



CITY OF ANN ARBOR'S BLUEBELT

September 11, 2025

farmland that
characterizes Michigan's
agricultural heritage and
supports the local food
economy



natural green
infrastructure that
safeguards drinking water



natural open spaces that
offer scenic views,
recreation and
biodiversity



preserved forever

Preserve: Preserve the highest quality lands with parcel level prioritization.

1. Prioritize soil quality and biodiversity.
2. Align with the priorities of key partners in the county, townships, land conservancies, and community, state, and federal agencies.
3. Include targeted outreach as part of the acquisition process.

Educate: Build awareness of Greenbelt program impacts and priorities throughout Ann Arbor and the surrounding communities.

1. Educate on the successes of the Greenbelt's first 15 years and opportunities for future investments for the general public, and to enhance equitable access for all whom the program can serve.
2. Communicate meaningful metrics on air/water/soil quality, social, cultural, and health impacts, and the economic value of biodiversity.
3. Initiate community and partner conversations to explore most valuable investments or changes needed in future strategies.

Collaborate: Actively participate in authentic cross-sector regional conservation collaboration.

1. Engage with county, townships, land conservancies, USDA-NRCS, and other partners.
2. Secure creative funding streams to support quality parcel acquisition in areas with fewer resources.
3. Align Greenbelt investments to support positive impact on city and township agricultural and open space plans and related community priorities.

Align: Align Greenbelt acquisitions with water, climate, and health equity goals.

1. Prioritize water quality.
2. Align with the City's Climate Action Plan, specifically the goals related to local food, healthy ecosystem, sustainable systems, and engaged community.
3. Be aware of county, city, and townships health and equity goals in Greenbelt education and engagement activities, and prioritize parcels accordingly.

STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITIES

Total Suspended
Solids
(TSS)

800k
lbs/yr

Biological
Oxygen Demand
(BOD)

87k
units/yr

Lead

1,200
lbs/yr

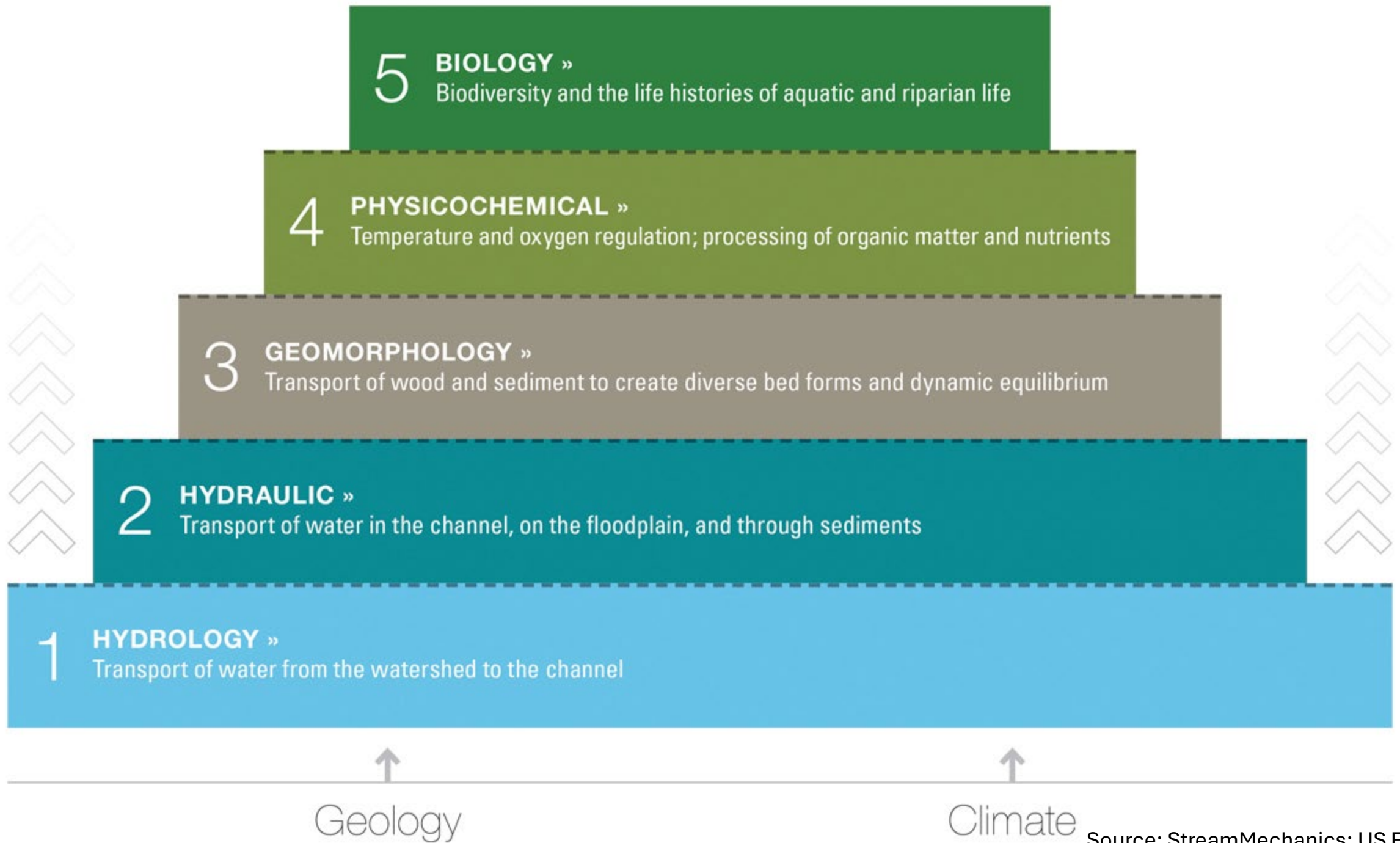
Total Nitrogen
(TN)

