

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed improvements to Trunk Highway (Highway) 371 are considered a Federal Class I Action because of its potential for significant impacts on the natural and physical environment. Therefore, this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared to discuss the environmental impacts of this proposed Class I action. This Draft EIS discusses all reasonable alternatives and summarizes the results of all studies, reviews, consultation, and coordination conducted on the potential environmental impacts of the action and alternatives. A Final EIS will be prepared following the selection of the preferred alternative. The Final EIS will describe environmental impacts in more detail and mitigation commitments for the preferred alternative.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) proposes improvements to Highway 371 from Crow Wing County Road 18 in the City of Nisswa to Cass County Road 42 in the City of Pine River. The improvements include the construction of a four-lane divided highway with access control and service roads to serve existing developments. The total length of the project corridor is approximately 16 miles (Figure 1).

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE HIGHWAY 371 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The purpose of this Draft EIS is to identify a preferred alternative for a transportation system improvement designed to solve critical travel safety and capacity problems. Identified transportation needs include:

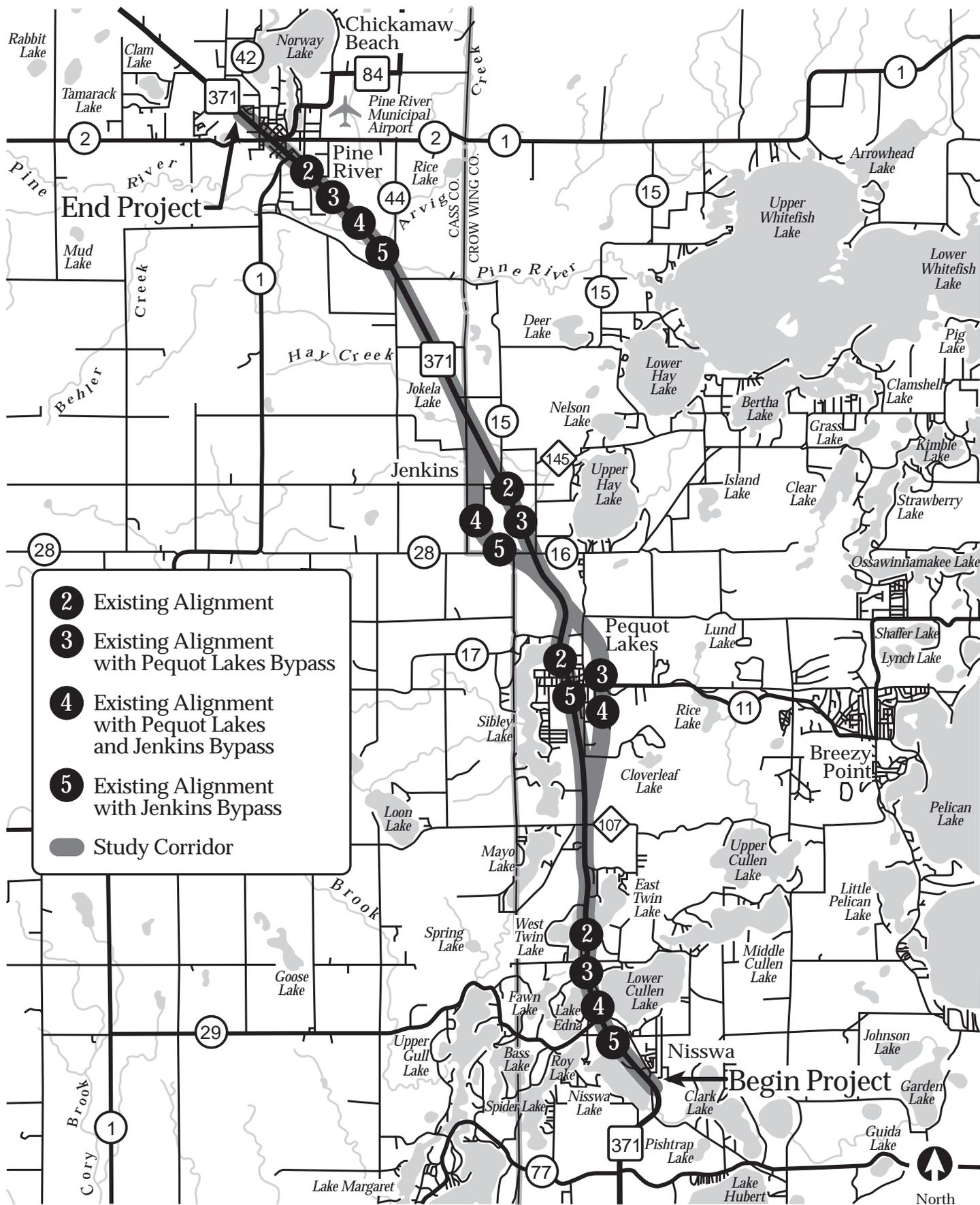
- Improve safety
- Reduce congestion
- Correct design deficiencies

