

# VESPR: Vision for an Ecologically Sound Platte River

PRRIP GC MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 15, 2021  
MELISSA MOSIER



Photo credit:  
Crane Trust  
Nebraskaland Magazine/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
Kirk Steffensen/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission  
Jonathan Nikkila/Nebraska Master Naturalist  
Jonathon Dankert/Nebraska Master Naturalist  
Neil Dankert/Nebraska Master Naturalist  
Jayne O'Connell/Nebraska Master Naturalist  
Melvin Nenneman/USFWS  
Keith Geluso  
Sharia Meester  
and Public Domain

## Vision for an Ecologically Sound Platte River (VESPR)

- Initiated in 2019
- Work in parallel with PRRIP, while expanding and enhancing conservation work
- Whole ecosystem approach to conservation – balance numerous demands
- Developing a long-term framework that will extend throughout entire watershed
  - South Platte (CO), North Platte (WY), Central Platte and Lower Platte (NE)



## Current Partners

- Audubon Nebraska
- The Crane Trust
- Ducks Unlimited
- The Nature Conservancy
- Nebraska Game & Parks Commission
- Playa Lakes Joint Venture
- Prairie Plains Resource Institute
- University of Nebraska
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

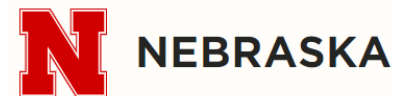




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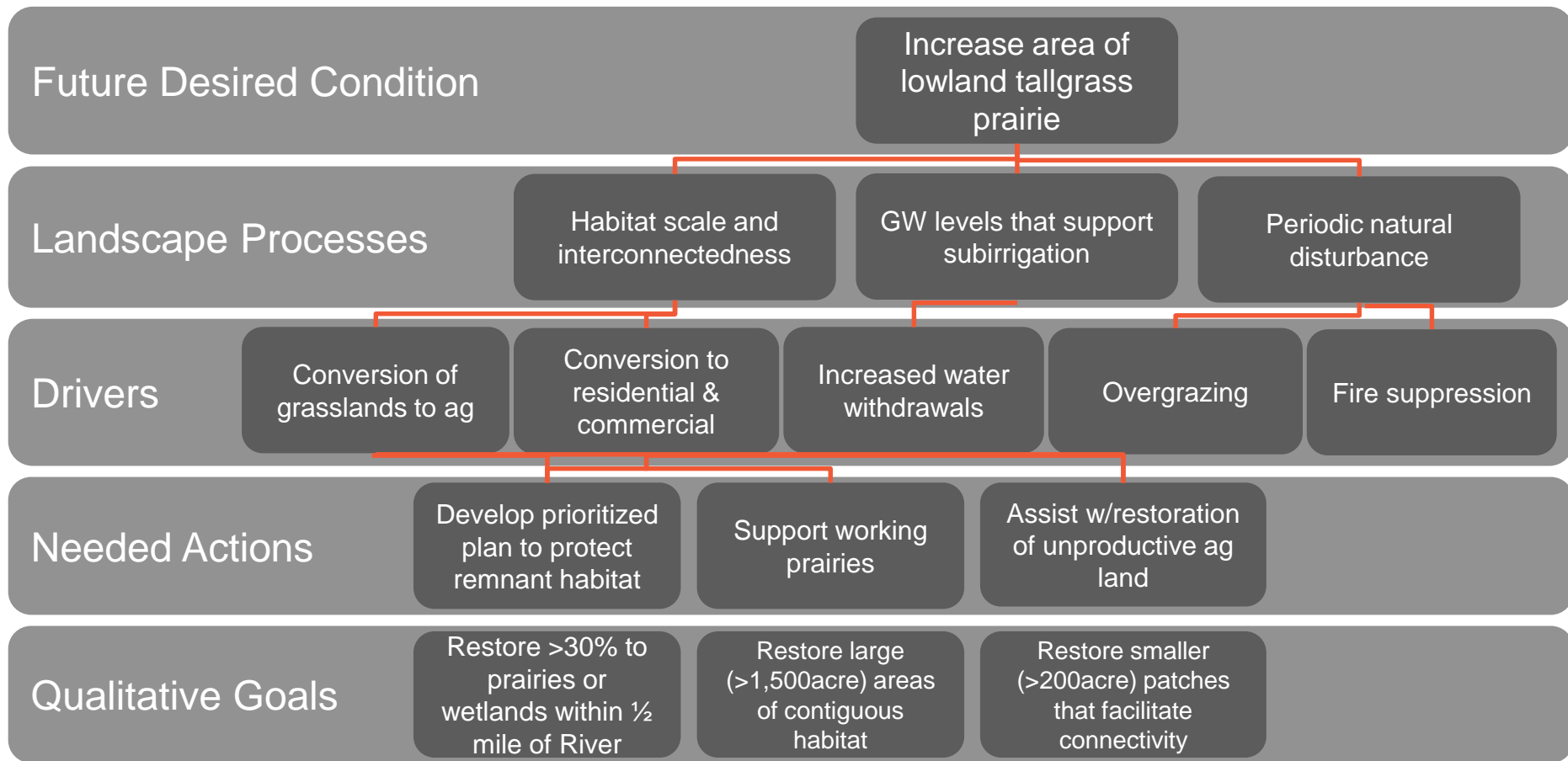
## Vision for an Ecologically Sound Platte River (VESPR)

Develop a long-term (50 year) vision for the Platte River that:

1. takes a whole ecosystem-based approach to conservation,
2. focuses on a diversity of wildlife needs, as well as ecosystem functionality,
3. recognizes the importance of balancing the water needs of wildlife, irrigation, ecotourism, and human consumption, and
4. focuses on building social and ecological resilience throughout the riverscape



# Landscape Design Process



# VESPR's Strategic Priorities (3-5 years)

Engage in  
activities affecting  
the Platte River  
ecosystem

Build Support for  
the Platte River

Expand  
throughout the  
Platte watershed

Collaborate with  
communities and  
entities working  
along the Platte

Maintain  
organizational  
health



## PRRIP & VESPR

- Work on parallel tracks
  - Open communication & coordination
- Scale-up partnerships and conservation work in the Platte watershed
- Improve participation through better coordination



An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing a complex network of channels and sandbars. The sun is reflecting off the water in the center of the image. The surrounding landscape is flat and green, with some trees visible along the riverbanks.

# Questions?

**Please get in touch!**

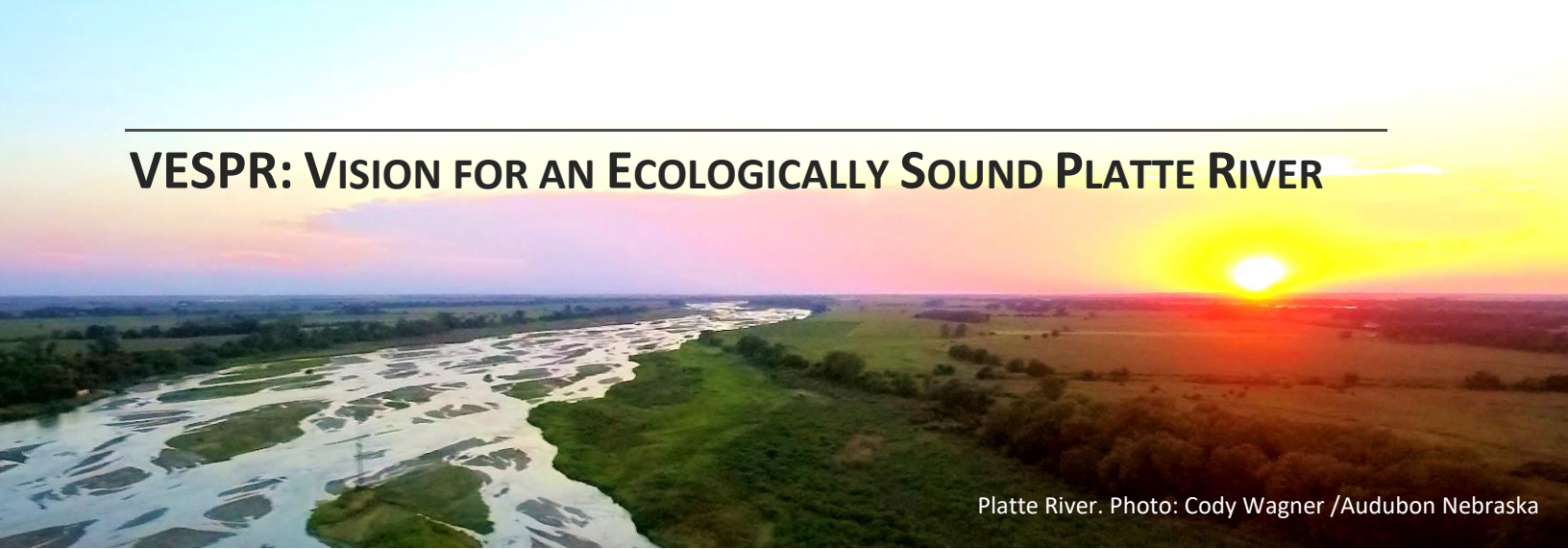
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# VESPR: VISION FOR AN ECOLOGICALLY SOUND PLATTE RIVER



Platte River. Photo: Cody Wagner /Audubon Nebraska

**THE VISION:** Platte River management will be carried out in a way that meets the needs of multiple water users, ensures ecological integrity and functionality, supports the natural hydrograph with higher flows as well as base flows, and values wet meadows and lowland prairies as critical components for landscape-level conservation. Over the next 50 years, management will improve water quality, take an ecosystem approach across multiple states, prepare for and adjust to changing conditions across the entire Platte River Basin, and take extreme weather events/changing climate into model considerations.

