Sarah Cromie

From: Sarah Cromie
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2024 3:01 PM
To: Marsh, Dawn S
Cc: Carol Guy-Stapleton; Pete Holmes; Jennie Geiger
Subject: Coneflower Energy (Solar) - Meeting Summary Notes Dec 19, 2023
Attachments: Coneflower_USFWS and DNR Meeting_Notes and PPT_2023-12-19.pdf; 20240318-131257_PROJECT_BOUNDARY_SPC.zip

Hello Dawn,
Attached please find meeting summary notes and the PowerPoint presentation from our December 19, 2023 meeting on the Coneflower Energy (Solar) Project for your review and consideration. Also attached please find an updated Project boundary for your files.

Thank you very much for your time and helpful input.

Best,
~Sarah

SARAH CROMIE
Senior Environmental Permitting Manager

Apex Clean Energy
120 Garrett Street, Suite 700, Charlottesville, VA 22902
cell: 434-270-3131 | fax: 434-220-3712
sarah.cromie@apexcleanenergy.com | www.apexcleanenergy.com

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Sarah Cromie

From: Sarah Cromie
Sent: Monday, March 18, 2024 3:00 PM
To: Byron, Haley (DNR)
Cc: Carol Guy-Stapleton; Pete Holmes; Jennie Geiger
Subject: Coneflower Energy (Solar) - Meeting Summary Notes Dec 19, 2023
Attachments: Coneflower_USFWS and DNR Meeting_Notes and PPT_2023-12-19.pdf; 20240318-131257_PROJECT_BOUNDARY_SPC.zip

Hello Haley,
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CONEFLOWER SOLAR PROJECT - MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Attendees:	Haley Byron, DNR (In-person) Karla Ihns, DNR, (In-person) Kate Carlson, DNR (In-person) Brent Besties, DNR (In-person) John Byer, USFWS (In-person) Sarah Cromie, Coneflower Solar (In-person) Carol Guy-Stapleton, Coneflower Solar (In-person) Pete Holmes, Coneflower Solar (In-person) Jennie Geiger, Coneflower Solar (Teams) Garrick Valverde, Coneflower Solar (Teams) Anne Hall, DNR (Teams) Becky Thompson, DNR (Teams) Ben Schaefer, DNR (Teams) Bill Schuna, DNR (Teams) Cynthia Warzecha, DNR (Teams) David Trauba, DNR (Teams) Ethan Jenzen, DNR (Teams) Genevieve Brand, DNR (Teams) Jenzen, Ethan, DNR (Teams) Lisa A. Gelvin-Innvaer, DNR (Teams) Megan Benage, DNR (Teams) Michael Worland, DNR (Teams) Scott Roemhildt, DNR (Teams) Tim Cisecke, DNR, (Teams) Todd Kokender, DNR, (Teams) Vanessa Zachman, DNR (Teams) Dawn Marsh, USFWS (Teams) Michael Budd, USFWS (Teams)
Notes Prepared by:	Coneflower Solar
Date:	18 March 2023

Coneflower Energy, LLC (Coneflower) is developing an up to 235-megawatt solar project known as the Coneflower Solar Project (Project) in Lyon County, Minnesota. On December 19, 2013, Coneflower conducted a hybrid in- person (at the DNR office in Mankato, Minesota) and virtual (Teams) meeting with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to discuss the proposed Project located on approximately 2,300 acres in a portion of Lyon county, Minnesota (Project Area). The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the Project, present results from the studies completed to date, and agree on appropriate minimization/avoidance measures. The attached PowerPoint (PPT) presentation was provided, and the following is a summary of the topics discussed. There was general agreement that the material presented in the PPT was accurate and that surveys proposed and/or completed

to date were appropriate to evaluate potential risk to wildlife. The following is a summary of the topics discussed.

General Project Area Information: The Project Area consists primarily of habitat dominated by cultivated crops (81.5%), developed/open space (7.2%), herbaceous (6.1%), and hay/pasture (3.8%). There are minimal forested areas (woody wetlands, deciduous, mixed forest) within the Project Area (totaling 0.1%). There are minimal wetlands and waterbodies within the Project Area; however, the Project was sited to avoid a greater abundance of wetlands and waterbodies that are located to the south and west of the Project Area. The Project has been sited to avoid all state and federally protected lands, including state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and federal Wildlife Protection Areas (WPAs) that are adjacent to the Project Area. Both USFWS and DNR indicated that the Project is well sited; however, they would like a buffer between the Project boundary and WMA/WPAs. Coneflower confirmed that no facilities will be placed within 200' of public conservation lands, consistent with the Lyon County setbacks for Large Solar Energy Systems. There is one private conservation easement within the Project Area; facilities will be sited to avoid if the easement does not allow for Project facilities.

Federally Listed Species: The Project is within the range of the federally endangered northern long-eared bat (NLEB, *Myotis septentrionalis*) and proposed federally endangered tricolored bat (TCBA, *Perimyotis subflavus*). There are no known occurrences, hibernacula, or maternity roosts within or in proximity to the Project Area. In addition, there is very limited forested habitat (0.1%) that may concentrate or be used by bats for roosting within the Project Area. No tree clearing is anticipated for the Project at this time.

State Listed Species: No state listed species were identified as potentially occurring within the Project Area. Coneflower utilized their license agreement to access and present DNR Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) data for historical occurrences of rare plants and animals within the Project area and a 1-mile buffer; a formal data request was submitted on 8/3/2022, but a response has not yet been received. There are no historical records of rare plants or animals within the Project Area or the 1-mile buffer.

Avian Studies: Coneflower presented the results from the spring 2023 raptor nest study completed in accordance with USFWS guidelines. No raptors were documented within the Project Area or the 0.25-mile buffer during the spring 2023 survey. There is minimal nesting habitat within the Project Area. Coneflower plans to conduct an additional raptor nest survey prior to construction to ensure regulatory compliance.