1.2 ALTERNATIVES

As a result of the analysis and screening efforts conducted to date, the number of potentially feasible and prudent alternatives for improving Highway 371 and meeting the stated purpose and need objectives (Section 2.0) has been refined to include the options illustrated in Figure 1 and listed below.

- Alternative 1 – No-Build Alternative
- Alternative 2 – Existing Alignment
- Alternative 3 – Existing Alignment with a Pequot Lakes Bypass
- Alternative 4 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes and Jenkins Bypasses
- Alternative 5 – Existing Alignment with a Jenkins Bypass

These alternatives are described in detail in Section 3.3.



Highway 371 North Improvement Project
Draft EIS

Figure 1
Project Location
and Alternatives

1.3 PROJECT COST AND FUNDING SOURCE

Construction of the Highway 371 North Improvement Project will be funded from both federal and state resources. It is anticipated that federal funds would be the primary source of funding (80 percent) with a 20 percent state match. Construction cost estimates for the build alternatives are presented in Table 1. These cost estimates are based on a standard cost per mile of construction for the year 2003.

**Table 1
Preliminary Cost Estimates (\$2003)**

Alternative	Construction Costs Without Interchanges¹ (\$ millions)	Construction Costs With Interchanges¹ (\$ millions)	Right of Way and Acquisition Costs (\$ millions)	Total Costs Without Interchange Construction² (\$ millions)	Total Costs With Interchange Construction (\$ millions)
Alternative 1	NA ³	NA ³	NA ³	NA ³	NA ³
Alternative 2	\$55,500,000	NA ⁴	\$9,800,000	\$65,300,000	\$65,300,000
Alternative 3	\$57,000,000	\$75,000,000	\$15,600,000	\$72,600,000	\$90,600,000
Alternative 4	\$58,000,000	\$77,000,000	\$16,200,000	\$74,200,000	\$93,200,000
Alternative 5	\$53,800,000	\$63,800,000	\$13,900,000	\$67,700,000	\$77,700,000

¹ Includes frontage roads, local road connections, trail relocation, and wetland mitigation estimates

² Includes right-of-way costs associated with interchanges, but not the construction costs of building interchanges.

³ There are no construction costs for the No-Build Alternative because no specific improvements have been identified.

⁴ There are no interchanges with Alternative 2.

1.4 POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL AFFECTS

A summary of the potential beneficial and adverse environmental effects associated with each alignment alternative is presented in Table 2. In many cases, the potential effects are common among one or more of the build alternatives because they share portions of the same alignment. Impacts shown on Table 2 are based on a preliminary right-of-way and/or construction limit. This assessment is intended to represent a worse case scenario in terms of potential impacts. Avoidance and minimization measures will be further applied during the detailed design of a single preferred alternative. For a complete description of the impacts shown in Table 2, the reader is encouraged to review Section 4.0 of this document.

