Rice Lake Nature Area

Location: 4120 Bassett Creek Drive
Nature Area Size: 9.23 Acres

Description

The Rice Lake Nature Area is located along the north side of Bassett Creek Drive. The nature area is within a residential neighborhood, although the woods and wetland provide more seclusion than expected for a small urban nature area.

Access to the park is through a pedestrian bridge crossing of Bassett Creek, which flows from west to east. In this reach, Bassett Creek is within an incised channel and some bank erosion is present. The creek is bordered by mixed hardwood floodplain forest and hardwood swamp. Reed canary grass is present where there is sufficient clearing, but the understory can be sparse due to heavy shading. Tree removal would likely generate a flush of reed canary grass

Rice Lake Nature Area can be accessed by walking an aggregate path, and a boardwalk leading to a floating dock. South Rice Pond, sometimes referred to as Rice Lake, is a shallow basin, with a wide emergent marsh fringe. Small, shallow ponds and lakes like South Rice, are somewhat unique, as they are successionally proceeding from deeper open water to wetland. That natural process can be observed from the Rice Lake Nature Area, by observing the existing habitat and surrounding areas.

The Rice Lake Nature Area provides a unique opportunity to provide an unobstructed view of South Rice Pond. Because the park is dominated by wetland, access is limited to a raised trail and boardwalk.

Forest and Woodlands

The southern portion of the Rice Lake Nature Area is composed of a mixture of floodplain forest and hardwood swamp. The wooded areas include a high proportion of box elder trees, with a mix of silver maple, American elm, and green ash present.

Aquatic Resources

The Rice Lake Nature Area is within the floodplain of Bassett Creek and provides both floodway and flood storage functions that are critical to this part of the community.

Rice Lake Nature Area contains two primary aquatic features. The first is Bassett Creek, which is a connecting resource throughout the City of Golden Valley.

The second feature is South Rice Pond. South Rice does not have a fishery, as it likely freezes out on a regular basis. It does, however, support abundant waterfowl, as the habitat and isolated nature of the pond make ideal nesting habitat year round, and an important protected spot for layovers during spring and fall migration.

Wetlands

The majority of Rice Lake Nature Area is wetland, including hardwood swamp, wet meadow emergent marsh, and shallow open water. These wetlands show some signs of degradation, but are overall above average in quality, and when assessed collectively, provide a critical function for the lake and Bassett Creek, which is the receiving water from South Rice Pond.

The wetland complex surrounding open water is a diverse mixture of species, including several sedges. Pockets of high quality wetland vegetation are present.

Prairie and Grassland

Rice Lake Nature Area has no significant areas of prairie or grassland.

Invasive Species

Within the nature area, the woods include some buckthorn, but the majority is too wet to support large buckthorn populations.

In the wetlands, reed canary grass is dominant along the wooded transition, but declines in abundance as hydrology transitions from seasonal saturation to more permanent saturation and shallow inundation. Some areas of reed canary grass are thick, where it is the only species present. The survey data indicates a reduction in reed canary grass density, but this is likely a result of where the data were collected.

Purple loosestrife was not inventoried in 2003, but was likely present in low densities. In 2013 it comprised approximately 10% of the vegetative coverage in the shallow marsh habitat.

Table 5.17 Invasive Species Cover Percent Change 2003-2013			
Description	%Cover 2003	% Cover 2013	% Change
Common Buckthorn	30	25	-5

Reed Canary Grass	90	50	-40
Purple Loosestrife	n/a	10	n/a

Site Recommendations

Natural Resources

Restore/stabilize eroding Bassett Creek banks (high)
Within the Rice Lake Nature Area, there is some erosion and degradation of the Bassett Creek corridor, in part due to excessive shading and erosion causing steep and exposed slopes. Consideration of tree removal to allow more sunlight, in combination with reshaping of the channel to allow additional vegetation can be considered. Use of natural materials is preferred over armoring for this reach.

