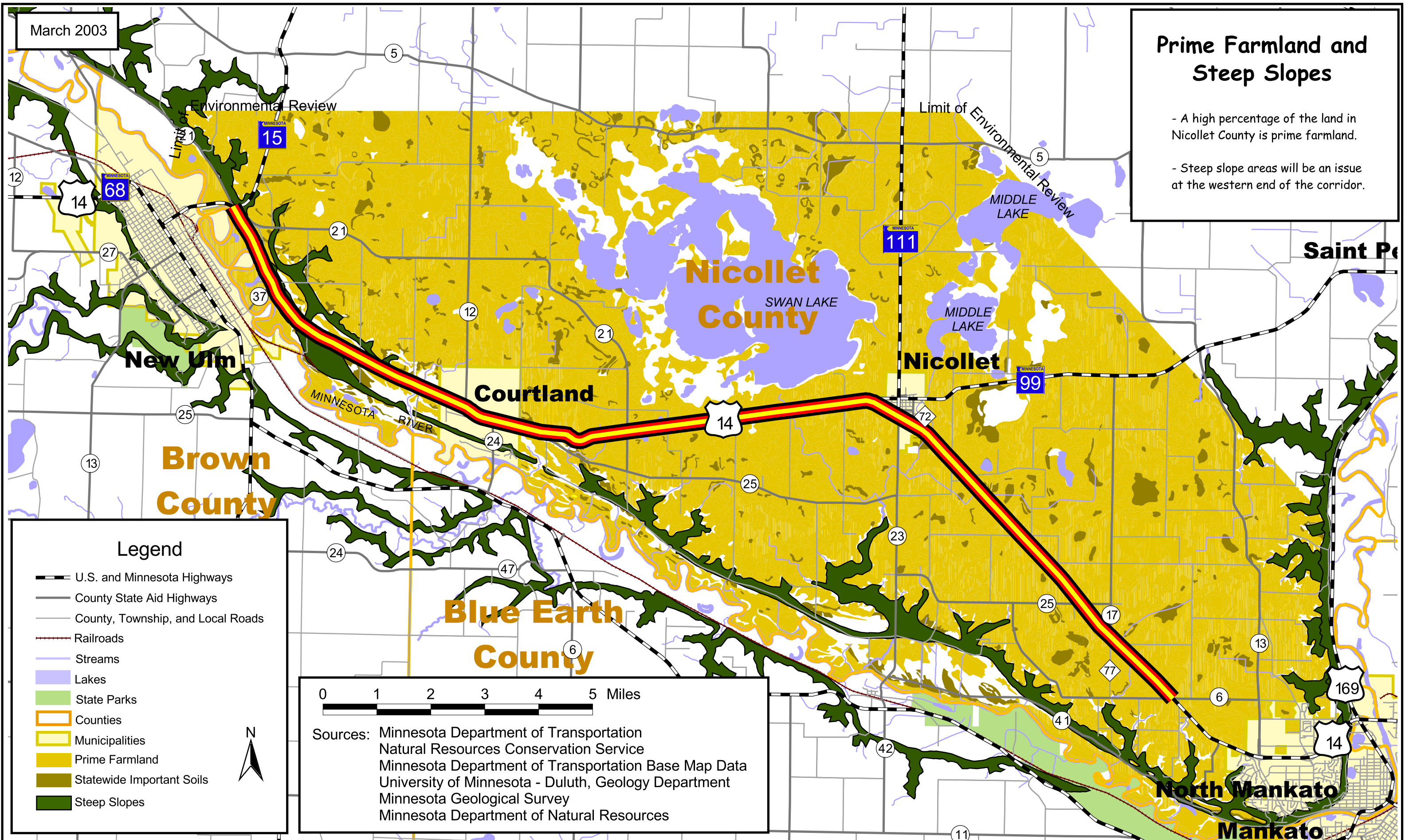
During the DEIS process; wetland and Public Waters impacts will be quantified for each improvement alternative. In addition, potential impacts to water quality, including short-term impacts from construction activities and long term impacts associated with roadway operation and maintenance, will be addressed in a qualitative manner. The focus of water quality impact assessment will be on the evaluation and implementation of appropriate storm water management and mitigation techniques. Such techniques are likely to include grass-lined ditch bottoms, ditch checks, sedimentation basins and infiltration basins; these techniques have been successfully implemented on other highway projects in Minnesota. The water quality of the Minnesota River must be considered when evaluating the impacts of highway development in the project area.

