

## Chapter 2: Description of Alternatives

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### 2.1 Formulation of Alternatives

Each of the following four alternatives was designed to benefit specific wildlife and plant habitats within the Study Area. The boundaries were formulated based on the watersheds, existing conservation areas, habitat requirements of desired wildlife species, public roads, and comments received from the public. The recommended protection levels (e.g., acquisition, conservation easements, private landowner initiatives, etc.) were based on the Service's policy to acquire the least interest in land necessary to meet Refuge goals.

### 2.2 Explanation of Alternatives

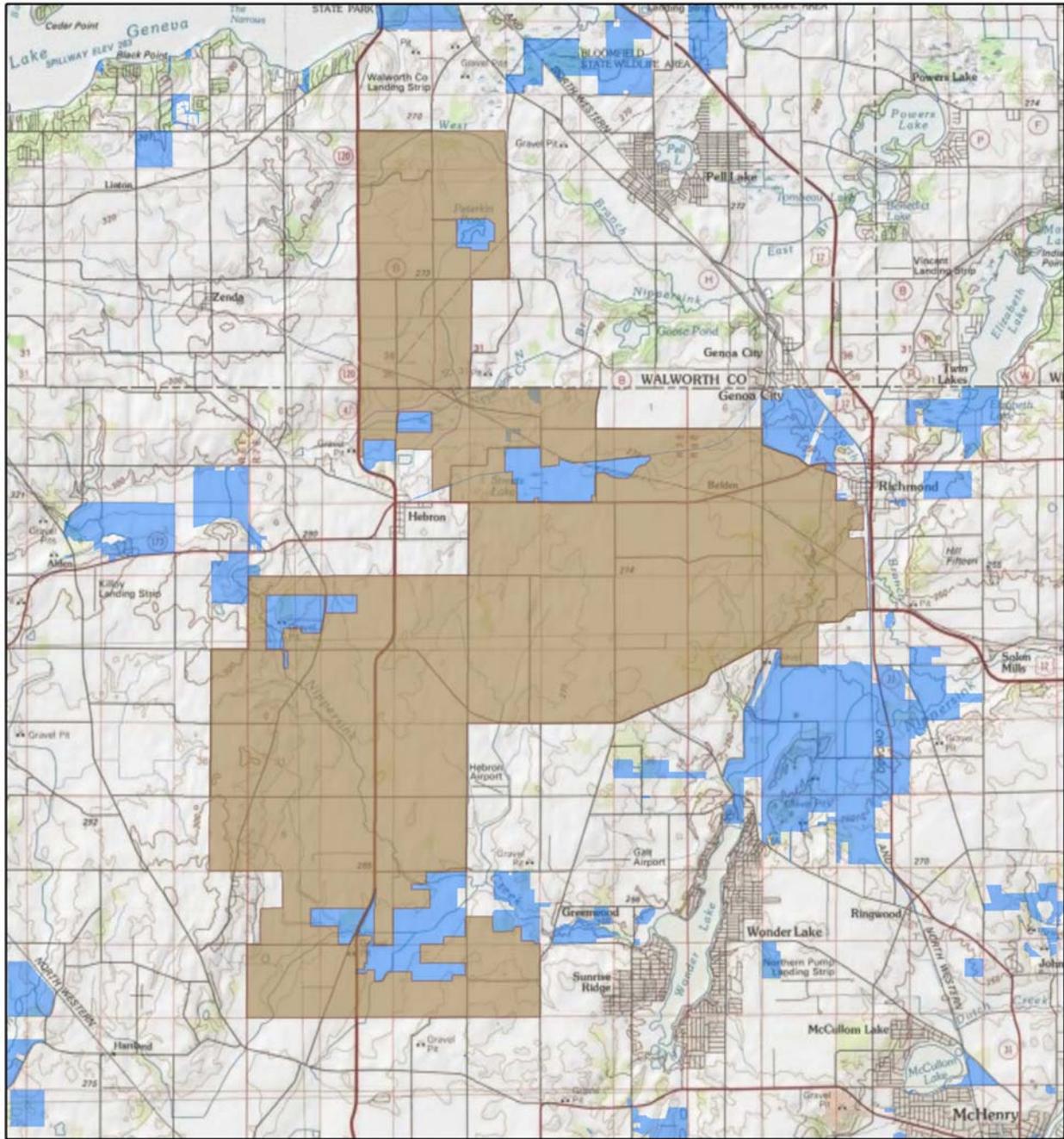
#### *Alternative A: Current Direction (No Action)*