Enhance aquatic vegetation (medium)
Although there are large portions of the wetland that are dominated by reed canary grass, cattails, and purple loosestrife, there is an abundance of high quality native vegetation. Management of invasive species, and encouragement of the native species, could have a profound influence on the quality of the emergent vegetation around Rice Lake.

Manage buckthorn (low priority)
Buckthorn is not present throughout the nature area, but is a dominant component where it is present.

Amenities

A concept plan has been developed as part of the Sochacki Park/Mary Hills/Rice Lake Nature Area, which includes collaboration between Three Rivers Park District, the City of Robbinsdale and the City of Golden Valley. This plan should support the efforts of that collaboration.

Maintain access (high)
One of the primary deficiencies of the Rice Lake Nature Area is that it is dominated by wetland, which limits access. The area has a single crossing of Bassett Creek, and one trail leading to the floating dock on Rice Lake. These features are in need of repair to maintain the existing access. Repairs may be needed to the Bassett Creek span, resurfacing the existing earthen trail, and to even out the transition from the trail to the floating dock sections. If expanding accessibility to allow wheelchairs is desired, more significant changes would be required.

Update entry sign (high)
A new signs should be installed at main entrance using approved style type.

Install pet waste disposal system (high)
Rice Lake Nature Area should include waste disposal systems for their dogs; one at each main entry. This not only keeps the nature area clean, healthy and attractive.

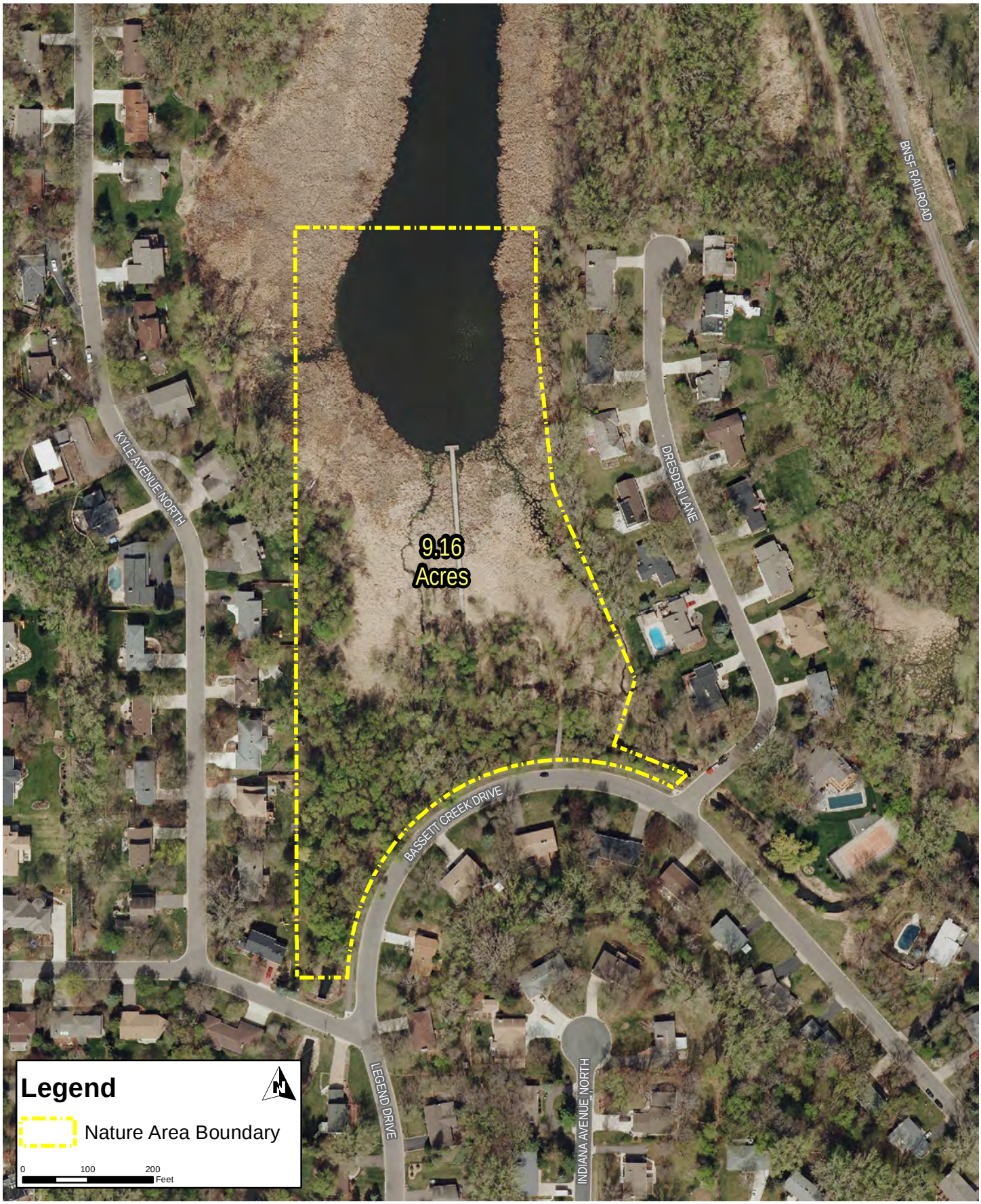
Install educational sign (low)
Rice Lake Nature Area provides a rich experience for wildlife habitat viewing. Provide education signs near the Bassett Creek bridge and one on the pond boardwalk.