**Table 2
Summary of Impacts by Alternative**

Subject	ALTERNATIVES				
	Alternative 1 (No-Build)	Alternative 2 – Existing Alignment	Alternative 3 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes Bypass	Alternative 4 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes & Jenkins Bypasses	Alternative 5 – Existing Alignment with Jenkins Bypass
Right-of Way/Relocation					
Total Number of Potential Takings	None	10	16	19	18
Potential Residential Takings	None	5	7	14	14
Potential Commercial Takings	None	5	9	5	4
Total R/W Required (acres)	None	166 acres	405 acres	416 acres	280 acres
Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positively, Alternative 1 maintains the existing alignment and provides for the retention of all businesses. Adversely, the No-build would not address the congestion and safety issues, which would affect the local and regional economies. Access to businesses would be adversely affected as traffic volumes continue to grow making it more difficult to turn on and off highway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several of the businesses located along the existing alignment are highway commercial businesses (not destination-oriented) and rely heavily on the ability to capture revenue from drive-by traffic. Alternative 2 holds the greatest potential for benefits to existing highway commercial businesses. Positively, Alternative 2 will reduce congestion, which will enhance the regional economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficial regional economic effects as mobility and connectivity of regional trade centers are improved. The through traffic that currently passes through Pequot Lakes would have the option of bypassing the community and could adversely affect highway commercial businesses. Potential for initial property tax loss; however, this would likely be offset through increased land value after the roadway improvement is made and relocations occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same beneficial regional effects as Alternative 3. Potential adverse effects on local highway commercial businesses in Pequot Lakes (same as Alternative 3) and Jenkins. Same property tax and value effects for Pequot Lakes and Jenkins as described under Alternative 3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The through traffic that currently passes through Jenkins would have the option of bypassing the community and could adversely affect highway commercial businesses. Therefore, the potential adverse effects on highway commercial businesses in Jenkins are the same as discussed under Alternative 4. Same property tax and value effects for Jenkins as described under Alternative 4.
Benefit-Cost Analysis	• N/A	• Benefit-Cost Ratio: 3.7	• Benefit-Cost Ratio: 2.5	• Benefit-Cost Ratio: 2.4	• Benefit-Cost Ratio: 3.0
Social and Community Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct impact. Indirect effects include decreased access and extended travel time between homes and community resources due to higher levels of congestion on the highway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially have a direct effect on the community cohesion for Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Jenkins, and Pine River since the highway corridor bisects the developed portions of these communities Potentially affect several churches, parks, and other community resources. A four-lane divided highway would enhance pedestrian safety by creating a refuge between the northbound and southbound travel lanes, allowing pedestrians the opportunity to cross one direction of travel at a time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 3 would minimize community cohesion impacts in downtown Pequot Lakes. Potentially affect several churches, parks, and other community resources. Pedestrian mobility and local circulation would be improved by moving the peak traffic volumes out of the downtown district. Pedestrian safety would be enhanced as described under Alternative 2. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 4 would minimize community cohesion impacts in Pequot Lakes and Jenkins. Same beneficial and adverse impacts as described under Alternative 3 except the bypass of Jenkins would move the highway further away from the Jenkins City Park. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 5 would minimize community cohesion impacts in Jenkins. Same beneficial and adverse impacts as described under Alternative 4.
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population growth and developments are anticipated to grow regardless of the highway project. With limited access control along the existing highway, continued linear commercial development along the highway will occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially affect existing land uses through the expansion of right-of-way acquisition and changes in access. Additional development in the project area is anticipated to grow. However, highway construction by itself does not cause new development if there are not market forces that support new development and changes in land use. The proposed action is consistent with the Highway 371 Transportation and Land Use Plan, the Crow Wing County Comprehensive Plan, and the Cass County Comprehensive Plan. 			

Table 2, Summary of Impacts (continued)