Rare Species and Native Plant Communities: There are no MN Biological Survey Sites of Biodiversity Significance, native plant communities, or native prairies within the Project Area. According to publicly available data, there are no calcareous fens within the Project Area. DNR committed to check their database for calcareous fens within Project Area and provide any relevant data to Coneflower.

Wetlands and Waters: Coneflower completed an aquatic resources assessment in 2023. The field delineated assessment documented 5% of the Project Area as freshwater emergent wetlands. The

Project will be designed to avoid and minimize impacts to waterbodies and wetlands to the extent practicable.

Other: Coneflower discussed plans to create a vegetation management plan as part of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission Site Permit process.

Action Items:

- Coneflower to provide an updated Project boundary to DNR and USFWS (attached to this email).
- DNR to provide an official review letter of the Project. DNR provided an email on December 21, 2023 confirming that the review letter was forthcoming.
- DNR to provide relevant fen data to Coneflower.
- As discussed, and agreed upon, Coneflower plans to develop a vegetation management plan for the Project.

Attachment 1: Power Point Presentation

December 19, 2023

Coneflower Solar Project

USFWS and MnDNR Coordination Meeting

Agenda and Goals

Agenda

- Introductions
- Project Overview
- Studies Completed
- Next Steps

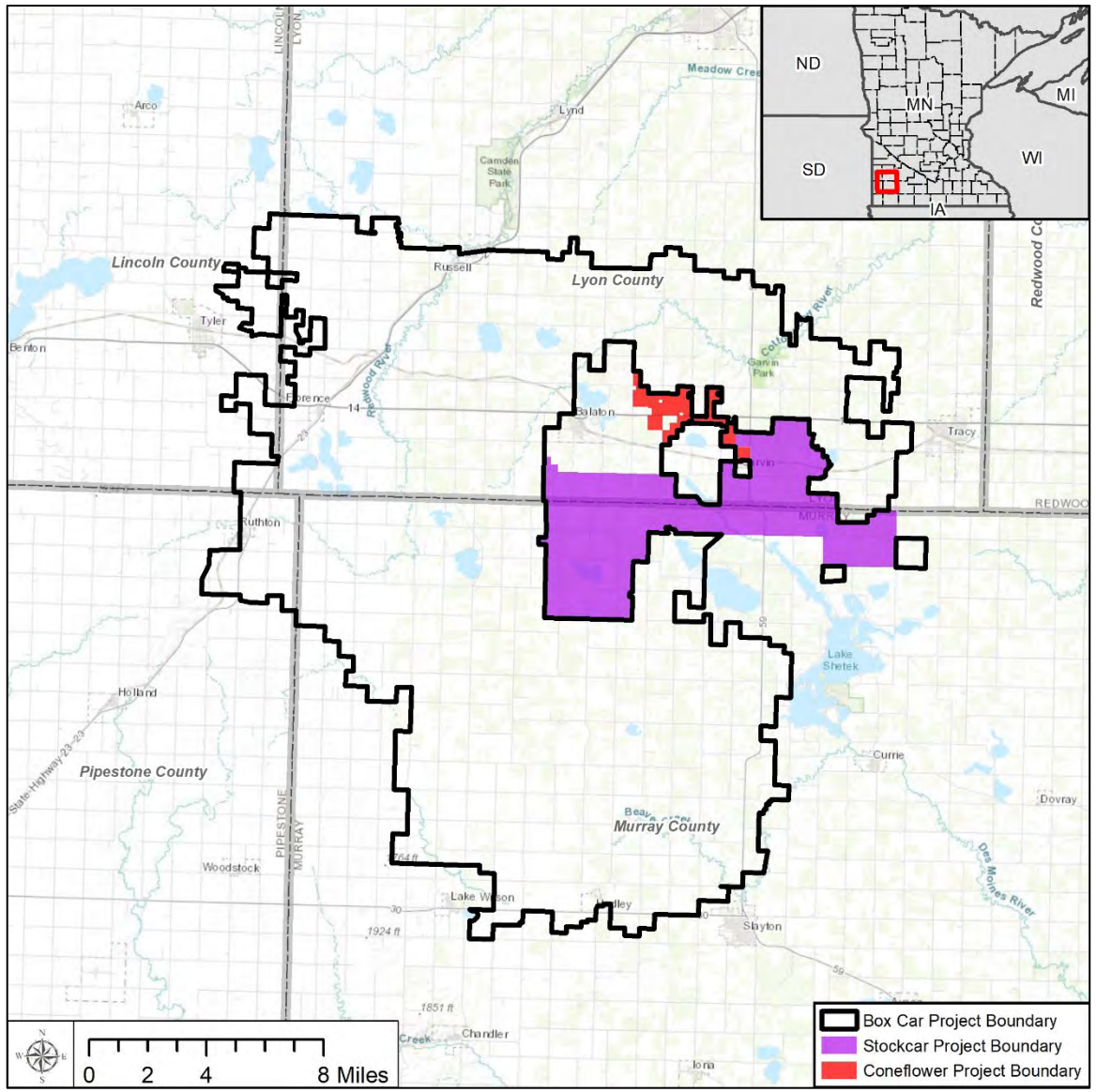
Goals

- Introduce Coneflower Project
- Agency input on site design and coordination per the PUC

Business Confidentiality/FOIA Exemption

- Importance of sharing data and open collaboration
- Information exchanged between Apex, USFWS, and MnDNR is exempt from release under FOIA Exemption 4 if the information is:
  - (a) commercial or financial
  - (b) obtained from a person, and
  - (c) privileged or confidential
- Information contained herein is Confidential Business Information
  - Voluntarily submitted
  - Held confidential by Company
  - Contains confidential business information valuable to the Company
- Promotes transparent, open coordination and communication

