

Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislib/>.

Settlement Patterns

This board uses maps from A. T. Andreas' *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa, 1875* overlaid with present-day town boundaries and water bodies. Published in 1875, Andreas' Atlas is an extraordinary resource showing the post-Civil War landscape of Iowa including settlement features (towns and villages, churches, schools, roads, railroads, etc.) and landscape features (water bodies, vegetated patches such as "timber" and "swamp," and major topographic features.) High-quality scans of the Atlas have been arranged to correspond closely with present-day maps revealing major landscape changes as well as features that have persisted, such as railroad rights-of-way and in some cases remnant vegetation patches.

West Branch in Context

Compare the 1875 boundaries of your town to the current boundaries. How much has your town grown? Compare the course of the rivers in 1875 to their current course, are there major changes in alignment or location? Are there vegetation patches shown in the 1875 map still in existence?

West Branch Historical Settlement Patterns

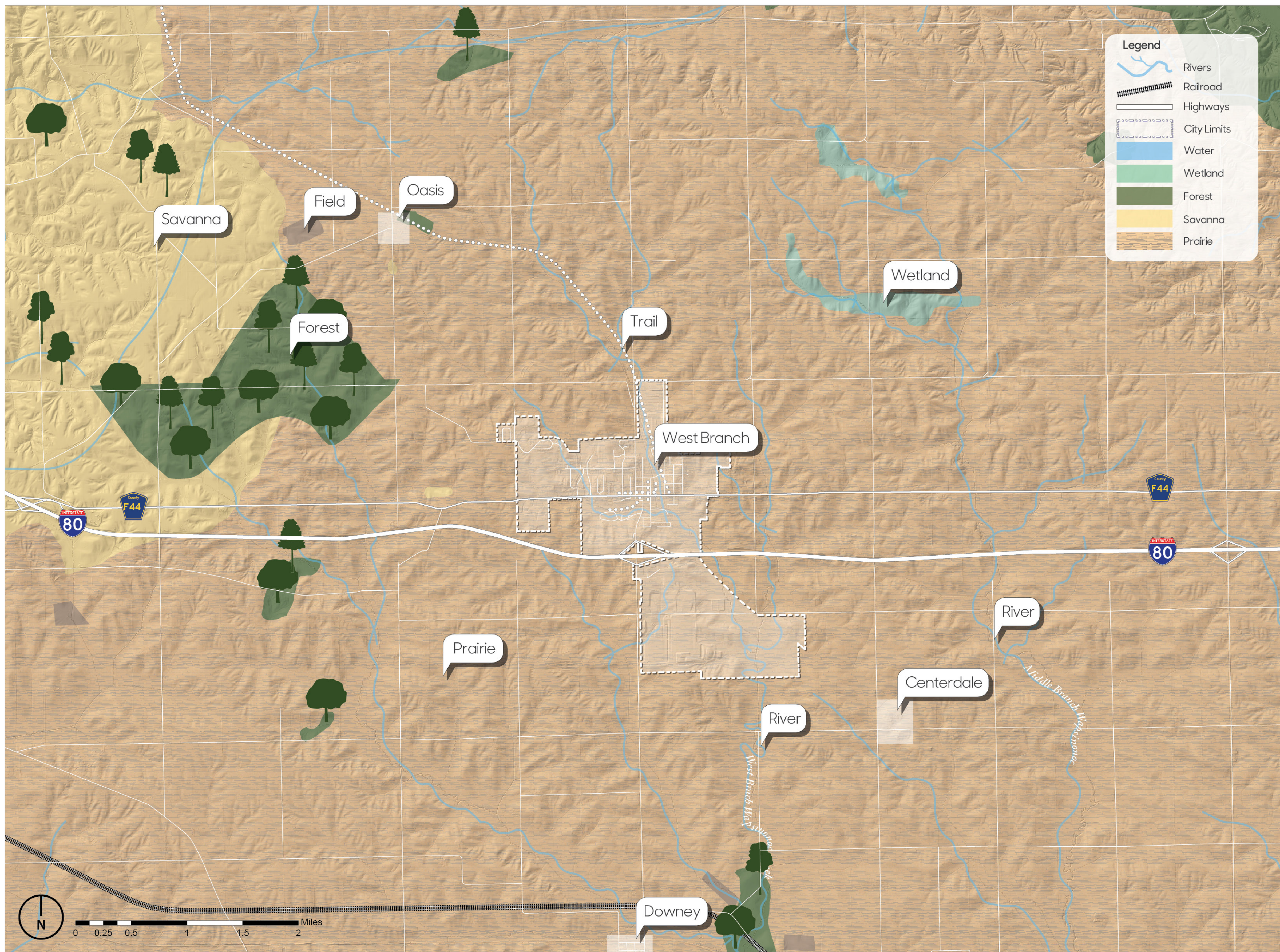
Bioregional Context

Julia Badenhope, Chad Hunter

Lead intern: Caleb Borrett

Iowa State University | Trees Forever | Iowa Department of Transportation





Historical Vegetation

The vegetation information shown here is derived from township maps made by the General Land Office (GLO) surveys beginning in 1836 through 1859. The vegetation information was digitized in 1996 as a resource for natural resource management and is useful "...for the study of long term ecological processes and as baseline data for the study of present day communities."¹

The names of plant communities mapped by the GLO surveyors varied. The original terminology used by the surveyors who made maps has been preserved in the original data, but we have re-named these types on this map to reflect names used to describe contemporary ecological vegetation communities.