SUBJECT	ALTERNATIVES				
	Alternative 1 (No-Build)	Alternative 2 – Existing Alignment	Alternative 3 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes Bypass	Alternative 4 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes & Jenkins Bypasses	Alternative 5 – Existing Alignment with Jenkins Bypass
Park and Recreational Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct impacts. Existing conditions of direct discharge of runoff to water resources would remain unchanged. Indirect effects could be decreased access and extended travel time to recreational resources due to high levels of congestion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Runoff controls and BMPs would benefit water quality and long-term recreational uses of these water resources for all build alternatives. Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 will impact the Paul Bunyan Trail. Alternatives 2 and 5 would directly and indirectly impact Bobberland Park in Pequot Lakes. Indirect impacts would involve the widening of the highway into green space that is within the existing Mn/DOT right-of-way. This space would become utilized for the transportation improvement, but no parkland would be acquired as a result of the proposed improvements. Direct impacts would involve increase noise levels and potential changes in access to the park. 			
Pedestrian and Bicycle Movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No substantial change to pedestrian and bicycle movements from the existing conditions. An increase in congestion and a further deterioration of highway safety may lead to further safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists in the project area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly impacts the Paul Bunyan Trail due to the right-of-way needs of a four-lane highway and the constraints of adjacent natural and built environmental features. A four-lane divided highway provides a refuge for pedestrians/bicyclists crossing the highway and allows them the opportunity to cross one direction of traffic at a time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Same adverse and beneficial impacts as described under Alternative 2. Removal of the highway through downtown Pequot Lakes would improve bicycle/pedestrian mobility and safety through downtown by reducing the peak traffic volumes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 4 would have the same adverse and beneficial impacts as described under alternative 2 and 3. Removal of the highway through downtown Jenkins would provide the same types of improvements as discussed for Pequot Lakes under Alternative 3. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 5 would have the same adverse and beneficial impacts as described under alternatives 2 and 4. Removal of the highway through downtown Jenkins would provide the same types of improvements as discussed for Pequot Lakes under Alternative 3.
Environmental Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project will not result in disproportionately high or adverse effects to minority populations or low-income populations since there are no readily identifiable groups within close geographic proximity of the project corridor. This is true for the No-Build Alternative and the build alternatives (Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5). 				
Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adversely affect transit service, specifically travel times, because higher levels of traffic congestion throughout the corridor will further impede traffic flow through the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved traffic operations would result in an improvement in transit travel times on routes that use roadways within the project area. Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 will make longer transit trips more efficient since these alternatives bypass the urban areas of Pequot Lakes and Jenkins. All of the build alternatives will improve single occupant vehicle travel times so the improvements are not likely to increase transit ridership directly 			
Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct impacts on existing utilities. 	Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 will potentially impact utilities and may require the relocation and disruption of some local and regional utility services. No one alternative appears to have a greater potential for impacting utility lines.			
Secondary and Cumulative Effects Effects are anticipated throughout the project area; therefore, impacts among Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 would be similar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued development, potential water quality impacts and economic impacts would still occur. No opportunity for mitigation that could avoid or minimize effects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for cumulative and secondary impacts exists in issue areas related to land consumption; land development, agricultural land, wetlands, water quality, vegetation, and wildlife. These potential impacts are typically considered through local and county comprehensive planning efforts and can be avoided and/or minimized through land use controls and roadway access restrictions. In the context of the existing regulatory framework and the mitigation activities for project impacts, the overall cumulative effects to natural resources are expected to be minimal. 			

Table 2, Summary of Impacts (continued)