Upgrade trash receptacle (low)
The trash receptacle is one of the first amenities viewed upon entering the nature area. As such, it should not only provide maintenance functionality and efficiency but should also be attractive and reflect the image of the both Rice Lake Nature Area.

Table 5.18 Rice Lake Nature Area Improvement Priorities

Priority	Management Type	Description	Action	Qty	Unit	Unit Cost	Cost Opinion
High	Bassett Creek Improvements	Erosion control	Restore/stabilize eroding streambanks	1	LS	$75,000	$75,000 (Possible BCWMC project)
Medium	Aquatic vegetation	Manage for invasive species, and establish a high quality native sedge meadow	Herbicide reed canary grass, cattails, and purple loosestrife	2	Acre	$10,000	$20,000
Low	Upland woods and hardwood swamp	Improve forest health, diversity	Remove undesirable trees, establish native woodland communities	2	Acre	$5,000	$10,000
High	Amenity	Improve physical access	Evaluate ped bridge crossing, resurface earthen trails, repair boardwalk transition	1	LS	$30,000	$30,000 (costs significantly greater if new bridge needed)
High	Amenity	Provide continuity of entry sign design through nature area system	Install new sign at entry	1	Each	$5,000	$5,000
High	Amenity	Provide dog walkers with pet waste disposal system at key access point	Install new pet waste disposal system	1	Each	$600	$600
Medium	Amenity	Provide natural resources education	Install interpretive sign	1	Each	$3,000	$3,000
Medium	Amenity	Provide continuity of bench design through nature area system	Install new benches at entry and on deck overlook	1	Each	$2,000	$2,000
Low	Amenity	Provide continuity of	Install new waste/	1	Each	$2,000	$2,000

		trash receptacle design throughout nature area system	recycle trash receptacle at entry				
Low	Amenity	Improve physical access	Consider canoe access	1	Each	$5,000	$5,000



