



## SITE-SPECIFIC MANAGEMENT SHEET TIER-3 RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROPERTY

**Property Name:** Romance Prairie

**Property Designation or Type:** State Natural Area

**SNA Designation Number:** 418

**Property Location:** Vernon County

**Real Estate:**

Project boundary acreage: 77

Fee acres owned: 77

DNR Easement acres: 2 (access), File #NA-869E

Federal aid interest: None

Land use agreements: None

Dedication(s): None

**Maps**

- A. Project Boundary
  - B. Existing Cover Types
  - C. Existing Roads and Infrastructure
- 

**Property Manager:** **Armund Bartz, Driftless Area Ecologist**

3550 Mormon Coulee Rd

La Crosse, WI 54601

608-785-9019

Prepared By (District Ecologist):

Name: Armund Bartz

Title: Conservation Biologist

Date: 4/28/2016

Reviewed/Approved By: (Bureau)

Name: Erin Crain-Sullivan

Title: Deputy Division Administrator Fish, Wildlife, & Parks      Date: 4/28/2016

Approved by Natural Resources Board: Date: May 25, 2016

## A. Regional and Property Assessment

1. **General Property Description:** Romance Prairie features a small, dry prairie and restorable oak savanna situated on a steep southwest-facing slope overlooking the town of Romance and Cox Creek. The thin, rocky soil supports an excellent variety of dry prairie species with side-oats grama being the dominant grass species. Red cedar and other woody species have invaded the prairie due to fire suppression. Exposures of limestone can be found near the summit of the slope, with sandstone exposed below. Dominant trees found on the wooded hillside include red oak and white oak with slippery elm, black cherry, and black walnut. The understory is dominated by gooseberry and hazelnut. At the base of the hill on the northwest side of the property are wooded seeps and an oxbow pond that was once part of the North Fork of the Bad Axe River.
2. **Ecological Landscape:** [Western Coulee and Ridges Ecological Landscape](#) is characterized by its highly eroded, unglaciated topography with steep sided valleys and ridges, high gradient headwaters streams, and large rivers with extensive, complex floodplains and terraces. It offers the best opportunities in the state to maintain many of southern Wisconsin's natural communities. Many rare species have been documented here due to the diversity, scale, types, condition and context of the natural communities present.
3. **Ownership and Adjacent Land Uses:** Includes a state highway, old field, forested uplands, grazed wetlands, Bad Axe River (partially protected by WDNR through Streambank Protection Program easement), agricultural lands, and farm buildings.
4. **Property Management Issues, Trends and Needs:**

Invasives: common buckthorn and some bush honeysuckle on the prairie

Invasives control history: red cedar, buckthorn and other shrubs were cut off the prairie in about 2005. This effort was incomplete and needs follow-up.

Forestry/Silviculture: Opportunities exist to conduct commercial timber harvests to help reach ecological goals of the property.

Prescribed Burning: An intensive prescribed fire regime will be needed to help reach ecological goals of the property for both the woodland and the dry prairie.

Prescribed burn history: The prairie was burned on February 6, 2009.

5. **Facility/Amenity development:**
  - a. Existing: none
  - b. Future: none
6. **Endangered, Threatened, Special Concern Species or Habitats, and wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need:** One state endangered and 5 state species of special concern are known from the general area. For detailed data, see Appendix A.
7. **Conservation Opportunity Area:** Rush Creek (11.12)
8. **Easements:** Two-acre ingress and egress easement (labeled "roads-maintenance/service" under "Infrastructure") is for management purposes only (Map C).
9. **Land use Agreements:** None.
10. **Significant Cultural and Archaeological Features:** SNAs may contain historic Native American or Euro-American sites. Activities with potential to disturb archaeological sites will only be undertaken after consultation with the DNR Archaeologist. Any sites with cultural or historical value will be managed in accordance with guidance and statutory requirements (see ss. 44.40 and DNR Manual Code 1810.10). More details can be found in Appendix B.
11. **Refuges and other Closed Areas:** None.
12. **Primary Public Use:** Recreational uses such as hiking, fishing, cross country skiing, hunting, trapping, scientific research, wild edibles collection, and wildlife viewing are allowed. Reference the [State Natural Areas Visitation Guidelines webpage](#) and the [property's specific webpage](#) for more information.
13. **Biotic Inventory Needs:** Currently no plant or vertebrate inventory needs have been identified beyond normal monitoring through established SNA Site Inspection protocol. There is, however, a lack of knowledge regarding prairie dependent invertebrate diversity and potential impacts to these species through management techniques such as prescribed fire, mowing, and grazing. Research is needed to help determine both the diversity of invertebrates at these remnant sites and especially the

impacts of management techniques. The Department acknowledges this and is moving forward with research to address this to help improve management outcomes for these species.