Coordination with appropriate regulatory agencies such as the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will be important during the DEIS to ensure that TH 14 storm water management is consistent with long-term water quality improvement goals for the Minnesota River. **Figure 4** identifies wetlands and public water resources.

March 2003

Prime Farmland and Steep Slopes

- A high percentage of the land in Nicollet County is prime farmland.
- Steep slope areas will be an issue at the western end of the corridor.



Legend

- U.S. and Minnesota Highways
- County State Aid Highways
- County, Township, and Local Roads
- Railroads
- Streams
- Lakes
- State Parks
- Counties
- Municipalities
- Prime Farmland
- Statewide Important Soils
- Steep Slopes

0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

Sources: Minnesota Department of Transportation
 Natural Resources Conservation Service
 Minnesota Department of Transportation Base Map Data
 University of Minnesota - Duluth, Geology Department
 Minnesota Geological Survey
 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

14 West Interregional Corridor:
 North Mankato to New Ulm

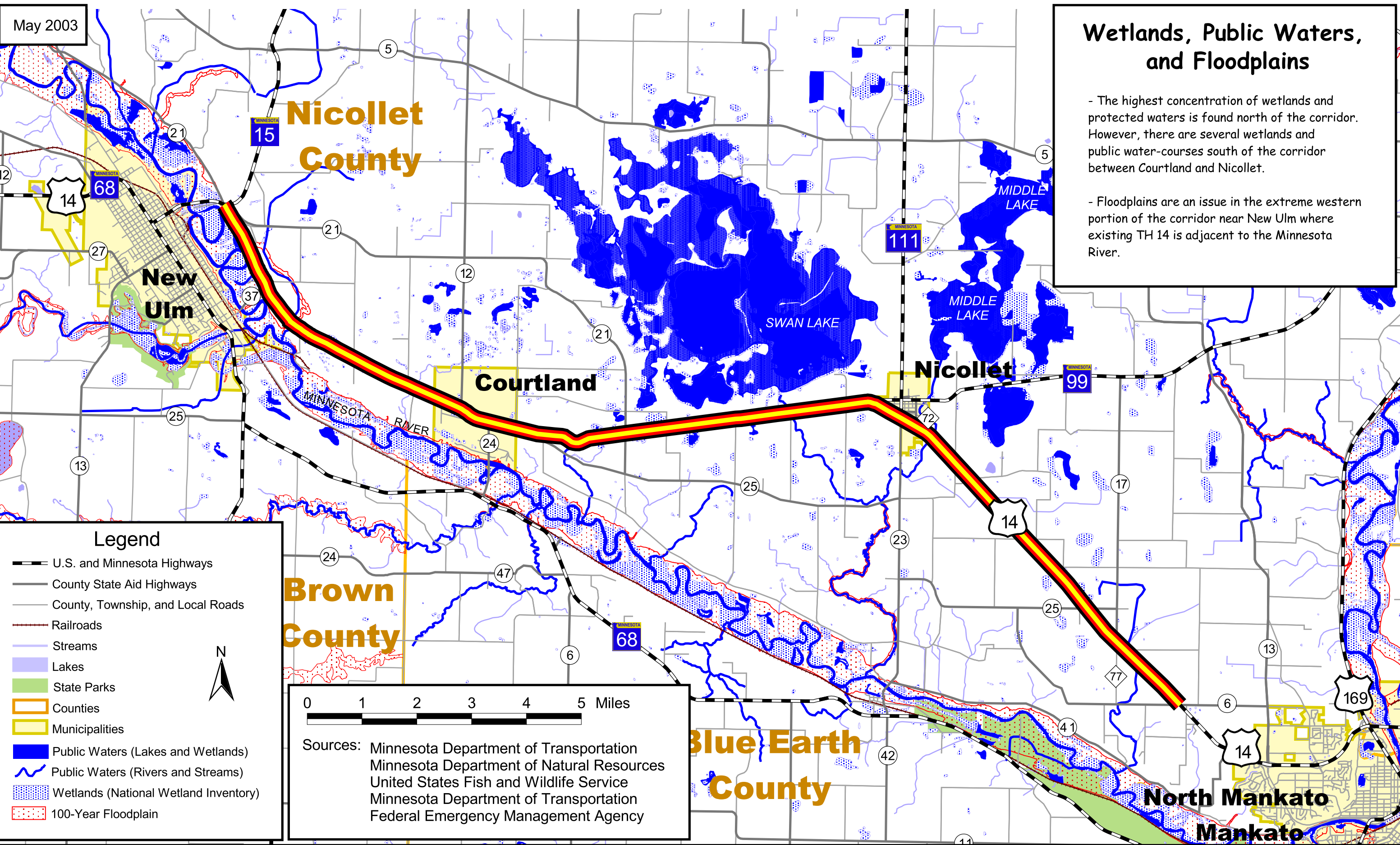
Figure 3
 Prime Farmland and Steep Slopes