Not all communities will have all vegetation types, because various conditions that effect vegetation- such as geology, exposure to wind, seasonally high water or ground water, and frequency of fire- differ from place to place.

The following types have been mapped :

1. **Forest:** Tree dominated, with a mostly closed canopy. Ground vegetation shade tolerant. developed under infrequent fire.
2. **Prairie:** Perennial non woody plants, fire dominated.
3. **Savanna:** Scattered trees, with an open canopy, and prairie below. Fire dominated.
4. **Wetland:** Perennial non-woody plants, water and fire dominated.

¹ J.E. Ebinger, "Presettlement Vegetation of Coles County, Illinois," Transactions of the Illinois Academy of Science (1987): 15-24, quoted in Michael Charles Miller, "Analysis of historic vegetation patterns in Iowa using Government Land Office surveys and a Geographic Information System" (master's thesis, Iowa State University, 1995), 8.

Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislib/>.

West Branch Historical Vegetation

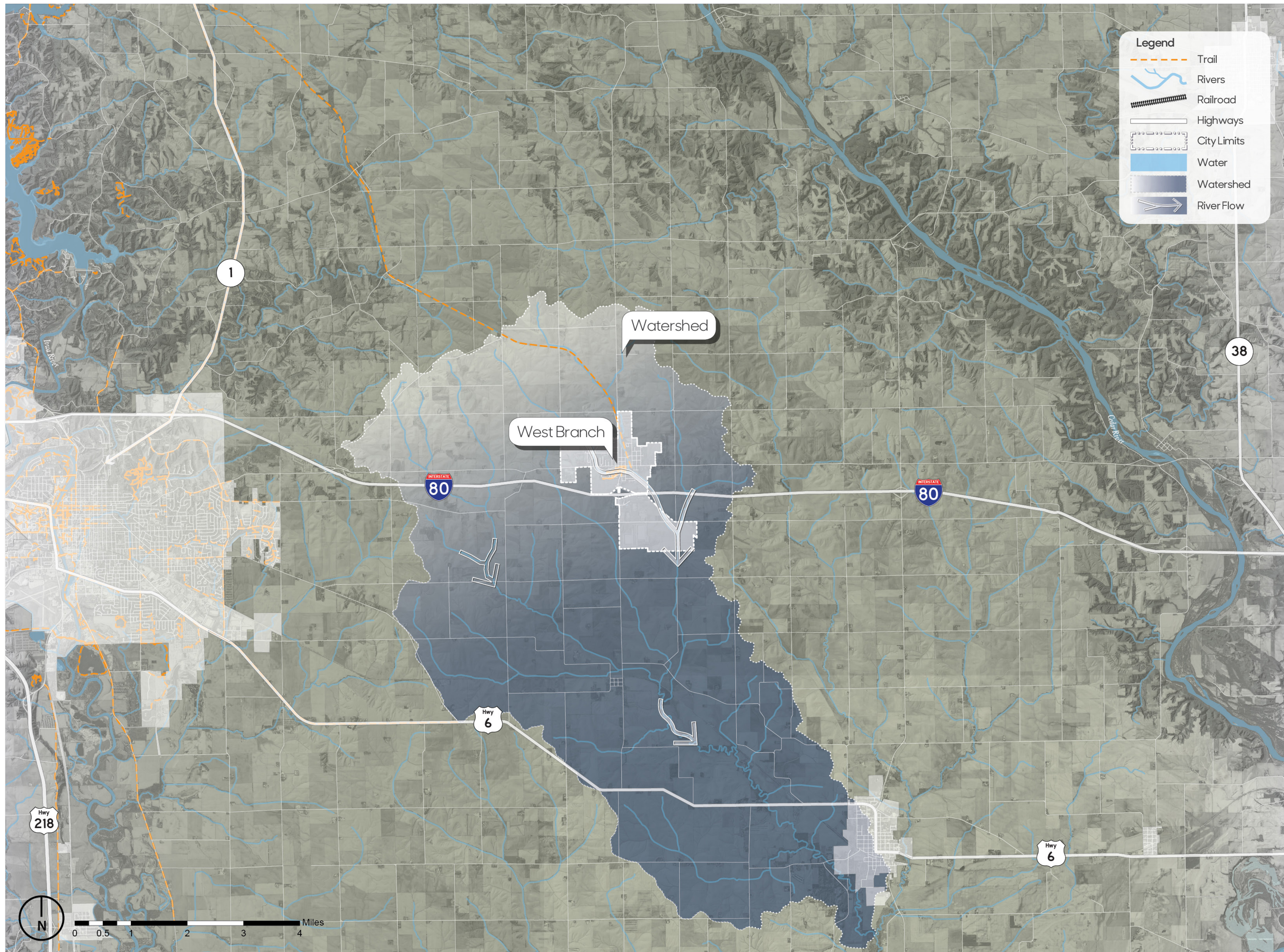
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Regional Watershed

