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March 6, 2025

Chair Nash and Members of the House State & Local Government Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and the Minnesota County Engineers Association (MCEA), we write in support of HF1478, a bill to appropriate additional funding to the Public Land Survey System Monument Grant Program.

AMC and MCEA represent all of Minnesota's 87 counties and county engineers across the state. Counties manage over 44,500 miles of county highways statewide. A vast majority of county roads are related to and described using the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) in Minnesota.

Our members are concerned about the deterioration of the PLSS. Over time, PLSS monuments have been lost, damaged, or misplaced. The PLSS is the basis for all real property descriptions and a foundational infrastructure that impacts both rural and urban areas, businesses and governmental agencies, property owners and tenants. As such, we would like to share our support for the re-monumentation and mapping of the PLSS as proposed by the Minnesota Society of Professional Land Surveyors and Minnesota Association of County Surveyors. Our county organizations support the funding provided in HF1478 for the re-monumentation of the PLSS and we desire to be a partner in the process to complete this important task.

We want to thank Representative Freiberg, Chair Nash, and members of the committee for recognizing the importance of the PLSS. Thank you for your consideration and support of HF1478.

Sincerely,

Emily Murray, Transportation & Infrastructure Policy Analyst  
*Association of Minnesota Counties*

Lyndon Robjant, Carver County Engineer  
*President, Minnesota County Engineers Association*

# Public Land Survey System Monument Grant Requests

## Overview

Discover the significance of the Public Land Survey System (PLSS)! Instituted in 1785, this system divides land into townships and sections, simplifying land identification and descriptions, and enabling efficient land management and real estate transactions. PLSS monumentation involves physically marking important PLSS locations, such as corners of a section or township, with markers called monuments.

In Minnesota, where PLSS surveys were pivotal for early settlement and development, neglect threatens the integrity of these historic markers. But change is underway.

Thanks to critical legislation passed last year, Minnesota is investing \$9.7 million in the Monument Grant Program, empowering counties to preserve and update PLSS records and monuments. This initiative ensures that our state's property infrastructure endures.

The impact? Immense! By maintaining the PLSS, certainty and stability of land boundaries will be provided. A stable PLSS will support infrastructure development, land management, and environmental stewardship.

The PLSS isn't just history—it's our foundation. Join us in preserving this vital system, securing Minnesota's legacy for future generations.

Find more information on the [Preserving the Public Land Survey System](#) webpage.



Brass-capped aluminum pipe monument (front) compared to previous wood post monument (back).

## Initiated Requests for Funding

The PLSS Monument Grant Request for Proposal (RFP) opened on February 1, 2024, and closed on April 5, 2024. Sixty-two counties submitted a total of 65 applications, asking for \$15.4 million in funding. Grant requests ranged from \$50,000 to \$300,000, with an average request of \$237,429. This strong response shows a high demand for funding to preserve PLSS monuments, suggesting that the current one-time funding isn't enough to meet the need.

On May 1, 2024, Minnesota IT Services (MNIT), through the Minnesota Geospatial Information Office (MnGeo), awarded 34 grants totaling \$9.1 million to counties for restoring, maintaining, and updating PLSS survey markers. The counties receiving grants are Becker, Big Stone, Carlton, Chippewa, Cook, Cottonwood, Faribault, Grant, Koochiching, Lac qui Parle, Lake, Lake of the Woods, Mahnommen, Marshall, Martin, Meeker, Mower, Murray, Norman, Pennington, Pipestone, Polk, Pope, Red Lake, Redwood, Renville, Roseau, Stevens, Swift, Traverse, Wadena, Waseca, Watonwan, and Yellow Medicine.

## Funding requests reflect current challenges:

- Rural counties have contrasting characteristics of vast area and significant public lands vs. limited tax base and low population.
- The overwhelming backlog of PLSS remonumentation in most counties poses a daunting financial burden.
- Even counties equipped with survey programs struggle due to funding and staff shortages for PLSS remonumentation.
- Inflation and labor shortages in Minnesota exacerbate financial strains on counties.
- County recorder funds often fall short or are depleted, rendering them inadequate for PLSS remonumentation.
- Current PLSS preservation heavily relies on private surveyors providing services to private landowners or county projects.