## **B. Property Purpose and Goals/ Management Objectives and Prescriptions**

### **1. Property Purpose and Goals**

- a. **Purpose:** The purpose of the State Natural Areas (SNA) Program is to protect outstanding examples of Wisconsin's native landscape of natural communities, significant geological formations and archeological sites. Natural areas are valuable for research and educational use, the preservation of genetic and biological diversity, and for providing ecological benchmarks for determining the impact of use on managed lands. They also provide habitat for numerous rare plants and animals.
- b. **Goal:** Manage the site as a reserve for dry prairie and oak savanna (oak opening and open oak woodland), and as an ecological reference area.

### **2. Management Objectives by Natural Community Type**

- a. Restore approximately 55 acres of open oak woodland, 5 acres of oak opening, and 5 acres of dry prairie remnant.
- b. Maintain a continuum of fire-dependent native communities from dry prairie and oak opening to oak woodland.
- c. Create overstory conditions that allow enough light to penetrate the canopy and reach the forest floor to stimulate light-dependent understory oak savanna species that are currently suppressed from inadequate light.
- d. Expand the size of remnant dry prairie openings to maintain conditions favorable to native prairie vegetation.
- e. Develop and maintain natural transitions between different plant communities. Reduce hard edges between different cover types.
- f. Increase the diversity and abundance of remnant dry prairie and oak savanna vegetation and associated animal species with emphasis on rare species.
- g. Maintain or increase existing populations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need.
- h. Restore and maintain oak savanna to provide long-term hard mast food sources and habitat for wildlife and game species such as white-tailed deer and wild turkeys.

- i. Expand the size of remnant dry prairie openings to provide thermal cover and an important late winter food source for white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, and other wildlife.
  - j. Prevent introduction of new invasive species, and ensure long-term limitation of the spread, reproduction and impact of existing invasive species.
  - k. Restore and maintain open areas around appropriate rock structures as an important habitat component for herptiles.
3. **Management Prescriptions by Natural Community Type**
- a. The ecological characteristics of the site will be primarily shaped by an intensive fire management program. Prescribed fire will be used to restore and maintain a continuum of fire-dependent upland communities from dry prairie and oak opening to oak woodland.
  - b. In the oak savanna the native dominant tree species (primarily oaks) are managed passively. However, some thinning of the canopy via timber harvest, as well as understory manipulation and shrub control via cutting, brushing, and herbicide application may be needed to mimic natural disturbance patterns.
  - c. Timber harvests will focus on removal of central and northern hardwood species and walnut (primarily non-oak and hickory species), some thinning of suppressed oak where dense patches occur (leaving largest diameter/crowned individuals), or where small-crowned individuals are shading open-grown, larger-crowned trees.
  - d. Retain ground juniper via refugia as an important habitat component for herptiles.
  - e. Retain snags as important habitat features, unless they conflict with other objectives (such as hazard trees near roads, or prescribed fire hazards).
  - f. In the dry prairies, the native species are managed primarily through tree/shrub control using cutting and brushing combined with herbicide application, and prescribed fire to mimic natural disturbance patterns. Occasional fire-tolerant native shrubs such as hazelnut may be retained at low densities.
  - g. Contain or eradicate invasive species through the use of department approved manual, chemical, biological, and mechanical practices and prescribed fire.
  - h. Leave unburned refugia for prairie remnant-dependent invertebrates within prescribed burn units.
  - i. Follow Incidental Take Protocols for listed species: <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/erreview/itgrasslands.html>

- j. Consider impacts to both reptiles and prairie invertebrates regarding both timing and ignition techniques of prescribed burns.
  - k. For additional guidance, see the Xeric Prairie, and Oak Savanna, State Natural Areas Management Guides (WDNR, 2010).
4. **Special Management Issues and/or constraints**
- a. Salvage of trees after a major wind event can occur if the volume of woody material inhibits fire prescriptions.
  - b. Access is allowed to suppress wildfires.
  - c. Roadside easement area may be managed sporadically by county.
  - d. Maintenance of existing facilities.
  - e. Augmentation of the ground layer after careful review and documentation would only add species that historically would have been found on the site, using seeds or plugs from local genetic material. Follow the steps below based on seed availability:
    1. Collect seed on-site, distribute to depauperate areas.
    2. Collect seed from remnant sites within 50 miles east/west and 25 miles north/ south.
    3. Purchase seed from local nurseries who can identify source location that meets the about criteria. Consult with NHC Botanist to ensure appropriateness of any nursery introductions.

