SCOPING DOCUMENT/DRAFT SCOPING DECISION DOCUMENT

TRUNK HIGHWAY 371 – MAJOR CONSTRUCTION

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

State Project Number: S.P. 1116-22
Trunk Highway Number: TH 371

The project proposes to improve approximately 16.0 miles of Trunk Highway 371 (Highway 371) from the intersection of Highway 371 and Crow Wing County Road 18 in Nisswa, Minnesota to the intersection of Highway 371 and Cass County Road 42 in Pine River, Minnesota. The project is located within Crow Wing County and Cass County, Minnesota.

The following person may be contacted for additional information regarding this document.

Tony Hughes
Project Manager
Minnesota Department of Transportation, District 3 Baxter Office
1991 Industrial Park Road
Baxter, MN 56425
(218) 828-2465
TH371N@dot.state.mn.us

10/24/02
Date Approved

Bob Busch, P.E.
Transportation District Engineer

10/28/02
Date Approved

Richard Elasky
Chief Environmental Officer, Mn/DOT

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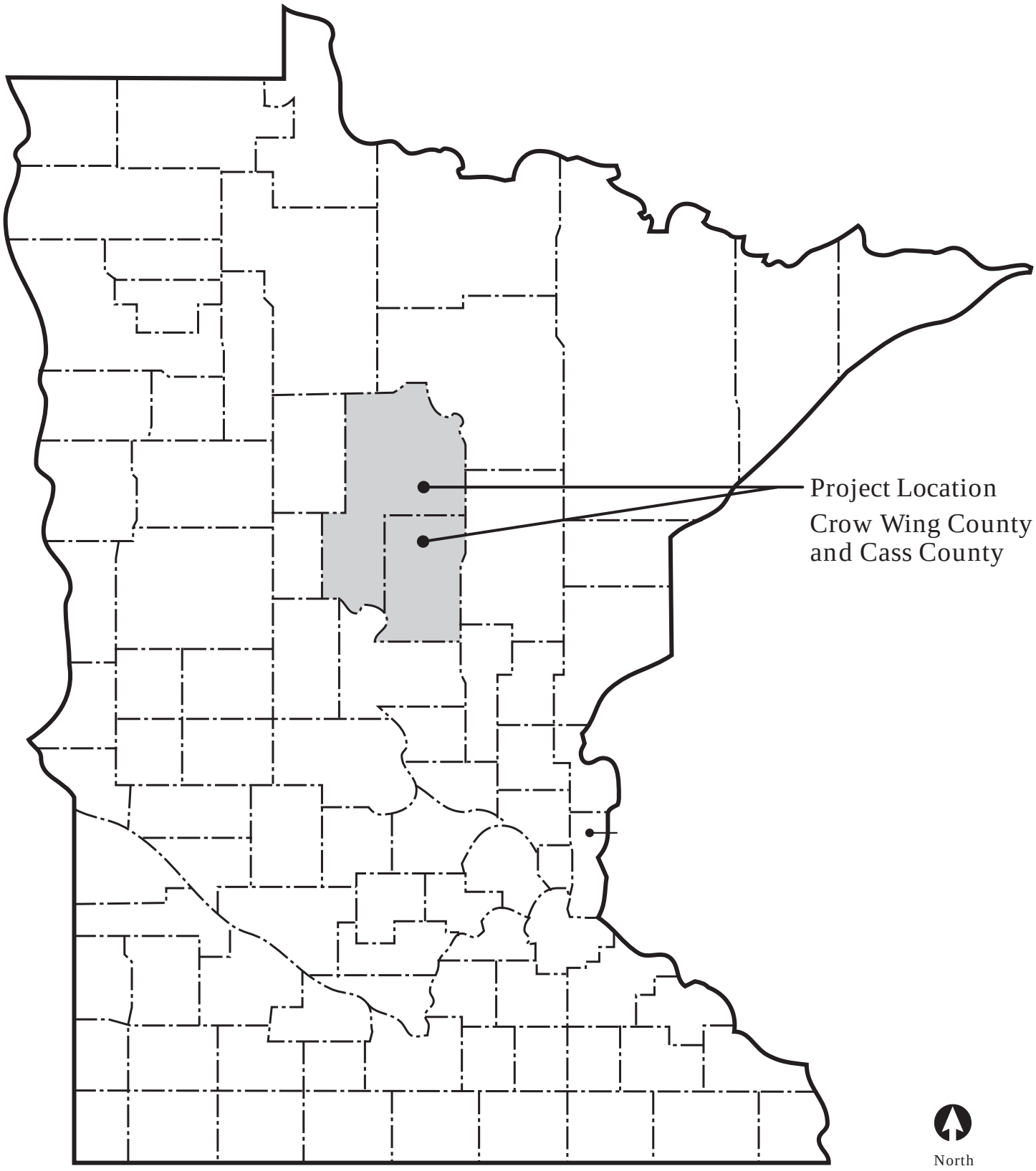

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Figure 1
State / County Location Map

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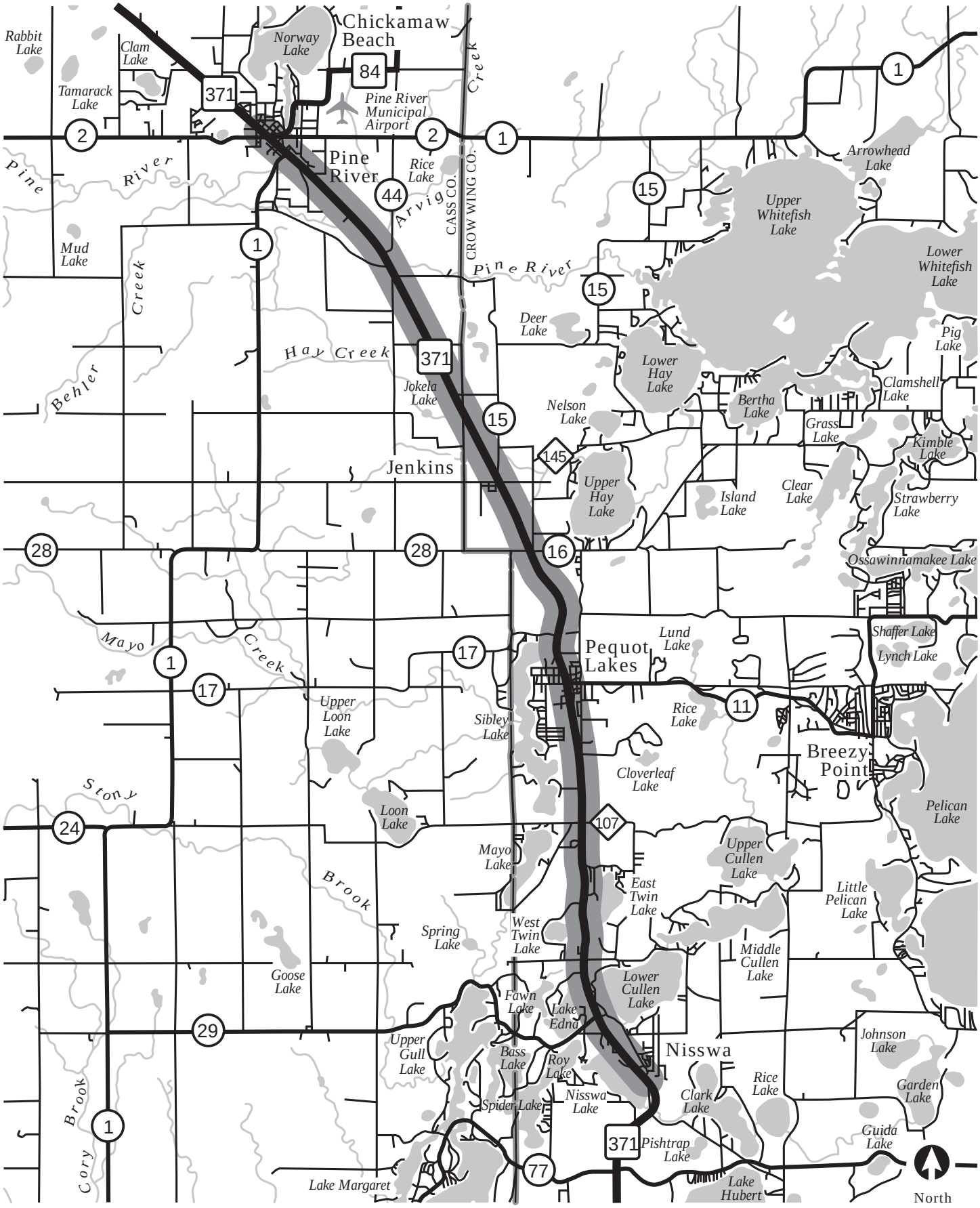

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Figure 2
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I. REPORT PURPOSE

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires that social, economic, and environmental considerations are included in the planning of projects that receive federal funding. This Scoping Document has been prepared as part of the federal NEPA process and specifically to fulfill state environmental review requirements. A 30-day comment period will begin when the Availability Notice for the Scoping Document is published in the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) Monitor. The Scoping Document will be circulated to the required EQB distribution list and will be made available to the public for review and comment. A Public Scoping Meeting will be held during the comment period, which will provide an opportunity for comments to be submitted.

The Scoping Document provides a discussion of:

- The need for and function of the proposed project
- Alternatives considered
- Potential social, economic, and environmental impacts
- Agencies and persons consulted during project review

The project scoping process is used in the initial stages for preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to identify those potentially substantial issues relevant to the proposed project, to define the form, level of detail, content, alternatives, time table for preparation, and to determine the permits for which information will be developed concurrently with the EIS. A Final Scoping Decision Document will be prepared after the public comment period to refine the scope and focus of the Highway 371 North EIS. The Scoping Document and Draft Scoping Decision Document are distributed to federal, state, and local agencies and the public to provide an opportunity for review of the proposed project and comment on project issues and alternatives. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) is the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) for the development of the Highway 371 North Improvement Project. The contact person for the RGU is:

Contact Person:	Tony Hughes
Title:	Project Manager
Agency:	Minnesota Department of Transportation-District 3
Address:	1991 Industrial Park Road, Baxter, MN 56425
Phone:	218.828.2465, Fax: 218.828.6105
e-mail:	TH371N@dot.state.mn.us

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT LOCATION

The Highway 371 North Improvement Project corridor is located in central Minnesota approximately 140 miles from Minneapolis/St. Paul. The project corridor traverses the western border of Crow Wing County and the southeastern section of Cass County (see Figure 1). The project limits extend from Crow Wing County Road 18 in the City of Nisswa, Minnesota to Cass County Road 42 in the City of Pine River, Minnesota. The total length of the project corridor is approximately 16.0 miles (see Figure 2).