**GROUP PURPOSE:** Develop and implement a long-term (>50 year) vision for the Platte River that: 1) takes a collaborative, ecosystem-based approach to conservation, 2) focuses on a diversity of wildlife needs, as well as ecosystem functionality, 3) recognizes the importance of balancing the needs of wildlife, irrigation, ecotourism, human consumption, and municipal and industrial uses, and 4) focuses on building social and ecological resilience in the Platte River Valley and major tributaries. This group will be a trusted source of information and drive landscape-scale management of natural resources in the Platte River Basin using science-based decisions. This effort is unique in scale and scope and will work in parallel with other ongoing conservation efforts within the Platte River Valley and its major tributaries.

**WHY:** Across Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska, the Platte River system is vital for drinking water, irrigation, wildlife, ecotourism, recreation, and a variety of municipal and industrial uses. It is a conservation-dependent system that relies on intense management to serve a multitude of beneficial purposes. Water demands and availability, technological advances, scientific knowledge, river conditions, and weather patterns/climate will change over time, but to what degree and extent is uncertain. A diversified management approach centered around ecosystem functionality is best suited to meet future needs while being able to respond to change and recover from extreme weather events.

**PROBLEM:** The current water management systems, including the regulations governing them, are not guaranteed, nor are they designed with long-term ecosystem sustainability or resiliency in mind. Many conservation efforts and programs within the Platte River Valley are dependent on the regulatory requirements associated with these systems and are typically implemented retroactively. Further, they are often designed to address a few species and are not equipped or able to address holistic ecosystem management. To prepare for the future uncertainty of water availability (in terms of both amount and timing) conservation efforts need to focus on proactive measures and go beyond the limits of what can and cannot be done within these regulatory frameworks.



It is also important to understand the people who live, work and recreate on or near the river. Their perceptions, concerns, and desired future conditions in regard to the Platte River are largely unknown. Public support and buy-in is critical in order to achieve broad-scale conservation beyond the regulatory framework that currently exists. It is important that a long-term vision with identified solutions for the entire Platte River ecosystem is equitably developed and embraced by stakeholders and communities within in all three states.

**WHAT IS NEEDED:** An interdisciplinary approach will be required to meet the challenges faced by wildlife and human communities within the Basin. This vision should address the needs of a growing number of species of conservation concern, as well as ecological functionality and resilience. A long-term solution will involve policy, education, science, a unified voice, collaboration, advocates, a diverse set of stakeholders, and a durable public will. Scientific advances and the need for accomplishing this vision will need to be articulated to decision-makers and regulators. In order for policy to effectively balance multiple needs, it must evolve, pursue innovative solutions, and be informed by a wide coalition of interests.

**PARTICIPATION:** Participants share common priorities centered around ecosystem conservation, protection, restoration, and resiliency, and use the best available science in carrying out such efforts. Participation in this multi-stakeholder effort is informal and allows representatives to prioritize their contributions based on their individual/agency strengths, resources, and directives. Representatives from the Crane Trust, Ducks Unlimited, National Audubon Society, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, The Nature Conservancy, Playa Lakes Joint Venture, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and Prairie Plains Resource Institute are currently involved in this effort. Other institutions, organizations, agencies, and stakeholders in Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming will also need to be involved in order to achieve the vision.

### **GOALS:**

1. Implement a long-term plan to address a diverse set of future scenarios and needs.
2. Maintain ecological functionality in the lower Platte River.
3. Restore the central Platte River.
4. Protect and enhance ecological function in the North and South Platte Rivers.
5. Protect, restore, and enhance lowland tallgrass prairie.
6. Protect, restore, and enhance seasonal and temporary wetland habitats, including wet meadows and shallow marshes.
7. Direct management and conservation efforts to benefit waterbirds, grassland birds, endemic aquatic communities, terrestrial communities, and pollinators.
8. Engage stakeholders.
9. Understand and incorporate public perceptions, needs, and desired future conditions.
10. Make science-based decisions.
11. Garner public and political support.
12. Educate citizens regarding mutual benefits of conservation efforts for both wildlife and humans.



# Water Action Plan Update

Seth Turner & Kevin Werbylo

PRRIP Governance Committee Meeting

September 15, 2021

# Fall Contributions to Lake McConaughy EA

Project	Volume Credited to EA (AF)
CPNRD surface water lease	14,208
NPPD surface water lease	3,306
CNPPID irrigator lease	773
No-Cost NCCW	314
Pathfinder Municipal Account	0
TOTAL =	18,601 AF

- 9,863 AF transferred from Pathfinder EA to Glendo on August 13.
- ~9,316 AF released from Guernsey August 30-September 8.
- Volume reaching Lake McConaughy TBD.
- All other sources credited to EA on or around October 1.

# Other WAP Project Operations

- Recharge Projects (Phelps, Elwood, Cottonwood Ranch BSR, NPPD canals, CPNRD canals)
  - Diversion of excess flows unlikely until at least mid-November
  - Post-irrigation season maintenance
  - Anticipate lack of consistent high(er) flows
- Cook Recapture Well
  - Pumped 217.2 AF between February and July
  - Working to resolve pump surging and valve cavitation issues
  - Turned on August 25

# Water Service/Lease Agreements

Project	WSA or Lease Agreement Expiration
CPRND surface water lease	12/31/2021
NPPD surface water lease	12/31/2021
CNPPID Irrigator Lease	12/31/2023
Phelps County Canal recharge	12/31/2023
Elwood Reservoir recharge	12/31/2023
CPNRD recharge	12/31/2024
NPPD recharge	12/31/2025
Cottonwood Ranch BSR	12/31/2032
Pathfinder Municipal Account Lease	12/31/2032





# CNPPID Irrigator Lease

Year	Acres Enrolled	EA Credit (AF)
2016	1,037	778
2017	1,275	956
2018	2,055	1,541
2019	2,934	2,201
2020	2,989	2,242
2021	1,030	773
Average	1,887	1,415