A watershed is a defined area or ridge of land with a boundary that separates waters flowing to different rivers, creeks, or basins. Watershed boundaries show the extent of a drainage area flowing to a single outlet point and determine whether precipitation is directed into one watershed or an adjacent watershed.

It is important to note that there are multiple levels of watersheds; for instance the Iowa River watershed is composed of a dozen smaller watersheds, and the Iowa River watershed is a sub-basin of the Mississippi River watershed.

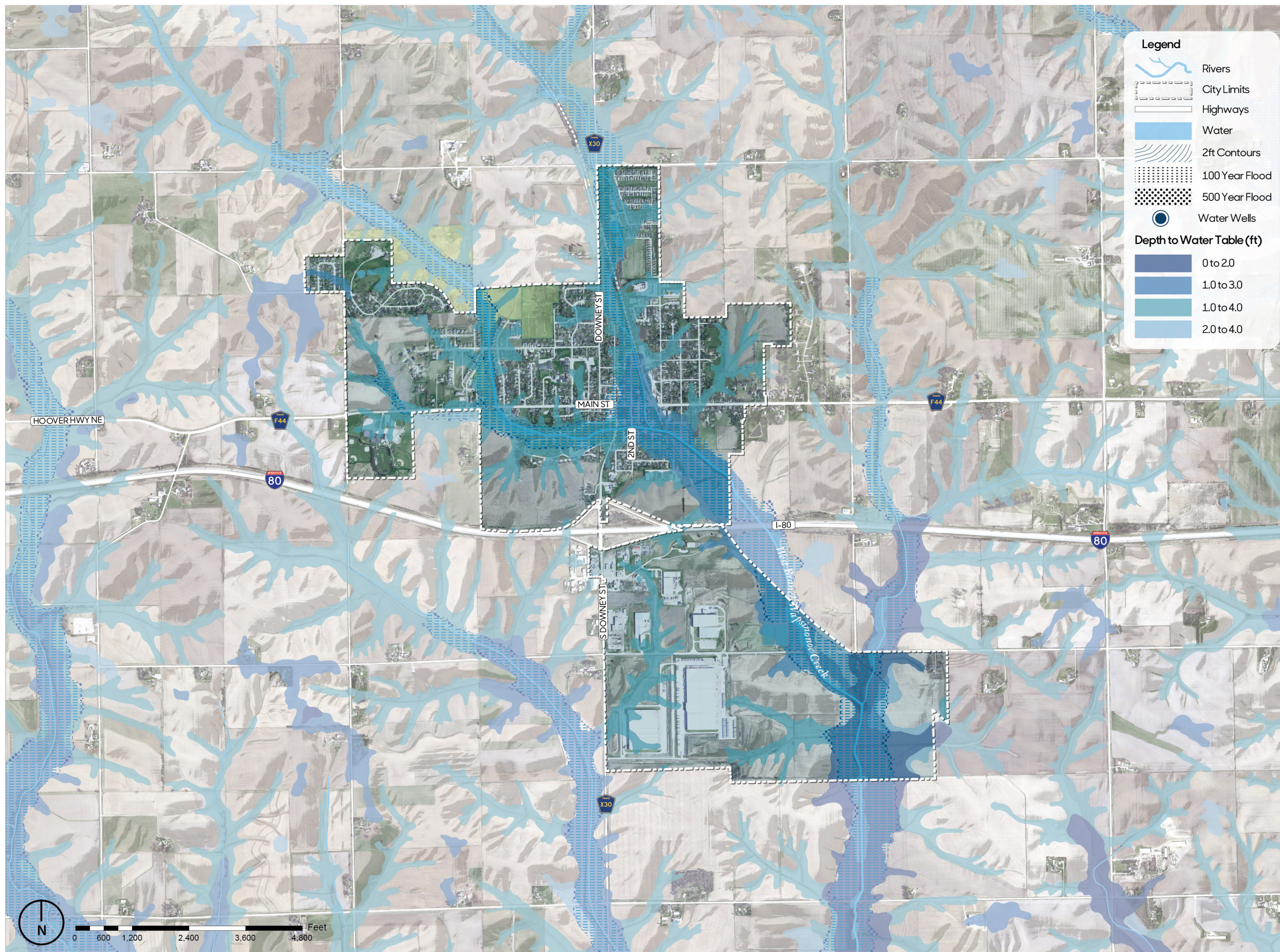
Where a community is located in relation to its surrounding watershed(s) determines its capacity to manage regional watershed issues such as flooding. For example, a community located near the end of a watershed (close to the outlet point) will have little capacity to reduce the amount of water draining toward it from upland areas.