PROJECT SETTING

Highway 371 is a major north-south route on the Minnesota Trunk Highway System. Locally and regionally, Highway 371 connects citizens and communities to jobs, retail centers, and recreational/tourist destinations. Tourist travel along this segment of Highway 371 creates high seasonal traffic peaks. These peaks commonly cause traffic delays and congestion. From south to north, the highway corridor passes through the City of Nisswa (population 1,943), the City of Pequot Lakes (population 1,802), the City of Jenkins (population 287), and the City of Pine River (population 928).

The land use characteristics within the project area include urban areas with commercial and residential development, and rural/agricultural areas with scattered single-family residences, commercial businesses, resorts, and open space. The highway corridor abuts many important natural and recreational resources including the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail, numerous lakes, streams, and wetlands, as well as other natural communities and rare species.

ROADWAY HISTORY AND EXISTING FACILITY

Improvements to Highway 371 have been studied at various degrees and times. Highway 371 has been identified in Mn/DOT's Statewide Interregional Corridor (IRC) Study, completed in November 1999, as a Medium Priority IRC because it connects regional trade centers, such as Brainerd/Baxter and Bemidji, to other centers including St. Cloud and the Twin Cities.

Several improvements to Highway 371 have recently occurred or are currently being pursued by Mn/DOT. A new four-lane bypass of Brainerd was completed in 2000, and a new interchange at the junction of Highway 371 and Business 371, located south of Brainerd/Baxter, is nearly complete. Other proposed improvements include reconstructing Highway 371 as a four-lane divided highway between Little Falls and the new four-lane Brainerd Bypass and the implementation of access management strategies (e.g. access closure, frontage/backage roads) are being designed and constructed along the highway between TH 210 in Baxter and the City of Nisswa.

The study corridor of Highway 371 is presently a two-lane undivided urban and rural highway. A short three-lane section of highway exists in downtown Pequot Lakes. In addition to the role of providing regional access, the road serves to provide access to

residential, commercial, light industrial, and agricultural properties located along the corridor.

III. COST AND FUNDING SOURCE

This project is currently programmed at a cost of $37,400,000 (2003 dollars). The programmed cost is based on typical rural four-lane construction costs and will be updated as the project progresses into preliminary design. It is anticipated that federal funds would be the primary source of funding (80 percent) with a 20 percent state match.

State Project Number	Construction Date*	Funding Program	Funding Source	Program Budget**
1116-22	2010 and 2011	Major Construction	Federal (80%) and State (20%)	$37,400,000

* Some right-of-way acquisition to begin in 2008, but the cost of right-of-way is not included in the program budget shown above.

** Program budget estimate based on 2003 dollars.

IV. SCHEDULE

The following is the anticipated project schedule for completion of the Highway 371 North Scoping Study and EIS:

Fall 2002	Federal Notice of Intent
Fall 2002	Release of Scoping Document/Draft Scoping Decision Document for public comment; begin the 30-day comment period
Fall 2002	Public Scoping Meeting
Winter 2003	Final Scoping Decision Document
Winter 2003	State EIS Preparation Notice
Summer 2003	Distribute Draft EIS for agency/public comment; start of Draft EIS comment period
Summer 2003	Public Hearing on Draft EIS
Fall 2003	Identification of Preferred Alternative by Mn/DOT and FHWA
Winter 2004	Distribute Final EIS
Winter 2004	Federal Highway Administration Record of Decision
2008	Begin Right-of-Way Acquisition Process
2010-2011	Anticipated Construction

V. PURPOSE AND NEED STATEMENT

Highway 371, between Nisswa and Pine River, is a two-lane principal arterial highway. From a broader perspective, Highway 371 is the primary north-south highway extending through north-central Minnesota and connecting trade centers, such as Brainerd-Baxter and Bemidji, with St. Cloud and the Twin Cities. Highway 371 is also a critical part of the regional and local road system.

The purpose of this study is to identify an environmentally and culturally sensitive preferred alternative for a transportation system improvement designed to solve critical travel safety and congestion problems. The preferred alternative must be consistent with meeting the identified needs presented below:

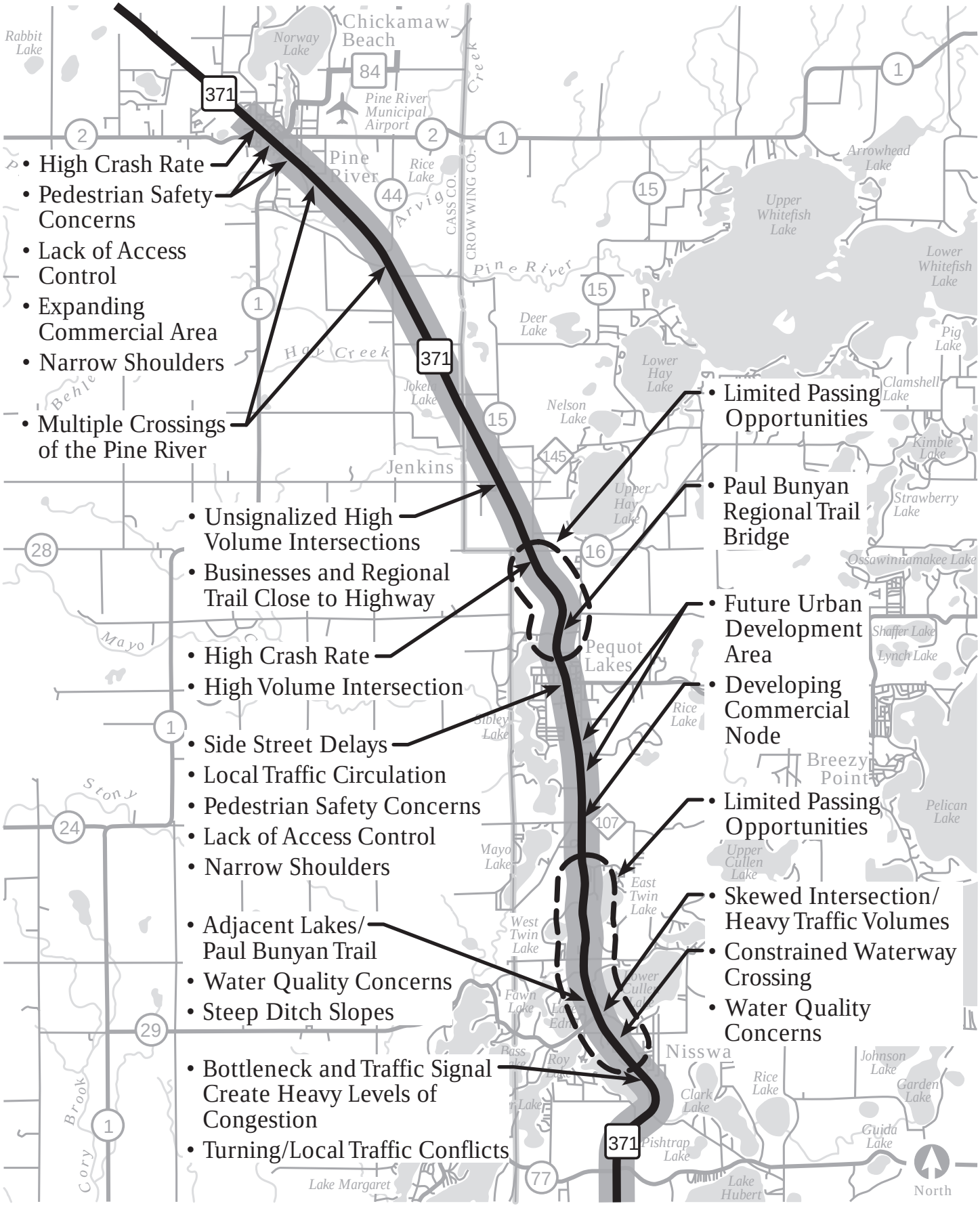
- Improve Safety – Crash rates and crash severities in several areas of the study corridor are much higher than average for similar-type roadways. For example, at the intersection with County Road 16 in Jenkins and with County Roads 1 and 2/42 in Pine River, both the crash rates and the severity rates are double the statewide average for similar intersections. Eighteen fatal crashes have occurred on the corridor over the past 18 years, resulting in 24 fatalities. Pedestrian safety is also an issue, particularly in the communities (e.g., downtown Pequot Lakes and Pine River) through which the highway passes.

- Reduce Congestion – Daily traffic demand at times reaches capacity for the segment of roadway between Nisswa and County Road 16 in Jenkins. The remaining segment of the study area from County Road 16 to Pine River is rapidly approaching capacity constraints. Furthermore, traffic increases dramatically during the summer, resulting in substantial congestion throughout much of the corridor. This is an especially problematic situation for vehicles attempting to enter onto or cross over the highway. As the traffic continues to increase, periods of heavy congestion will occur throughout more days of the year and more hours of the day, becoming increasingly common even during non-peak times. Traffic demand will approximately double by 2030, far exceeding the highway's capacity and severely degrading travel conditions in the area.

- Correct Design Deficiencies – The roadway's design is deficient given the current use of the roadway. The deficiencies include excessive access points, substandard curves limiting sight distance and design speeds, and locations with substandard shoulders and turn lanes. These deficiencies hinder traffic flow and contribute to the safety problem.

Many of the issues described above are identified on Figure 3.

The proposed reconstruction of Highway 371 would also provide the opportunity to address many other needs that exist in the project area that extend beyond vehicle transportation and may result in enhancements in a number of areas. These opportunities may include providing safe bicycle and pedestrian connections to the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail, improving the water quality of highway runoff, and visual/aesthetic enhancements.



Highway 371 North Improvement Project

Figure 3

Highway 371 North Issues Map

August 2002

IMPROVE SAFETY

Improving travel safety is a priority objective of Mn/DOT in managing the State Trunk Highway System. Identifying and addressing the segments of the trunk highway system that experience above average crash rates is an important first step in determining which highways should be studied for potential improvements.

To identify safety deficiencies along the Highway 371 study corridor, a review of the crash history since 1984 was conducted. From 1984 through 2001, there were 822 crashes on this section of Highway 371. A total of 282 crashes were reported during the 5-year period from January 1997 to December 2001. Table 1 summarizes the crash data for the corridor by each level of severity reported.

Table 1
Crash Severity Tabulation

Crash Severity (code)	Crashes from 1984-2001 (18 years)		Crashes from 1997-2001 (5 years)	
	Total	Avg/yr	Total	Avg/yr
Fatal (K)	18	1.0	7	1.4
Incapacitating Injury (A)	25	1.4	6	1.2
Non-incapacitating Injury (B)	99	5.5	38	7.6
Possible Injury (C)	151	8.4	57	11.4
Property Damage (N)	529	29.4	174	34.8
Total	**822**	**45.7**	**282**	**56.4**

Summary based on Mn/DOT Crash Data.