Project Overview



Coneflower Project Capacity

- Up to 235 MW

Commercial Operations

- 2027 COD Target

Project Drivers

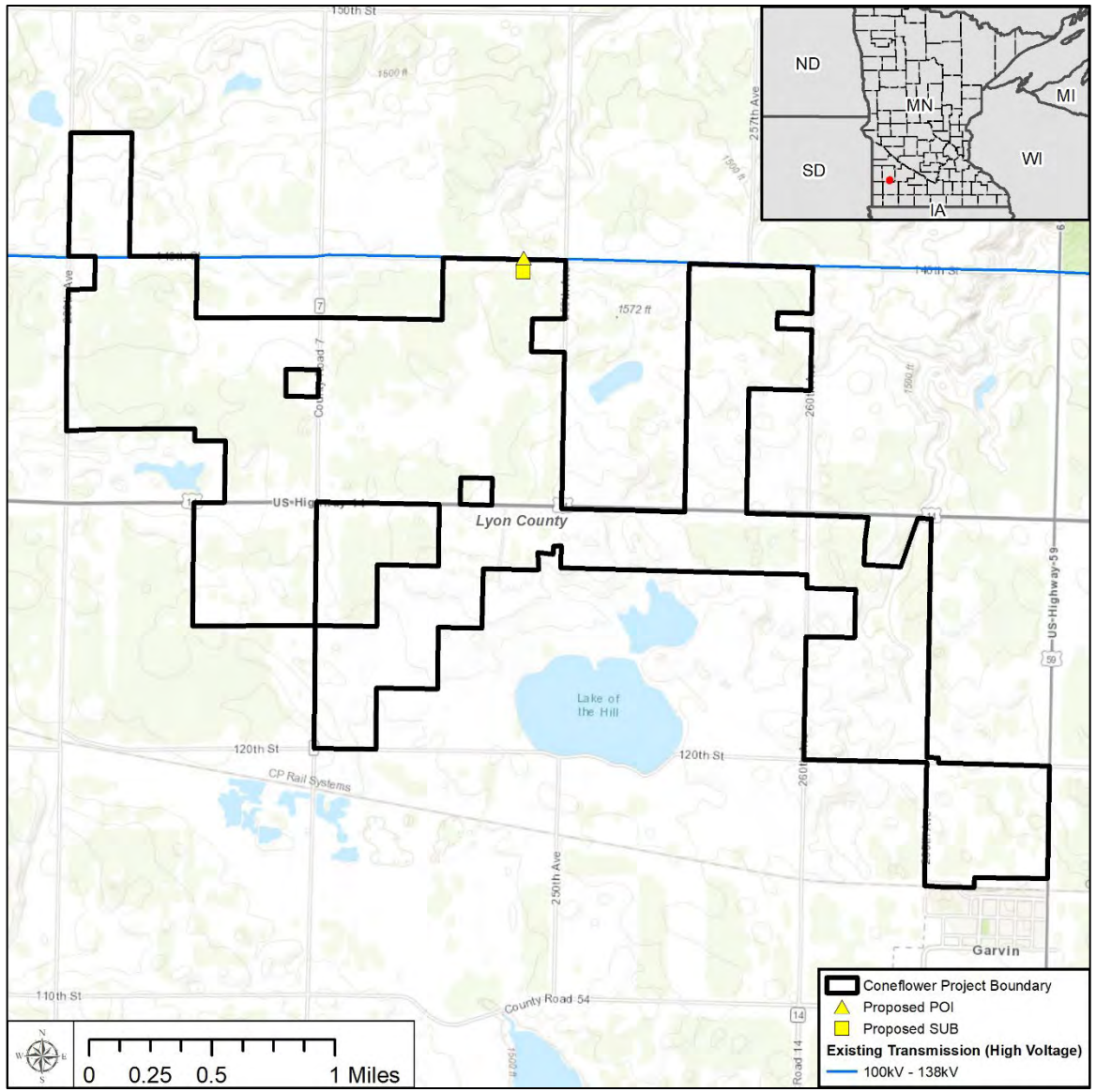
- Community and landowner support
- Strong commercial interest; Sherco coal plant is retiring, need alternative source of electricity
  - Retiring 682 MW in 2023, 680 MW in 2026, and final 517 MW in 2030
- Strong solar resource compatible with wind resource
- Existing high voltage t-line nearby