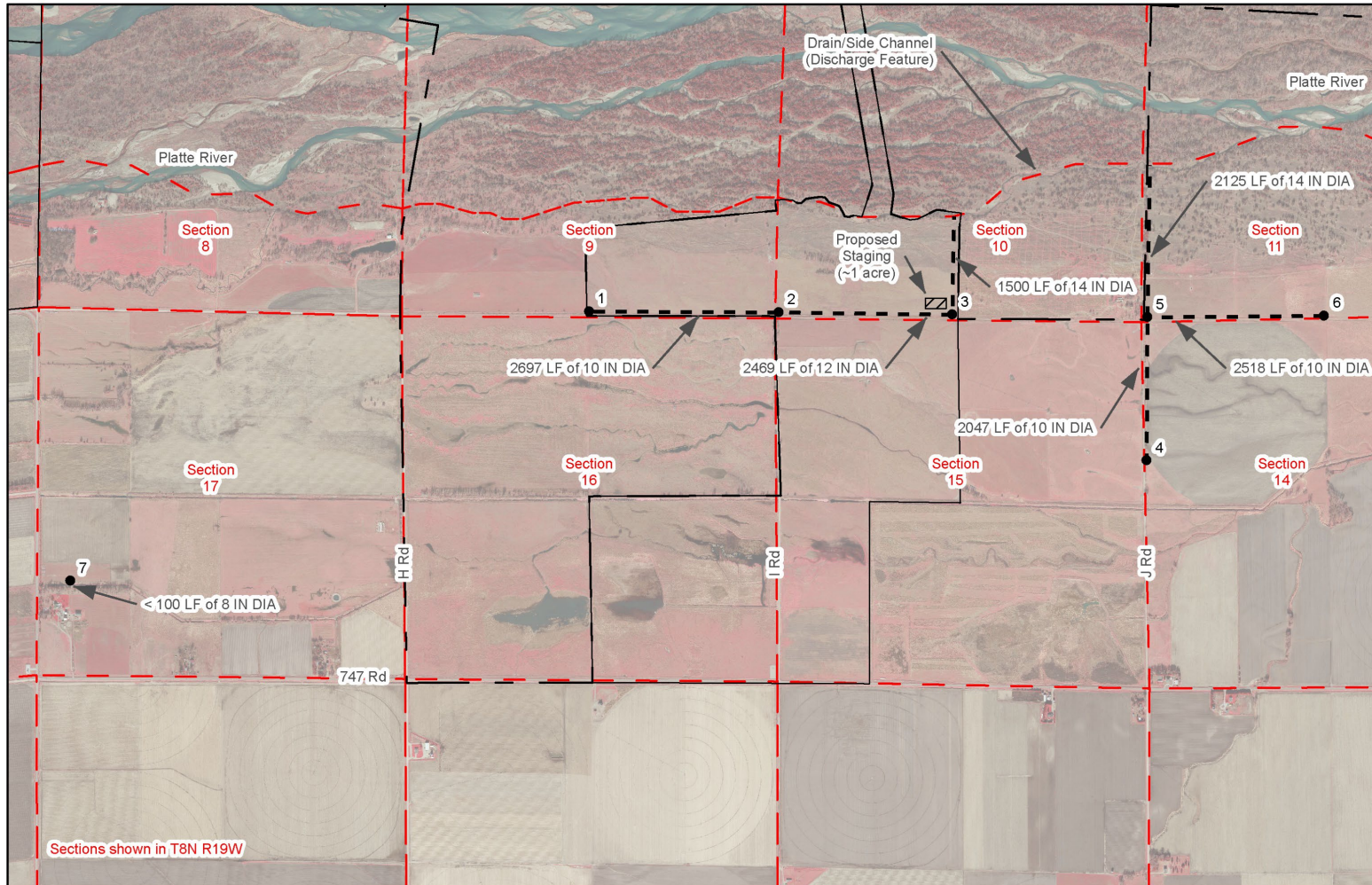
- Reduced payment in 2021 = reduced enrollment
- No changes to terms for 2022:
  - \$100/acre
  - 3,000 acres cap
- If allocation, no water available

# Cottonwood Ranch Broad-Scale Recharge

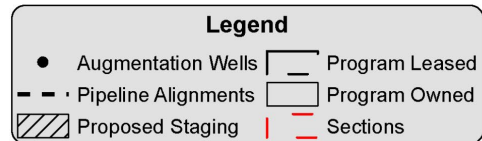




# Pilot Recapture Network



## General Augmentation Plan



0 0.25 0.5 Miles

Figure  
1a

Date:  
8/30/2021



PLATTE RIVER  
RECOVERY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

# Permitting Contractor Procurement Process

- Contract for Permitting Services held by HDR expires 12/31/21
- Sole sourced to HDR in 2018
- Covers “on call services” for 404 permitting. Examples:
  - Lakeside Gravel Mine (T&F)
  - Recapture Network
  - Sediment Augmentation



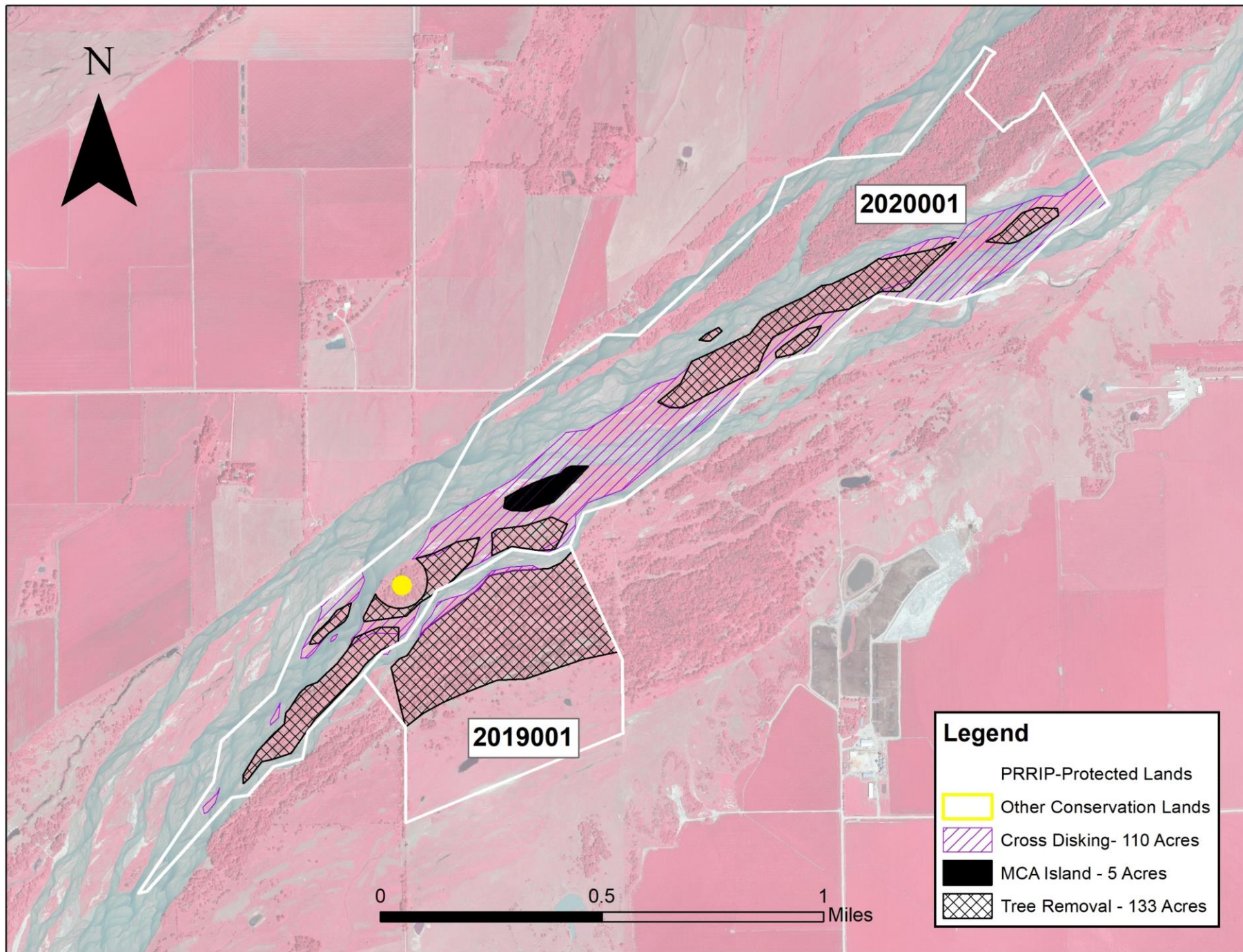
# Options with Permitting Contract

- Option 1:
  - Renew sole source contract with HDR
  - Sole source justification and contract approval at Dec GC
- Option 2:
  - Compete contract
  - RFP development and review/approval at Dec GC
  - Advertise RFP in Jan
  - Select review panel, review proposals, interviews in Feb/Mar
  - Contracting in March 2022