The types of crashes in the 5-year analysis period are distributed as follows:

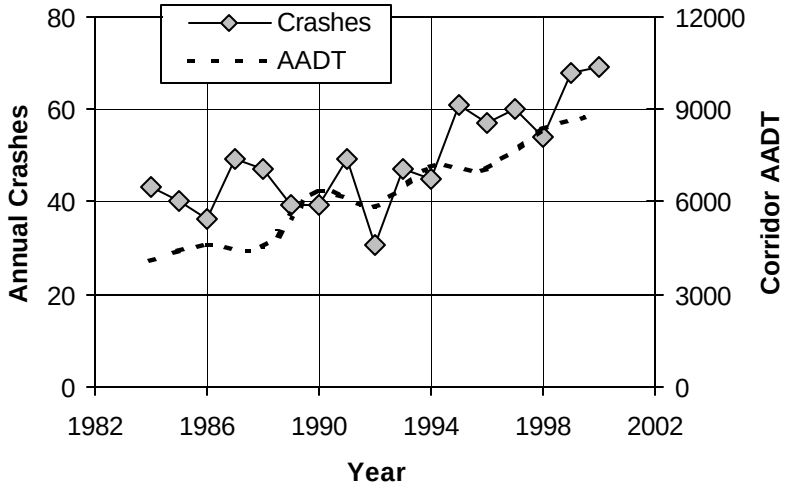
Collision with Pedestrian	1%
Collision with Animal	16%
Rear-end	19%
Right Angle	12%
Left Turn	6%
Head-on	4%
Sideswipe	7%
Run Off Road	13%
Other or Unknown	22%

Of the two collisions with a pedestrian, one resulted in an incapacitating injury and the other was fatal. Many crashes can be avoided through roadway design, especially those involving conflicts between vehicles. For example, 66 percent (rear-end, right angle, left turn, head-on, sideswipe, and run of road) of all collisions between vehicles were at an intersection or driveway or were intersection-related, and 47 percent of the crashes could be a result of a high volume two-lane highway.

Table 1 shows that the number of crashes occurring per year is higher for the more recent analysis period than for the full 18-year period. Figure 4 illustrates the number of crashes that have occurred along this corridor each year since 1984. Also shown in that figure is how the corridor annual average daily traffic (AADT) has grown over the same years. The graph shows that as traffic volumes have grown, so has the

overall number of crashes. This suggests that the expected continuation of traffic growth will result in more crashes if road improvements are not implemented.

Figure 4
Highway 371 Traffic Projection



Comparing crash frequency relative to traffic volumes among similar facilities can bring attention to especially unsafe roadways. A crash rate per million vehicle miles (MVM) traveled over a 3 to 5 year analysis period is typically used for comparison. For example, a 1.5-mile segment of Highway 371 in Pequot Lakes had 55 crashes from January 1997 through December 2001 (5 years). The average daily traffic volume during that time was approximately 10,500 vehicles per day. This volume (10,500 vehicles per day) is multiplied by both the number of days in the study period (1,826 days) and the length of the analysis segment (1.5 miles) to obtain 28.8 MVM. Thus, 55 crashes divided by 28.8 MVM is 1.9 crashes per MVM. This is meaningful because it is nearly double the Mn/DOT District 3 average for similar roads. Table 2 lists the 5-year crash rates, severity rates, and severe crash history for several sections along the project corridor. The rates in bold are above Mn/DOT District 3 and/or statewide average.

Table 2
Highway 371 Section Crash Statistics

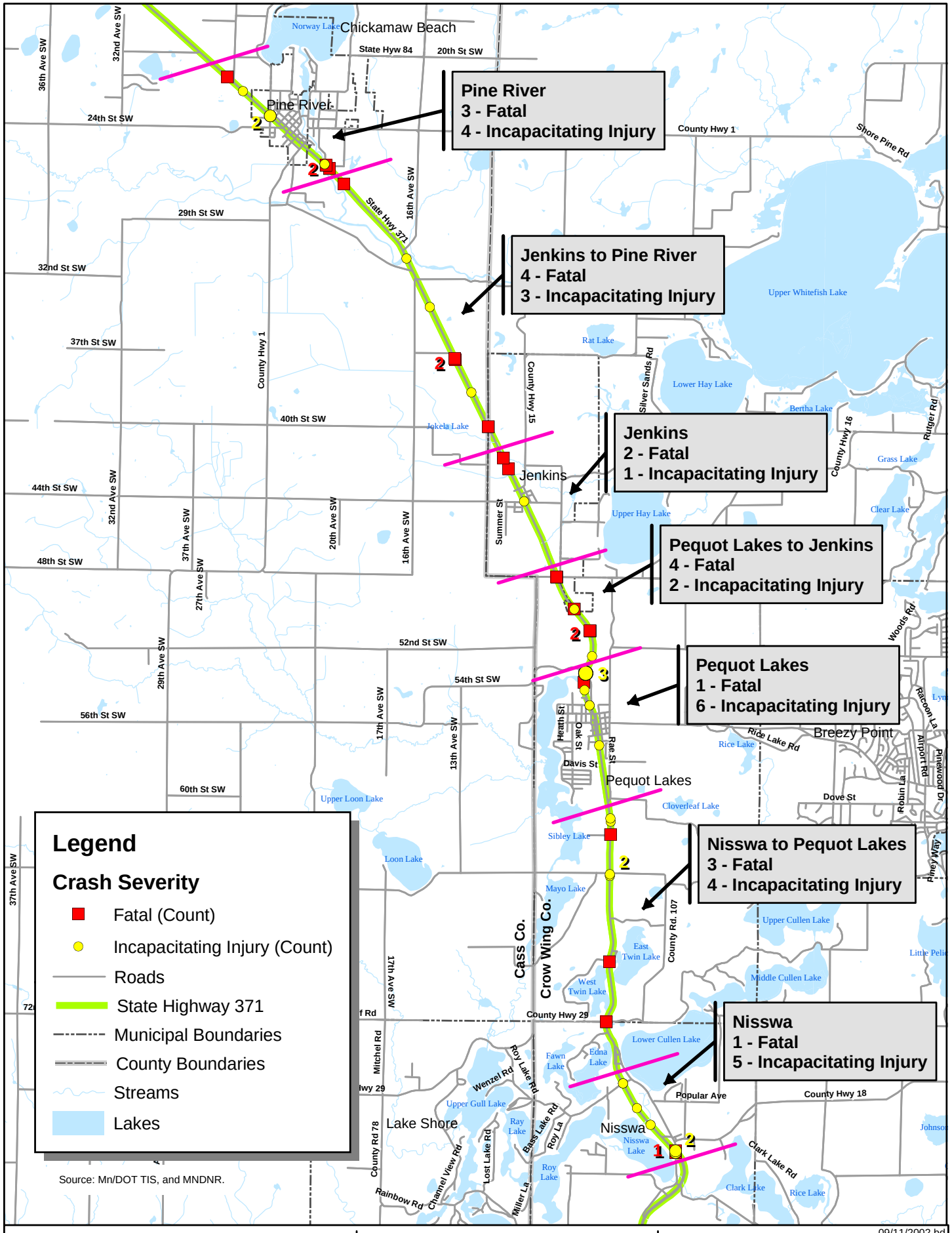
Highway 371 Section	Length (miles)	2000 AADT	5-Year Crash Rate	5-Year Severity Rate	District 3 Averages		Statewide Averages	
					Crash	Severity	Crash	Severity
Nisswa	2.2	10,500	1.0	2.1	1.0	2.3	1.2	2.6
Nisswa to Pequot Lakes	3.6	10,200	1.0	1.9	1.0	2.3	1.2	2.6
Pequot Lakes	1.5	10,500	**1.9**	**4.4**	1.0	2.3	1.2	2.6
Pequot Lakes to Jenkins	1.5	9,600	1.0	**3.3**	1.0	2.3	1.2	2.6
Jenkins	1.7	7,600	0.6	2.1	1.0	2.2	1.0	2.3
Jenkins to Pine River	4.3	7,100	0.5	1.2	1.0	2.2	1.0	2.3
Pine River	2.2	7,500	**1.7**	**3.5**	1.0	2.2	1.0	2.3

Eight intersections located on Highway 371 have a 5-year crash rate above the statewide average for similar intersections. A detailed traffic report was prepared for the Highway 371 corridor. The full report, Traffic Report: Highway 371 North Improvement Project, August 2002, provides detailed crash information for the intersections listed below. The report is available for review at the Mn/DOT District 3 Office in Baxter.

- County Road 29/County Road 107 (Nisswa north limits)
- County Road 168/County Road 107
- County Road 11 (Main Street Pequot Lakes)
- County Road 17
- County Road 16 (Jenkins south limits)
- County 145 (Lilac Avenue in Jenkins)
- County Road 1/Ridge Avenue (Pine River)
- County Road 2/County Road 42 (Pine River)

Coupled with these areas showing a safety problem is the high severity of the crashes that do occur. Because severe and fatal crashes are infrequent events, it is prudent to tabulate crashes over a longer time – 18 years – to evaluate systematic effects (Mn/DOT records go back to 1984, thus limiting greater review). Twenty-four people have died in the eighteen fatal crashes that have occurred in that time. Figure 5 illustrates the fatal and high-severity injury crashes that have occurred from 1984 through 2001. As mentioned above, the distribution of these unsafe areas does not lend itself to isolated safety improvements. Improving capacity in the towns where volumes are higher and speeds are lower does not address the fatal and severe crashes that are occurring on rural sections between the cities. Over half the fatal collisions between vehicles were head-on crashes on the high-speed sections of this corridor, which can be indicative of a high volume two-lane roadway.

Beyond the statistics on crashes along the Highway 371 corridor, the safety issues that are present can be described through the recurring incidents that take place along the corridor each day as a result of the unique nature of the study area. These incidents include conflicts between through traffic and traffic entering or exiting the highway, conflicts between high-speed traffic and traffic slowing to turn off the highway, as well as conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians. These are the conflicts that generate the high crash rates that exist along Highway 371, and in turn, result in the need to consider improvements to address the current and increasing safety problem.