Project Status

- Land is 100% leased
- Studies completed

APEX CLEAN ENERGY

Landscape Level Siting

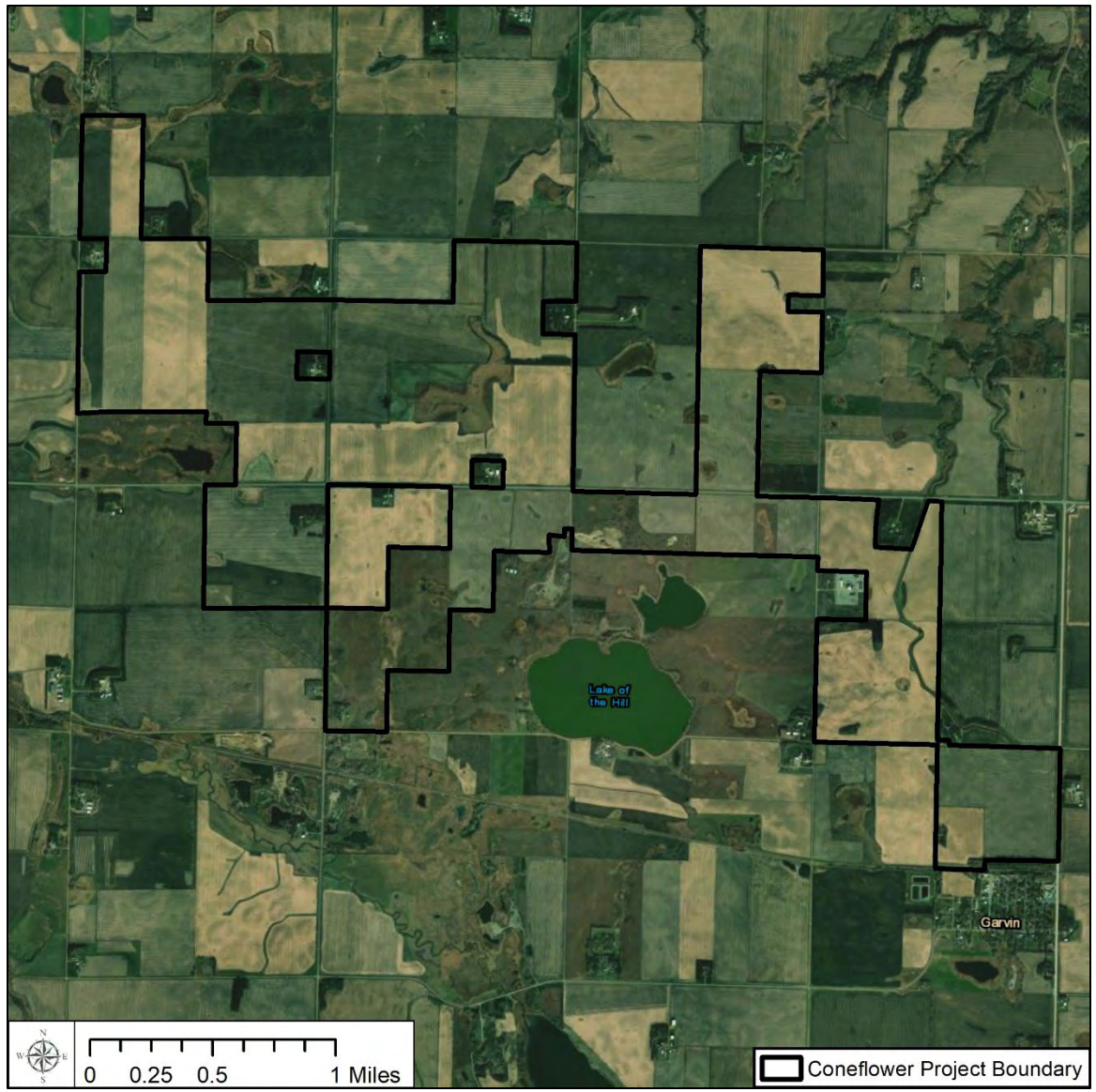


Apex originally assessed a larger area in this portion of Minnesota, considering factors such as:

- Transmission
- Solar Resource
- Public and Landowner acceptance
- Environmental sensitivity:
  - Listed species
  - Sensitive habitats
  - Wetlands/WOTUS
  - Conservation lands
  - Intact vs. disturbed habitats
  - Cultural resources
  - Review of existing, publicly available data

Based on findings, Apex is targeting development efforts in the area shown (black boundary).

Site Characterization Review



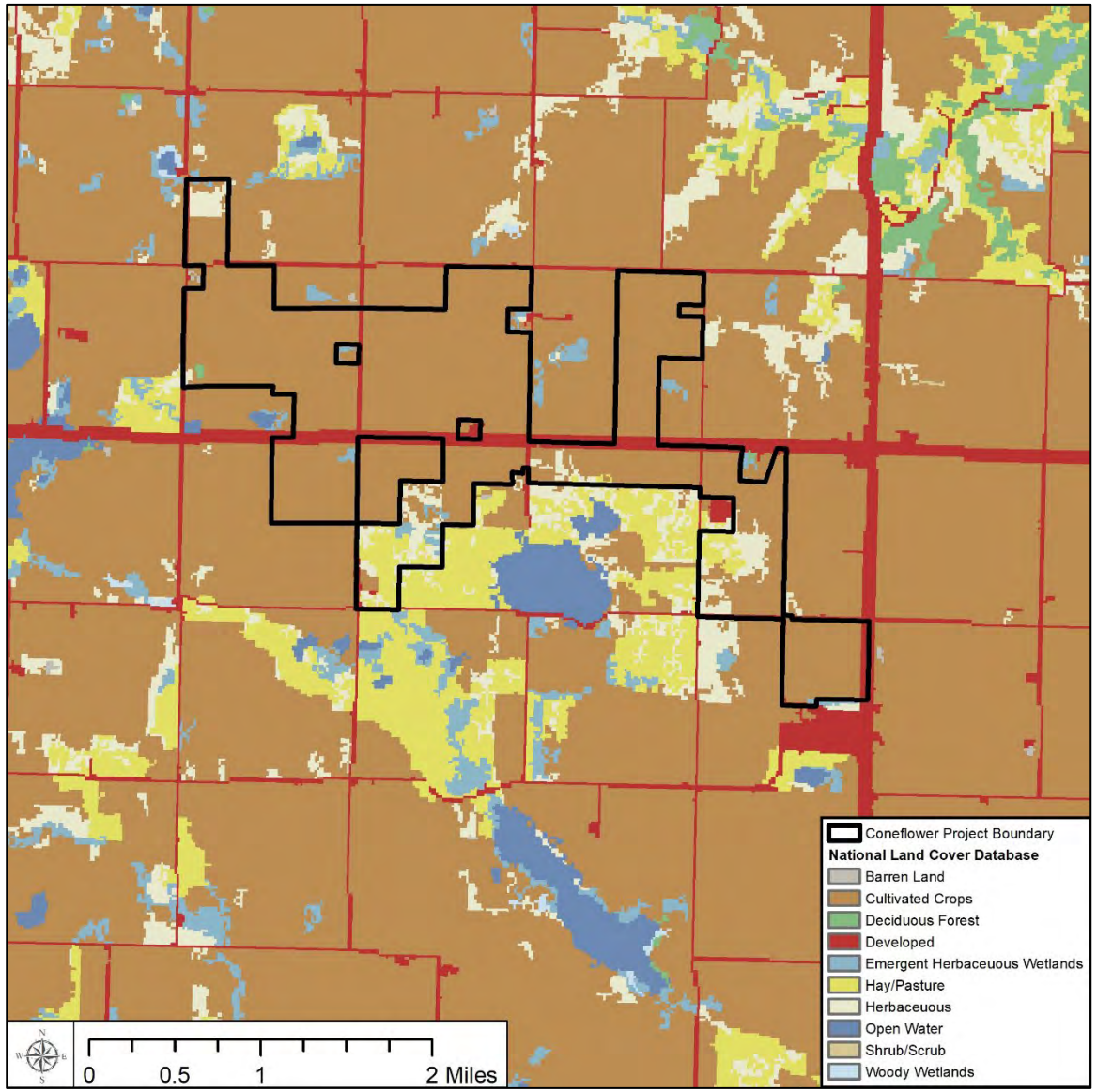
Methods

- Review of publicly available information for the Project Area
- Landscape level review for species of concern likelihood, protected areas, wildlife concentration areas, etc.