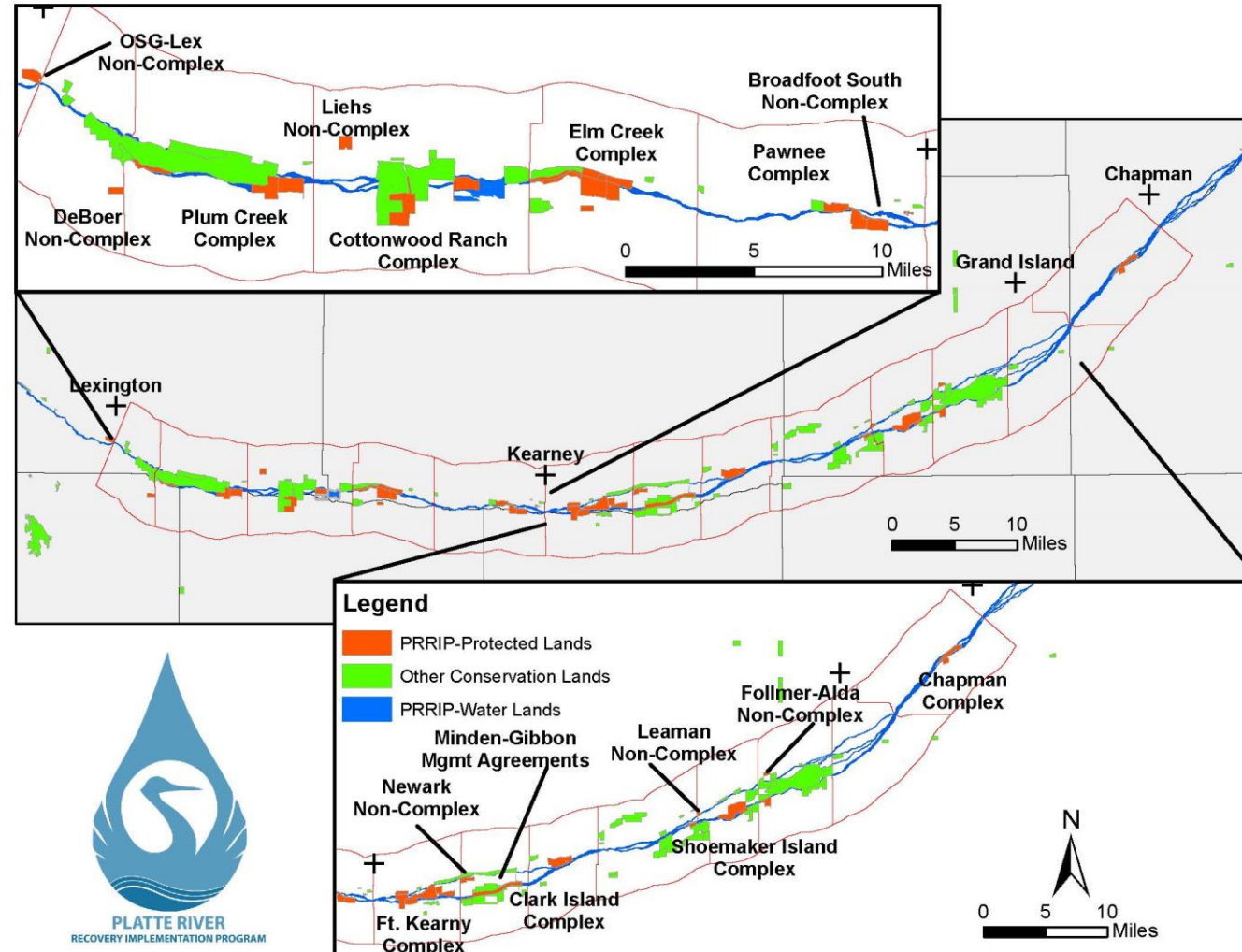


# Land Management Update

P21-006 Chapman Complex Habitat Enhancement



# Land Objective Summary Update Executive Session

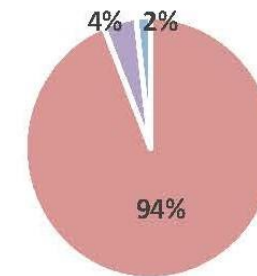
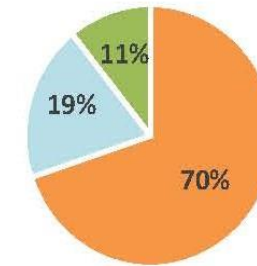