**62 counties**  
submitted applications  
requesting grant funding.



**34 counties**  
received grant funding.

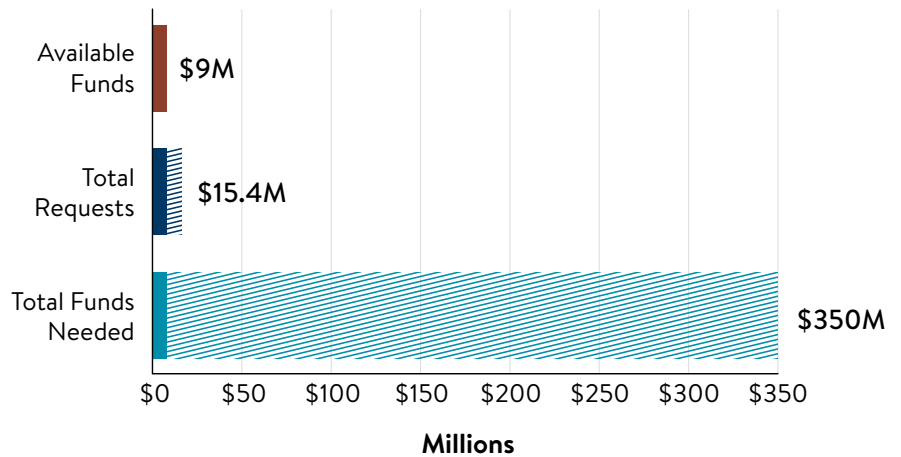


**5,657**  
Corners to be restored,  
maintained or updated.

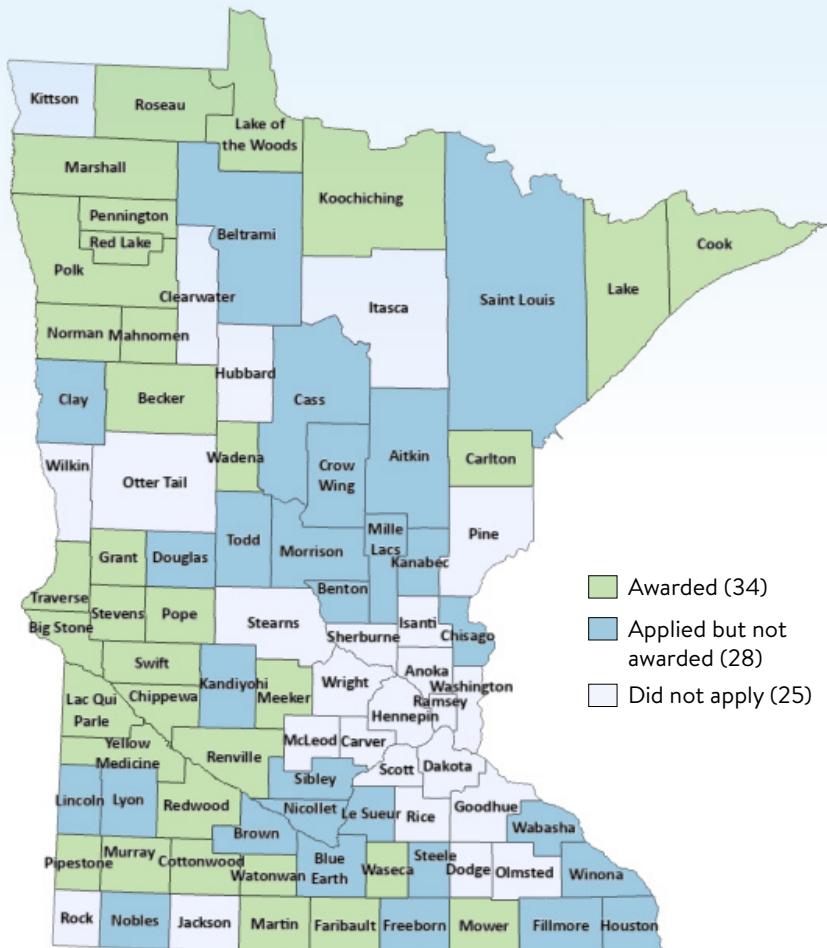


**19,836**  
Records to be updated.

## Current vs. Long-Term Funding Needs



## 2024 PLSS Grant Applications and Awards



### Timeline

- ..... Counties completed the full grant applications by April 5, 2024.
- ..... The Geospatial Advisory Council (GAC) PLSS Preservation Committee, a cross-sector team, evaluated applications prioritizing criteria defined in the legislation.
- ..... Selected grantees were announced April 30, 2024.
- ..... Workplans were approved, and grant projects began May 2024.
- ..... Project work, evaluation, and final reimbursements are to be completed by March 31, 2026.