Rice Lake Nature Area - 2012 Aerial

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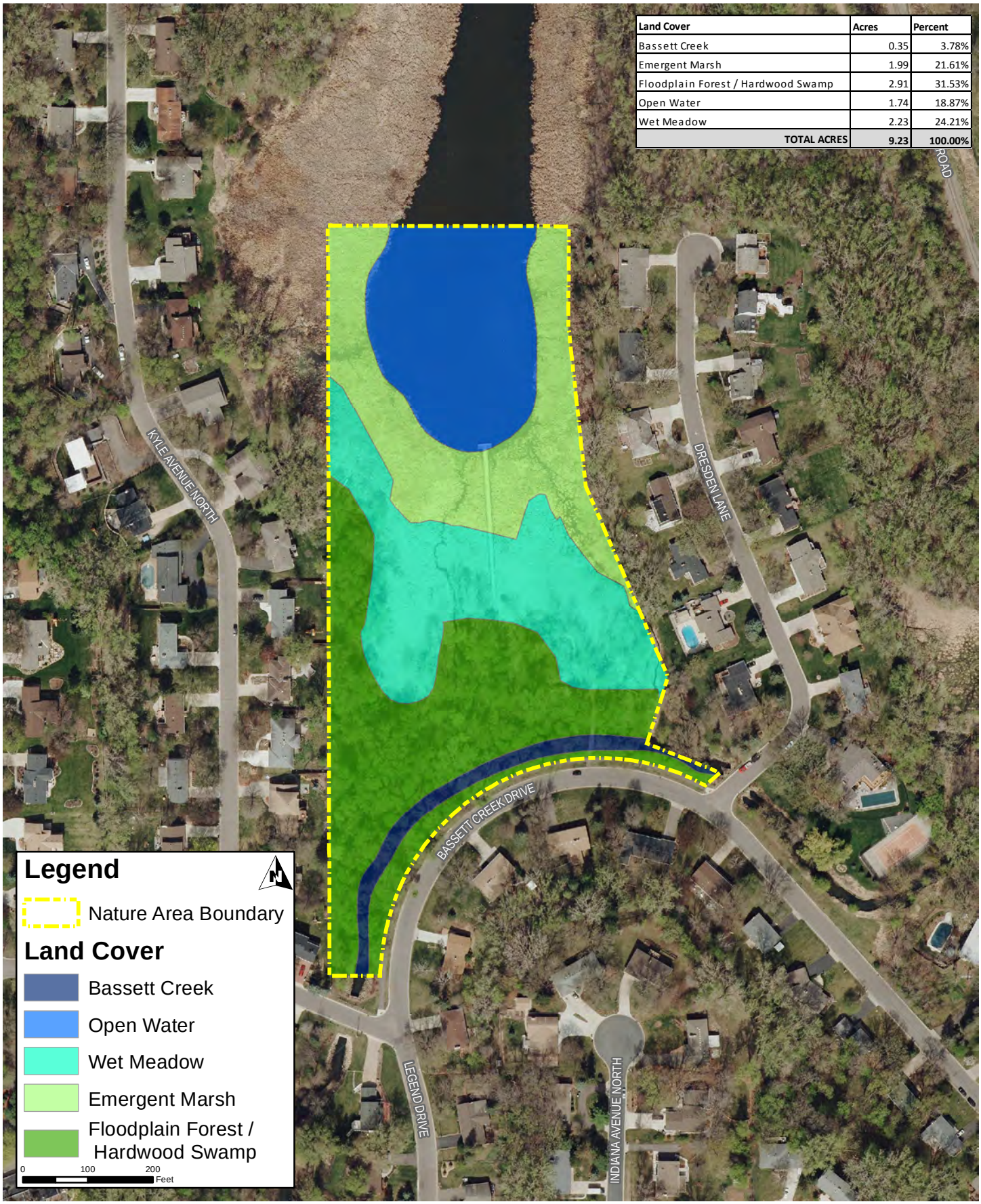
FIGURE 5.52



Land Cover	Acres	Percent
Bassett Creek	0.35	3.78%
Emergent Marsh	1.99	21.61%
Floodplain Forest / Hardwood Swamp	2.91	31.53%
Open Water	1.74	18.87%
Wet Meadow	2.23	24.21%
TOTAL ACRES	9.23	100.00%