May 2003

Wetlands, Public Waters, and Floodplains

- The highest concentration of wetlands and protected waters is found north of the corridor. However, there are several wetlands and public water-courses south of the corridor between Courtland and Nicollet.
- Floodplains are an issue in the extreme western portion of the corridor near New Ulm where existing TH 14 is adjacent to the Minnesota River.



Legend

- U.S. and Minnesota Highways
- County State Aid Highways
- County, Township, and Local Roads
- Railroads
- Streams
- Lakes
- State Parks
- Counties
- Municipalities
- Public Waters (Lakes and Wetlands)
- Public Waters (Rivers and Streams)
- Wetlands (National Wetland Inventory)
- 100-Year Floodplain

0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

Sources: Minnesota Department of Transportation
 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
 United States Fish and Wildlife Service
 Minnesota Department of Transportation
 Federal Emergency Management Agency

**14 West Interregional Corridor:
 North Mankato to New Ulm**

**Figure 4
 Wetlands, Public Waters, and Floodplains**



Floodplains

Existing TH 14 is immediately adjacent to the Minnesota River 100-year floodplain near the TH 14/TH 15 intersection (**Figure 4**); expansion on the existing alignment in this area could result in a longitudinal encroachment into the floodplain. In addition, there are floodplains associated with some of the intermittent streams and drainage ways that are tributaries to the Minnesota River. Some of the improvement alternatives cross these floodplains, resulting in a transverse encroachment. During the DEIS, floodplain assessments will be conducted and a Floodplain Finding will be included, if necessary.

Land Use

Preliminary assessment of the TH 14 corridor has included review of existing land use and proposed future land use, especially in the cities of Courtland and Nicollet. During the DEIS process, land uses that are incompatible with transportation improvements will be identified, and each transportation improvement alternative will be assessed for consistency with local and regional planning.

In order to avoid cemeteries during the development of potential alternatives, the preliminary land use review included the identification of cemeteries, as shown on **Figure 5**.

Park, Recreational, Open Space, and Section 4(f)/6(f) Public-use Land

The project area contains the Swan Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and several small local and regional parks. Improvements to the existing alignment could impact local parks in the City of Courtland, and would likely impact Swan Lake WMA property between Courtland and the City of Nicollet. New alignment alternatives do not appear to impact WMA or park properties. Any acquisition of park property, would trigger Section 4(f) evaluation requirements; review of the status of the WMA will be required to determine the applicability of Section 4(f) requirements.

Figure 6 identifies Parks and Wildlife Management Areas in the TH 14 corridor, as well as rare natural features in the study area.