West Branch Regional Watersheds

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Map Source: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, "Natural Resources Geographic Information Systems Library," <http://www.igsb.uiowa.edu/nrgislibx/>.

Depth to Water Table

The water table is defined as the distance below the surface at which the ground is saturated with water. Depth to water table is represented as a range because it varies due to seasonal changes and precipitation volumes. For example, following spring snow-melt an area with a depth to water table ranging from one foot to three feet is likely to be at or near one foot depth.

The map shows how close to the surface groundwater can be. Pavement and foundations are affected by groundwater near the surface. Freezing and thawing, and upward pressure of rising groundwater can cause cracks or "frost boils" in pavement. Foundations can be wet and require "dewatering," which can be expensive.

Where the value is less than 0ft, water can well up out of the ground. This causes localized flooding, even if there is no surface water draining to the area.

West Branch

Depth to Water Table

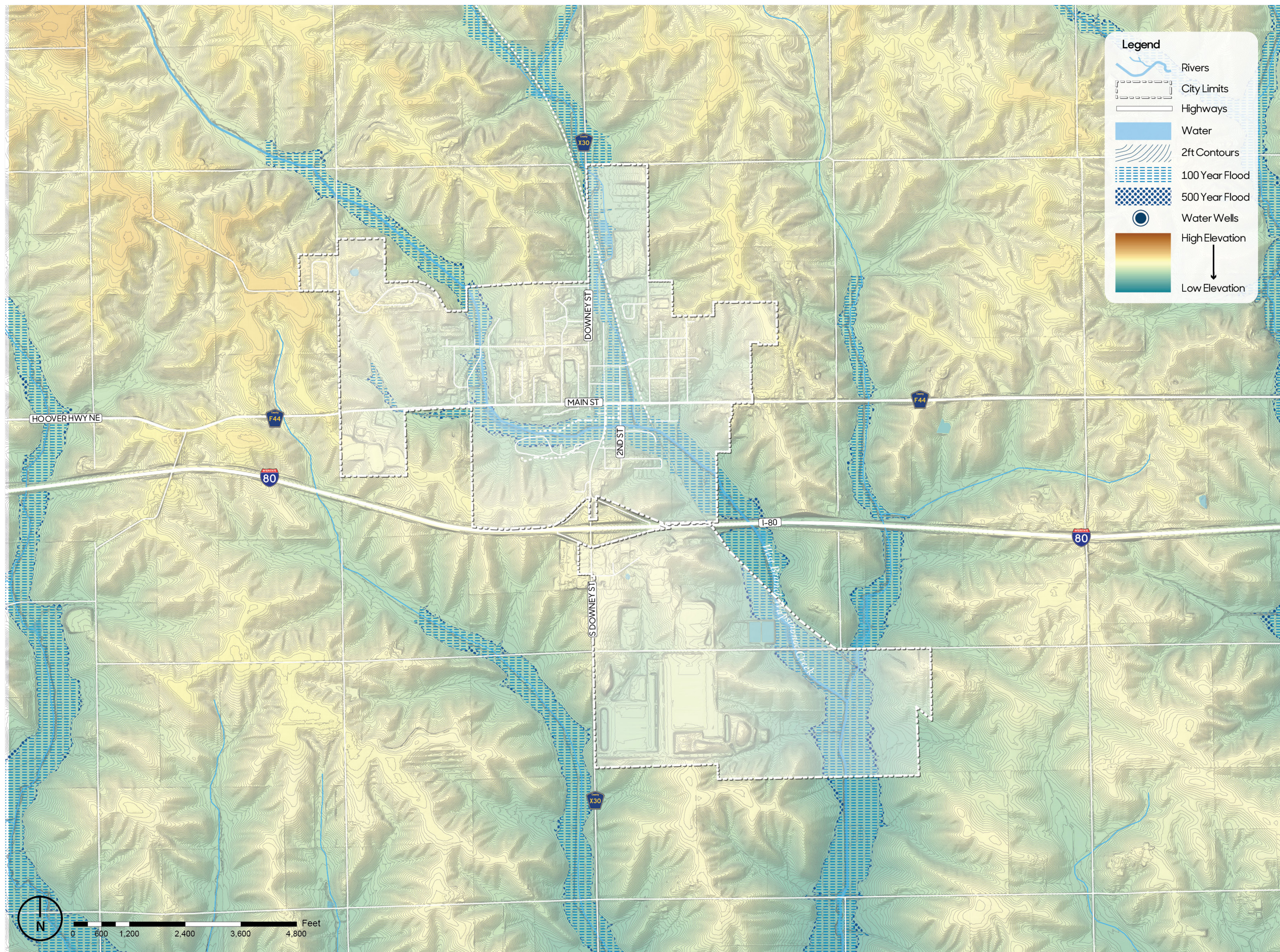
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Elevation and Flow

The map to the left displays topographic differences in elevation using a combination of contour lines and the color gradient depicted in the legend. The high points and low points have also been located.

Note the relationship of your community to the surrounding elevation; is it located in a valley or on high ground, or is it split between the two?

If your community lies within or near a floodplain or floodway, the map reflects these features. Not all communities will have these elements; if they are absent on this map, none are present.

Flood risk is correlated to low-lying land. This map shows your community's flood risk as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Map Service Center. This map shows the two most important flood zones: if they are present: the Base Flood and the Regulatory Floodway (consult legend.) Base Flood is the zone having a one percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year, also referred to as the "100-year floodplain." The Regulatory Floodway is the channel of a stream plus any adjacent floodplain areas that must be kept free of encroachment so that the 1% flood discharge can be accommodated without increasing the base flood elevation.