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 requires all federal agencies consider a "No Action" alternative. In this case "No Action" means that a refuge would not be established in the Study Area. However, Service involvement in conservation work would continue under existing programs and, in some cases, may increase in future years. The Service would continue to emphasize habitat conservation on private lands through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Joint Venture projects under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Endangered Species Program, and other federal or partner agency initiatives.

#### *Alternative B: Refuge and Landscape Conservation Area*

The Refuge and Landscape Conservation Area alternative would create a large contiguous block of habitat (28,127 acres). The proposed Refuge boundary would seek to connect a series of existing county and state conservation lands to increase block size and promote travel corridors for wildlife (Figures 2 & 3). The larger block sizes would provide sufficient habitat for nesting grassland birds and waterfowl that are sensitive to fragmented habitat and edges. Land acquisition or conservation easements from willing sellers would be the preferred method of conservation.

**Figure 2: Alternative B – Refuge and Landscape Conservation Area (Source: USFWS, Midwest Region)**



**Alternative B**

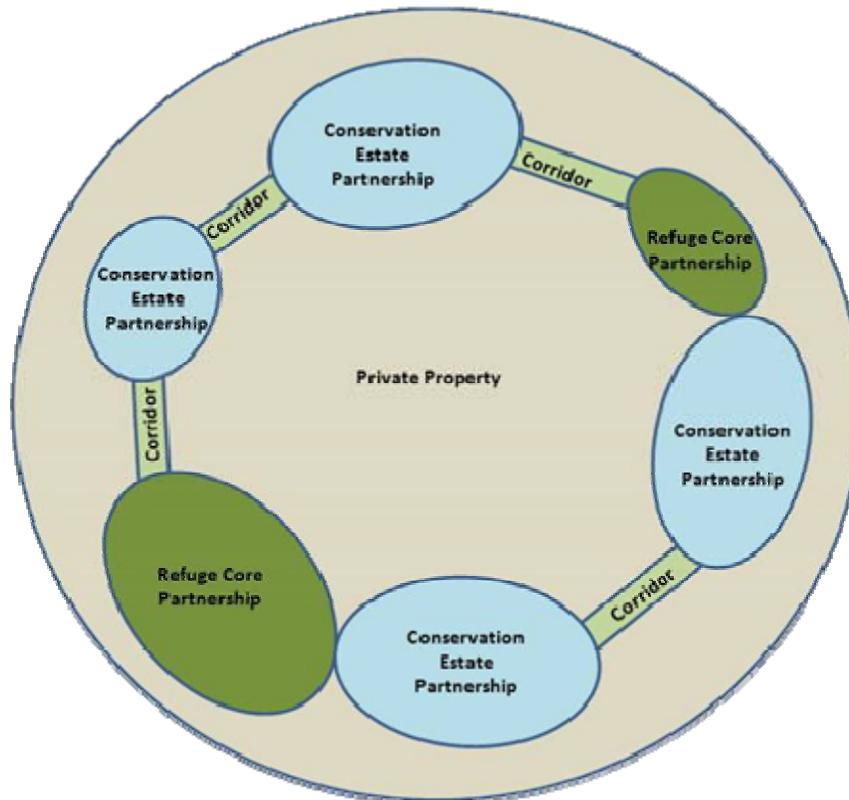
- Alternative B (28,127 ac)
- Existing Conservation Lands