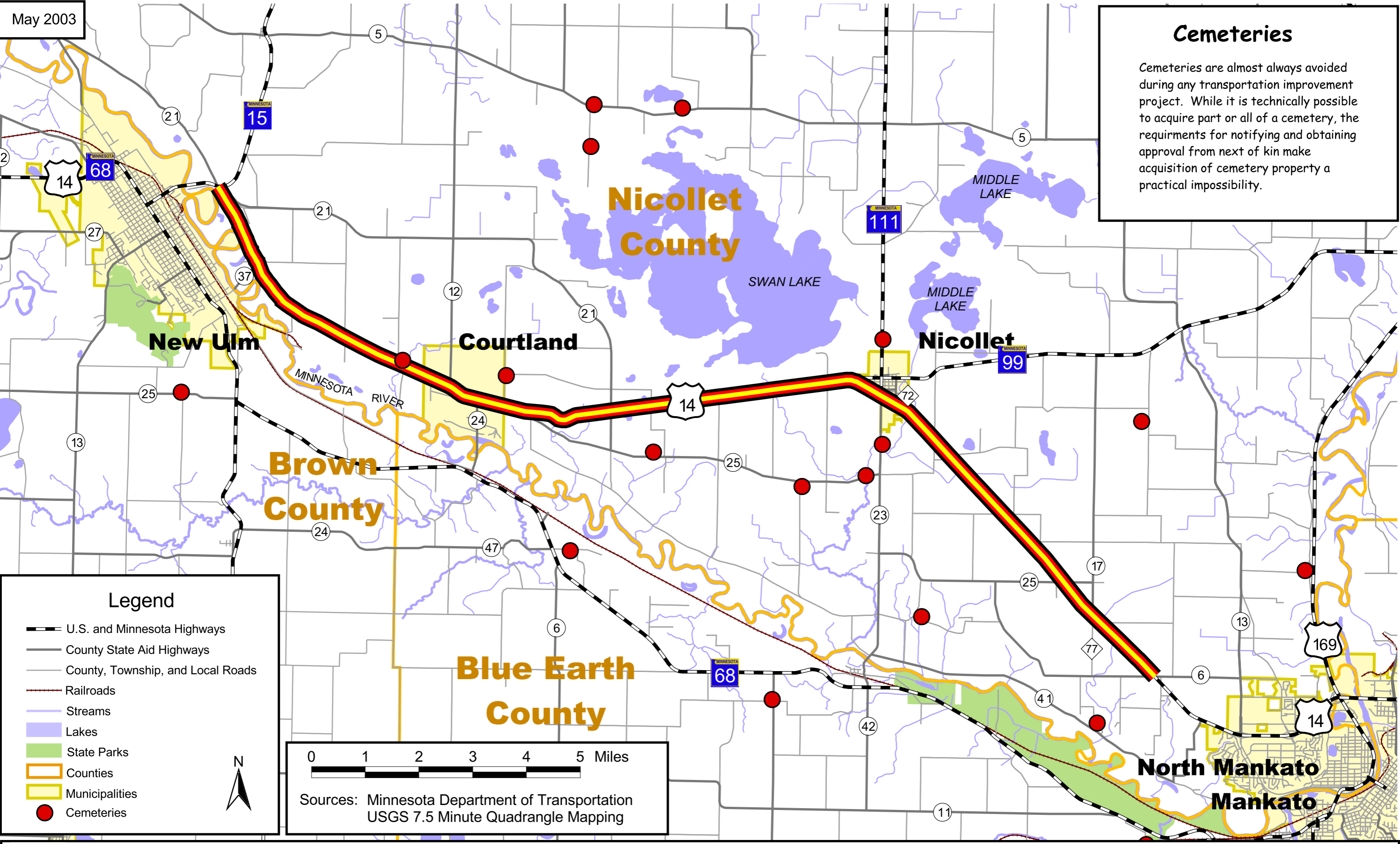
Bikeways and Pedestrians

Facilitation of non-motorized traffic should be considered during the DEIS process. In general, an interregional corridor such as TH 14 is not an ideal conveyor of non-motorized traffic. Identification of suitable parallel alternative routes for bicycles is therefore a key piece of the DEIS process. TH 68, which roughly parallels TH 14 on the south side of the Minnesota River between Mankato and New Ulm, has significantly lower traffic volumes and sufficient paved shoulder widths to make bicycling an acceptably safe mode of travel. In addition, TH 68 tends to be a more scenic corridor, which is a benefit for a bicycle route as most bicyclists look for scenic qualities as part of their overall travel experience.