**Table 1: Current Facilities or Infrastructure**

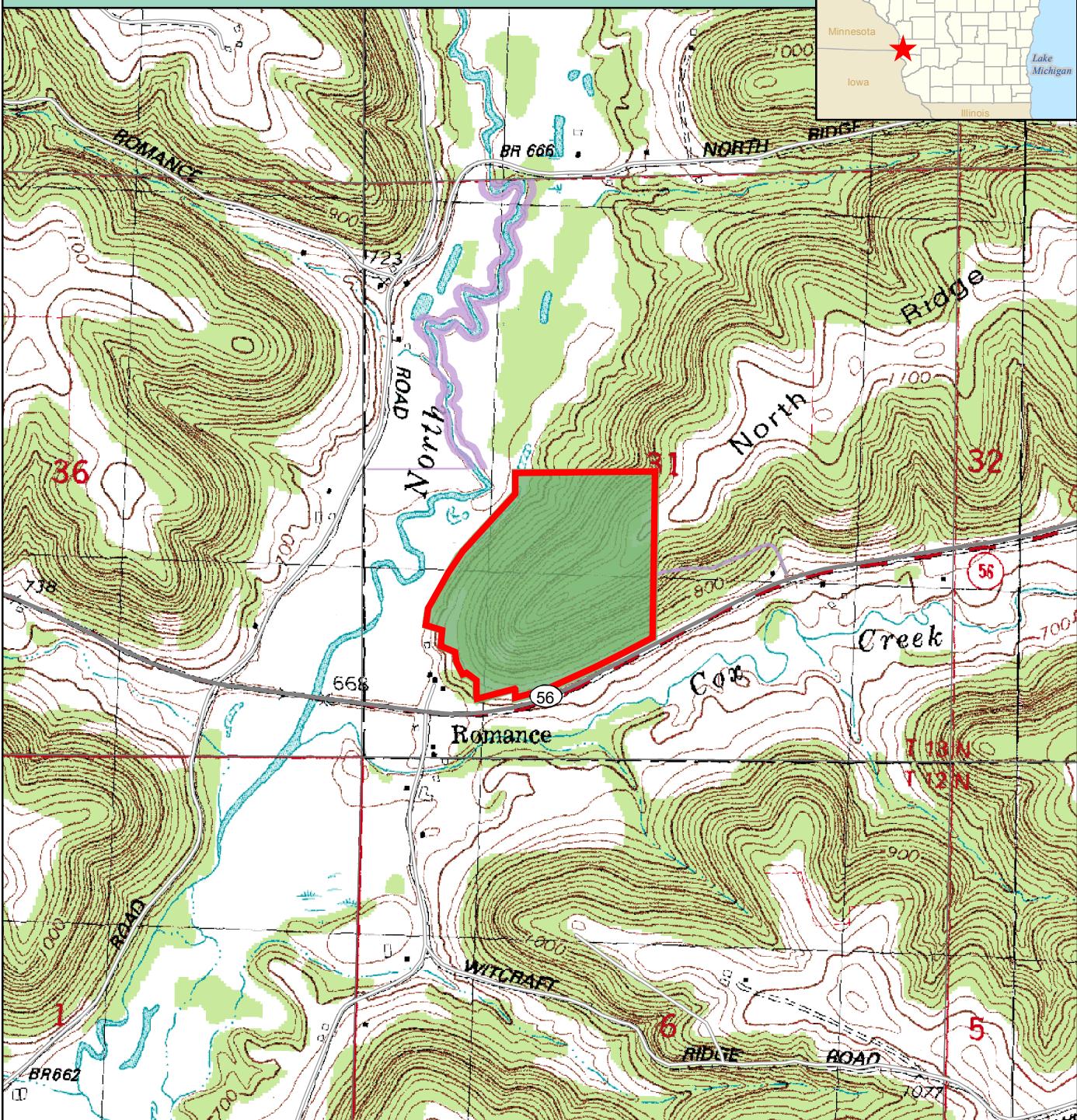
Type of Facility	Total (number/length)	Management Activities	Management Issues and Constraints
Roads – public	None		
Roads – maintenance/service	0.3 mi. (native surface)		
Parking lots	None		
Boat landings	None		
Designated trails	None		
Dikes, ditches	None		
Dams	None		
Other			

- C. **Additional Comments:** Road access easement is through private land and is for management purposes only.
- D. **Changes or Additions to Current Management and Development:**
  - 1. A carefully planned timber harvest (if viable) would improve community structure.