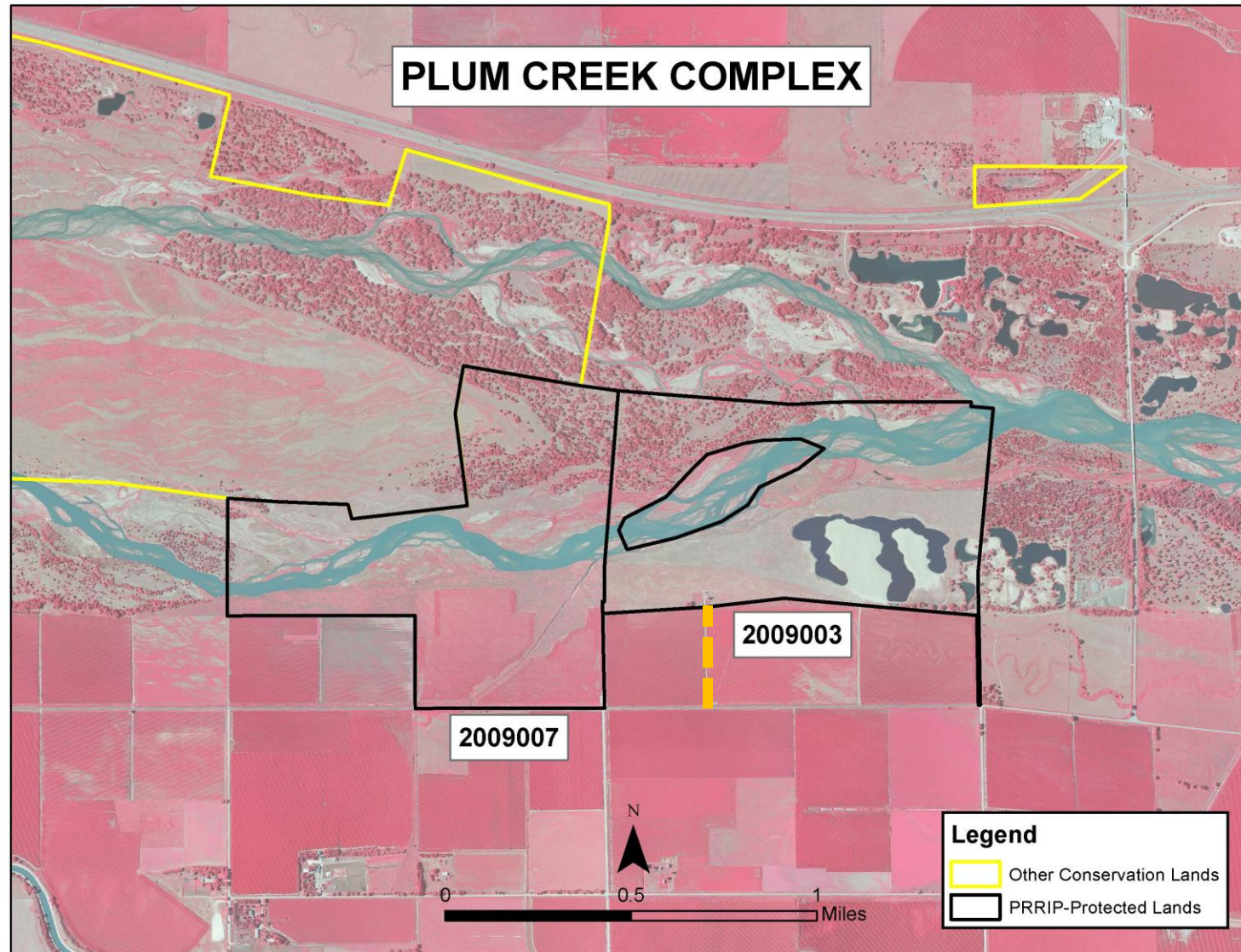


# Land Milestone Summary

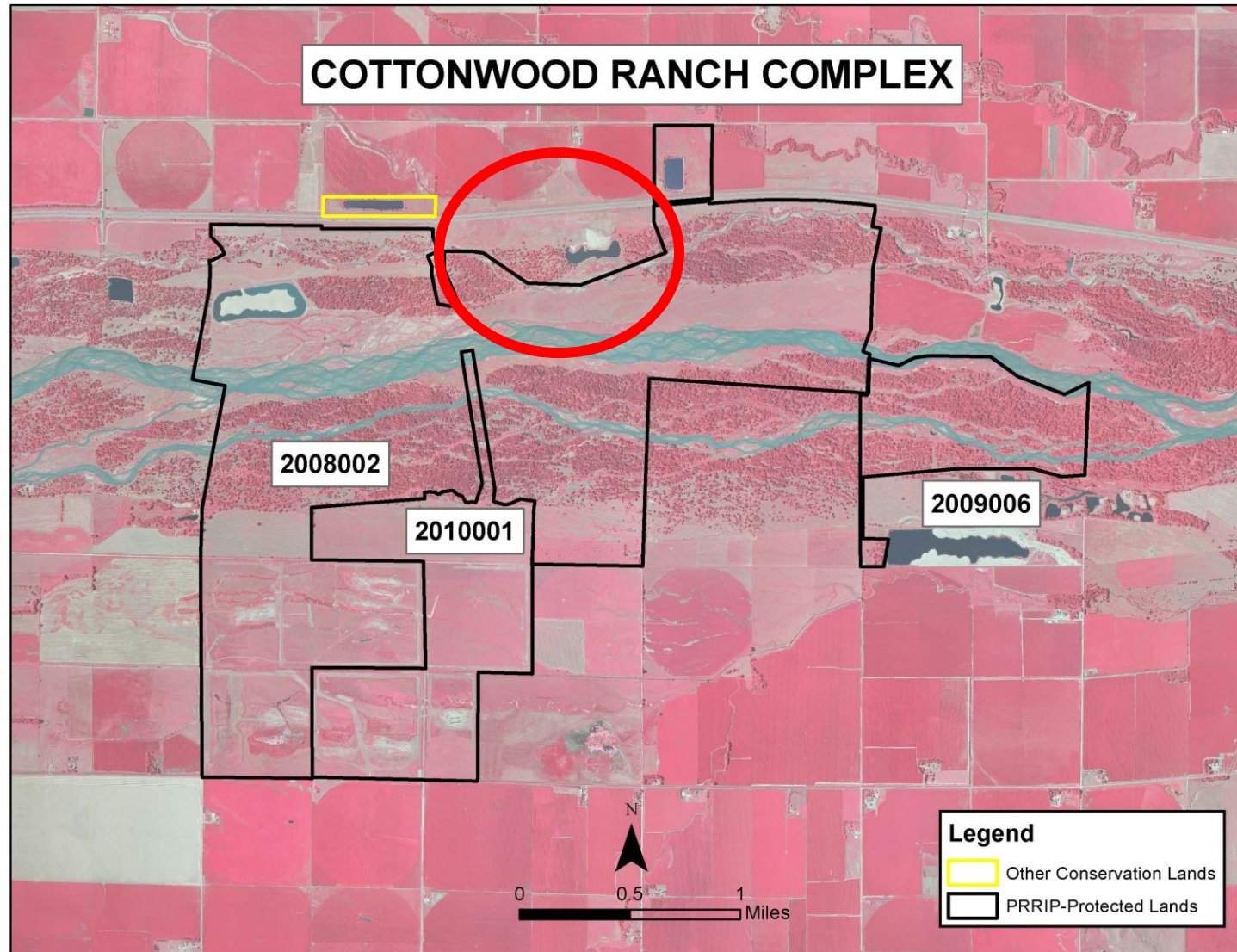
Summary of Progress Towards Land Milestone & Extension Plus-Up (Acquisitions Completed or Under Contract)				
<b>Ownership Interest</b>	<b>Acres</b>		<b>Cost</b>	
Purchased	9,613.0	\$	27,270,769	
Sponsorship / Lease	2,665.0	\$	37,500	
Management Agreements	1,481.0	\$	-	
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,759.0</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>27,308,269</b>	
<b>Habitat Type</b>	<b>Acres</b>		<b>Cost</b>	
Complex (9,200 ac)	12,917.7	\$	23,509,570	
Non-Complex OCSW (400 ac)	587.3	\$	2,843,699	
Non-Complex Palustrine Wetland (400 ac)	254.0	\$	955,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,759.0</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>27,308,269</b>	
<b>First Increment Objective and Plus-Up</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Ac. Remaining to Goal</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Remaining Budget<sup>1</sup></b>
First Increment Land Objective (10,000 ac)	12,297.4	0.0	\$ 20,269,829	\$ 2,630,171
First Increment Extension Plus-Up (1,500 ac)	1,461.6	38.4	\$ 7,038,440	\$ 2,021,560
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,759.0</b>		<b>\$ 27,308,269</b>	<b>\$ 4,651,731</b>