May 2003

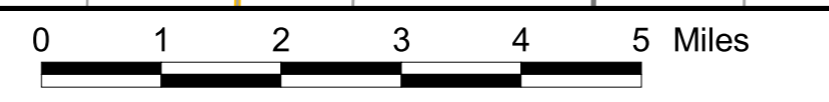
Cemeteries

Cemeteries are almost always avoided during any transportation improvement project. While it is technically possible to acquire part or all of a cemetery, the requirements for notifying and obtaining approval from next of kin make acquisition of cemetery property a practical impossibility.



Legend

- U.S. and Minnesota Highways
- County State Aid Highways
- County, Township, and Local Roads
- Railroads
- Streams
- Lakes
- State Parks
- Counties
- Municipalities
- Cemeteries



Sources: Minnesota Department of Transportation
USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle Mapping



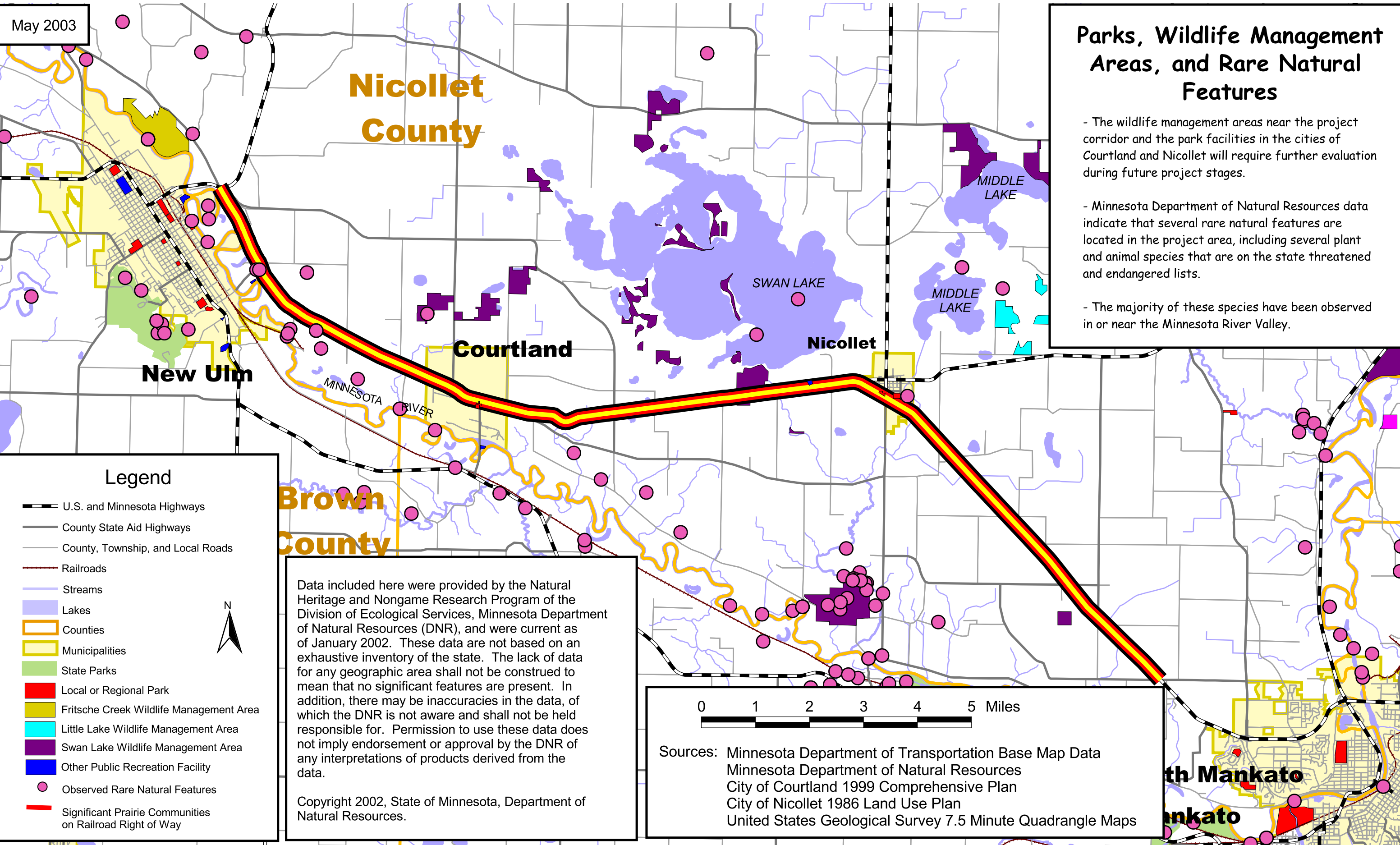
14 West Interregional Corridor:
North Mankato to New Ulm