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Elevation and Flow

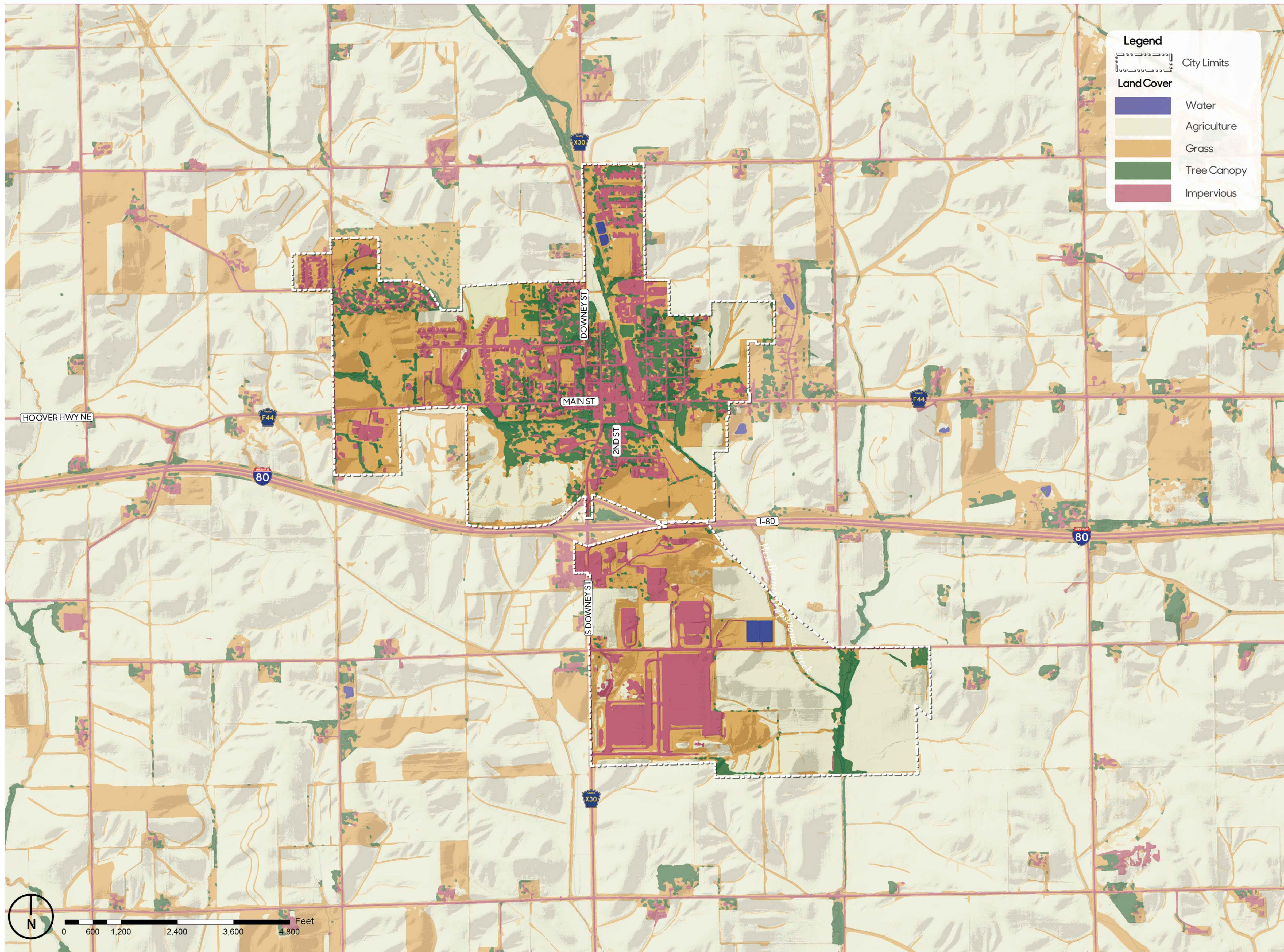
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Present Day Land Cover