Rice Lake Nature Area- Land Cover

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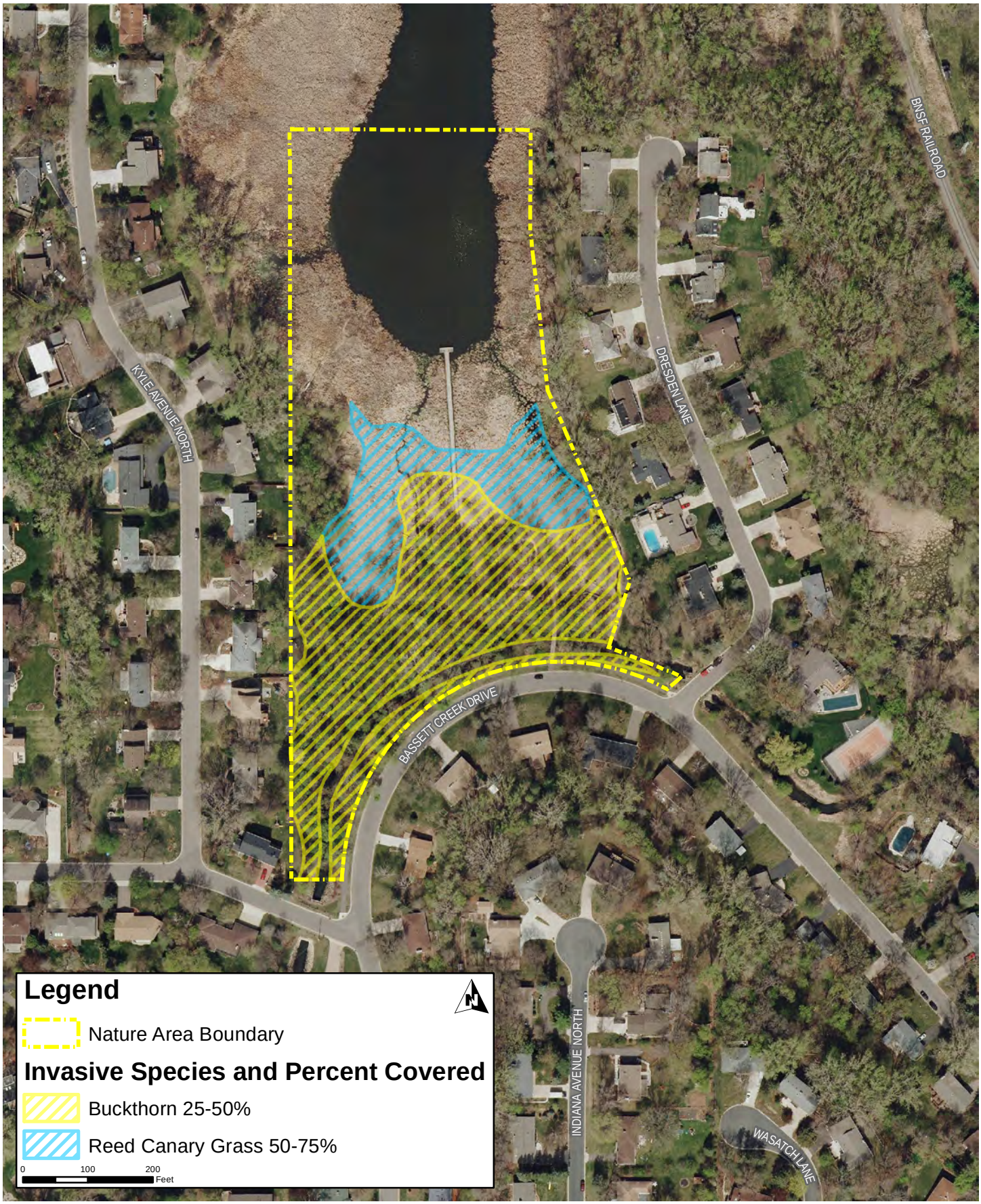
FIGURE 5.53