Highway 371 Improvement Project

Figure 5
Fatal and Incapacitating Injury Crashes 1984 - 2001

09/11/2002 bd

UTM, Zone 15, Meters
NAD83

0 — 9,000 Feet

REDUCE CONGESTION

Existing Traffic Volumes

The existing 2000 average annual daily traffic (AADT) volumes along the Highway 371 study corridor range from 10,200 north of Nisswa to around 6,500 north of Jenkins. The 2000 traffic volumes are shown in Figure 6. Seasonal variation is considerable due to summer recreational use. July weekends have the highest ADT volumes with volumes as much as 75 percent greater than the annual average. June weekday traffic in 2000 ranged from 8,000 to 13,000 vehicles per day. Traffic operations data indicate that two-lane roadways begin to experience noticeable problems once they exceed 10,000 to 12,000 vehicles per day. Current traffic demand on summer holidays and weekends sometimes exceeds 18,000 vehicles per day. Furthermore, the corridor has reached its maximum hourly traffic volume limit during peak travel times and additional traffic is spreading to other times of the day. Heavy congestion and delay, once observed only during peak hours, is spreading throughout the day and will continue to worsen without capacity improvements.

Conditions along the Highway 371 corridor are unique because the numerous lakes and wetlands in the area have prevented the development of other north-south roads to service traffic originating from or destined to the communities in the study area. Because of the inability to develop new road corridors that would service the increasing traffic demand, the only reasonable, prudent, and practical alternative is improvement along the existing Highway 371 corridor.

Future Traffic Volumes

The methodology for establishing future traffic volumes for the study corridor described below is based on widely accepted industry standards and practices. The data sources used to develop future traffic volumes included information from traffic counts conducted in June of 2002, Mn/DOT's automated traffic recorder station on Highway 371 located north of the project termini, and historical traffic volumes on highways and county roads in the study area from 1972 to the present.

The design year for the study has been established as year 2030, which represents 20 years after the anticipated construction completion date of 2010. Figure 7 illustrates the historical traffic growth and forecast to 2030. To account for the seasonal variation in traffic volume, the design condition considers a summer (June) 2030 weekday. These volumes are greater than the annual ADT by approximately 20 percent. Winter weekday traffic is about 20 percent less than the AADT, summer weekend traffic is typically 50 percent higher than the average, and summer holidays can exceed an 80 percent increase. All of these conditions must be incorporated into the decision-making process. Figure 6 illustrates various traffic volumes in 2000 and 2030 for the primary segments on this corridor.

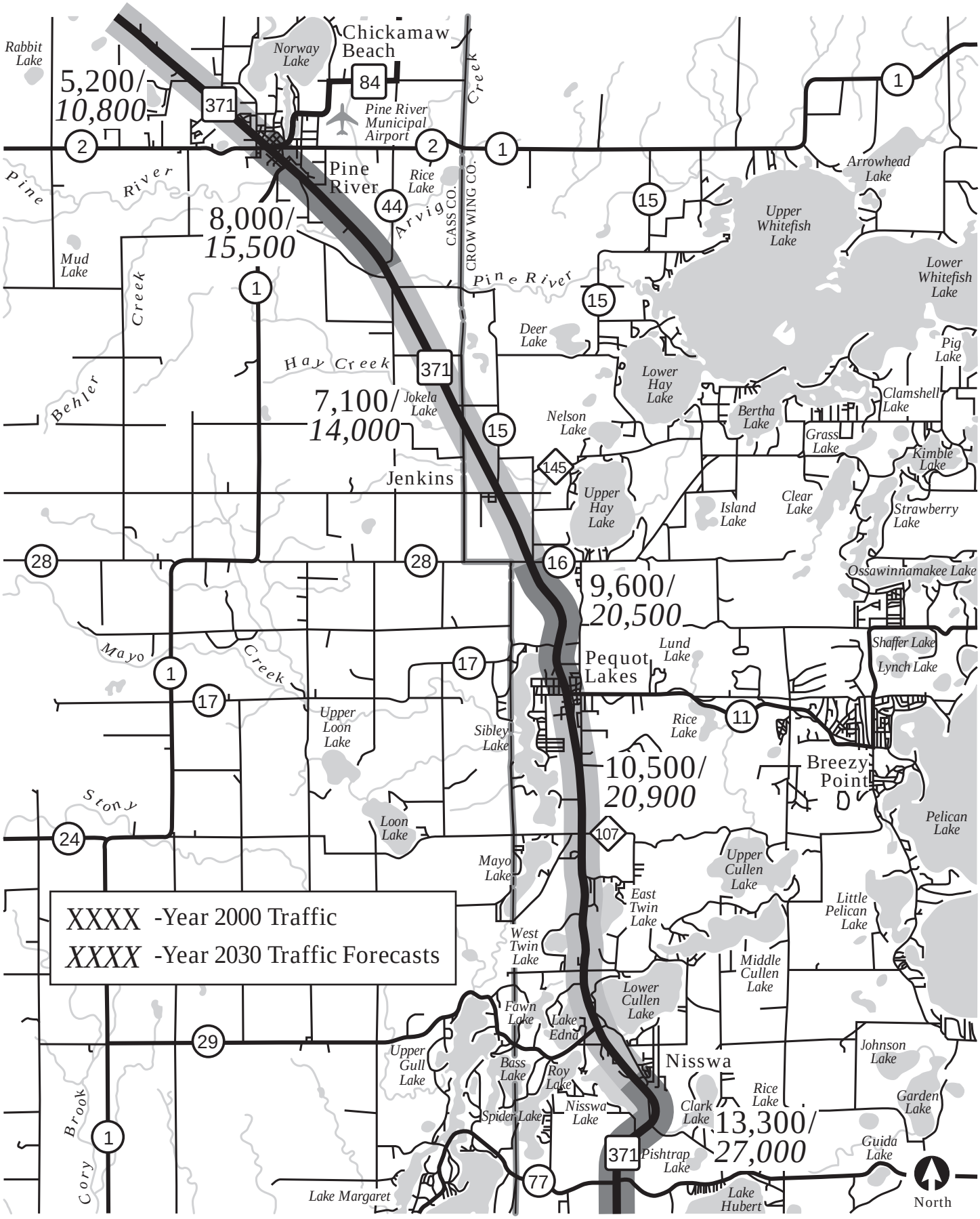


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Figure 6

Existing 2000 and Forecast 2030
Average Annual Daily Traffic
(AADT) Volumes

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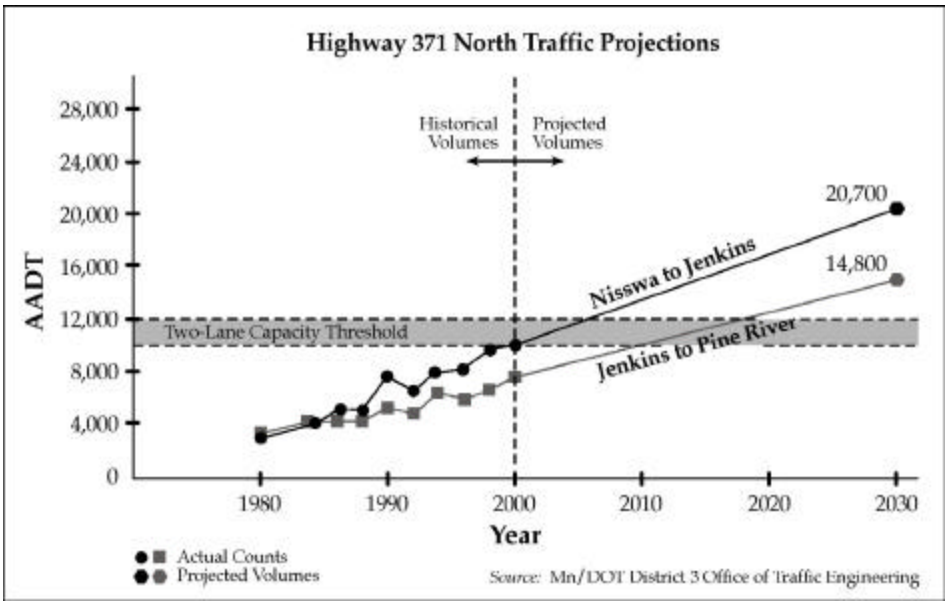
Figure 7
Highway 371 Traffic Projection



As shown in Figure 7, the forecast year 2030 AADT volumes along the Highway 371 study corridor are anticipated to average 20,700 south of County Road 16 in Jenkins and 14,800 north to Pine River. Seasonal variations in traffic volumes will remain sizable with up to 36,000 vehicles per day from Nisswa through Pequot Lakes on July weekends. With these anticipated traffic volumes, the operational characteristics of existing Highway 371, as well as surrounding roads will severely deteriorate. As growth continues along the Highway 371 study corridor, traffic demand throughout the year will be well over the capacity of a two-lane roadway.

Congestion

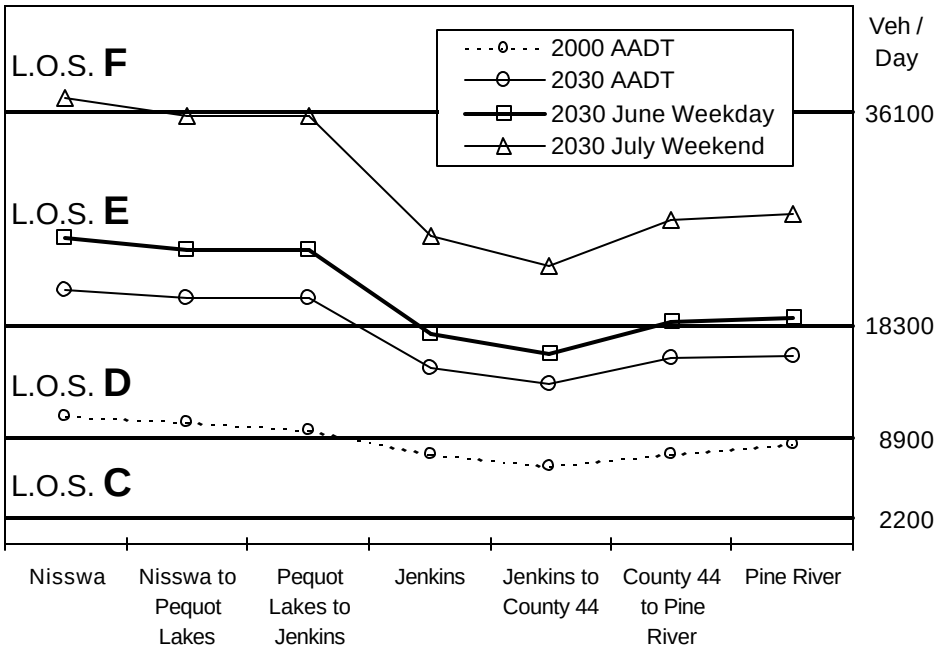
Under existing traffic conditions, Highway 371 experiences heavy levels of congestion during peak summer weekend recreational traffic periods. Backups and delays have been reported through Pequot Lakes, as well as approaching Nisswa from the north on Sunday afternoons.