Data Sources Used

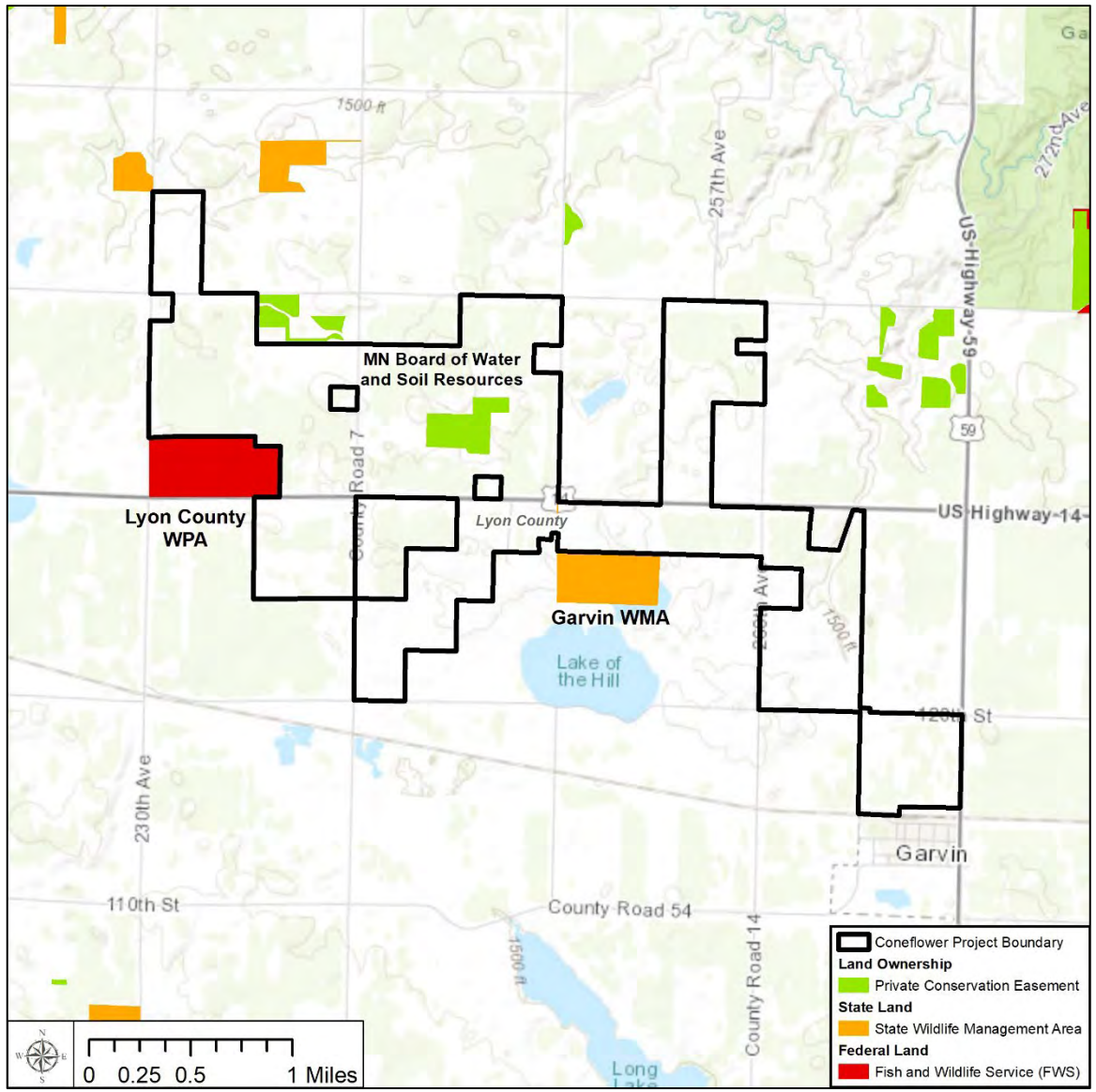
- USFWS IPaC
- MnDNR NHIS
- AWWI Landscape Assessment Tool
- Audubon Important Bird Areas, eBird, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, USGS Breeding Bird Survey, MN Breeding Bird Atlas, Audubon Christmas Bird Count
- National Wetland Inventory database and National Hydrography Dataset
- Protected Areas Database of the U.S. (PADUS)
- MnDNR Public Waters Inventory, Native Plant Communities, Potentially Undisturbed Land, Sites of Biodiversity Significance, Calcareous Fens