0 1.5 3 6 Miles



Scale 1:140,000

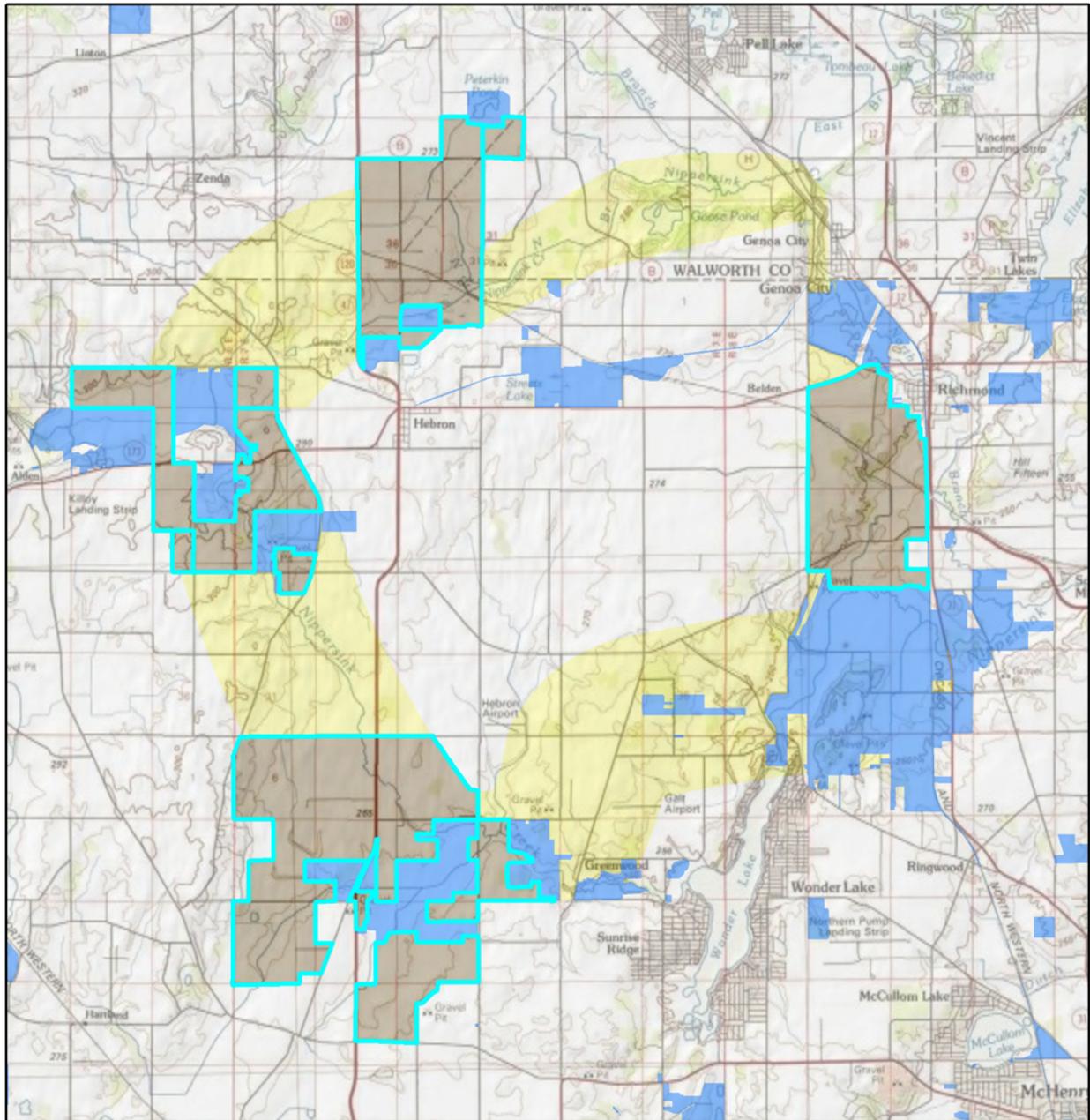
**Figure 3: Conceptual Configuration for Alternatives C**