During future Friday or Sunday peak recreational periods, traffic demand will be well over the 10,000 to 12,000 ADT capacity of a two-lane highway. Without improvements, the corridor is anticipated to operate in an extremely congested state between Nisswa and County Road 16 in Jenkins. Furthermore, moderate congestion will be experienced north into Pine River. Capacity problems on Highway 371 are further complicated by the poor access management conditions along the corridor.

Figure 8 depicts the levels of service (LOS) under 2000 and projected 2030 traffic volumes. LOS is a measure of delay and operating conditions defined by the Highway Capacity Manual and ranges from A to F. The LOS thresholds indicated on the figure are determined through Highway Capacity Manual methodology and are based on the characteristics of this road.

LOS A and B on a two-lane highway are conditions when traffic demand is well below capacity and travel is rather unimpeded. At a LOS C, the average speed noticeably decreases and slower traffic and turning traffic quickly cause congestion. Through LOS D, traffic volumes approach a highway's functional capacity, stoppage and delays begin to occur, the average speed is substantially lower, and passing is unlikely to occur. At LOS E, traffic demand exceeds capacity, drivers are choosing other routes and times to travel, and any disturbance to the traffic flow – such as a turning vehicle – promptly drops this condition to a LOS F. A LOS F means traffic demand far exceeds capacity, heavy congestion is prevalent, long periods of stop and go conditions occur, and travel time is severely degraded.

Figure 8
Levels of Service on Two-Lane Sections



As depicted in Figure 8, the project corridor from Nisswa to Jenkins is currently operating at a LOS D. The northern portions of the corridor from Jenkins to Pine River are currently operating at a LOS C.

CORRECT DESIGN DEFICIENCIES

Highway 371 has numerous design deficiencies. These deficiencies influence the safety and quality of traffic flow on the corridor including intersection operation and safety. Design issues include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Limited passing opportunities arising from roadway geometry and compounded by high traffic volumes. There are 13 no passing zones heading northbound and 14 zones heading southbound. In sum, 42 percent of the corridor is marked no passing.

- Absence of appropriate turn lanes and bypass lanes
- Poor visibility
- Excessive access directly to Highway 371 resulting in increased conflicts between through-traffic and turning/merging traffic. There are approximately 130 public and private access points on this section of Highway 371, or 8 per mile on average.
- Intersection geometry, skew, and visibility
- Areas with narrow shoulders (e.g. downtown Pequot Lakes and Pine River)
- Excessive curvature tighter than desired design speed
- Steep ditch slopes near lakes (Edna/Twin Lakes area) and wetlands.

In addition to hindering traffic flow, these design deficiencies directly relate to safety. Limited passing opportunity may cause driver frustration, attempts to pass when unsafe, and head-on collisions. Absence of turn lanes and bypass lanes contribute to sideswipe and rear-end collisions. Poor visibility contributes to collisions with other vehicles and with animals (16 percent of all crashes are with animals). Excessive access and poor intersection design creates unnecessary and unexpected conflicts between vehicles. Lastly, narrow shoulders and steep slopes contribute to irrecoverable run off the road incidents.

VI. ALTERNATIVES

This section describes the full range of Highway 371 alternatives developed for consideration in the scoping process and an overview of some of the key issues associated with each alternative. The Scoping Decision Document serves as the basis for determining which alternatives have the potential for addressing the stated project purpose and need statement, and therefore, will be retained for detailed analysis in the EIS.

DEVELOPMENT OF SCOPING ALTERNATIVES

The alternative development process is based upon the utilization of existing roadbeds where possible, the potential to serve future traffic volumes, the ability to achieve the project purpose and need, the ability to minimize potential impacts, and agency/public input. The basic steps used to develop alternatives were:

- Identify a full range of alternatives to address existing and forecasted Highway 371 issues and needs.
- Assess the reasonableness and responsiveness of each alternative considering the purpose and need of the project. Mn/DOT will retain only those alternatives that address the project-specific issues and needs.

After defining the range of possible improvement alternatives, a two-step assessment was applied to assist in determining which alternatives warrant detailed consideration and evaluation in the EIS. The two-step process consisted of the following:

1. First, all alternatives were weighed against the degree to which they do or do not address the purpose and need objectives of the project. Only those alternatives with potential for addressing the purpose and need were carried forward to the second step.
2. Second, each remaining alternative was evaluated to illustrate the degree to which they might involve various social, economic, and environmental impacts.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

The proposed project alternatives provide for construction of a new highway using existing and/or new alignments that meet applicable design standards and the No-Build Alternative.

Alternative 1 – No-Build Alternative

Under the No-Build Alternative, Highway 371 improvements will be limited to normal pavement maintenance and minor transportation system management improvements, including shoulder widening, turn lanes, periodic shoulder bypass lanes, access consolidation, and minor geometric changes.

The effects of future traffic increases will be borne by existing Highway 371 and supporting roadways, causing increased congestion and a proportional decline in road user mobility and safety. The No-Build Alternative will be retained throughout the

scoping and EIS analysis process, and will serve as a baseline for comparison of the build alternative(s).

Alternative 2 – Capacity Expansion on Existing Highway Corridor

This alternative would involve reconstruction and capacity expansion of Highway 371 along the existing highway corridor. Variations of different cross-sections will be considered to address capacity needs and minimize impacts to the built and natural environment. The total length of construction for Alternative 2 would be approximately 16.0 miles. Currently, Mn/DOT has budgeted $37,400,000 (2003 dollars) for construction of this project (this figure does not include right-of-way, design, mitigation, or associated roadway turnback costs). Various decisions regarding the design of the highway will need to be made before a detailed construction cost estimate can be prepared.

Furthermore, Alternative 2 has three design options that include bypass alignments around the Cities of Pequot Lakes, Jenkins, and Pine River (see Figure 9). The general locations of the bypass options were chosen based on existing development, environmental constraints (lakes and wetlands), the location of the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail, and topography. The specific location of the bypass alignments will be determined based on more refined efforts to minimize social, economic, and environmental impacts and the length of new alignment. Any community bypass will affect construction costs by requiring additional right-of-way and costs to refurbish the existing facility prior to turnback to a local road authority.

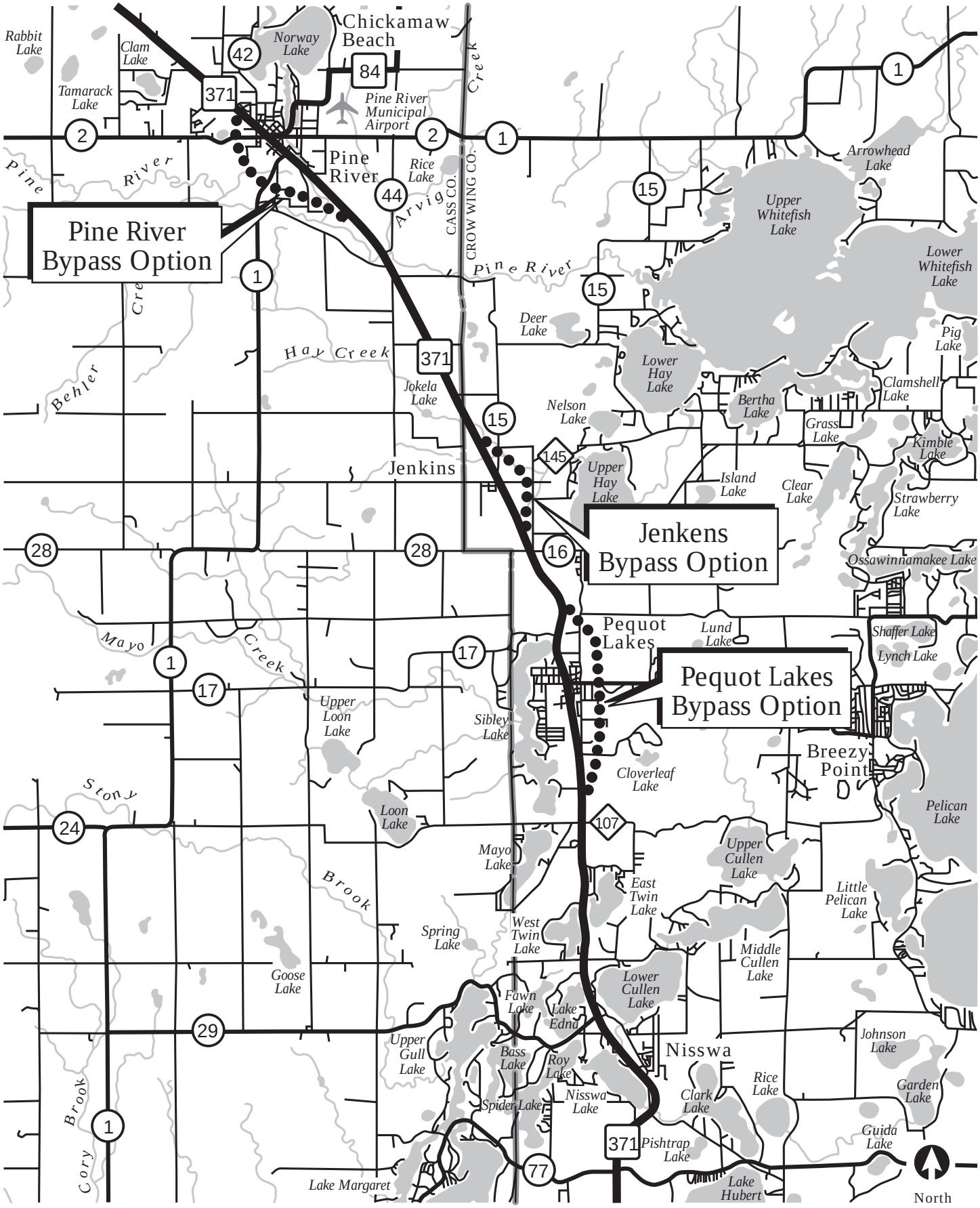
The community bypass options include:

- Pequot Lakes Bypass (PLB) – This option includes an eastern bypass of the City of Pequot Lakes. A west bypass was determined unfeasible because of Sibley Lake.

- Jenkins Bypass (JB) – This option includes an eastern bypass of the City of Jenkins. A west bypass would require two additional crossings of the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail and offers no substantial advantages in comparison to an east bypass option.

- Pine River Bypass (PRB) – This option includes a western bypass of the City of Pine River. An east bypass was determined unfeasible because of Norway Lake.

