

Preserving The Public Land Survey System

Ensuring that Minnesota's Public Land Survey System (PLSS) Monuments are available for everyone

Background



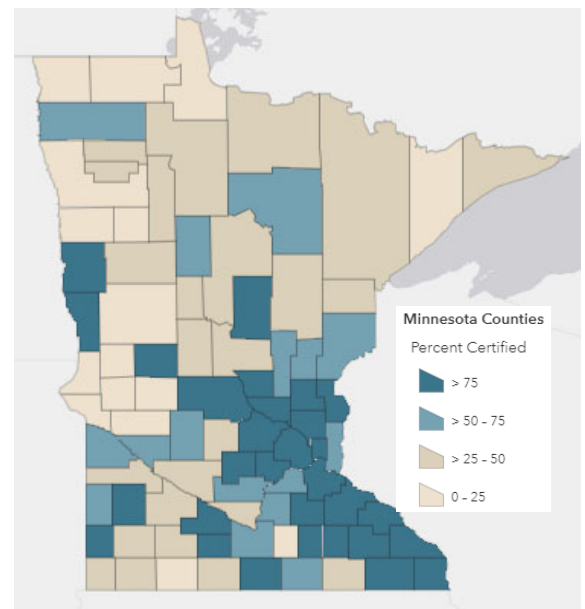
The Public Land Survey System (PLSS) is the foundation of property boundary descriptions in Minnesota. An essential part of the PLSS is physical monument at each corner within the PLSS network. Accurate monuments ensure taxpayers are assessed accurately, minimize property disputes, clarify mineral rights boundaries, and reduce unnecessary litigation for local governments and private citizens. Minnesota has over 315,000 PLSS corners in the state. Many of the PLSS corners have been destroyed or buried and need work to replace them. Less than half of the PLSS corners have been certified by a licensed land surveyor. The average cost to certify a PLSS corner is \$1800.00 and even more in remote areas of the state.



This system was started in 1847 and completed in 1905. Many of the PLSS corners were set with wooden posts as markers. Over the years the maintenance of the PLSS has been neglected due to the demands of a young nation and its growing infrastructure. The Government Land Office (GLO) originally set these PLSS corners and gave the power of maintaining them to the State. The State delegated that authority to the Counties, however traditional funding sources for maintenance of the system leave much of Minnesota short of the funds needed to update and maintain this system.

Importance

The PLSS is Minnesota's very first infrastructure and serves as the essential framework for property ownership, maps, parcels, roadways and more. Without an accurate and properly maintained network of PLSS monuments, there is an increased risk of property disputes, inequitable taxation, disagreements about resource rights, confusion over easement locations, and unnecessary expenditures by private citizens and local governments. The PLSS is the foundation for determining the location of every property description, including private, government, and business, in Minnesota. PLSS monuments are the basis for 100% of boundary descriptions in the State and, as such, are vital in terms of the land tenure and exchange system. The PLSS serves as the base infrastructure for accurately locating state, county, municipal, and private development projects. Additionally, the PLSS serves as the underlying framework for geospatial data. The geospatial data, in turn, supports data driven decisions, providing better outcomes for all Minnesotans.



Investment Need

Like roads, bridges, and underground utilities, PLSS monuments are important infrastructure that require programmatic support and maintenance. Given the importance of the PLSS system and the monuments that serve as the foundation for it, there is a critical need to invest, and create a program to maintain and certify the monument locations in Minnesota. Locating, surveying, replacing and certifying one monument costs roughly \$1,800 and can place an undue burden on stakeholders. Current funding sources leave Minnesota short of the funds needed to update and maintain this important infrastructure and system. However, State funds can help restore and maintain this infrastructure; positioning all of Minnesota for success.

Proposed Solution

Securing funds now is the best way to maintain the PLSS for future generations. Original markers are disappearing every day. It is crucial to invest in the preservation of Minnesota's PLSS immediately.

Several states (Michigan, Wisconsin, and Utah) have shown the positive effects of preserving PLSS corners. A proactive investment will save millions of dollars in future litigation and restoration.

The total cost to remonument Minnesota is estimated to be \$350 million dollars and will take 35 years to complete. We recognize this sort of investment will need to be made over time, hence we are proposing a 4 year 40-million-dollar initial effort that will develop a long-term plan and strategy for meeting the needs of the PLSS system into the future.

A \$40 Million state-funded pilot project, spread out over the course of four years, would produce the following:

- Restore monuments in priority areas around the state.
- Define a long-term remonumentation program and associated funding needs for the update and maintenance of the system
- Define and create a state commission for:
 - Distribution of grant funding to support the update and maintenance of PLSS across Minnesota
 - Creation of a public shared repository for PLSS data
 - Establish data standards for PLSS monumentation
 - Provide online access to a state PLSS resources, map, and data that can be used by everyone.
- A Survey Coordinator within the Minnesota IT Services Geospatial Information Office (MnGeo) to coordinate the statewide program.
- Identification of a representative for each county and development of a remonumentation plan for every county to establish priority areas
- Funding for continued survey education to support future needs for PLSS monumentation for Minnesota.
- Institute a maintenance program in each county to maintain the PLSS corners forever.

Benefits to Minnesota

Providing an up to date and accurate PLSS system serves as the foundation for and provides benefits related to all activity on an under the land including activities such as:

- Location and accurate documentation of mineral deposits in support of mining and the economy
- Farming and precision agriculture
- Forestry
- Wildfire management (whose property)
- Land development
- Recreation
- Planning for urban growth and the infrastructure and land needs related to that



An accurate PLSS:

- Provides better and more precise land descriptions provide for more accurate parcel mapping leading to increased consumer confidence and fewer boundary disputes during land transactions
- Provides necessary data to ensure proper taxation
- Provides an accurate foundation for geospatial data in Minnesota which informs effective decisions and positive outcomes.
- Reduced cost of resurveys

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