March 4, 2025

Representative Jim Nash  
Chair  
State Government Finance & Policy Committee  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Nash and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Minnesota Society of Professional Surveyors (MSPS), I am writing to express our strong support for HF1478, a bill that addresses a critical need to preserve and modernize Minnesota's Public Land Survey System (PLSS). This legislation upholds a fundamental duty of governance—safeguarding property rights—and ensures the long-term stability of land ownership records across our state.

Since the incorporation of the western territories following the Louisiana Purchase, the PLSS has served as the foundation for Minnesota's property maps. Surveyors from the Government Land Office meticulously divided the land into townships and sections, marking each corner with monuments. Today, however, 180 years of development, agriculture, and natural wear have left only half of these critical markers as certified with a known location. As these section corners legally define every parcel in Minnesota, their preservation is essential to maintaining clarity in property boundaries, reducing disputes, and supporting efficient land management.

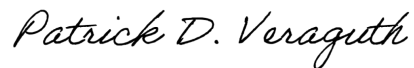
HF1478 continues a vital \$10 million annual grant program, managed by Minnesota IT Services (MNIT), to assist counties in remonumenting the PLSS. The program's initial funding of \$9.7 million in 2023 was met with overwhelming demand—over \$15 million in applications—demonstrating both the urgency of this work and the inadequacy of current resources. Many counties refrained from applying, aware that funds would fall short. This \$300 million, 30-year project requires sustained investment to succeed, and HF1478 provides the necessary framework to move forward.

The benefits of this initiative are clear and substantial. A robust PLSS significantly reduces the cost of private surveys—dropping expenses from as much as \$15,000 to \$5,000, or from \$8,000 to \$2,000 per survey. This not only eases the financial burden on landowners but also ensures accurate property taxation and informs sustainable land-use practices. Conversely, a deteriorating system invites costly disputes and undermines confidence in property ownership—a risk we cannot afford.

MSPS commends the legislature's leadership in launching this effort and urges the approval of HF1478 to secure the next phase of funding. This bill is an investment in Minnesota's future, preserving a system that has defined our state for nearly two centuries and preparing it for the next 200 years. We stand ready to support this initiative with our expertise and advocacy.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me at (320) 762-2964 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patrick D. Veraguth".

Patrick Veraguth

Legislative Chair, Minnesota Society of Professional Surveyors

County Surveyor, Douglas County

A historical map of the Great Lakes region, showing Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. The map features a grid of townships and ranges, with major cities like Bismarck, Fargo, Duluth, Superior, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Pierre, Sioux Falls, Yankton, Milwaukee, Madison, and Lansing marked. It also shows Lake Superior, Lake Michigan, Lake Travers, and Lake of the Woods. The map is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue box containing text.

# Preserving The Public Land Survey System

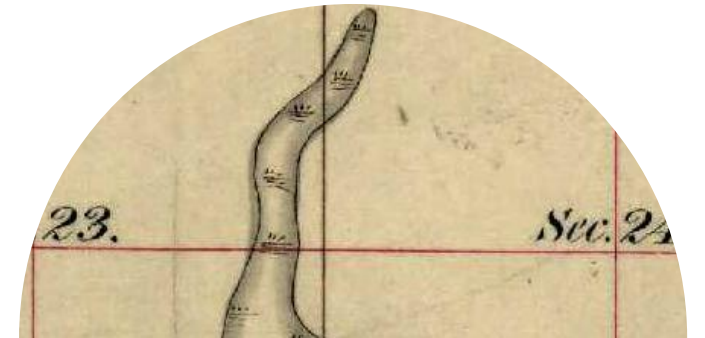
Ensuring that Minnesota's Public Land Survey System (PLSS) Monuments are available for everyone

Public Land Survey System Monuments are essential for all property descriptions, location of infrastructure, and are the basis for accurate digital geospatial data.