***Alternative C: Cores and Corridors (Preferred Alternative)***

Alternative C would link and expand upon existing conservation areas to benefit migratory birds and endangered species. Similar to Alternative B, the larger block sizes associated with the cores would provide sufficient habitat for nesting grassland birds and waterfowl that are sensitive to fragmented habitat and edges. The corridors would assist terrestrial migration of small mammals, herptiles, and plants that may be impacted by a changing climate (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Alternative C – Cores and Corridors (Source: USFWS, Midwest Region)**



0 1.5 3 6 Miles

**Alternative C**

- Existing Conservation Lands
- Conservation Core Area (11,193 ac)
- Conservation Corridor



Scale 1:130,000

Land protection methods for the conservation core areas (11,193 acres) would include land acquisition conservation easements, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)/private opportunities aimed at creating contiguous natural habitat (Table 2). The conservation corridors would connect the cores primarily through use of partnership efforts and to a lesser degree with land acquisition. Specific, narrow corridors can't be identified at this time as detailed land status and partnerships would determine the ultimate siting. However, a continuous corridor of a minimum of 600 feet wide would be considered complete.

**Table 2: Summary of Potential Conservation Tool Configurations**

Area	Primary Conservation Tool	Secondary Conservation Tool
Conservation Core	Acquisition, easement, agreements	Same as primary tools
Conservation Corridors	Easement, agreement, Partners for Fish and Wildlife	Acquisition, private landowner initiatives led by others (NGOs, County)
Private Property (Agricultural areas adjacent to core and corridor areas)	Partners and NRCS programs, easements, agreements, private landowner initiatives	Same as primary tools

**Cores:** These areas serve to round out existing conservation lands to create contiguous natural habitat in 3,000-5,000 acre blocks. Land protection methods would include both land acquisition and easements to conserve and restore lands. Federal programs such as the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Program would be encouraged to increase efforts in these areas.

**Corridors:** Conservation corridors used to connect to primary areas. The Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program would be actively engaged to work with landowners to conserve and restore natural habitat. Private landowners, NGOs, local governments, and other partners would provide the leadership for establishing connecting corridors.

### Corridor Selection Criteria and Desirable Features

The following selection criteria will be used to develop the best possible routes for future connecting habitat corridors.

- No development.
- Native habitats.
- Wide enough for wildlife corridor as well as room for a multi-use trail; minimum 600 feet wide; assume average of 660 feet (1/8 mile; 80 acres/mile).
- Shortest possible route between core areas when the property can meet other criteria.
- Willing participant landowners only.
- Use existing corridors when possible.
- Avoid roads when possible.
- The corridors have permanent protection.

- Avoid high economic value land when possible.
- Corridors contain areas of woody vegetation as well as grassland to facilitate movement of animals and plants dependent upon both habitat types.
- Trails are located on corridor edges, not through the center, to avoid habitat fragmentation.