# Romance Prairie State Natural Area

## PROJECT BOUNDARY

N



  Project Boundary

  DNR Owned

  DNR Easement

  DNR Easement (Closed to public access)

0 0.15 0.3  
Miles

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES



Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation  
Jun 08, 2016

SNA Tier 3 dmh

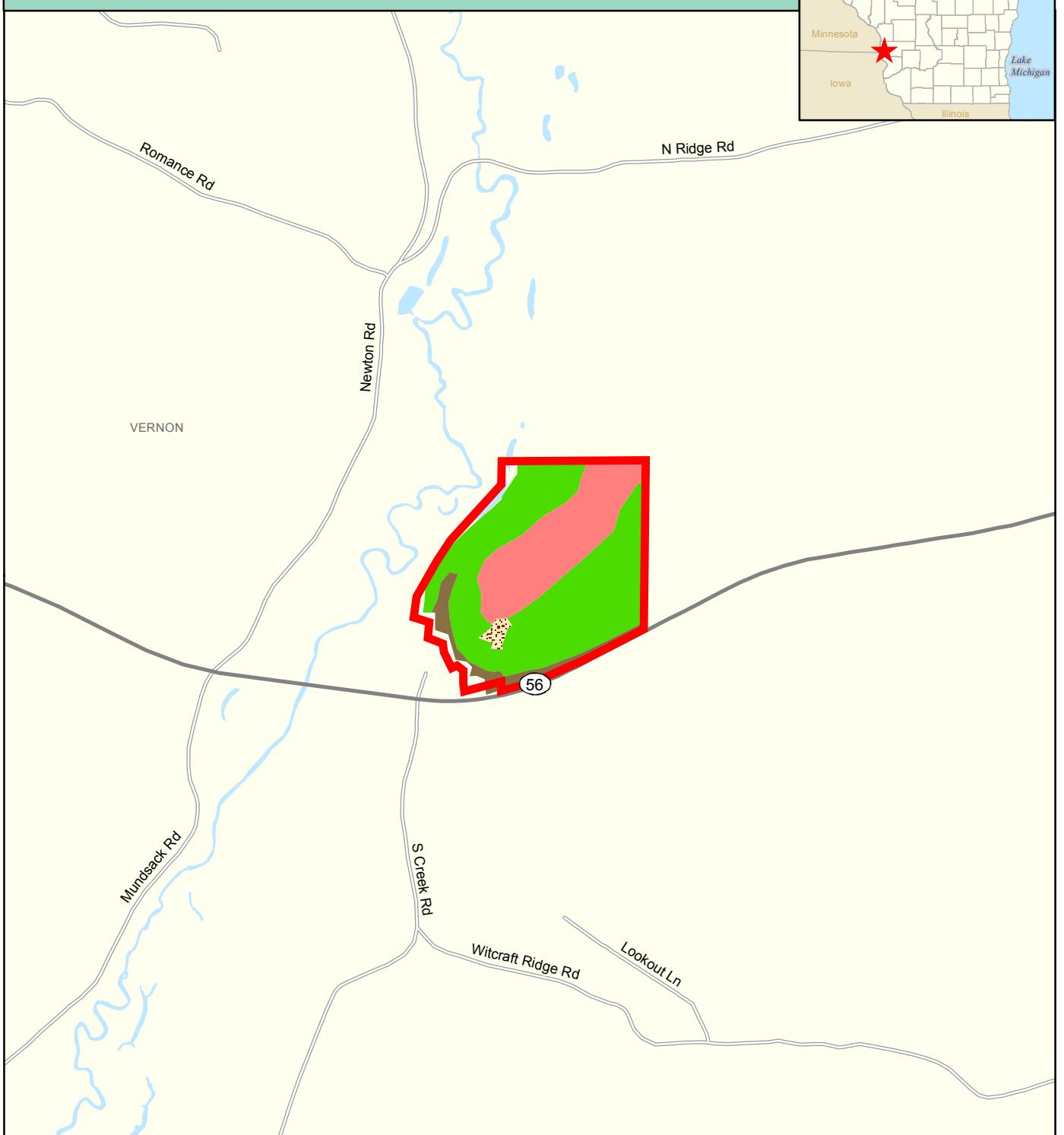
**MAP A**

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# Romance Prairie State Natural Area