Topography/Land Use



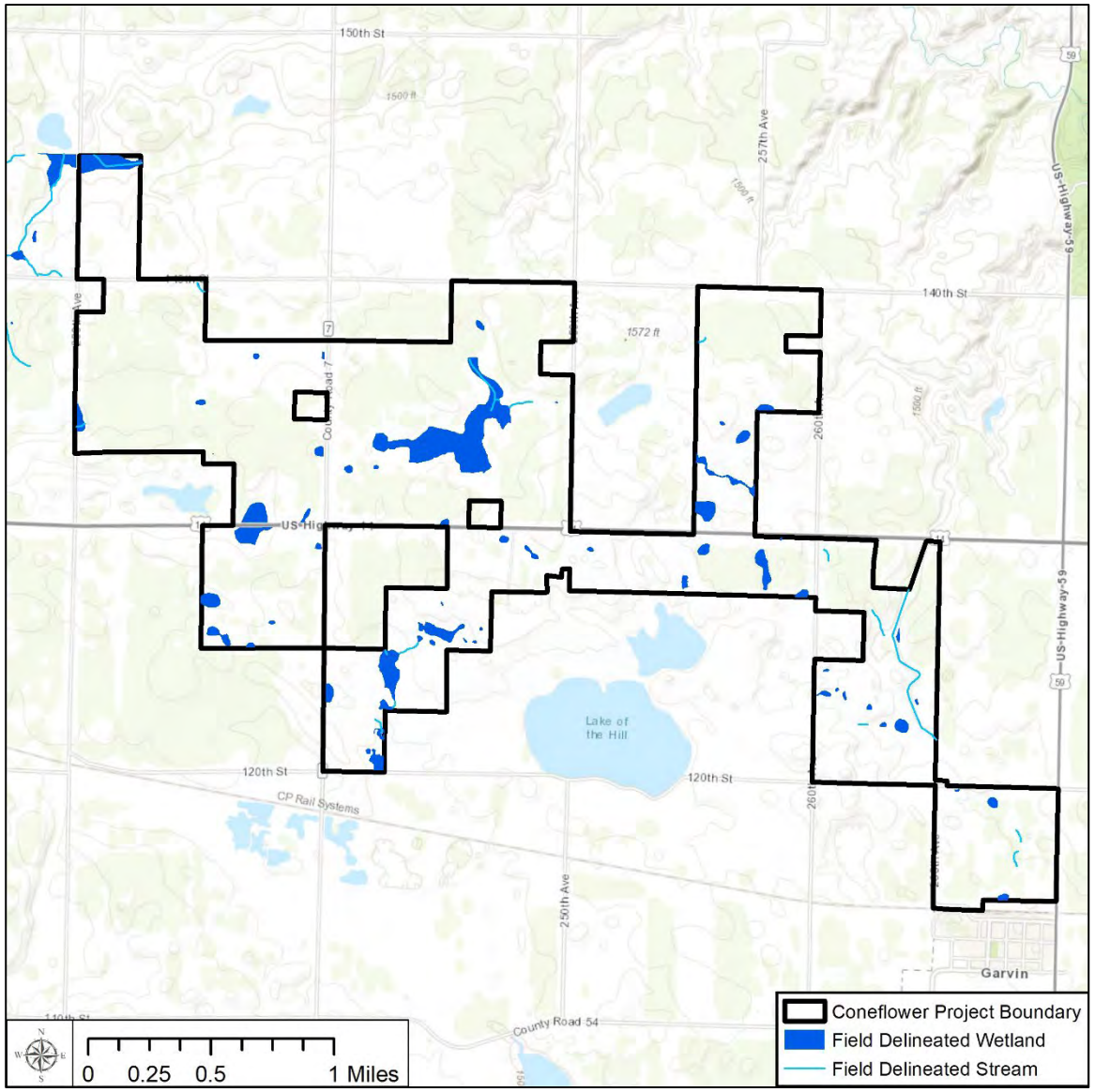
- Habitat is dominated by cultivated crops (81.5%), developed/open space (7.2%), herbaceous (6.1%), and hay/pasture (3.8%)
- There are minimal wetlands within the Project boundary; avoids larger number to the S and W
- Very limited forested areas within Project boundary (0.1%)
- Gently rolling topography typical of the region
- No significant ridges, rock outcrops, or unique topographical features within Project area
- No apparent concentrating features onsite (foraging, migrating, wintering species)

Important Public or Conservation Lands



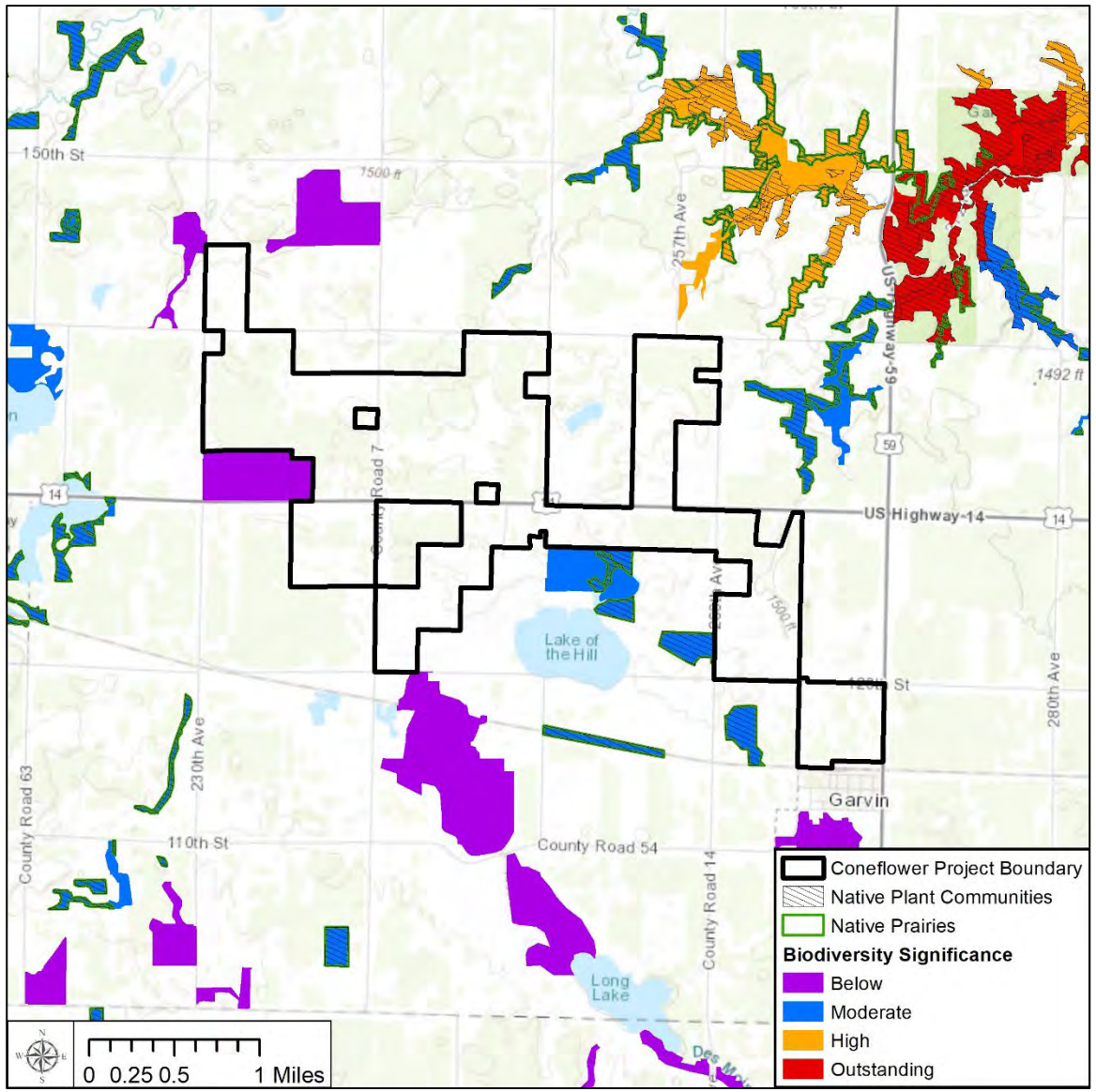
- Project generally sited to avoid important conservation lands
- One private conservation easement within the Project boundary; facilities will be sited to avoid if easements do not allow for Project facilities
- Nearest Audubon Important Bird Area (Prairie Coteau Complex) ~10-mi east