Rice Lake Nature Area- Invasive Species

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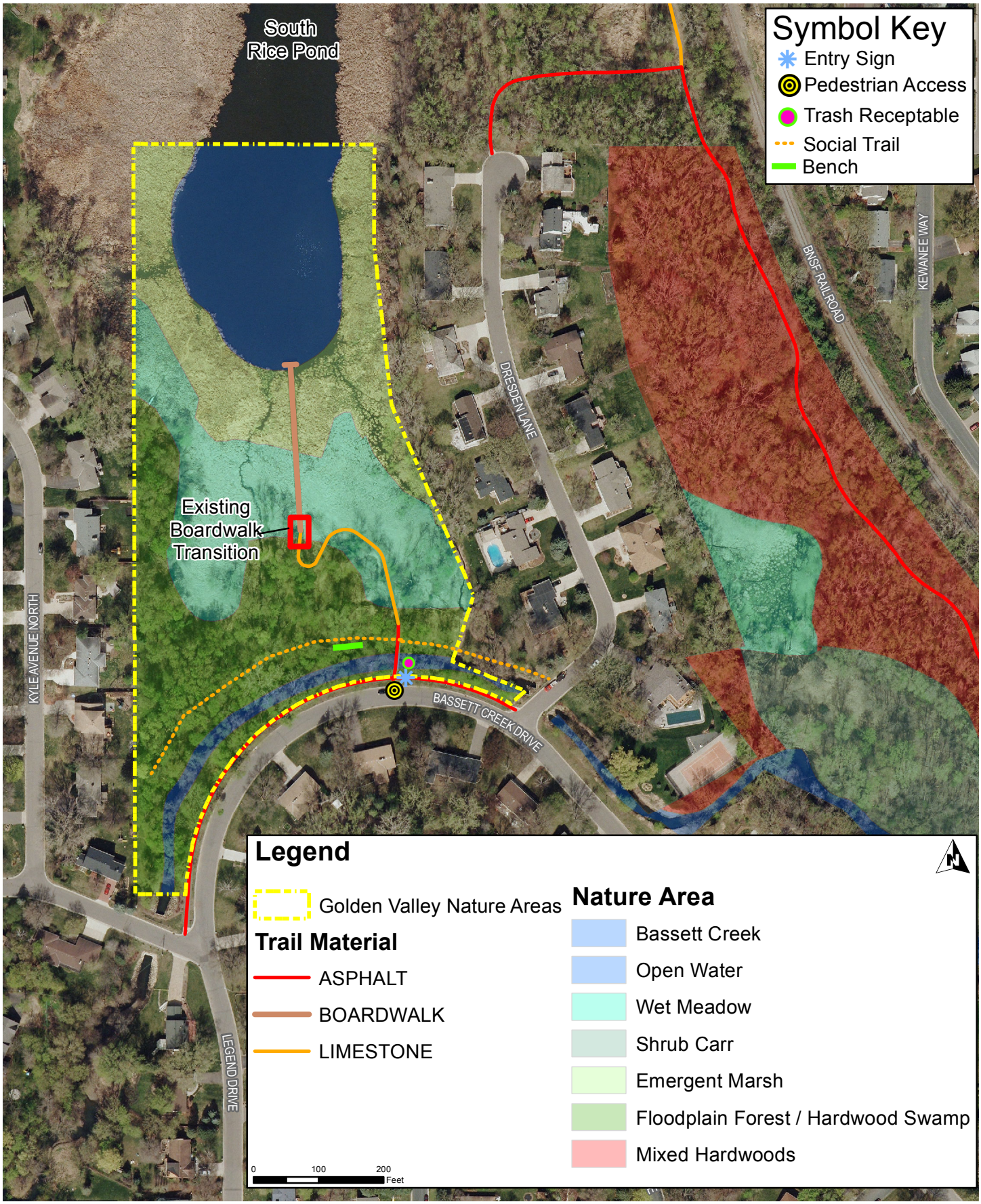
FIGURE 5.54