Figure 5
Cemeteries

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Parks, Wildlife Management Areas, and Rare Natural Features

- The wildlife management areas near the project corridor and the park facilities in the cities of Courtland and Nicollet will require further evaluation during future project stages.
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources data indicate that several rare natural features are located in the project area, including several plant and animal species that are on the state threatened and endangered lists.
- The majority of these species have been observed in or near the Minnesota River Valley.



Legend

- U.S. and Minnesota Highways
- County State Aid Highways
- County, Township, and Local Roads
- Railroads
- Streams
- Lakes
- Counties
- Municipalities
- State Parks
- Local or Regional Park
- Fritsche Creek Wildlife Management Area
- Little Lake Wildlife Management Area
- Swan Lake Wildlife Management Area
- Other Public Recreation Facility
- Observed Rare Natural Features
- Significant Prairie Communities on Railroad Right of Way

Data included here were provided by the Natural Heritage and Nongame Research Program of the Division of Ecological Services, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and were current as of January 2002. These data are not based on an exhaustive inventory of the state. The lack of data for any geographic area shall not be construed to mean that no significant features are present. In addition, there may be inaccuracies in the data, of which the DNR is not aware and shall not be held responsible for. Permission to use these data does not imply endorsement or approval by the DNR of any interpretations of products derived from the data.

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0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

Sources: Minnesota Department of Transportation Base Map Data
 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
 City of Courtland 1999 Comprehensive Plan
 City of Nicollet 1986 Land Use Plan
 United States Geological Survey 7.5 Minute Quadrangle Maps

The safe accommodation of bicyclists and pedestrians should be given full consideration. Therefore, an assessment of bicycle and pedestrian traffic to safely cross TH 14 at key locations, such as in the cities of Courtland and Nicollet, will be conducted. In addition, consideration should be given during the DEIS process to the TH 68 corridor as a suitable alternative to TH 14 for bicycle traffic.

SPECIAL REPORTS

The following is a list of special reports that will be prepared and incorporated into the DEIS.

- Cultural Resources (Archaeological and Historical Sites)
- Environmental Site Assessment (Contaminated Properties)

An in-depth analysis of existing and future traffic characteristics and an origin-destination study can be found in the Corridor Management Plan.

6.0 PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Early and continuing coordination with agencies and the public is the key to a successful project. The purpose of the Public and Agency Involvement Process is to allow ample opportunity for the affected governmental agencies and public to participate in the decision-making process along the TH 14 Corridor. The corridor communities have been actively involved in an open, collaborative process during the identification of deficiencies and potential solutions for the identified need. Comments on the Scope of the project were received during the Scoping process.

6.1 RESULTS OF SCOPING PROCESS

SCOPING PROCESS

This Scoping Decision Document (SDD) summarizes the comments and responses received on the Scoping Document and during the Scoping Hearings and comment period for the TH 14 West Interregional Corridor: North Mankato to New Ulm project. The public and agency involvement for the project was described in Section 8.0 of the Scoping Document. The Advisory Committee, Project Management Team, public outreach to the cities and counties along the corridor, and the Public Information Open House held on May 21, 2002 have given governmental agencies and the public an opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process for the TH 14 West project. The Scoping Document/*Draft* SDD was developed using this public and agency input to refine the alternatives and identify potential environmental issues.

The Scoping Document/*Draft* SDD was circulated to the required federal and state distribution lists and made available to the public for review and comment. The notice of availability was in the EQB Monitor on March 31, 2003 and again with additional