Waterbodies and Wetlands



- Wetlands and waterbodies are present within the Project Area
- Wetland Delineation for the Project completed fall 2023
  - Freshwater emergent wetlands 5% of Project area
- Project will be designed to avoid/minimize impacts to waterbodies and wetlands to extent practicable and per USACE and PWI permit standards

Rare Species and Native Plant Communities



- There are no MN Biological Survey Sites of Biodiversity Significance, Native Plant Communities, or Native Prairies within the Project boundary
- There are no calcareous fens within the Project boundary
- Project facilities will be located within cropland/disturbed areas

APEX CLEAN ENERGY

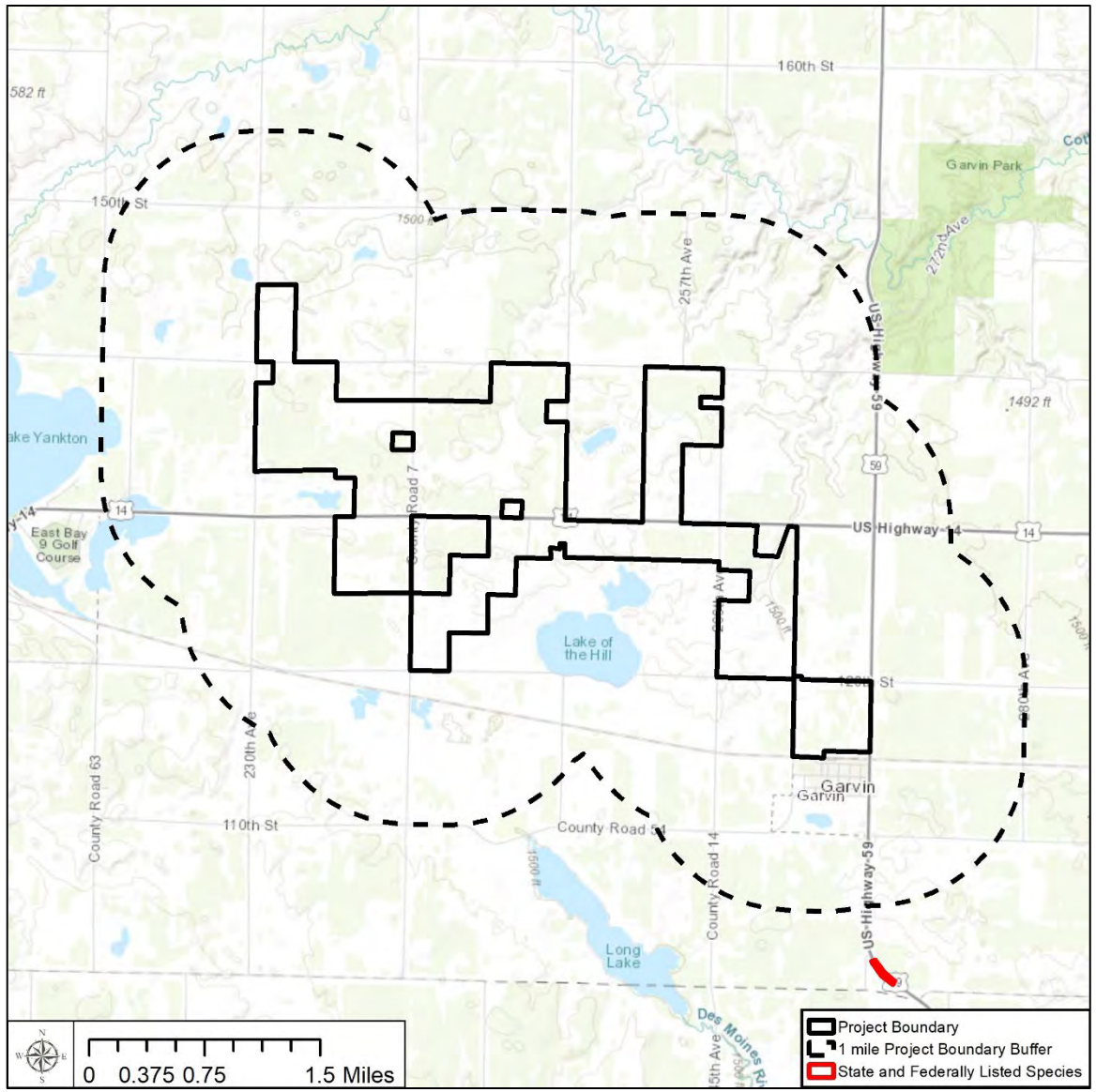
Federally Listed Species Potentially Occurring in Project Area