# Thank You, Legislators!

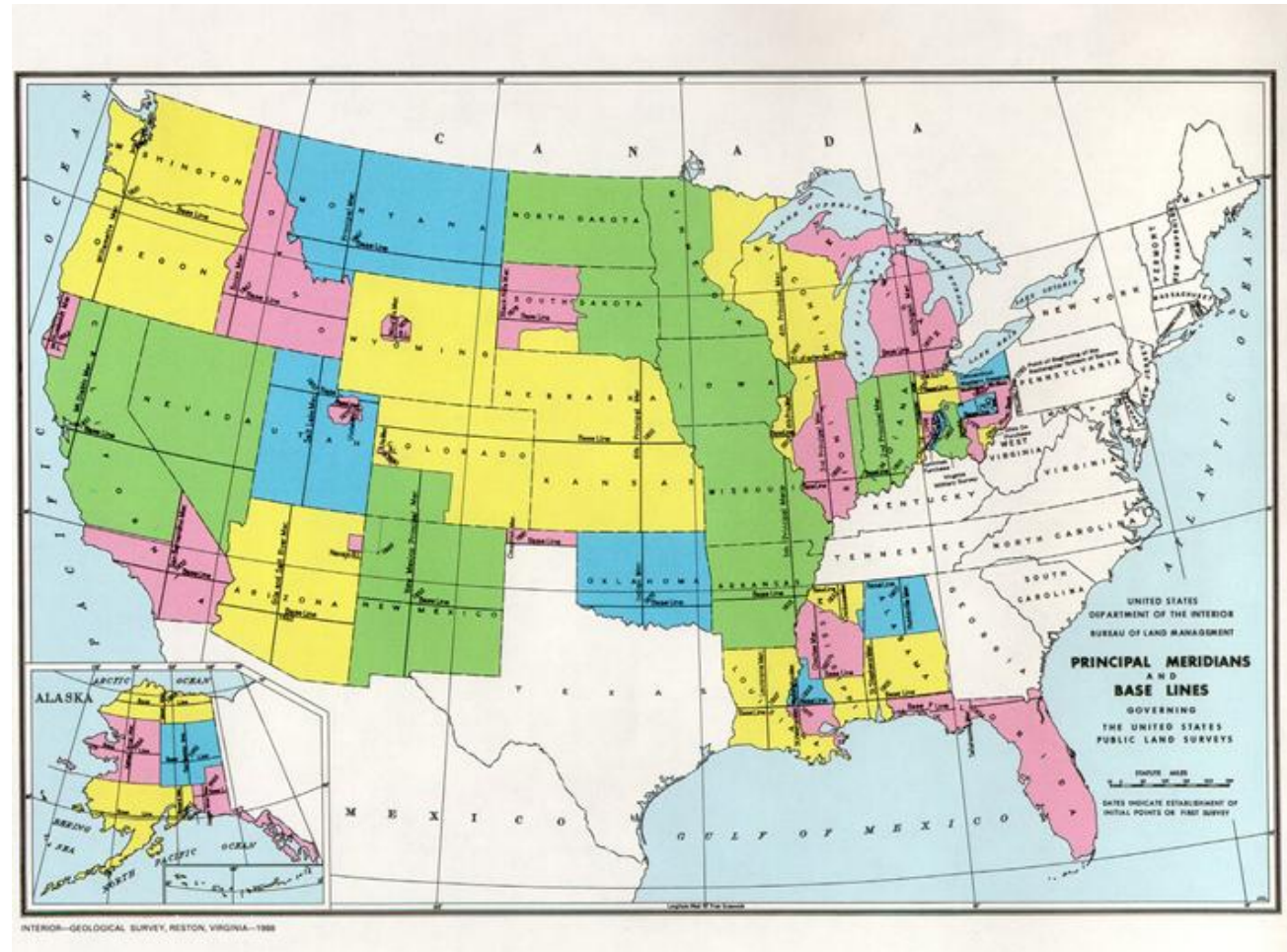
- 2023 State Government Finance Bill granted \$9.7 million for grants to counties for PLSS remonumentation
- First state funding for a fundamental government obligation
- Degradation creates lawsuits
- A great start to tackle a major problem.