Rice Lake Nature Area- Existing Amenities
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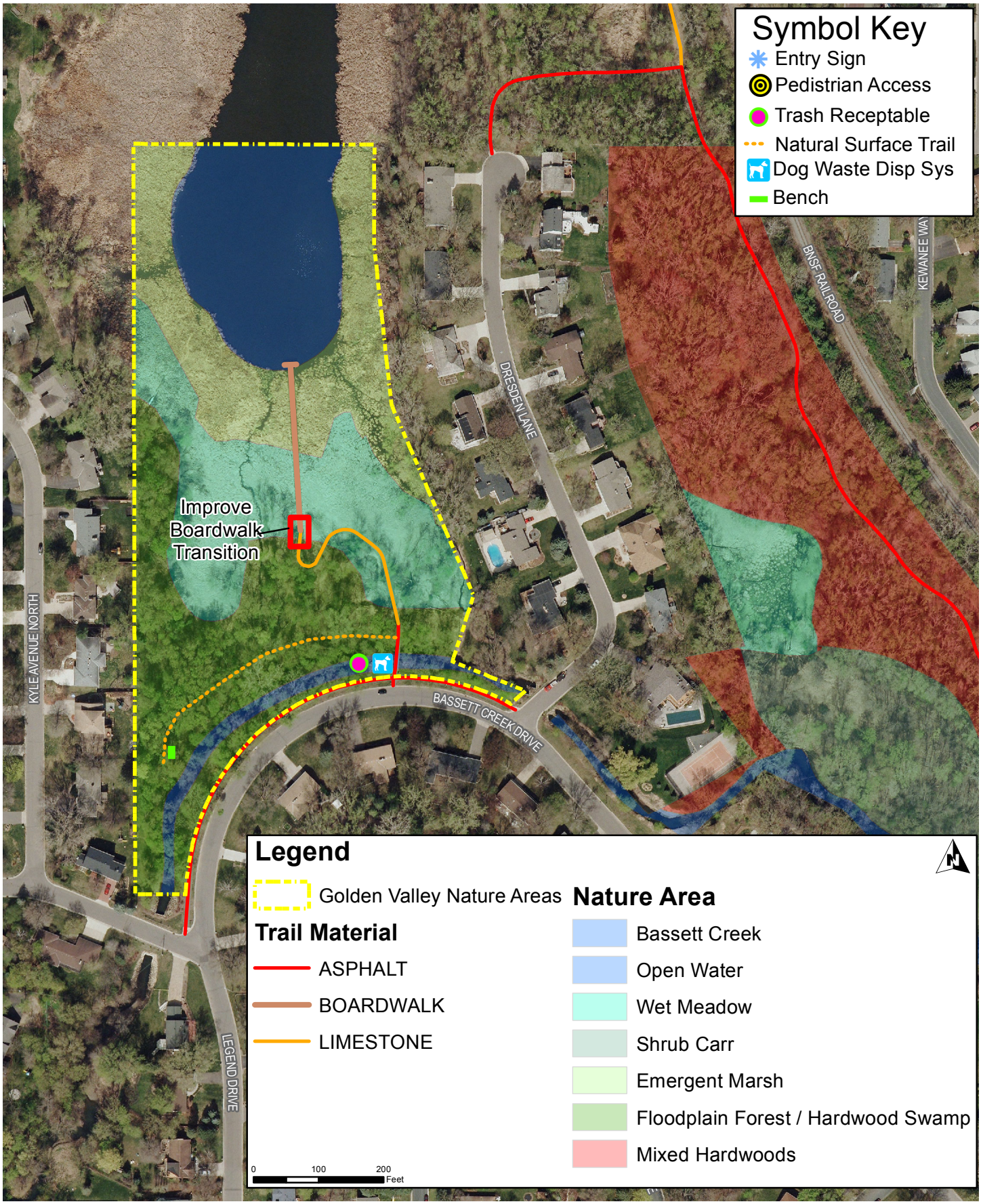
FIGURE 5.55



Rice Lake Nature Area- Concept Plan

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FIGURE 5.56

RICE LAKE
NATURE AREA
GOLDEN VALLEY