Species	Status	Potential to occur	Comments
Northern long-eared bat	FE, ST	Possible	• Hibernates in caves and mines; roost singly or in colonies underneath bark, in cavities or in crevices of both live trees and snags or dead trees. • Possible summer and fall migration risk
Tricolored bat	PFE, SCS	Possible	• Hibernates in caves and mines; primarily roost among live and dead leaf clusters of live or recently dead deciduous hardwood trees. • Possible summer and fall migration risk

Sources: *IPaC, accessed December 2023. Critical Issues Analysis, prepared by ECT, Inc., Dec 2023.*

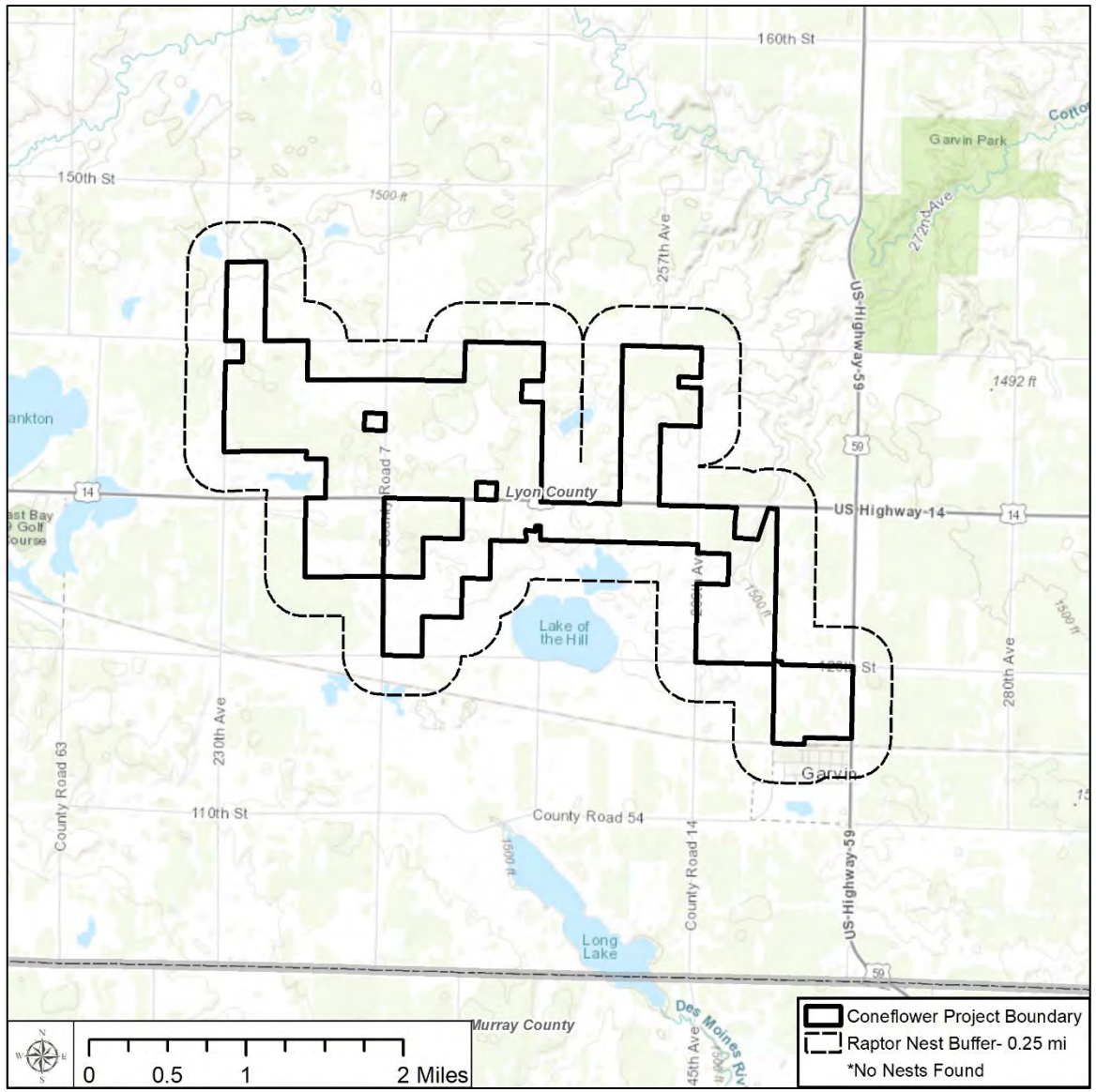
- No risk to federally listed species; no tree clearing anticipated for project

MnDNR Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS)



- NHIS provides info on MN's rare plants, animals, native plant communities, and other rare features.
- Internally ran NHIS data for Project area and 1-mi buffer in December, 2023
  - No historical records of rare plants or animals
- Project will request a formal environmental review from MnDNR as a next step

2023 Raptor Nest Survey



Methods

- March 8, 2023 in accordance USFWS guidelines
- Ground-based survey from public roads
- All raptor and eagle nests within Project area and 0.25-mi buffer

Results

- No raptor nests were observed within the Project area or the 0.25-mile buffer

Response/Next Steps

- Minimal nesting habitat in Project area, low risk of impact
- Conduct an additional raptor nest survey prior to construction to ensure regulatory compliance

Next Steps

- Develop vegetation management plan for Project
- Work with agencies as needed on siting of facilities

Apex Goals

- Bring well-sited, low impact project to operations
- Avoid and minimize impacts
- Address identified risk issues to ensure regulatory compliance

APEX CLEAN ENERGY

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