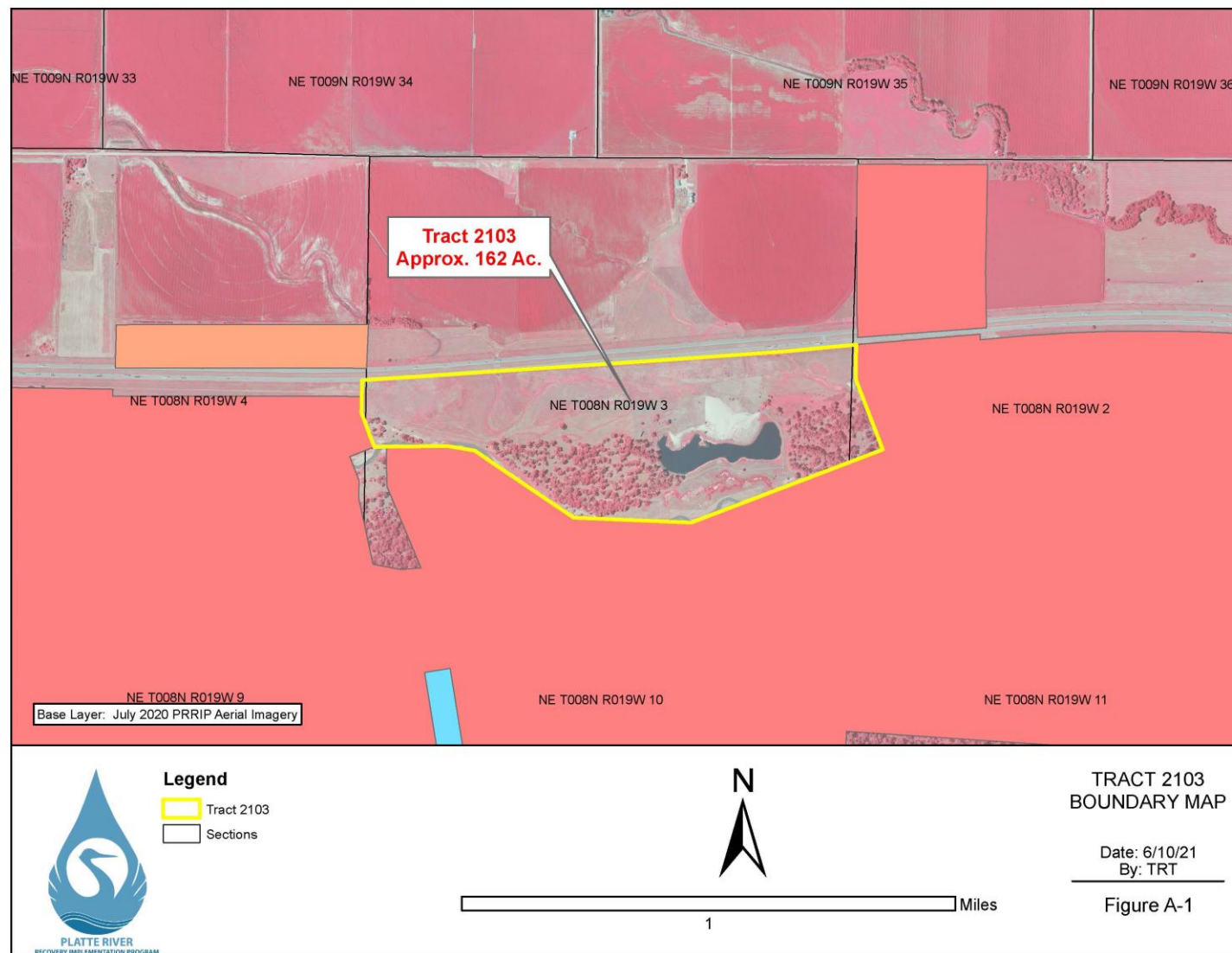


<sup>1</sup>Unindexed Acquisition Budgets

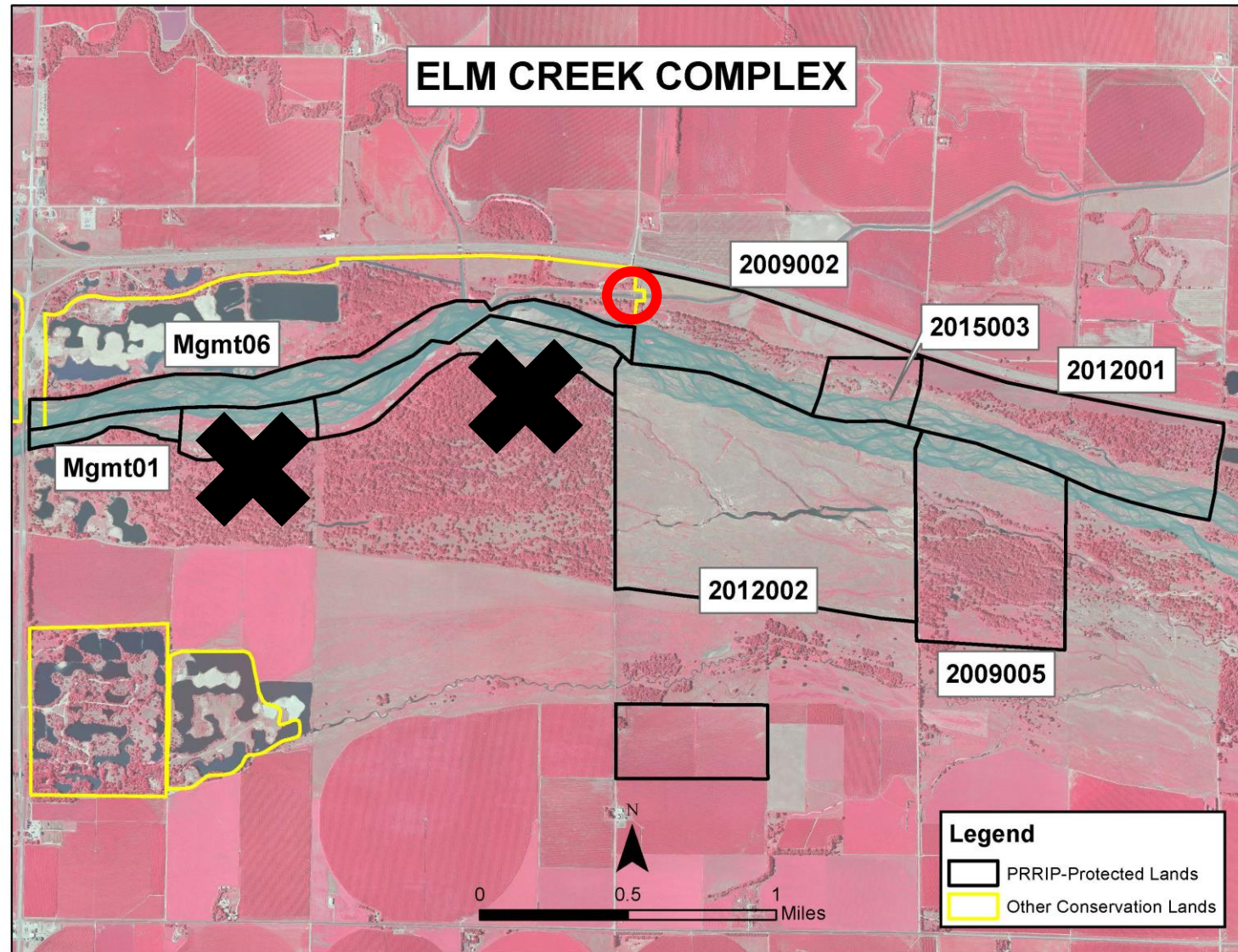