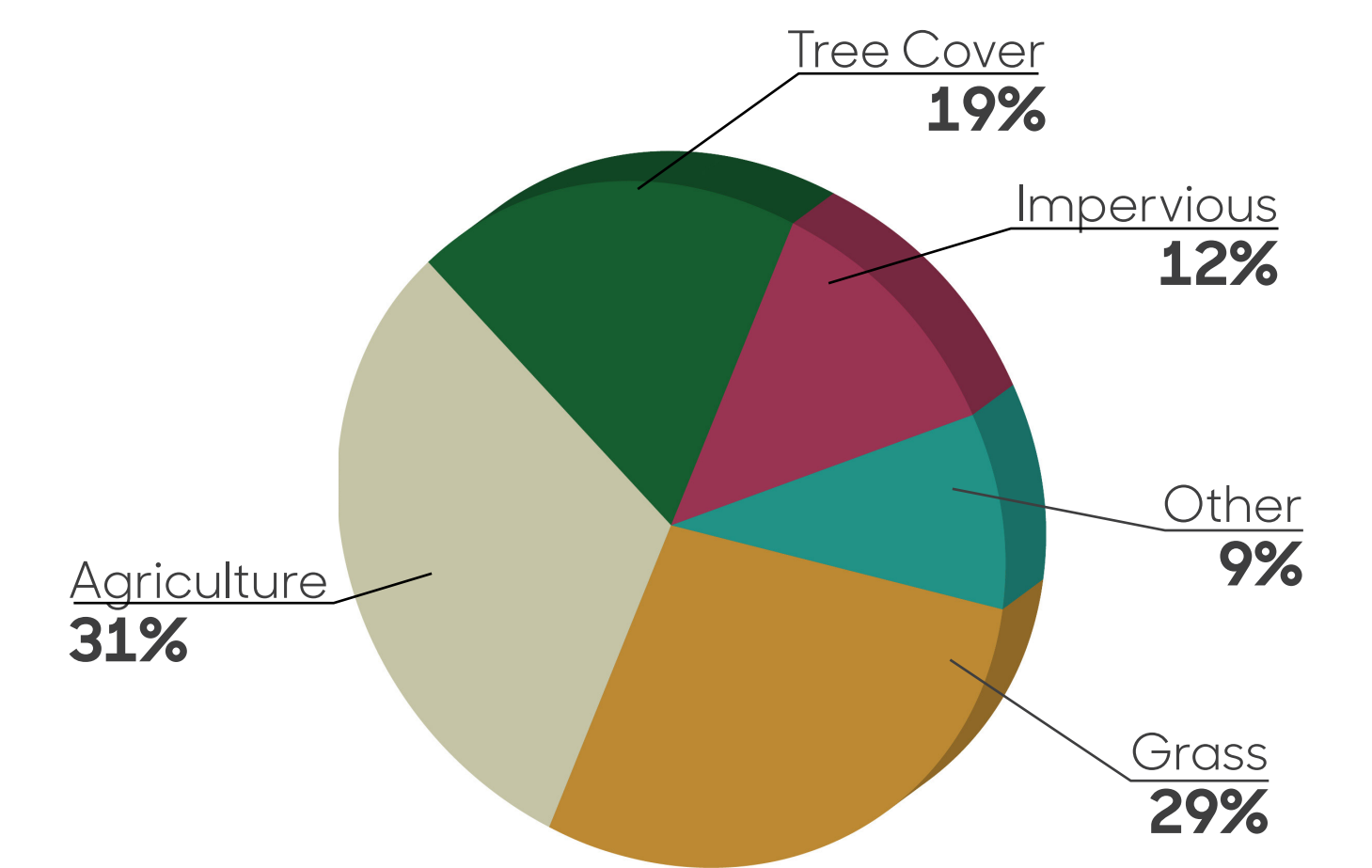
The land cover map depicts both natural and man-made land cover types with aerial imagery. The Iowa DNR created 15 unique classes for this dataset to differentiate land covers. Refer to the legend for a breakdown of land cover types within your community boundaries.

What do you observe about the dominant land cover types in your community?

Where is the tree canopy most concentrated?

Compare the amount of impervious surfaces (e.g., parking lots, roads, buildings) to the other surfaces (e.g., water, grass, and agriculture.) What does this mean for surface water movement?

Tree cover affects microclimate. Are places surrounded by canopy more pleasant in the summer? How do these places feel in the winter?