Set post for corner to Sec. 23  
20, 21, 28 and 29  
Black Oak 8 S 52° E 45 1/2  
Black Oak 6 N 32° W 19 links  
Black Oak 9 S 35° W 18 links  
Black Oak 7 S 40° E 22 links  
Surface  
S 1/4



# The Public Land Survey System is?

- Legal & geographic framework covering 2/3 of the USA
  - Underpins the land tenure system in the PLSS states
    - Basis for all property descriptions
    - Enables the secure transfer of property
    - Foundational documents of MN
- Vital for safety, taxation, and economic development
  - GIS data and mapping is directly related to and dependent on the PLSS
  - Municipalities, parcels, roads, zoning, online maps, ad infinitum are built from it
  - Economic development is tied to accurate data



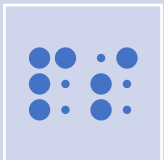
# The current state of PLSS monuments



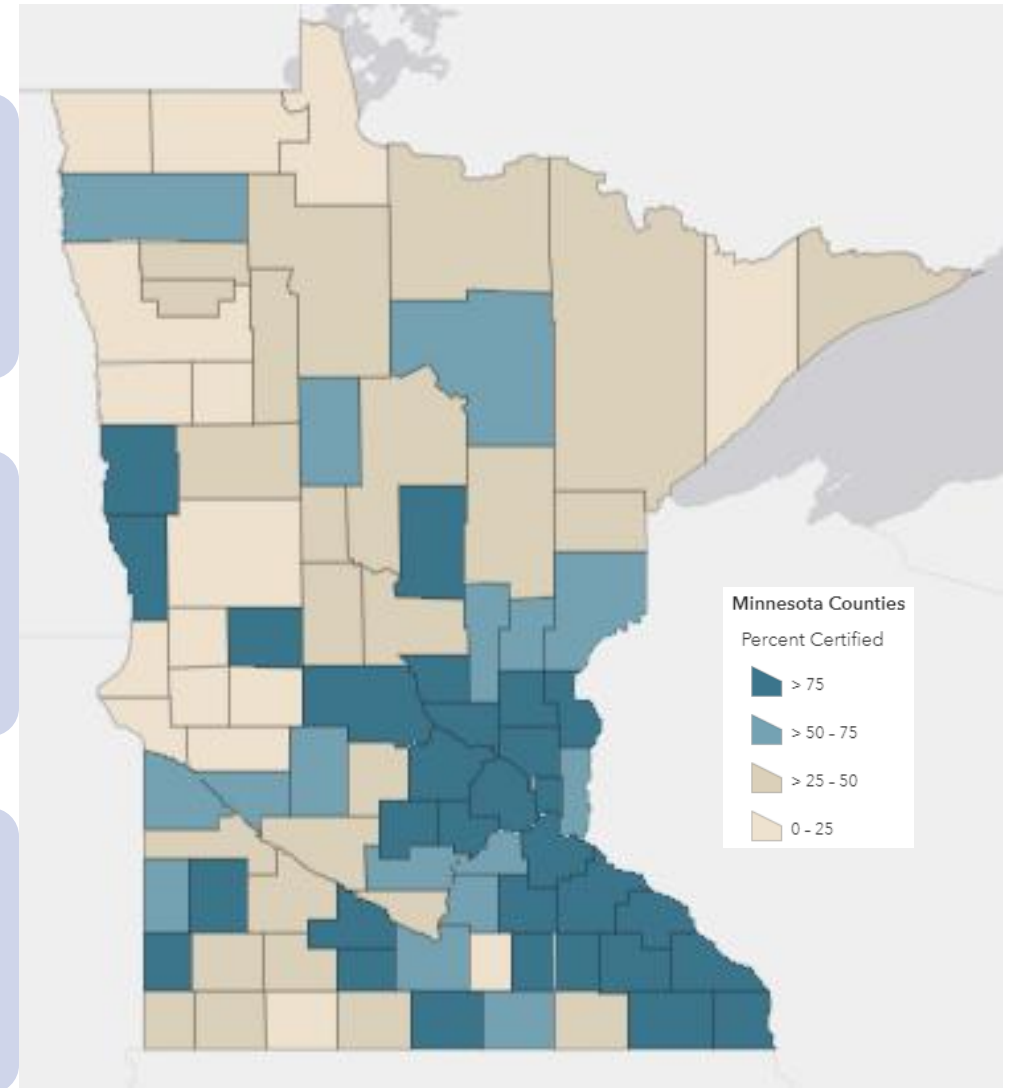
325,000 + PLSS Monuments set in MN  
(Originally set in 1850-90)