While each of the three bypass options are being addressed separately, any combination of two or all three may ultimately be selected. The analysis conducted in the EIS will assist in determining whether or not to construct any of the community bypass options.



Highway 371 North Improvement Project
Scoping Document

Figure 9

Alternative 2
Bypass Options

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Alternative 3 – Capacity Expansion on New Highway Corridor

This alternative would involve relocating Highway 371 to an alternative highway corridor in an attempt to avoid the need to expand Highway 371 on its existing alignment. A set of new corridor options were considered based on connecting different existing state and county highways along with input from the general public. Under each of the new corridor options, the existing Highway 371 roadway would remain in place to accommodate traffic not attracted to the new corridor.

STEP 1 – CONSIDERATION OF PURPOSE AND NEED OBJECTIVES

A fundamental question that needs to be resolved when considering alternatives for major highway improvements is whether or not the improvement would serve to address the base purpose and need objectives of the project. In the case of the Highway 371 Improvement Project, for any alternative to be considered feasible and reasonable, it must address the existing and forecast safety, congestion, and design deficiencies.

The purpose of this portion of the Scoping Document is to provide a broad yet objective assessment of the effectiveness of Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 in satisfying the project purpose and need objectives. As stated previously, with the exception of the No-Build option, those alternatives not meeting the purpose and need will be screened from further consideration.

Alternative 1 – No-Build Alternative

Based on the 2030 AADT projections, this alternative does not provide a suitable solution for addressing the purpose and need for the project as previously outlined in Section V of this document. Capacity, safety, and design deficiency concerns would remain and be further demanding on the existing transportation system, but Alternative 1 will be retained for comparison purposes.

Alternative 2 – Capacity Expansion on Existing Highway Corridor (including bypass options at Pequot Lakes, Jenkins, and Pine River)

Alternative 2 is viable for addressing the capacity, safety, and design deficiency concerns associated with the existing Highway 371 corridor. Compared to the existing two-lane road, a four-lane divided roadway would provide safer access to and from the highway because of increased gaps and a median refuge. A four-lane roadway reduces the frequency particularly of right angle and left turn crashes. A divided road also reduces the occurrence of head-on collisions compared to an undivided road. The addition of travel lanes would provide the necessary capacity to meet the demand of the forecasted traffic volumes, thus reducing periods of heavy congestion.

The community bypass options all have the potential to address the capacity, safety, and design deficiency concerns associated with the existing highway and should be carried into Step 2 of the scoping evaluation. Depending on the amount of traffic that would use each bypass, rather than remain on the current alignment through each community, some safety and congestion issues may remain.

Alternative 3 – Capacity Expansion on New Highway Corridor

Alternative 3 fails to address the basic purpose and need objectives because it provides minimal traffic benefits especially for traffic destined to locations on or close to the highway between Nisswa and Pine River, it introduces additional travel time and distance, is more costly, and would generate increased social, economic, and environmental impacts (e.g. wetlands, creek crossings, right-of-way acquisitions, relocations, and vegetation). In addition, Mn/DOT has made substantial public investment in improving other portions of Highway 371 over the past 25 years, including the four-lane section between Baxter and Nisswa, and the recently completed realignment of Highway 371 between Baxter and Barrows ("Brainerd Bypass"). Expanding Highway 371 on a new corridor would have a dramatic negative impact on the value of these past investments.

For these reasons, Alternative 3 should be removed from further consideration in the Highway 371 North Improvement Project and is not addressed as part of Step 2 in the following section.

STEP 2 – COMPARISON OF VARIABLE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS BETWEEN ALTERNATIVES

The presentation of issues included in this section is intended to provide a base level of information on each alternative to illustrate, in general terms, the degree to which each alternative might potentially involve various social, economic, and environmental impacts. It should be noted that the impact assessment is intended to provide a relative comparison of the alternatives as opposed to specific impacts for each alternative. These issues and the associated potential impacts are considered together to arrive at scoping decisions. For all alternatives, the total impacts may change due to further project planning and design.

As discussed previously, the Highway 371 corridor is defined by a diversity of natural and community resources. A key objective of the Highway 371 North Improvement Project will be to carefully consider these resources when making decisions on which alternatives to retain and dismiss. A more thorough evaluation of all the relevant social, economic, and environmental issues will be studied for the alternative(s) retained for analysis in the Highway 371 EIS. The EIS will consider impacts to several resources including: archaeological and historical sites, threatened and endangered species, right-of-way and relocations, groundwater, contaminated properties, and bicycles/pedestrians.

Right-of-Way and Relocation

Several typical roadway cross-sections were used to determine the potential right-of-way and relocation impacts. Alternative 2 and all bypass options used a combination of urban and rural four-lane divided highway cross-sections. Alternative 1 assumes that all improvements would be completed within existing Mn/DOT owned right-of-way. However, specific spot improvements under Alternative 1 may require the acquisition of additional right-of-way, which may increase the likelihood of relocations. These impacts could not be identified or estimated until such spot improvements were identified and analyzed. Table 3 summarizes the potential right-of-way and relocation impacts for each alternative.

Table 3
Highway Right-of-Way and Relocations By Alternative

Alternative	Potential Number of Acres Required	Potential Number of Residences and Commercial Properties Acquired
Alternative 1	0	0
Alternative 2	81.6	30
Alt.2 (with Pequot Lakes Bypass)	172.5	28
Alt.2 (with Jenkins Bypass)	135.2	35
Alt.2 (with Pine River Bypass)	161.6	23

Notes:

* Existing right-of-way is estimated at 210 feet to 260 feet from Nisswa to Pequot Lakes; 135 feet to 65 feet to Pine River; and 83 feet to 108 feet in Pine River.
* Proposed right-of-way is 150 feet for urban sections, 225 feet for rural sections on existing alignment, and 300 feet for county road intersections along the existing alignment and for rural sections on new alignment (bypasses).
* The number of structure impacts for each alternative may be reduced through design modifications.

Land Use

Existing Land Use

The project corridor is located within seven governmental jurisdictions, including Crow Wing County, Cass County, City of Nisswa, City of Pequot Lakes, City of Jenkins, City of Pine River, and Wilson Township. Existing development adjacent to the Highway 371 corridor, with the exception of the communities, is scattered commercial and residential development and open space. Development densities substantially increase within the four communities.

Cumulative and Secondary Impacts

Construction of a new or improved highway can create conditions that could change development patterns in the area the facility serves. However, highway construction by itself does not cause new development if there are not market forces that support new development. Furthermore, in order for potential development to occur in a given location, such development would have to be consistent with local land use and zoning standards.

Table 4 provides an estimate of acres within ¼-mile of each alternative that may be suitable for development. Bypass corridors, specifically laid out in undeveloped areas to avoid impacts, may provide more opportunity for further development.

Table 4
Potentially Developable Land Within ¼-Mile

Alternative	Acres of Developable Land
Alternative 2	4,410
Alternative 2 (with Pequot Lakes Bypass)	4,660
Alternative 2 (with Jenkins Bypass)	4,500
Alternative 2 (with Pine River Bypass)	4,660

Source: Thematic Mapper Satellite Imagery 1995-1996; Manitoba Remote Sensing Center, MNDNR.
Note: Vector-based land cover data set derived from classified 30-meter resolution satellite imagery.

Social and Economic Impacts

A review of general social, economic, and community impacts associated with the proposed highway improvements was conducted. The alternatives have the potential to impact neighborhoods, communities, and the local economy in very different ways. In general, bypass alternatives have the potential to cause the greatest change from the existing conditions.

Nisswa Area (population 1,943)

No bypasses are being considered for this area. Most of the proposed improvements are located north of the developed commercial and residential areas of Nisswa. However, additional improvements to the Highway 371/County Road 18 intersection will be considered. For all alternatives, no substantial economic changes are anticipated. The Paul Bunyan Regional Trail is not anticipated to be affected in the downtown Nisswa area, but widening of the highway could potentially affect the trail near the intersection of County Road 29/County Road 107 and Highway 371.

Pequot Lakes Area (population 1,802)

The Highway 371 corridor through Pequot Lakes currently divides the City's commercial business district. Also, a number of residential developments are located at the south and north ends of town. The Paul Bunyan Regional Trail runs parallel to Highway 371 along the east side of the highway and then crosses over the highway just north of downtown. Alternative 2 would improve Highway 371 on its existing alignment. Construction of this alternative could require strip acquisition of property and would potentially impact several commercial properties. Furthermore, access to residential and commercial properties would be altered through access management strategies aimed at improving safety and mobility along the highway. Alternative 2 may also result in impacts to the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail through the Pequot Lakes area.

A bypass of downtown Pequot Lakes could have both beneficial and adverse impacts on the local economy. Beneficially, a bypass would not require the acquisition and/or relocation of any existing businesses located along Highway 371 and would not alter the existing access conditions. However, a bypass would reduce the amount of through traffic in downtown, which could adversely affect businesses that rely on spontaneous or impulse purchases, such as convenience stores or gas stations. Furthermore, a bypass could require additional crossings of the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail.

Jenkins Area (population 287)

Jenkins is situated along both the east and west sides of Highway 371. A small commercial district is concentrated at the intersection of County Road 145 (Lilac Avenue/Veteran Street) and Highway 371. Several of the commercial buildings are located extremely close to the existing highway and road right-of-way. A city park is located between 3rd Street and County Road 15 on the east side of Highway 371. The Paul Bunyan Regional Trail runs parallel to Highway 371 along the west side of the highway.

Alternative 2 would potentially impact several residential and commercial properties located in close proximity to the highway. These acquisitions may result in an adverse impact to the social character and economic conditions within the City of Jenkins. A bypass of Jenkins would have both beneficial and adverse impacts to the social and economic environment of the area. The beneficial effects of a bypass include minimizing potential residential and commercial relocations that may occur if the highway is widened on the current alignment, further separating the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail from the highway, and potentially avoiding impacts to the city park. Several adverse impacts associated with a bypass of Jenkins may include creating new impacts on residential developments that are currently located away from the highway and loss of highway traffic and direct access for existing businesses in the commercial district and additional wetland impacts.

Pine River Area (population 928)

The Highway 371 corridor through Pine River currently divides the City's commercial business district. There are also residential developments located at the south and north ends of town. The Paul Bunyan Regional Trail runs parallel to Highway 371 along the west side of the highway.

Alternative 2 would improve Highway 371 on its existing alignment. Construction of this alternative would potentially require acquisition of property and impact several commercial properties located close to the highway. Furthermore, access to Highway 371 would be minimized through access management strategies aimed at improving safety and mobility along the highway. Alternative 2 may also result in direct impacts to the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail through the Pine River area.