Percent Land Cover Type

West Branch Present-Day Land Cover

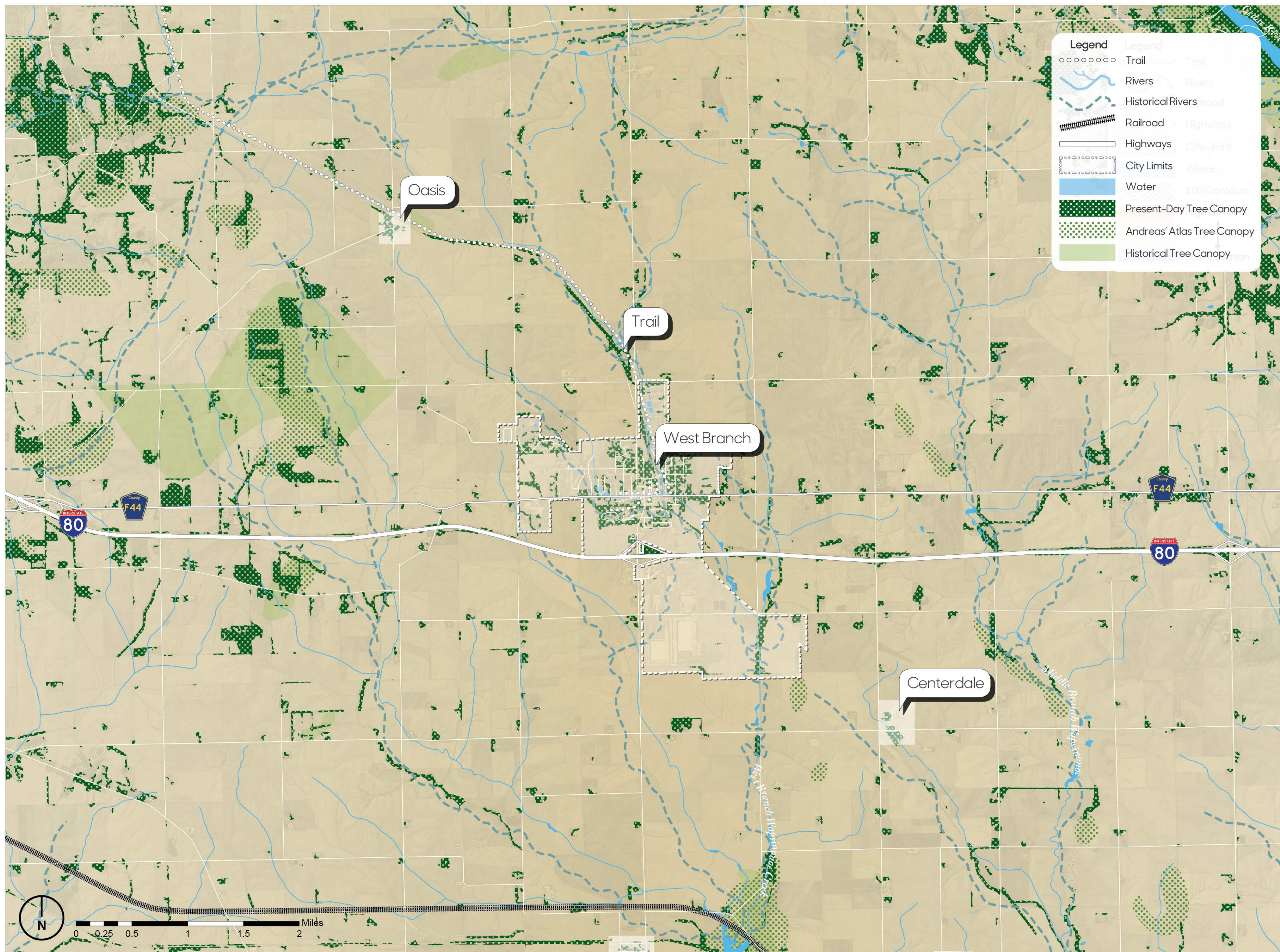
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Landscape Change Over Time

The map on this page shows how the landscape has changed over time, with an emphasis on vegetation and drainageways. It is helpful for understanding how landscapes change and for considering how these changes might affect how well the landscape works to support human and ecological needs.

Trees are invaluable. They clean the air, create shade, and cool the atmosphere. They intercept rainfall and consume groundwater, which helps mitigate stormwater runoff. Carefully chosen and placed trees provide communities identity and residents with a sense of home. In Iowa, a prairie state, we increased tree cover to create shade and a sense of enclosure within rural towns. Lack of natural fires and burning has also generally increased tree cover along rivers and floodplains. Other areas of trees have diminished due to clearing for roads or agriculture, or other purposes.

What changes do you see to the tree canopy surrounding your community? Where has the tree canopy decreased? Where might the tree canopy have increased? Consider what changes to the landscape might have led to the increase or decrease of trees in the region (e.g., farming practices, community development, establishing homesteads and windbreaks, preservation of natural resources).

This map also shows current and historical stream and river corridors. Alterations to waterways such as channelization have been made to increase drainage, but can lead to increased erosion, sediment movement, and flooding where the straightened portion ends. Storm sewers also affect streams and waterways where outfalls drop urban runoff into the corridor, which can dramatically decrease water quality. How have streams and rivers changed? Do these changes appear to be man-made or natural?

The following map shows the difference between the present day tree canopy gathered from the DNR's Land Cover data and past landscape cover, as defined in the General Land Office (GLO) surveys from 1836 through 1859 and the A.T. Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa from 1875.

West Branch

Landscape Change Over Time: Trees and Streams

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Julia Badenhope, Chad Hunter

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