17,000
lbs/yr

Total
Phosphorus

2,000
lbs/yr

prevented forever





"After growing food and flowers on leased farmland for six years, we now have a farm to call home. **That long-term commitment means we are able to invest our time, labor and funds in building healthy soil**, in water lines, in pollinator plantings, in fruiting trees and perennial shrubs, in four-season structures for year-round harvests."

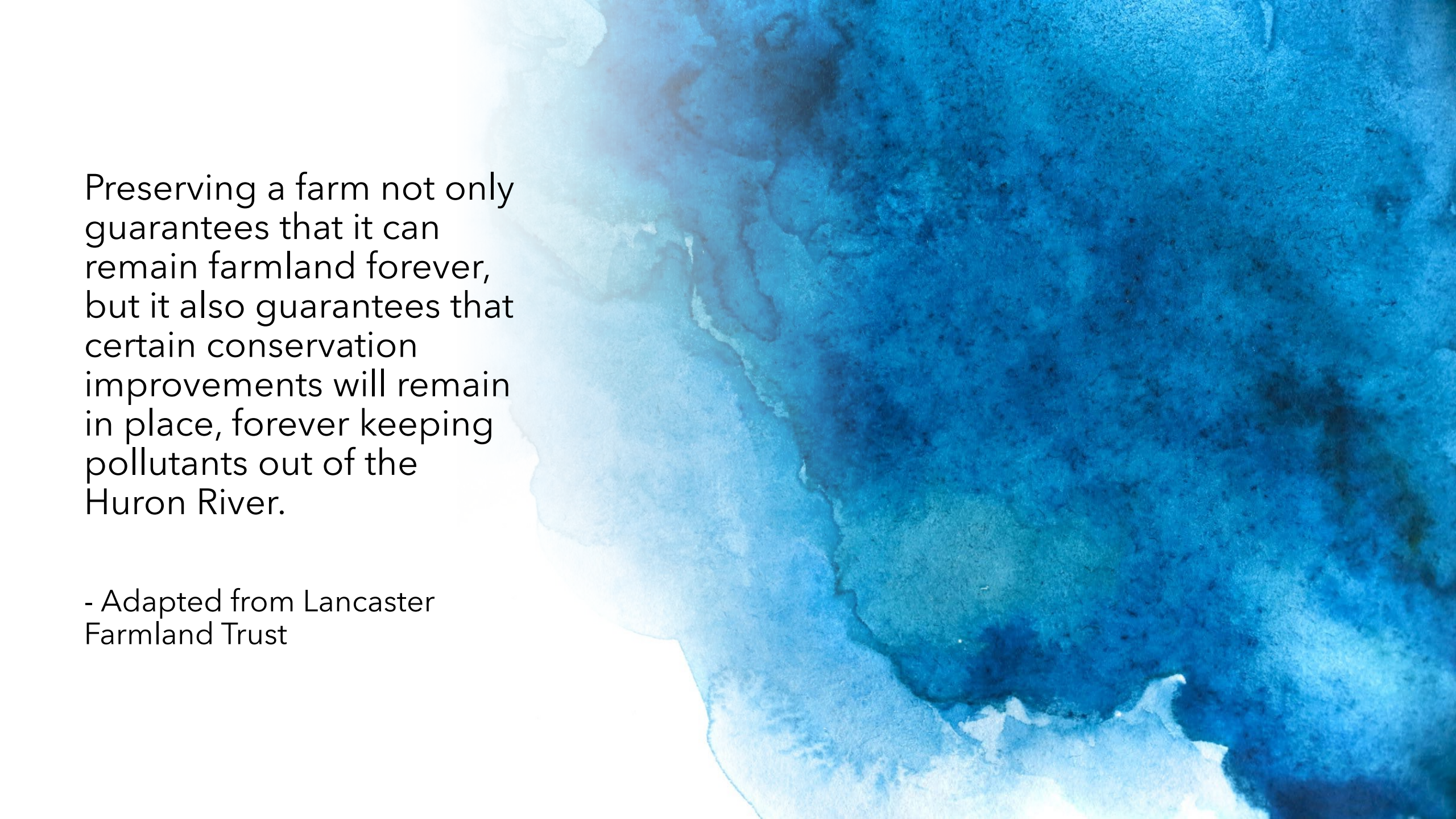
- Kristen Muehlhauser
Raindance Farm
a property with a conservation easement
Northfield Township, Washtenaw County