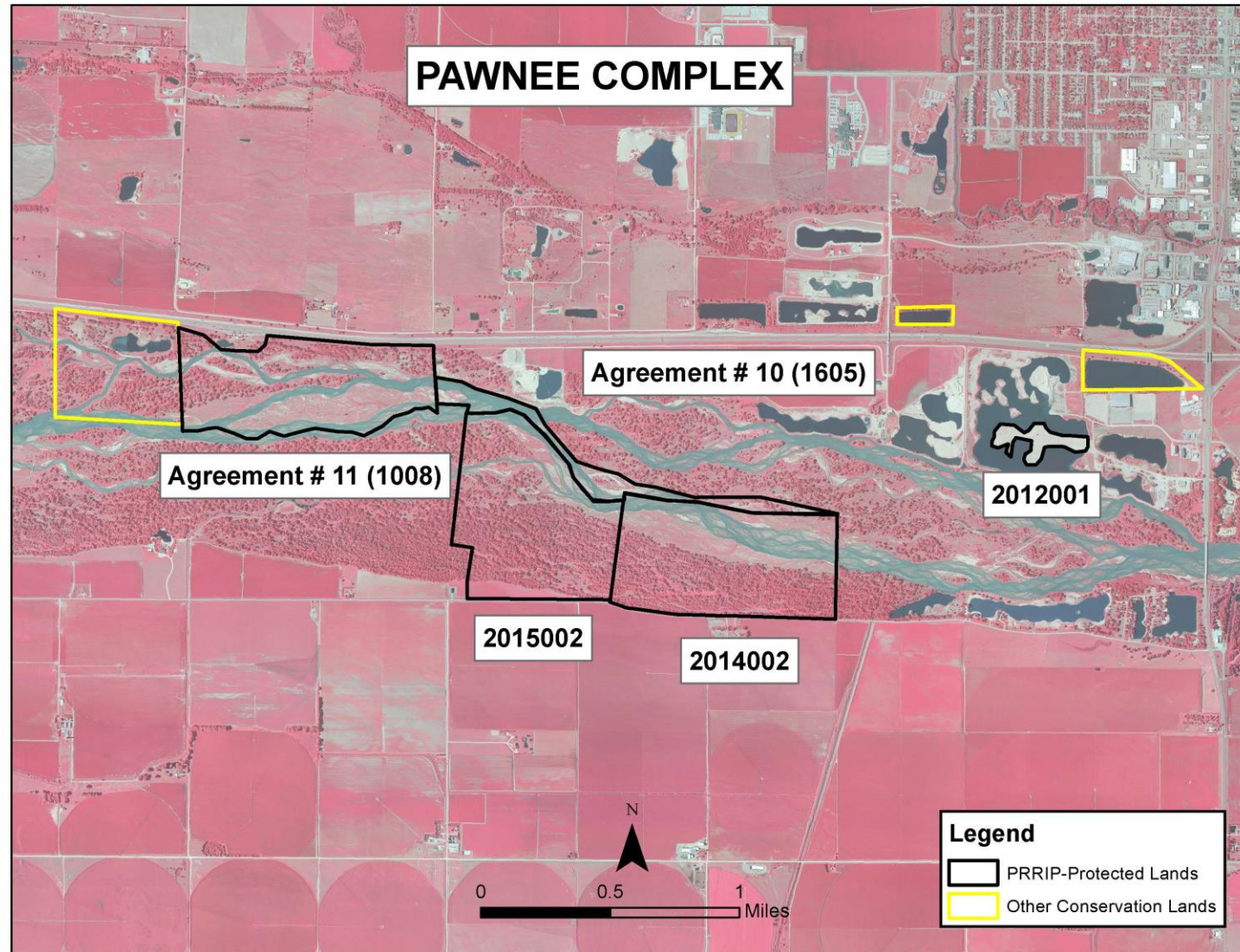




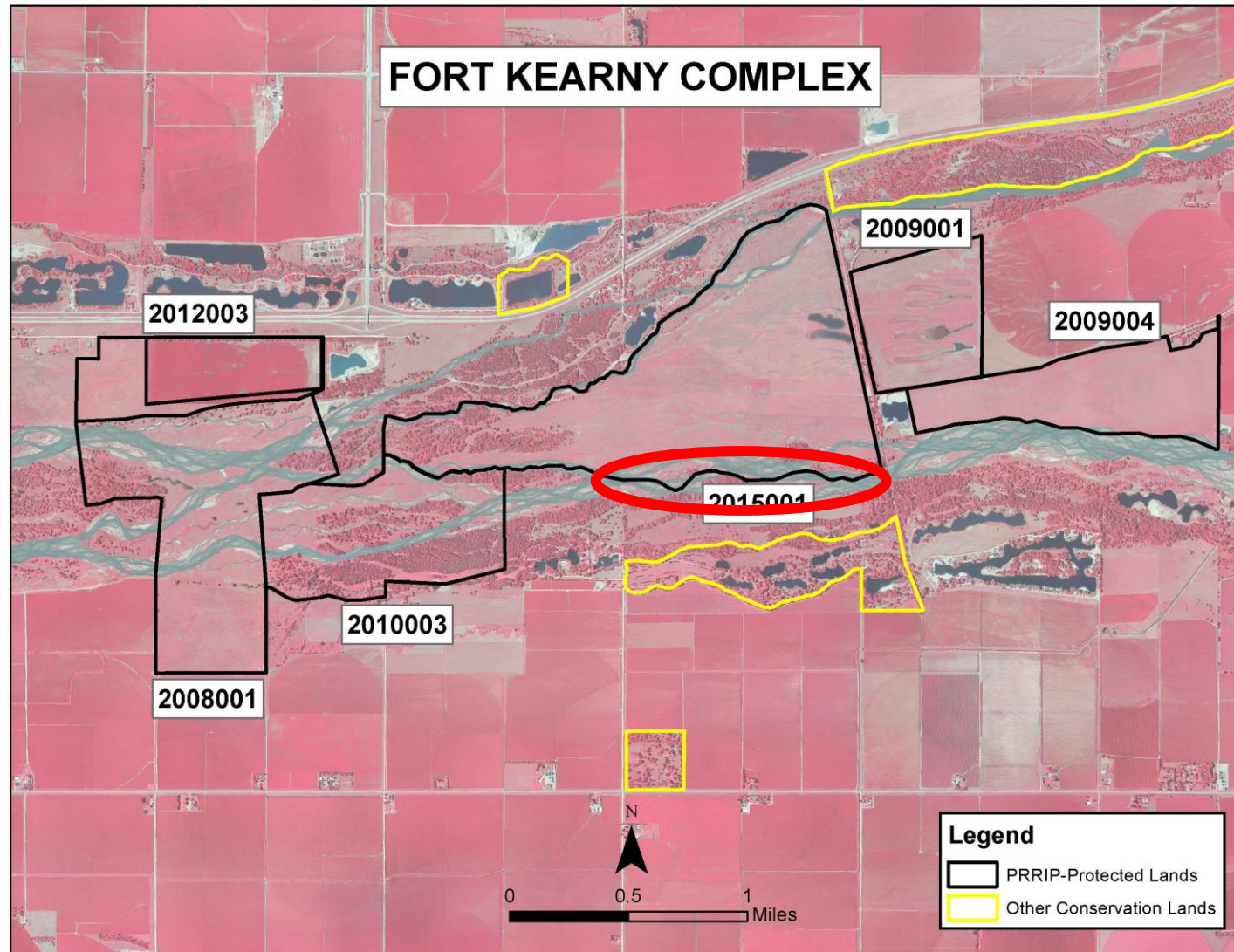


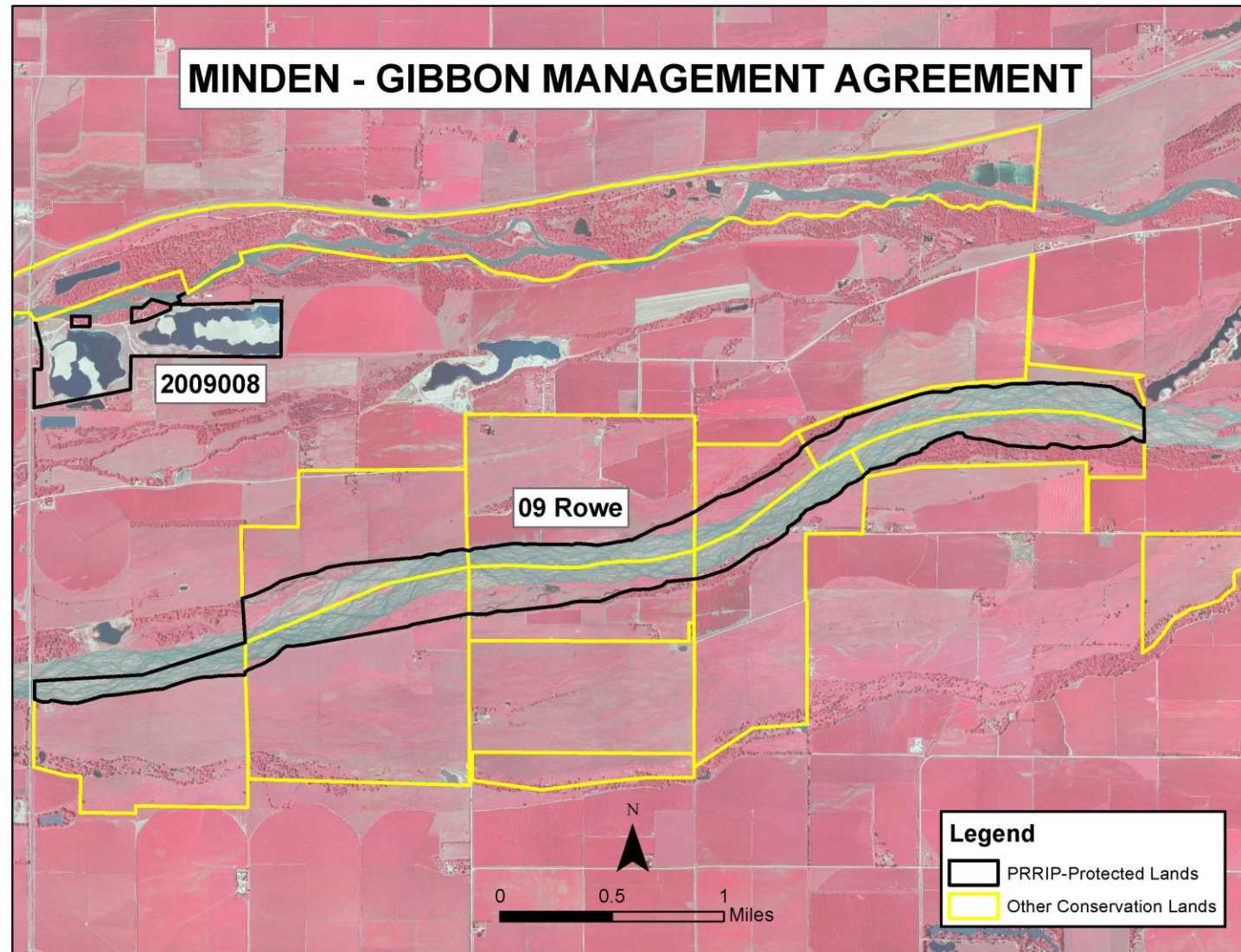