Less than ½ of the monuments  
(150,000) have a known location.



In 1896 Ramsey County recognized the  
need and began remonumentation.  
30% still in place.



# Need for Preserving the PLSS

- Many have never been verified, and were set by Civil War era contractors
- Half have “unknown” locations.
- Minimizing future lawsuits (\$15,000 minimum cost per party)
- Accurate location and cost savings for projects
- More precise data enables better land management and more accurate taxation
- Provides high paying jobs (\$60–130k)



# Good Start, Let's Keep It Going



Having a methodical program to preserve the future by perpetuating the PLSS



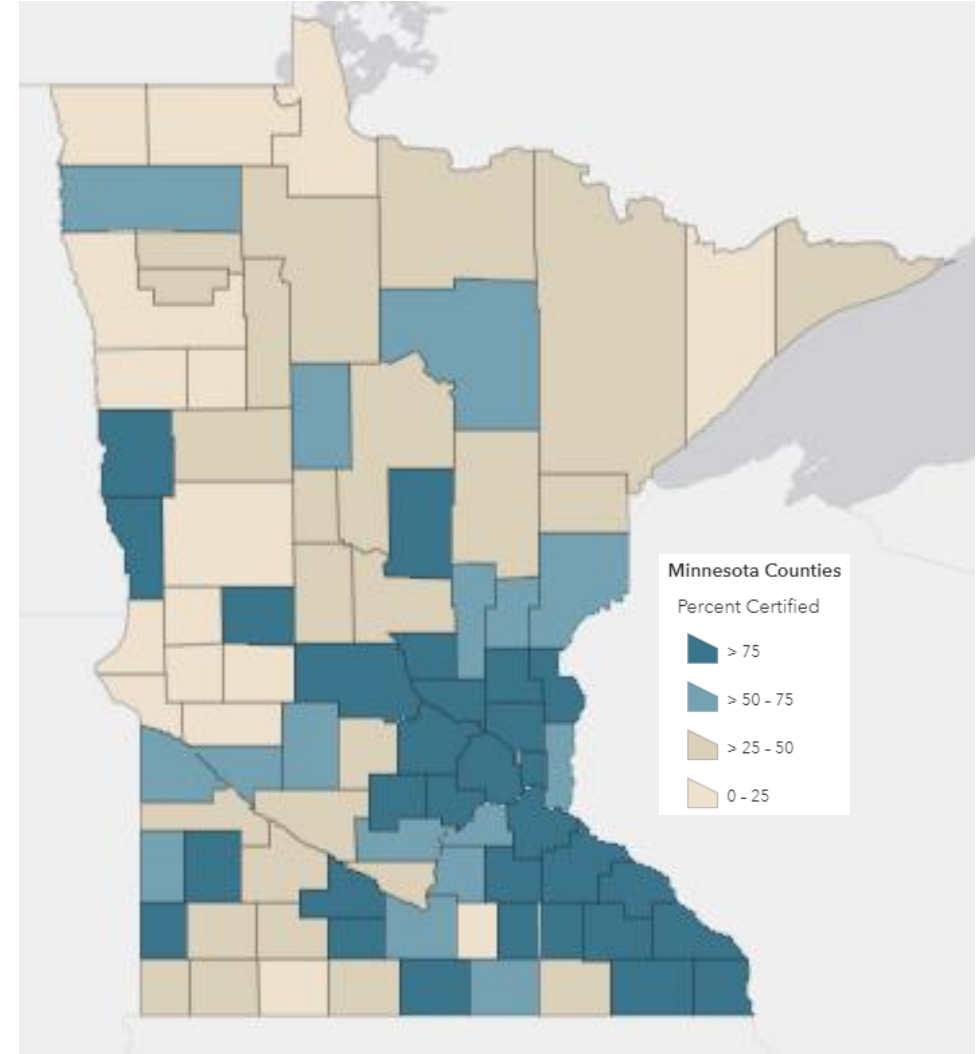
Over 175,000 unknown monuments must be found and locked into the digital system.