Sources referenced in speech: USDA Census of Agriculture; 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022

A recent survey found that the majority of landowners with easements have NRCS conservation plans and over 75% have adopted at least three conservation practices.

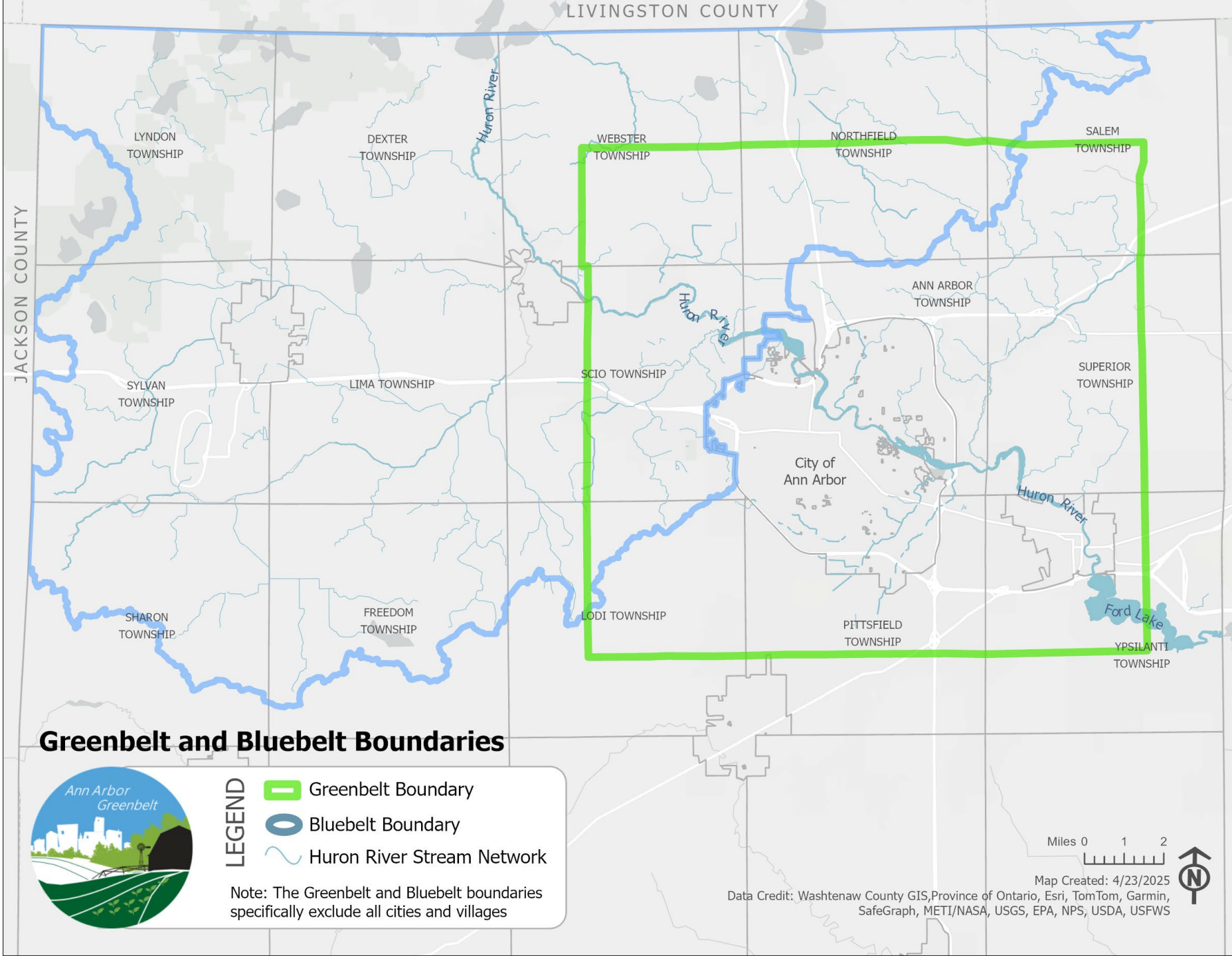
- American Farmland Trust



An abstract watercolor background with various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. The colors are blended together in a soft, painterly style, creating a textured, organic feel. The blue area occupies the right half of the image, while the left half is white.

Preserving a farm not only guarantees that it can remain farmland forever, but it also guarantees that certain conservation improvements will remain in place, forever keeping pollutants out of the Huron River.

- Adapted from Lancaster Farmland Trust





BLUEBELT DEVELOPMENT EXTRA CONTEXT

- OSPP voted in 2003 for 30 years
- OSPP expires in 9 years (distributed through 2034) - 1/3 of its life left
- No new money associated with Bluebelt
- Have 2 other well-defined goals that we still need to work on: Greenbelt and Buy-Protect-Sell
- Federal funding drying up for everyone
- Only land acquisition

Strategic and specific



BLUEBELT DEVELOPMENT - STAKEHOLDERS



ANN ARBOR
WATER



Huron
River
Watershed
Council



LEGACY
Land Conservancy



WEBSTER TOWNSHIP
MICHIGAN



ANN ARBOR
Charter Township



CITY OF ANN ARBOR
Natural Area
Preservation



TOWNSHIP OF
scio



Dexter Township
WASHTENAW COUNTY, MI



Northfield Township
— MICHIGAN —



BLUEBELT DEVELOPMENT - RESEARCH

- Similar programs
- Most effective land use
- Riparian buffer design
- Where does land preservation, not necessarily management & improvement, best benefit water quality?