A bypass of downtown Pine River would have both beneficial and adverse impacts on the local economy. Beneficially, a bypass would not require the acquisition and/or relocation of any of the existing businesses located along the highway in downtown Pine River and would not alter the existing access conditions. However, a bypass around the downtown area would reduce the amount of through traffic in downtown, which could adversely affect businesses that provide spontaneous or impulse purchases, such as convenience stores or gas stations. A bypass would also likely require additional crossings of the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail.

Cultural Resources

A preliminary review of State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) records was completed for historic and archaeological sites in the project area. The record search indicated a small number of potential historic structures within the project area. Based on the SHPO survey information, there appears to be one known historic structure in Pine River that may be affected by Alternative 2. A complete Phase I Standing Structures survey will be completed, and the results will be incorporated into the EIS.

The potential or probability of unrecorded archaeological sites being present along an alternative was assessed using Mn/Model, the State of Minnesota's archaeological predictive model for precontact sites. The archaeological site potential indicates a high potential for archaeological sites in the southern third of the study area. Site probabilities are mixed in the northern two-thirds. Archaeological site potential from

the Mn/Model analysis are displayed in Figure 10. The sites shown in Figure 10 do not reflect new surveys and discoveries since the time the model was completed in 1997. A complete Phase I Archaeological Survey will be completed and incorporated into the EIS.

Wetlands

This project will be in compliance with the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USCOE) Section 404, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) Protected Waters Permit. Potential wetland impacts were identified by reviewing aerial photography, National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps, and field investigations. These investigations yield sufficient detail for comparison purposes.

Several typical roadway cross-sections were used to determine the potential wetland impacts for Alternative 2 and each bypass option. The analysis used a combination of urban and rural four-lane divided highway cross-sections.. It was assumed that widening on the existing alignment would require a 225-foot corridor in rural sections (300-foot at county road intersections), bypass sections of new alignment would require a 300-foot corridor, and a 150-foot corridor was used in urban/developing areas. Alternative 1 assumed that all spot improvements would be completed within existing Mn/DOT owned right-of-way and may impact wetland basins located within those areas. Table 5 shows that complete avoidance of wetlands is not possible with any build alternative. Design refinements, including non-typical or modified highway cross-sections, may be considered during the preliminary design phase of the project for highly constrained areas to minimize wetland impacts, but without compromising the safety improvements. Unavoidable impacts to wetlands will be mitigated in accordance with WCA replacement plan criteria or partial deduction from Mn/DOT's wetland bank. Potential restoration sites have not been identified at this time, but will be actively searched for during the EIS process and will be coordinated with the appropriate resource agencies.

Table 5
Potential Wetland Impacts

Alternative	Potential Wetland Acres Impacted
Alternative 1	0
Alternative 2	12.5
Alternative 2 (with Pequot Lakes Bypass)	12.0
Alternative 2 (with Jenkins Bypass)	13.3
Alternative 2 (with Pine River Bypass)	26.8

Source: National Wetland Inventory

Mn/Model Archaeological Site Potential

Mn/Model Archaeological Sites
Cities
SHPO Historic Structures
Highways

Archaeological Site Potential

- Unknown
- Possibly low
- Low
- Suspected medium
- Possibly medium
- Medium
- Suspected high
- Possibly high
- High
- Water
- Steep Slopes
- Mines

Map by Crystal Phillips
July 16, 2002

0 5 10 Miles

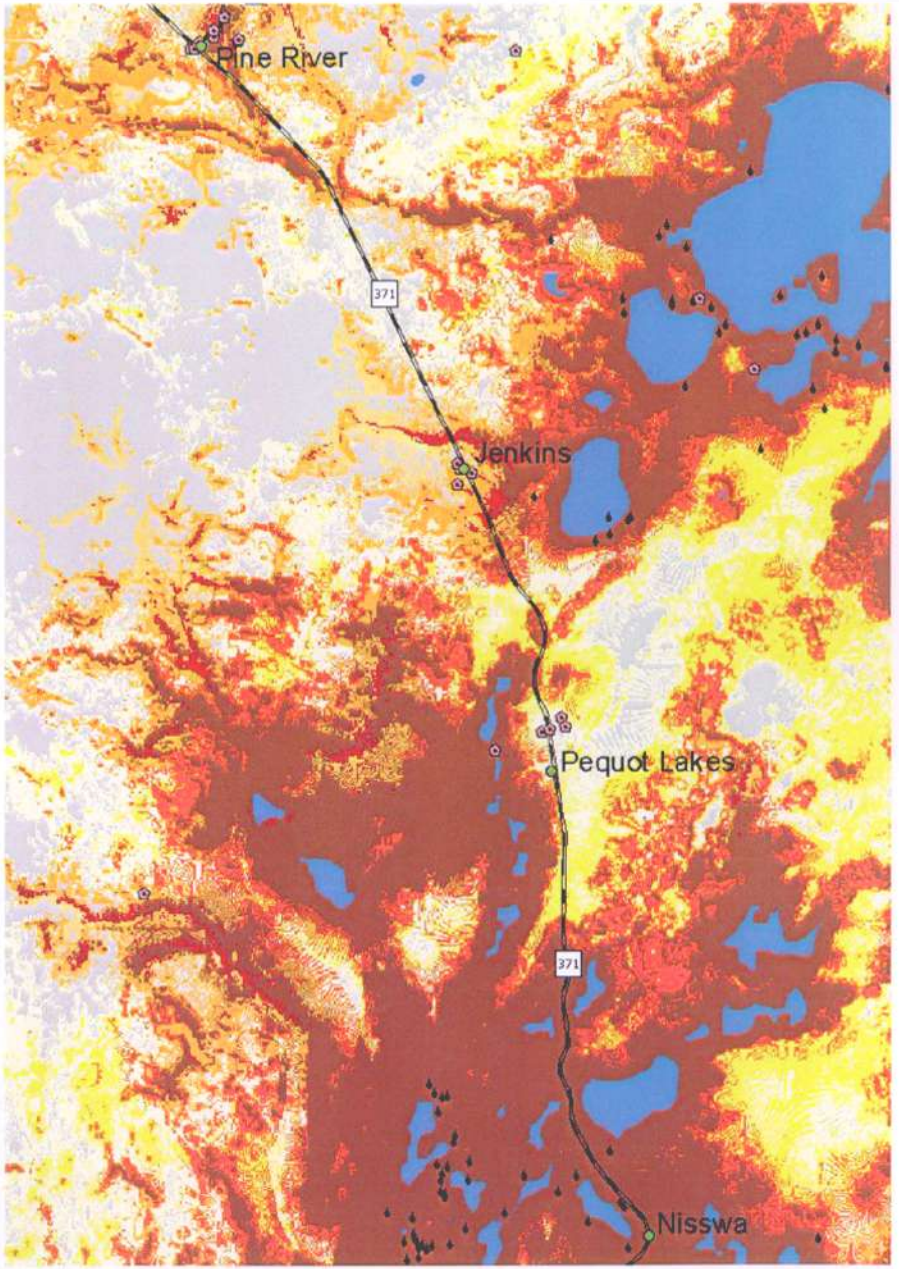

Figure 10

Other Environmental Areas of Concern

Section 4(f) Resources

All Section 4(f) resource descriptions, analysis, measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts, and coordination will conform to the requirements of Federal Highway Administration Technical Advisory T6640.8A and 23 CFR 771. If required, a Section 4(f) Evaluation will be prepared as a separate section of the EIS.

Paul Bunyan Regional Trail

The Paul Bunyan Regional Trail is a multi-use recreational trail that runs immediately adjacent to Highway 371 through much of the project corridor. Due to environmental constraints (lakes, wetlands, developed areas, etc.), the right-of-way for the highway improvements may encroach upon the existing trail right-of-way and potentially require the relocation of the trail. Coordination meetings with the MNDNR Trails and Waterways Division have already begun and will continue throughout the EIS process.

City Parks

A linear park exists adjacent to Highway 371 in Pequot Lakes. The park is owned by the City and is located between the highway and the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail. A portion of the existing Mn/DOT owned right-of-way is being utilized as open space/parkland. Existing facilities include a gazebo shelter, picnic tables, and open space.

The Jenkins city park is located just east of Highway 371 in downtown Jenkins. The existing facilities include picnic tables, a playground, and open space.

Historical and Archaeological Resources

As previously discussed under the Cultural Resources section, there is the potential that historical or archaeological resources may be impacted by the proposed project.

Local Economics

The issue of potential economic impacts was raised during early coordination meetings with the local units of government (Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Jenkins, Pine River, and Wilson Township). Concerns ranged from the acquisition of residential and commercial properties to possible traffic diversion impacts on local businesses that may result from bypass alternatives. Previous studies of highway bypasses show there is the potential for both adverse and beneficial economic impacts on local businesses. These issues, including effects of access management, will be further evaluated for the alternatives that are carried forward for analysis in the Draft EIS.

River Crossings

From the south, the existing highway crosses an unnamed stream that flows between Lower Cullen Lake and Nisswa Lake. Near the north end of the project corridor, the highway crosses the Pine River just south of the Highway 371/County Road 44 intersection in Wilson Township. Continuing north, the highway also crosses Norway Brook (North Fork of the Pine River) just south of downtown Pine River. A bypass of

the City of Pine River would require an additional crossing of Norway Brook (North Fork of the Pine River), which would be located west of the existing crossing.

Threatened & Endangered Species

The proposed improvement project could potentially affect state and/or federal Threatened & Endangered (T&E) species or communities. The MNDNR Natural Heritage Information System database has been reviewed for the corridor and will be further considered in the analysis of alternatives for the Scoping Decision Document. Furthermore, coordination with the MNDNR and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USWFS) will occur throughout the EIS process to ensure all practical and feasible measures are taken to minimize harm to these rare species or communities. The Natural Heritage Information System records indicate there are nine points in close proximity to the corridor where a rare species/community has been observed. Some of the rare species/community occurrences include the Blanding's turtle, bald eagles (including nesting sites), sandhill crane, old growth red pine forest stands, and possibly rare mussel species.

VII. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive review of a wide range of social, economic, and environmental (SEE) issues is required by federal and state legislation as part of the EIS. The purpose of this Scoping Document is to identify the issues to be reviewed in the EIS. Listed below are the subject areas considered for inclusion for study in the EIS.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY IMPACTS

- Right-of-Way and Relocation
- Economic
- Social and Community
- Land Use
- Parks and Recreational Areas, Section 4(f)/6(f)
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Movements
- Environmental Justice
- Transit
- Utilities
- Cumulative/Secondary Impacts
- Historic and Archaeological Resources

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IMPACTS

- Noise
- Surface Water Drainage
- Water Quality
- Floodplains
- Water Body Modification
- Groundwater
- Wetlands
- Vegetation
- Wildlife
- State and Federal Threatened and Endangered Species
- Prime and Unique Farmlands
- Air Quality
- Visual Resources
- Soil and Water Contamination
- Construction Impacts
- Relationship of Short-term Uses versus Long-term Productivity
- Irreversible & Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The environmental review process will address the build alternative(s) retained in the EIS and the No-Build Alternative.