SUBJECT	ALTERNATIVES				
	Alternative 1 (No-Build)	Alternative 2 – Existing Alignment	Alternative 3 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes Bypass	Alternative 4 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes & Jenkins Bypasses	Alternative 5 – Existing Alignment with Jenkins Bypass
Architectural/Historic and Archaeological Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No physical effect on any National Register eligible or listed properties. However, continued congestion may have negative effects on the value, economic viability, and setting of adjacent historic properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly impact the Pine River Depot with physical, audible, and visual impacts. Directly impact the Brainerd and Northern Minnesota Railway Corridor with physical impacts. The Molstad property may be audibly impacted. The Drew Cabin complex may be audibly and visually impacted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly impact the Pine River Depot with physical, audible, and visual impacts. Directly impact the Brainerd and Northern Minnesota Railway Corridor with physical impacts. The Molstad property may be audibly impacted. The Drew Cabin complex may be audibly and visually impacted. Pequot Fire Lookout Tower may be audibly impacted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly impact the Pine River Depot with physical, audible, and visual impacts. Directly impact the Brainerd and Northern Minnesota Railway Corridor with physical impacts. The Molstad property may be audibly impacted. The Drew Cabin complex may be audibly and visually impacted. Pequot Fire Lookout Tower may be audibly impacted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directly impact the Pine River Depot with physical, audible, and visual impacts. Directly impact the Brainerd and Northern Minnesota Railway Corridor with physical impacts. The Molstad property may be audibly impacted. The Drew Cabin complex may be audibly and visually impacted.
Contaminated Properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The No-Build Alternative would have no direct impacts on existing contaminated properties. Remaining sites may affect groundwater over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 2 could potentially affect 61 sites categorized as having a medium or high risk for contamination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar impacts as described under Alternative 2 except Alternative 3 would potentially impact 42 medium or high risk sites. 19 sites located in downtown Pequot Lakes would be avoided. Additional sites on the Pequot Lakes bypass alignment may be encountered that were not identified in the Phase I ESA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar impacts as described under Alternative 2 except Alternative 4 would potentially impact 35 medium or high risk sites. 26 sites located in downtown Pequot Lakes and Jenkins would be avoided. Additional sites on the bypass alignments may be encountered that were not identified in the Phase I ESA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similar impacts as described under Alternative 2 except Alternative 5 would potentially impact 54 medium or high risk sites. 7 sites located in downtown Jenkins would be avoided. Additional sites on the bypass alignment may be encountered that were not identified in the Phase I ESA.
Air Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project is not located in an area in which conformity requirements apply, and the scope of the project does not indicate that air quality impacts would be expected. The build alternatives would improve traffic operations, which would reduce the amount of time vehicles wait idling in heavily congested conditions and at cross street intersections waiting to access or cross the highway. 				
Noise Residential sites that potentially have noise affects greater than state standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 120 residential parcels exceed daytime standard. 195 residential units exceed nighttime standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 135 residential parcels exceed daytime standard. 295 residential units exceed nighttime standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 136 residential parcels exceed daytime standard. 251 residential units exceed nighttime standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 136 residential parcels exceed daytime standard. 259 residential units exceed nighttime standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 141 residential parcels exceed daytime standard. 311 residential units exceed nighttime standard.
Water Quality and Surface Water Drainage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative 1 would result in no increase of impervious surface. Water quality conditions may deteriorate as untreated runoff directly discharges to receiving water bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases in impervious surface resulting from the expanded roadway would increase the amount and velocity of run off. Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 provide an opportunity to collect, hold and treat run off. Most of the runoff from the expanded roadway would be directed to grassed medians, roadside ditches, or storm water treatment ponds. 			
Floodplains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change from existing conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 potentially affect two crossings of the Pine River, Nisswa Creek and Hay Creek. Alternatives 4 and 5 would have similar floodplain impacts as Alternatives 2 and 3 except for a new crossing of the Hay Creek floodplain. 			
Geology/Groundwater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change from existing conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct effects to geology and/or groundwater. Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 all include improvements located within two designated Wellhead Protection Areas for the City of Pine River wells. However, the improvements are not anticipated to create adverse effects on any public water supply system. 			
Wetlands (Based on preliminary construction limit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct wetland impacts. 	Approximately 22.28 acres.	Approximately 26.87 acres.	Approximately 27.87 acres.	Approximately 29.07 acres.

Table 2, Summary of Impacts (continued)