GOAL SUBSETS

Groundwater Recharge Protection

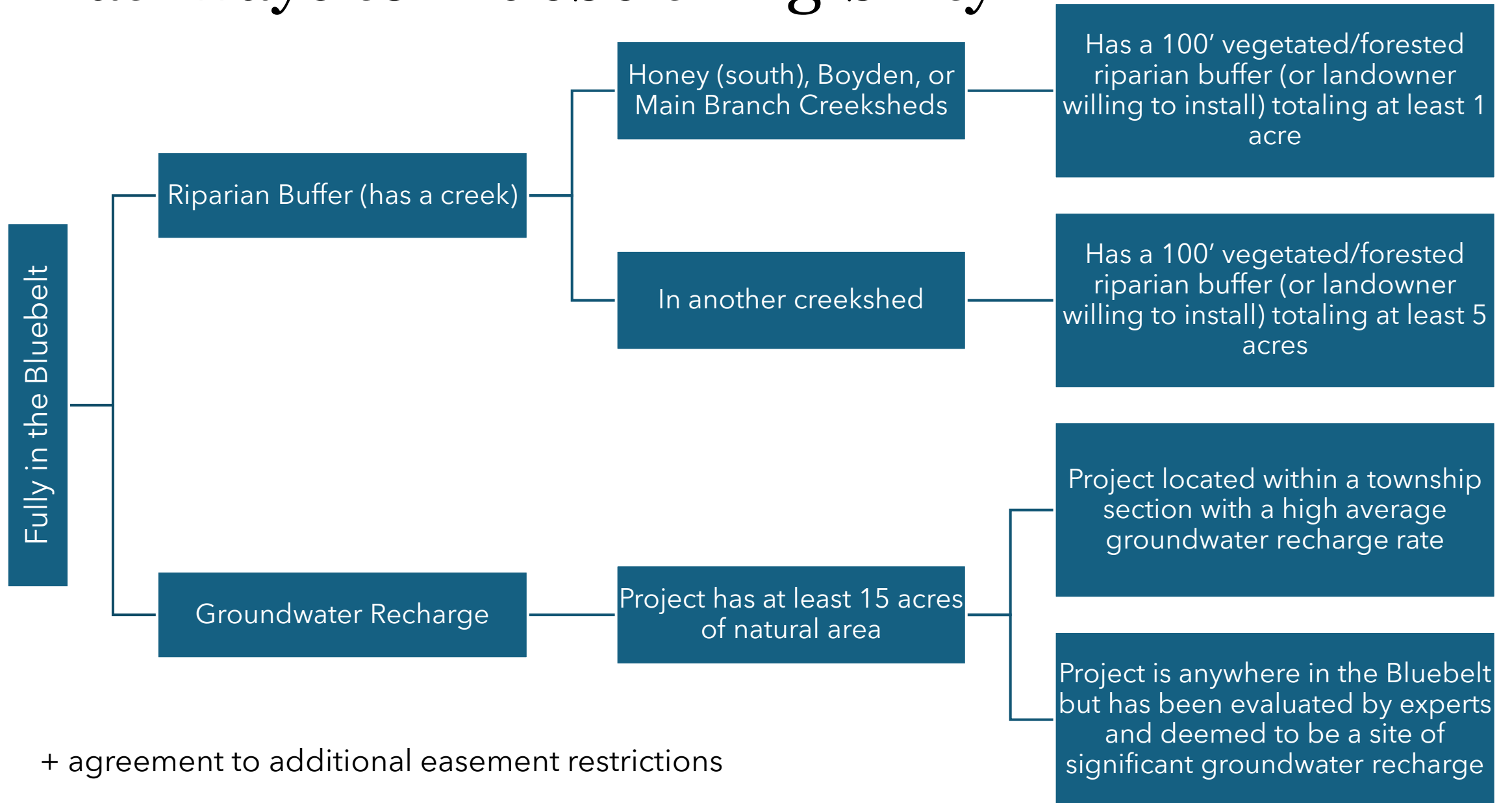
- Flooding/runoff prevention
- Maintain groundwater sources for stream baseflow
- Climate change → drier summers → more groundwater pumping