VIII. PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Mn/DOT is committed to public involvement/outreach at all levels in decision-making related to the Highway 371 North Improvement Project. Mn/DOT will continue to engage community organizations; area property owners; business owners; residents; and local, county, regional, and state agencies in the development of the project. The public involvement/outreach efforts will include:

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (TAC)

The TAC was formed to establish a communication link with the affected communities, organizations, and agencies. The committee represents a wide range of special interest groups to communicate their concerns to the TAC through their representative to ensure that their agency and community values/interests are expressed. The TAC comprises representatives from each of the following groups:

- City of Nisswa – Mayor Harold Kraus
- City of Pine River – Mayor Bob Fladung
- City of Jenkins – Dave Dallman
- City of Pequot Lakes – Marty Peisch
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency – Lisa Kraemer
- MNDNR – Kate Drewry and Mike North
- Crow Wing County – Duane Blanck
- Cass County – Dave Enblom
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Leo Grabowshi
- Region 5 Development Commission – Roger Germann
- Minnesota Lakes Association – Tom Beaver
- Mn/DOT District 3 – Tony Hughes and Curt Eastland
- Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. – Chris Hiniker and Bob Rogers

To date, the TAC has met two times and will continue to meet periodically throughout the planning and preliminary design phase of the project.

Although the TAC is an advisory committee, their input is a very important element that Mn/DOT will use in helping to reach decisions throughout the study process.

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

On June 27, 2002, a kick-off open house meeting was held at the Pequot Lakes schools. The purpose of the meeting was to inform individuals of the upcoming planning efforts and opportunities to get involved in an important transportation project in their area. Future open house meetings will provide up-to-date information on the project, receive verbal and written comments, and answer questions.

PROJECT NEWSLETTERS

A series of informational newsletters will be prepared with the intent of providing project related information to the public. To date, one newsletter has been distributed to property owners along and in close proximity to the highway corridor.

PROJECT WEB SITE

An informational project web site has been established on the World Wide Web at (http://www.projects.dot.state.mn.us/seh/371). The site will provide an additional means of distributing information and gathering input with an e-mail reply feature where visitors of the site can send comments directly to the project managers from the web site. The site will be periodically updated to reflect project updates, planning/design changes, and to address new issues.

AGENCY COORDINATION

Mn/DOT has regularly involved resource agencies in the project development process. The Highway 371 TAC includes members from the MNDNR, MPCA, USCOE. Additional coordination meetings with the various resources agencies are anticipated throughout the planning and design phase of the proposed project.

PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

It is anticipated that federal, state, and other local permits may be required for the proposed action. It is probable that the following permits and approvals will be required (an updated list of permits/approvals will be included in the EIS):

- Section 404 Permit from the USCOE
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) from MPCA
- Protected Waters Permit from the MNDNR
- Wetland Conservation Act from Mn/DOT
- Municipal approval from the Cities of Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Jenkins and Pine River.

SCOPING DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION LIST

Federal Agencies

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- National Park Service
- Federal Highway Administration

State Agencies

- Environmental Quality Board
- Board of Water & Soil Resources
- Department of Public Service
- State Historic Preservation Officer
- Department of Natural Resources
- Legislative Reference Library
- Environmental Conservation Library
- Department of Health
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Commerce

- Pollution Control Agency

Local Agencies

- City of Nisswa
- City of Pequot Lakes
- City of Jenkins
- City of Pine River
- Cass County
- Crow Wing County
- Wilson Township
- Pine River Township

Other

- Kitchigami Regional Library
- Brainerd Public Library
- Various Native American Tribes for consultation on historic, archaeological, and cultural resources
- Minnesota Lakes Association
- Region 5 Development Commission

IX. LEVEL OF ACTION

This project is considered a federal Class I action because there is the potential for significant environmental effect as documented in the Social, Economic, and Environmental Impact Assessment Section. This project meets the mandatory EIS threshold test at Minnesota Rule 4410.4400, subp. 16. Mn/DOT is the RGU for this project.

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Highway 371 North Improvement Project
Draft Scoping Decision Document

November 2002

I. REPORT PURPOSE

A Scoping Decision Document (SDD) is prepared after the scoping period and scoping meeting. The SDD indicates the issues and alternatives that will be examined in depth in the EIS. Since this is a draft SDD, the decisions presented are subject to change depending on comments and concerns raised through the completion of the scoping process.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

State Project Number: S.P. 1116-22
Trunk Highway Number: TH 371

Mn/DOT proposes improvements to Highway 371 in Cass County and Crow Wing County, Minnesota. The project corridor extends from Crow Wing County Road 18 in the City of Nisswa, Minnesota to Cass County Road 42 in the City of Pine River, Minnesota. The total length of the project corridor is approximately 16.0 miles (see Figure 1).

Highway 371 is a major north-south route on the State of Minnesota Trunk Highway System. Locally and regionally, Highway 371 connects citizens and communities to jobs, retail centers, and recreational/tourist destinations. Tourist travel along this segment of Highway 371 creates high seasonal traffic peaks. These peaks commonly cause traffic delays and congestion. The major considerations to be addressed in the planning and design of this project include potential community impacts to four urban areas, the Paul Bunyan Regional Trail, scattered residential and commercial developments, and potential environmental resource impacts, such as wetlands, lakes, rivers, and wildlife habitat.

III. SCHEDULE AND PROJECT MANAGER

The following is the anticipated project schedule for completion of the Highway 371 North Scoping Study and EIS:

Fall 2002	Federal Notice of Intent
Fall 2002	Release of Scoping Document/Draft Scoping Decision Document for public comment; begin the 30-day comment period
Fall 2002	Public Scoping Meeting
Winter 2003	Final Scoping Decision Document

Winter 2003	State EIS Preparation Notice
Summer 2003	Distribute Draft EIS for agency/public comment; start of Draft EIS comment period
Summer 2003	Public Hearing on Draft EIS
Fall 2003	Identification of Preferred Alternative by Mn/DOT and FHWA
Winter 2004	Distribute Final EIS
Winter 2004	Federal Highway Administration Record of Decision
2008	Begin Right-of-Way Acquisition Process
2010-2011	Anticipated Construction

Mn/DOT District 3 Baxter office has assigned the duties of Project Manager to:

Tony Hughes, P.E.
1991 Industrial Park Road
Baxter, MN 56425
(218) 828-2465
TH371N@dot.state.mn.us

IV. ALTERNATIVES

The purpose of this section is to identify which of the alternatives presented in the Scoping Document will be dismissed and which will be retained for further review in the EIS. This initial screening is based on the information presented in Section VI. of the Scoping Document, which includes an assessment of how each alternative addresses the purpose and need of the project, as well as an overview of some of the social, economic, and environmental issues associated with each alternative. The preliminary findings presented in this document will be reviewed by the various federal, state, and local agencies involved in the project, as well as the public prior to finalizing any decisions and proceeding with the EIS.

ALTERNATIVES DISMISSED FROM FURTHER REVIEW

The following project alternatives from the Scoping Document would not be evaluated in the EIS and would be dropped from further consideration:

Alternative 3 – Capacity Expansion on New Highway Corridor

As mentioned in the Scoping Document, Alternative 3 fails to address the capacity, safety, design deficiencies, and mobility and connectivity concerns associated with the existing Highway 371 alignment because it has minimal traffic benefit, results in increased travel distances/times, is much more costly, and has greater potential for environmental impacts.

ALTERNATIVES RETAINED FOR FURTHER REVIEW

Alternative 1 – No-Build Alternative

As noted in the Alternatives section of the Scoping Document, Alternative 1 is not a suitable solution for addressing the purpose and need objectives of the project. However, in accordance with federal regulations, the No-Build Alternative will be retained throughout the scoping and EIS analysis process and will serve as a baseline for comparison of the build alternative(s).

Alternative 2 – Construct Four-Lane Highway on Existing Alignment

Alternative 2 is viable for addressing all the existing capacity, safety, and design deficiencies concerns associated with the existing Highway 371 corridor. Therefore, Alternative 2 will be retained for further analysis in the EIS.

Bypass Options – Construct Four-Lane Highway on Existing Alignment with Eastern Bypass of Pequot Lakes, and/or Eastern Bypass of Jenkins, and/or Western Bypass of Pine River

Not enough information has been compiled at this point to conclude conclusively whether or not bypasses of Pequot Lakes (to the east), Jenkins (east), and/or Pine River (west) are reasonable and feasible. As a result, bypass options for the three communities may be carried forward into the Draft EIS.

V. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The following issues are expected to require analysis in the EIS.

- Right-of-Way and Relocation
- Economic
- Social and Community
- Land Use
- Parks and Recreational Areas, Section 4(f)/6(f)
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Movements
- Environmental Justice
- Transit
- Utilities
- Cumulative/Secondary Impacts
- Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Noise
- Surface Water Drainage
- Water Quality
- Floodplains
- Water Body Modification
- Groundwater
- Wetlands
- Vegetation
- Wildlife

- State and Federal Threatened and Endangered Species
- Prime and Unique Farmlands
- Air Quality
- Visual Resources
- Soil and Water Contamination
- Construction Impacts
- Relationship of Short-term Uses versus Long-term Productivity
- Irreversible & Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

SPECIAL REPORTS

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

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

VI. PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Mn/DOT is committed to public involvement/outreach at all levels in decision-making related to the Highway 371 North Improvement Project. Mn/DOT will continue to engage community organizations, area property owners, business owners, residents, and local, county, regional, state, and federal agencies in the development of the project.

PERMITS

It is anticipated that federal, state, and other local permits may be required for the proposed action. It is probable that the following permits and approvals will be required (an updated list of permits/approvals will be included in the EIS):

- Section 404 Permit from the USCOE
- Section 401 Water Quality Certification from MPCA
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) from MPCA
- Protected Waters Permit from the MNDNR
- Wetland Conservation Act from Mn/DOT
- Municipal approval from the Cities of Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Jenkins and Pine River

VII. LEVEL OF ACTION

This project is considered a federal Class I action because there is the potential for significant environmental effects as documented in the Social, Economic, and Environmental Impact Assessment section. This project meets the mandatory EIS threshold test at Minnesota Rule 4410.4400, subp. 16. Mn/DOT is the RGU for this project.