
4.0 Economic Development

4.1 LAND USE

The largest acreage of cropland is in the Grand Marais subwatershed. Clearwater River subwatershed contains the largest acreage of pasture land and the largest forest acreage is in the Red Lake River subwatershed. The area in lakes is rather large, occupying approximately 8.2 percent of the RLWD. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the various land uses within the RLWD. The U.S. Census Bureau and State of Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development have a wealth of statistics related to population, employment, income and activities within the RLWD (Appendix 9).

4.2 AGRICULTURE

Agricultural production plays an extremely important role in the RLWD. Approximately 41 percent of the RLWD is in cultivation. Due to geomorphology, the predominance of agricultural production lessens from west to east within the RLWD. Important crops produced include wild rice, beans, corn, wheat and some livestock production (Figure 12).

4.3 FORESTRY

Forestry is another important industry within the RLWD, ranking close behind agriculture and industry in importance. Approximately 30 percent of the RLWD's land cover is forested and the alignment of forested land tends to be inverse to cultivated land. (Figure 12).

4.4 INDUSTRY

Major industrial employers within the RLWD include Artic Cat, Digi-Key and American Crystal Sugar. There are also numerous other small business located within the RLWD including grocery and retail, commercial and other light industrial activities.

4.5 RECREATION AND TOURISM

The RLWD offers great opportunities for many kinds of recreation including fishing, camping, hunting, wildlife viewing, canoeing, tubing, cycling, water sports and winter sports. Waskish, on Upper Red Lake, is the center for some of the best crappie and recovering walleye fishing in the nation. A state forest campground, with public access to Upper Red Lake, is located there. Good fishing at the other lakes also attracts many tourists.

Parts of three state forests, Beltrami Island, Pine Island and Koochiching, are located in the RLWD and provide habitat for moose, elk, deer, bear, wolves, coyotes and small game birds. In

the fall, the northern and eastern parts of the RLWD become a mecca for a large number of hunters. The Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and the Agassiz NWR provide ideal habitat for the production of migratory waterfowl. Many different species of birds and other wildlife live in these management areas. Both areas are open to controlled deer hunting and Thief Lake is open to controlled hunting of waterfowl in the fall.

There are some resorts on the lakes in the RLWD that provide swimming, boating, water skiing and other facilities. In the communities along the Red Lake River are groups concerned with the quality and accessibility of the river. These groups are focusing on cleaning and improvement of the access, safety, trails and shoreline.

4.6 WILDLIFE REFUGE AND MANAGEMENT AREAS

4.6.1 Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge

Agassiz NWR was established in 1937 as Mud Lake NWR. The Refuge was renamed in 1961 for the shallow depressional lake plains formed by Glacial Lake Agassiz. The NWR lies in the aspen parkland transition zone between the coniferous forest to the north and east and the tallgrass prairie to the south and west. The original focus of the Refuge was on waterfowl. Over the years other migratory birds and year-round resident wildlife have received an increasing emphasis in NWR management.

Agassiz NWR is located in the eastern Red River Valley, an area of relatively flat terrain and a gentle gradient averaging 1.5 feet per mile, sloping east to west across the NWR. The major threat of flooding at Agassiz NWR is the result of spring runoff following wet winters and spring rains. Flooding is one of the key issues affecting the NWR's habitat and facilities. Sedimentation deposition from erosion off adjacent farm lands and ditch systems discharging into the NWR are other factors affecting the NWR pools, wildlife habitat and water quality.

Agassiz's 61,500 acres includes 26 impoundments and three lakes. These diverse habitats provide a haven for many wildlife species. The refuge supports over 280 species of birds, 49 species of mammals, 12 species of amphibians and nine species of reptiles.

The NWR is administered by the USFWS, a branch of the Department of the Interior. The goal of the USFWS is to conserve and enhance the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats.

The refuge is located in northeastern Marshall County, 23 miles northeast of Thief River Falls.

4.6.2 Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area

The Thief Lake WMA covers 55,000 acres and encompasses a variety of habitat types. The WMA includes MnDNR Division of Fish and Wildlife acquired lands, dedicated consolidated conservation lands and trust fund lands.

Thief Lake, located 38 miles northeast of Thief River Falls, is located in northeastern Marshall County. The lake covers 7,100 acres at normal pool level and is approximately 5 miles long and 3 miles wide. The average water depth is 3 feet. Approximately 3,000 acres of the lake is in a sanctuary, while the remainder is open to the public, with four major boat launches and camping areas. The Moose River enters the lake from the east, and the Thief River is the outlet to the west. A dam at the outlet controls the water level, and the normal summer pool is 1158.5 feet msl.

The MnDNR's Division of Fish and Wildlife manages this WMA, as well as the Eckvoll and Elm Lake WMAs discussed below.

4.6.3 Eckvoll Wildlife Management Area

The Eckvoll WMA is in eastern Marshall County, 31 miles northeast of Thief River Falls, and nine miles west of Grygla. It is adjacent to the Agassiz NWR. Bisected by the main stem of Judicial Ditch 11, the area consists of 6,440 acres of mostly tax-forfeited land.

Approximately 50 percent of the area is open, primarily wetland, consisting of cattail, cane and sedges. Brush, largely willow and aspen, make up the bulk of the remaining cover types. An estimated 300 acres of open water type marsh is located on the north side of Judicial Ditch 11.

This management area produces and supports a high wildlife population, including such major species as moose, deer, ruffed grouse, sharp-tailed grouse and waterfowl. Many other mammals and birds make use of the area for at least a portion of the year. The area will be managed both as a wildlife production and staging area, as well as for public hunting and wildlife viewing.

4.6.4 Elm Lake Wildlife Management Area

The Elm Lake WMA is in eastern Marshall County, 9 miles northeast of Thief River Falls. The area consists of 15,543 acres. It adjoins the south boundary of Agassiz NWR.

Approximately 75 percent of the area is open wetland consisting of marsh vegetation. The higher land is mainly brush with some open areas of grass, legumes and scattered woodlands.

This WMA produces and supports a high wildlife population including such major species as moose, deer, ruffed grouse, sharp-tailed grouse and waterfowl. Fur-bearing animals are common in the area.

Farmes Pool Impoundment, which lies within Elm Lake WMA, was designed to help with flood control, drainage and wildlife benefits, with funding of up to \$1.5 million, funded by Ducks Unlimited, to be used toward the establishment of this project.

4.7 RED LAKE INDIAN RESERVATION

The RLWD maintains a cooperative working relationship with the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians. As the RLWD moves forward with projects, it will make every effort necessary to involve the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians very early in the planning effort, including in the creation of PTs, for any project involving potential effects to, or in the vicinity of, Red Lake Nation lands.