Cost is approximately \$1,800 per monument.

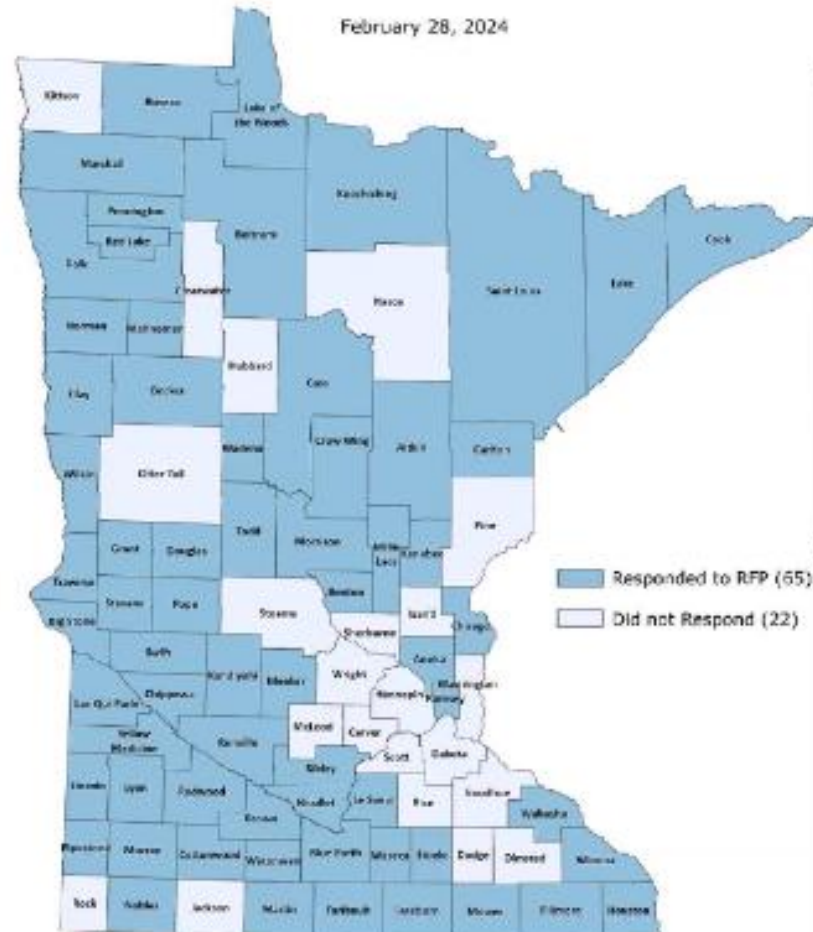


Cannot be done in 1 year.



## Counties Responding to the Spring 2024 RFP

February 28, 2024



## Letter of Intent (LOI) Statistics

65 Counties have responded to the Spring Request for Proposal and initiated 70 applications for funding.

	Funding To Be Requested	PLSS Corners To Be Addressed	Survey Records To Be Addressed
Totals =	\$16,168,454.00	13,503	57,332
Averages =	\$230,978.00	193	819

How many years and how much annually would you need to complete remonumentation in your county?

	Years to Complete Remonumentation	Annual Funding Needed to Remonument
Totals =	Min.= 0 Max.=100	\$13.5 million
Averages =	20	\$210,000.00

# Supporters



# Summary - PLSS

- Original infrastructure predating the State of Minnesota
- Integral to our property management system.
- 150 years of neglect has taken its toll and flaws are becoming worse.
- An investment in the PLSS today will decrease property disputes and enable successful projects in the future.
- Cost \$300 million over 30 years (\$10 million per year)
- Over \$15 million in request for \$9.7 million in funding.
- 64 counties applied. Estimates for \$14 million annual demand/capacity.