## EXISTING COVER TYPES

N



Project Boundary



Upland Hardwood



Oak



Dry Prairie



Shrub

0 0.15 0.3  
Miles

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Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation  
May 26, 2016

SNA Tier 3 dmh

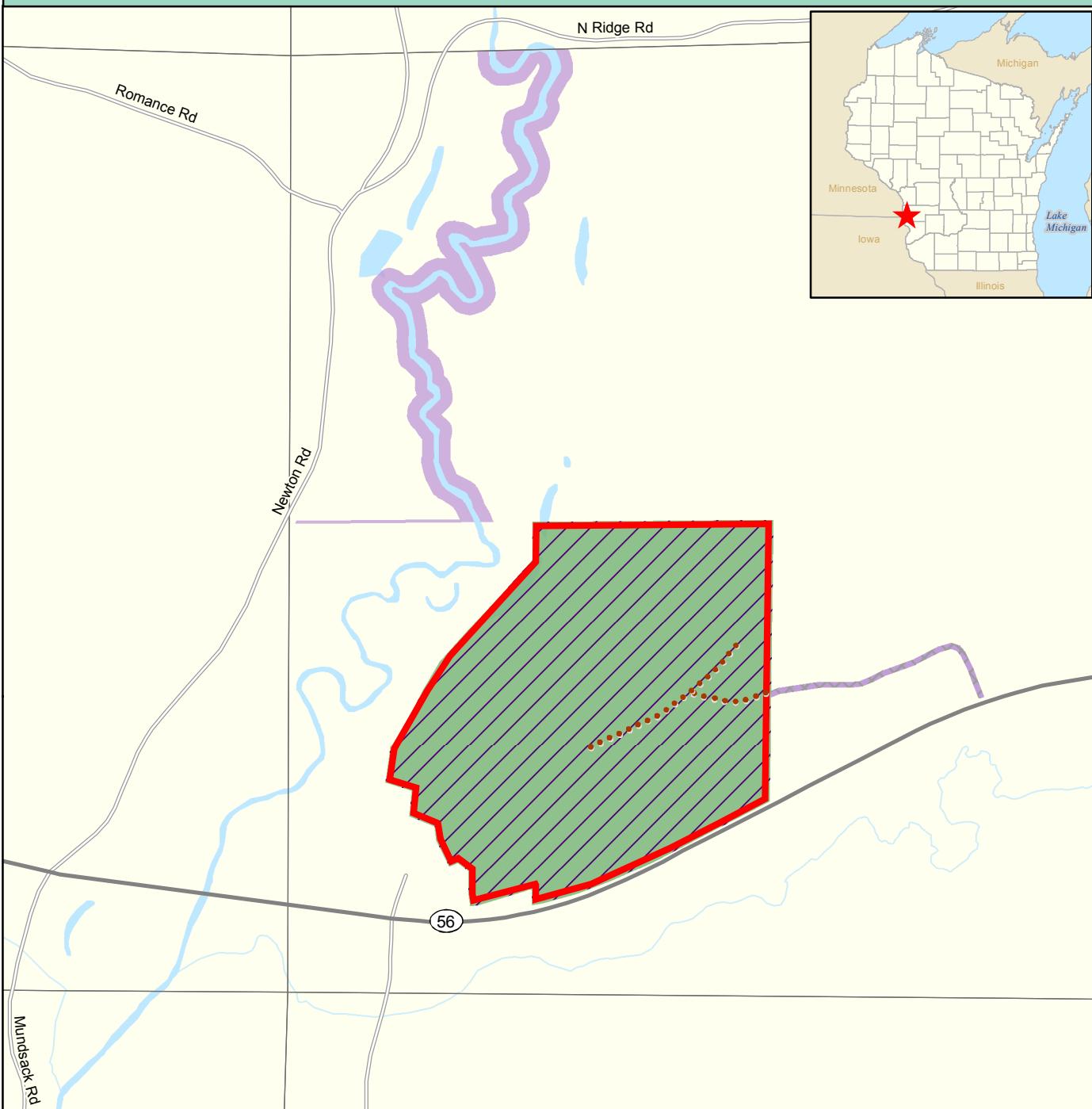
**MAP B**

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## Romance Prairie State Natural Area

# EXISTING ROADS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

N



Project Boundary

State Natural Area

DNR Owned

DNR Easement

DNR Easement (Closed to public access)

Primitive Road - closed to public use

0 0.1 0.2  
Miles

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May 26, 2016

SNA Tier 3 dmh

**MAP C**

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