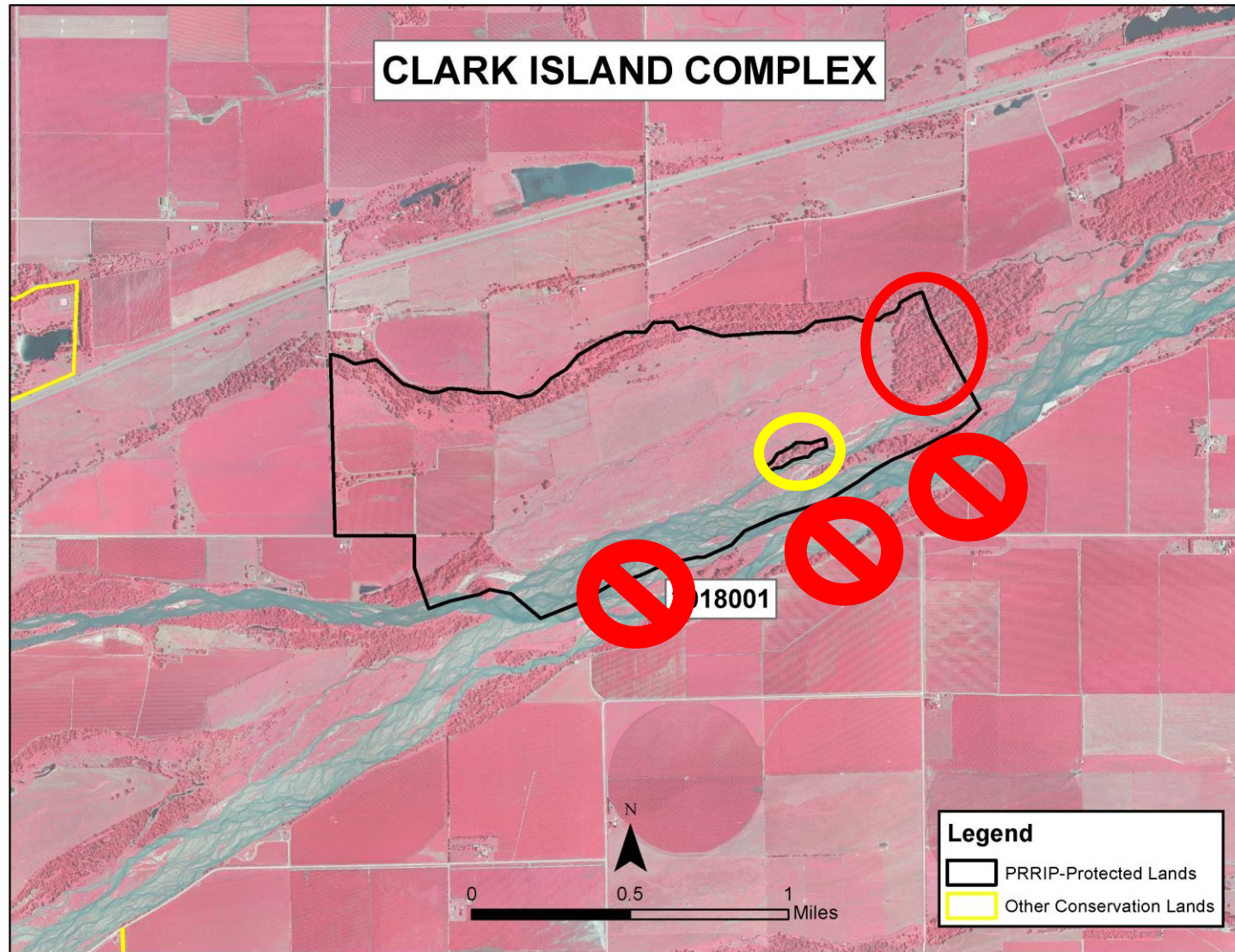




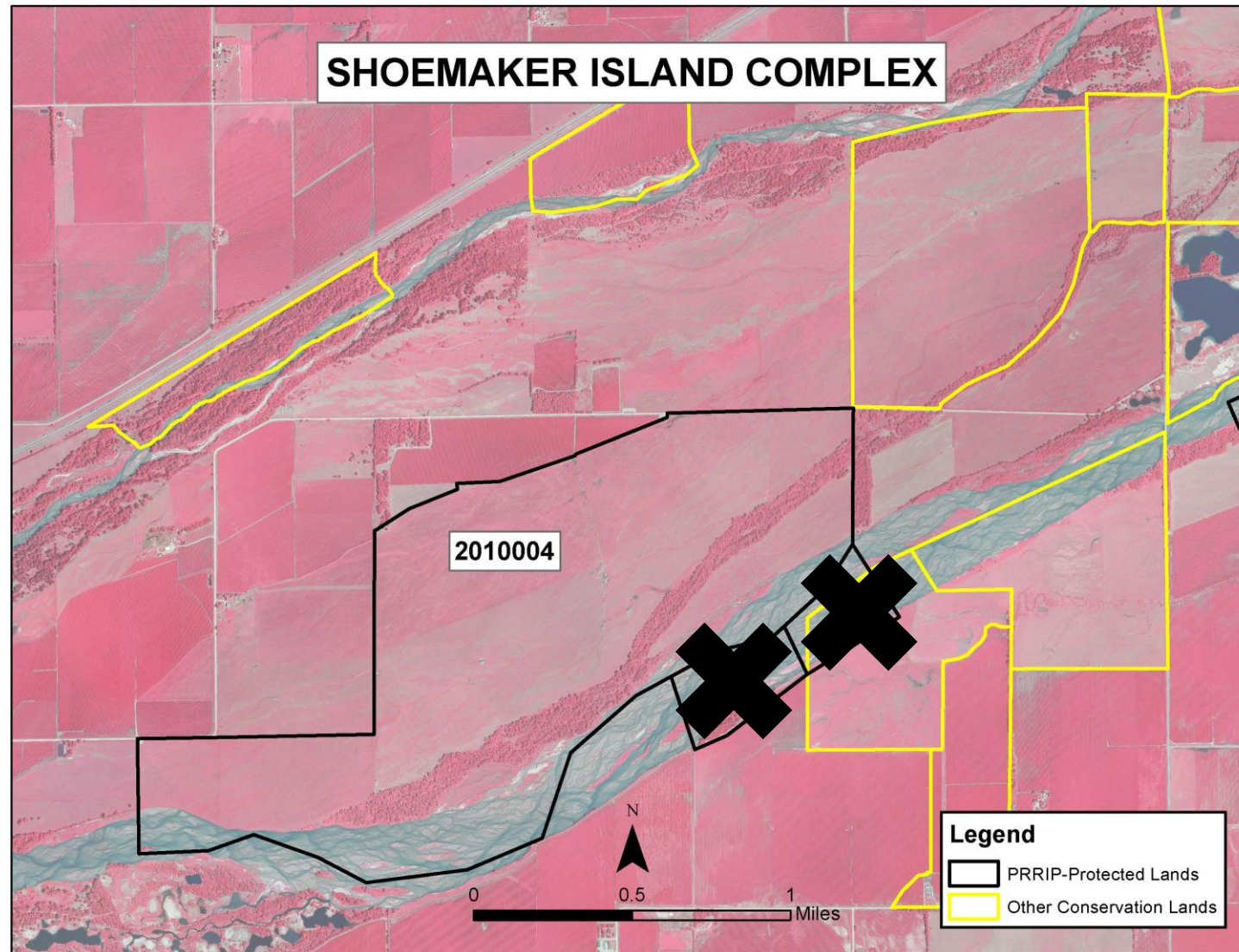


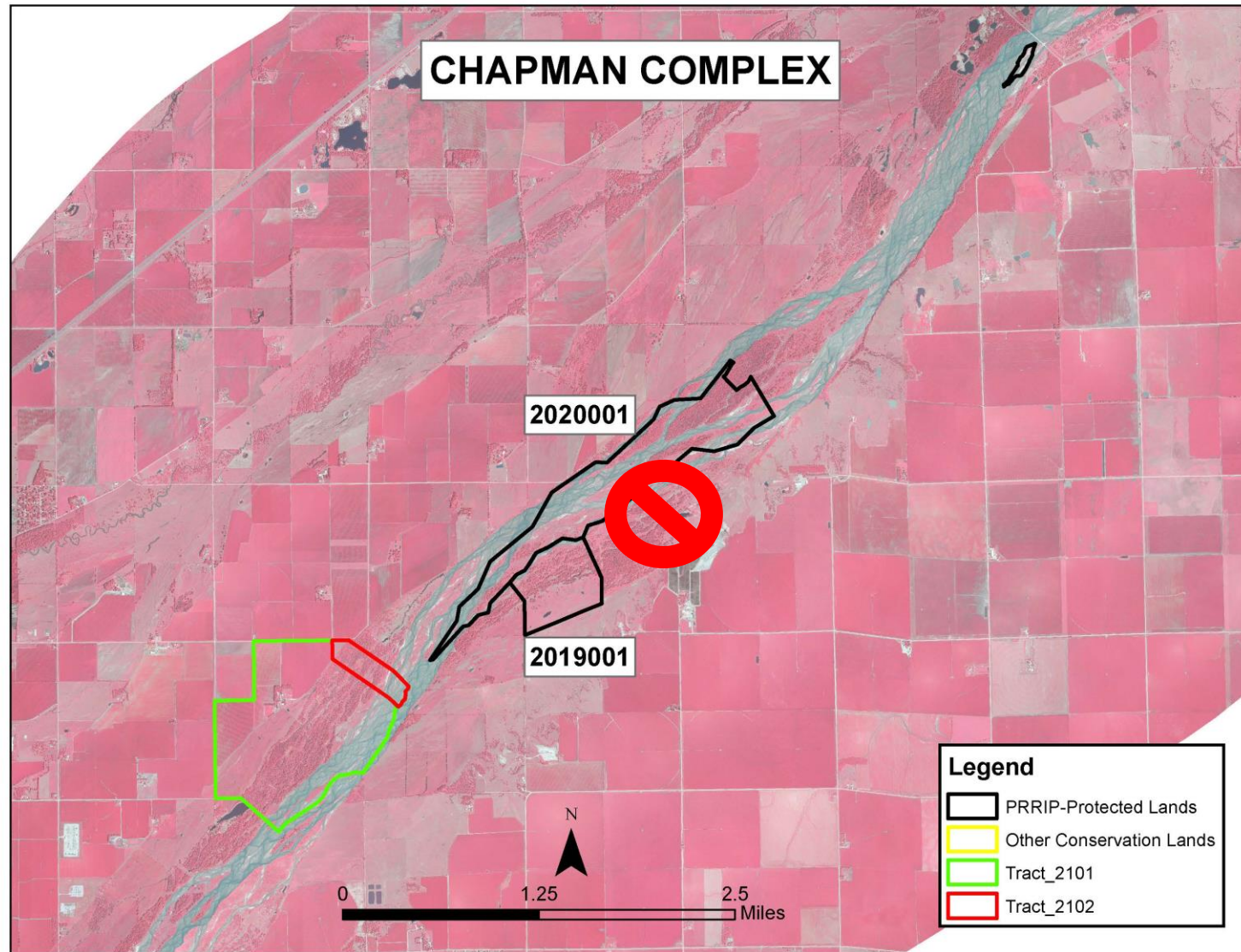














# Questions