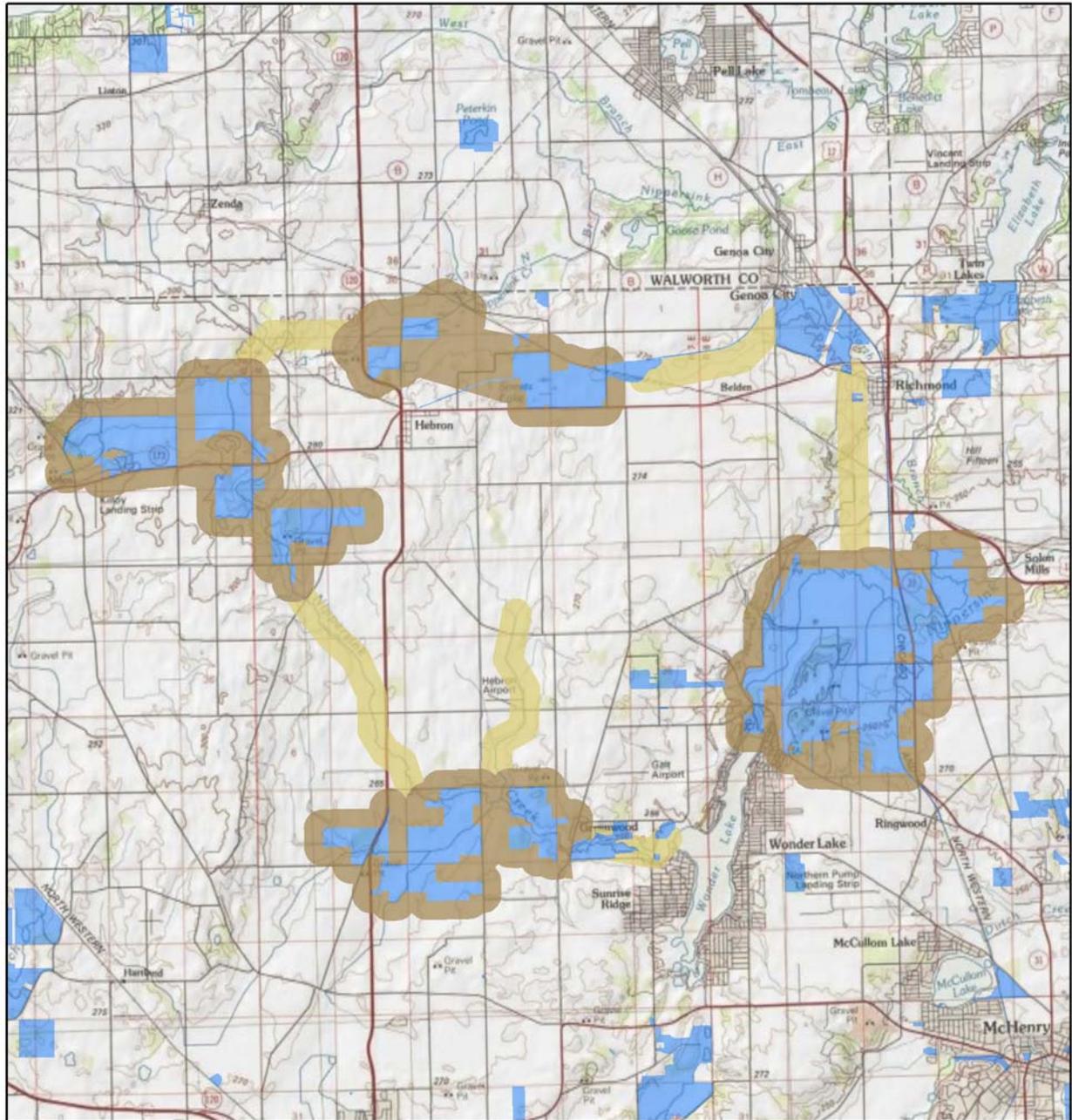
Possible means to create the corridors:

- Partners take the lead in developing the corridors.
- If Service is involved in acquiring the corridors.
  - Partner acquires rights to any areas to be used by snowmobiles prior to Service acquisition of any rights; Service works with partners to minimize any potential negative impacts of the trail's location.
  - Easements are first priority; include rights to establish a multi-use trail.
  - Voluntary partnerships with landowners are possible but may not result in areas that allow trail development.
  - Use willing-seller acquisition as the last resort.
- Service or partners obtain rights to restore habitats in the corridor or at least maintain existing habitats where they are compatible with Service interests.

#### ***Alternative D: Partnership Initiative***

This alternative would seek to increase the amount of conservation land in the area similar to Alternative C but with a reduced acreage footprint (Figure 5). Core areas would encompass 9,687 acres, while the corridors would be similar to those in Alternative C with a minimum width of 600 feet. The emphasis of the Refuge would be to buffer and connect existing conservation lands. The Service would purchase lands if a landowner preferred that option. However, the Service would primarily work with established partners and private landowners on less-than-full acquisition options.

Figure 5: Alternative D – Partnership Initiative (Source: USFWS, Midwest Region)



0 1.5 3 6 Miles



Scale 1:140,000

**Alternative D**

- Primary (9,687 ac)
- Secondary
- Existing Conservation Lands