SUBJECT	ALTERNATIVES				
	Alternative 1 (No-Build)	Alternative 2 – Existing Alignment	Alternative 3 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes Bypass	Alternative 4 – Existing Alignment with Pequot Lakes & Jenkins Bypasses	Alternative 5 – Existing Alignment with Jenkins Bypass
Vegetation (Based on preliminary construction limit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No substantial change from existing conditions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no state or national forests, large tree farms, or other unique vegetative features that are potentially affected by Alternatives 2, 3, 4, or 5. An old growth stand of conifers referenced in the MNDNR Natural Heritage Information System database located on the southwest side of the City of Pine River is not affected by the proposed build alternatives. 			
Fish & Wildlife Habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No benefits gained to fish habitats by water quality treatment applications that currently do not exist. No impacts to sensitive wildlife or their critical habitats are anticipated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing fish passage in Niswaa Creek and the Pine River will be maintained. No in-lake fish habitat impacts are expected due to dredge and fill activities from the build alternatives. There are no MNDNR Designated Trout Streams crossed or within close proximity of the build alternatives. No designated state Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), Scientific & Natural Areas (SNAs), MNDNR designated Shallow Game Lakes, federal National Wildlife Refuges (NWR), or Waterfowl Production Areas (WPAs) are within the vicinity of or potentially affected by the build alternatives. There are no known wildlife concentrations (i.e., wintering deer yards), colonial nesting bird colonies or rookeries, or other unique wildlife resources within the vicinity of Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5. 			
State/Federal Threatened & Endangered (T & E) Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct effects on state/federal T & E species. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MNDNR Natural Heritage database shows 28 State and Federally listed T & E species occurrences within a one-mile radius of the project area. However, only one State and Federal listed T & E occurrences (an active bald eagle nest) is potentially affected by the build alternatives. Effects on the nest area are being minimized by locating all proposed construction/expansion activities to the opposite side of the nesting area. 			
Prime and/or Statewide Important Farmlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The No-Build Alternative would have no effects on prime, unique, or statewide important farmland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two statewide important farmland (731 Sanborn loamy sand, 0-3%) locations would be encountered along Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5. Both occurrences are found within Cass County where the four build alternatives share the same alignment. There is the potential of 7.3 acres of state important farmland being converted to a transportation use. No Prime or Unique farmlands would be encountered. 			
Visual Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal adverse/beneficial effects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the proposed build alternatives will have an effect on the existing visual scene and resources for both travelers and neighbors. The proposed highway improvements will require additional pavement and clearing of some natural areas. Improvements along the corridor could also adversely and beneficially affect views of lakes, wetlands, and woods for the traveler, as well as neighbors residing in the project area. 			

1.5 PERMITS AND APPROVALS

It is anticipated that federal, state, and other local permits and approvals may be required for the proposed action. The following permits and approvals will likely be required for construction of the proposed action.

- Section 404 Permit – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and USFWS
- Section 401 Water Quality Certification – Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Public Waters Permit – Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR)
- Approval for Section 4(f) Property Conversion – FHWA
- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit – MPCA
- Section 106 Concurrence – State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- Wetland Conservation Act (WCA) Approval - Mn/DOT
- Municipal Approval – Cities of Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Jenkins, and Pine River
- Final EIS – FHWA (Federal Highway Administration) and Mn/DOT
- Adequacy Determination – Mn/DOT
- Record of Decision (ROD) – FHWA
- Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for Mitigation Measures – As Applicable
- Section 7 Consultation/Concurrence - USFWS

1.6 COORDINATION

Mn/DOT is committed to public and agency 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 this project.

The development and analysis of alternatives for this project was coordinated through the Highway 371 Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC was formed to establish a communication link with the affected communities and resource agencies. The committee represents a wide range of interests and will provide two-way communication between the agencies and groups they represent. Furthermore, the TAC will ensure community values/interests are being expressed. A complete list of members participating on the TAC is presented in Section 8.1 of this document.

Informational and coordination meetings have also been held with representatives from local, state, and federal agencies with approval and/or permit authority to discuss appropriate analysis methodology for different resource issues.

1.7 MAJOR PROPOSED ACTIONS BY OTHER AGENCIES

Currently, there are no major projects being proposed by other agencies within the Highway 371 project area. However, several potential projects mentioned through the public involvement project included an expanded industrial park in the City of Pequot Lakes and a sanitary sewer project between the City of Pine River and Pequot Lakes. It is Mn/DOT's understanding that these projects are merely ideas at this time and no project development actions have taken place at this time.

1.8 UNRESOLVED OR CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Section 8 provides a description of the public and agency coordination that has occurred during the development of this Draft EIS. Among the concerns of the agencies were impacts to the Paul Bunyan Trail and to area water resources. Other issues discussed with the public included potential economic impacts of the community bypass alternatives, access concerns, and potential noise impacts.