Riparian Buffer Protection

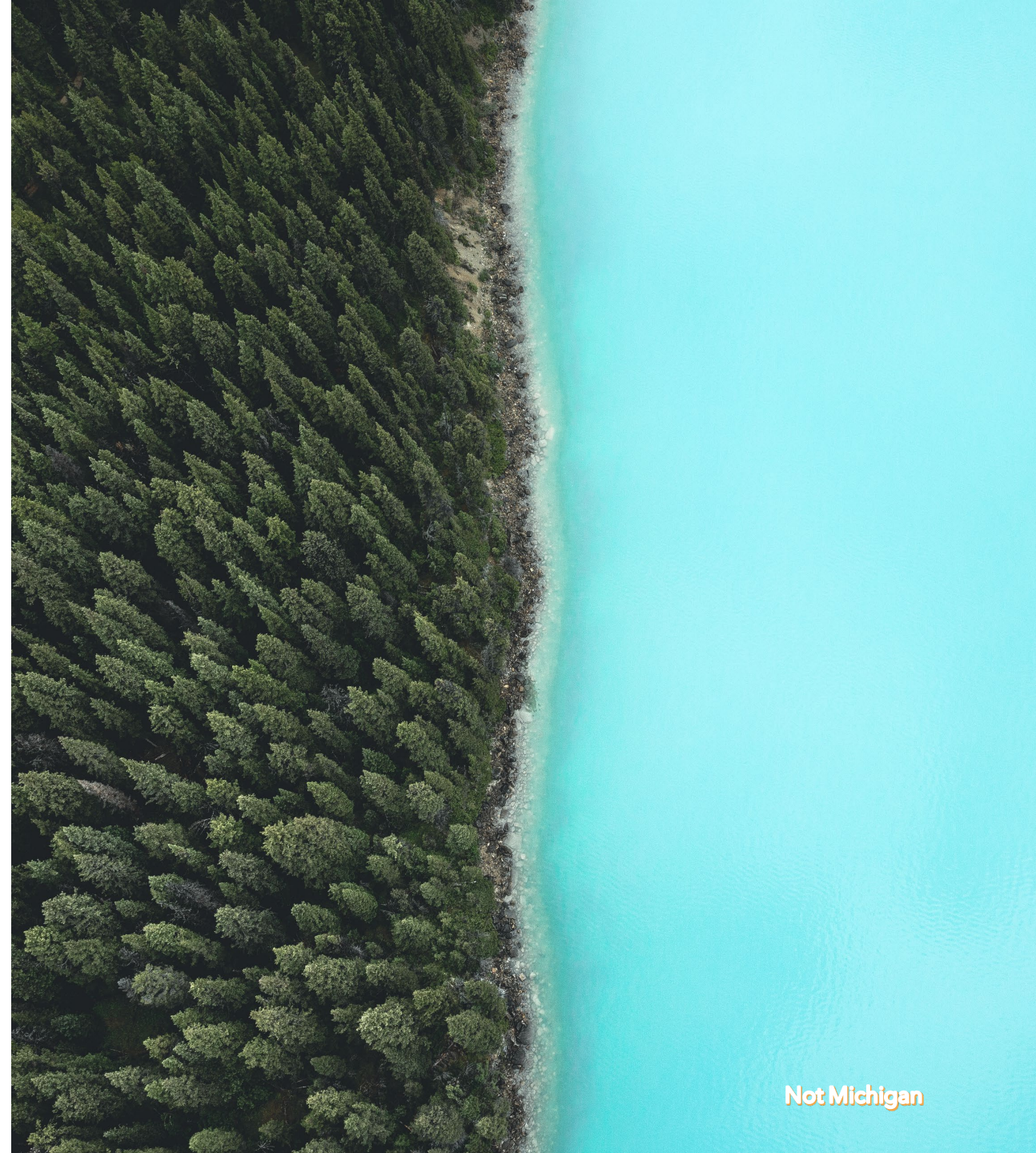
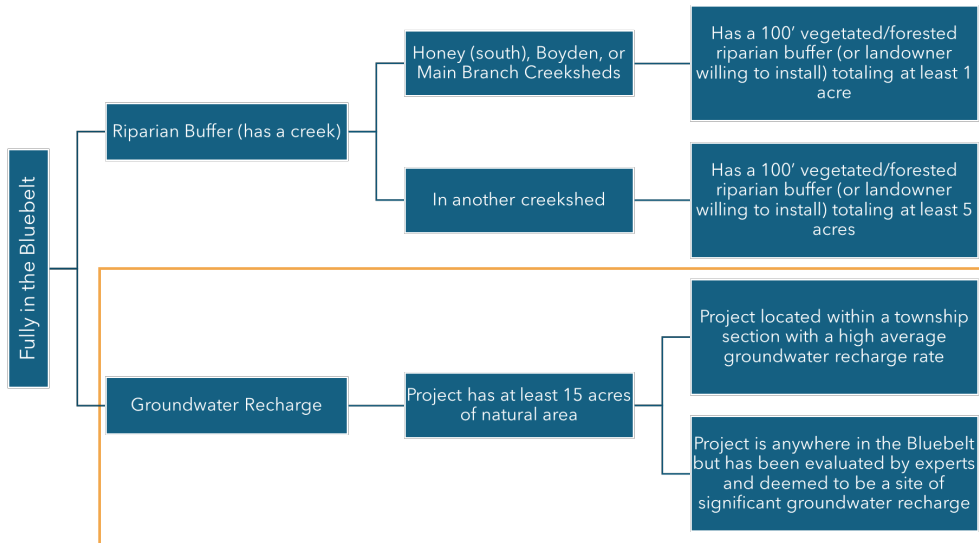
- Sedimentation and erosion
- Aquatic wildlife/water temperature
- Nutrient overload
- Storm mitigation

"cherry-pick to get the best projects you can; work harder to get the best ones you can, where everyone can see the direct benefit ... Don't pick iffy projects."

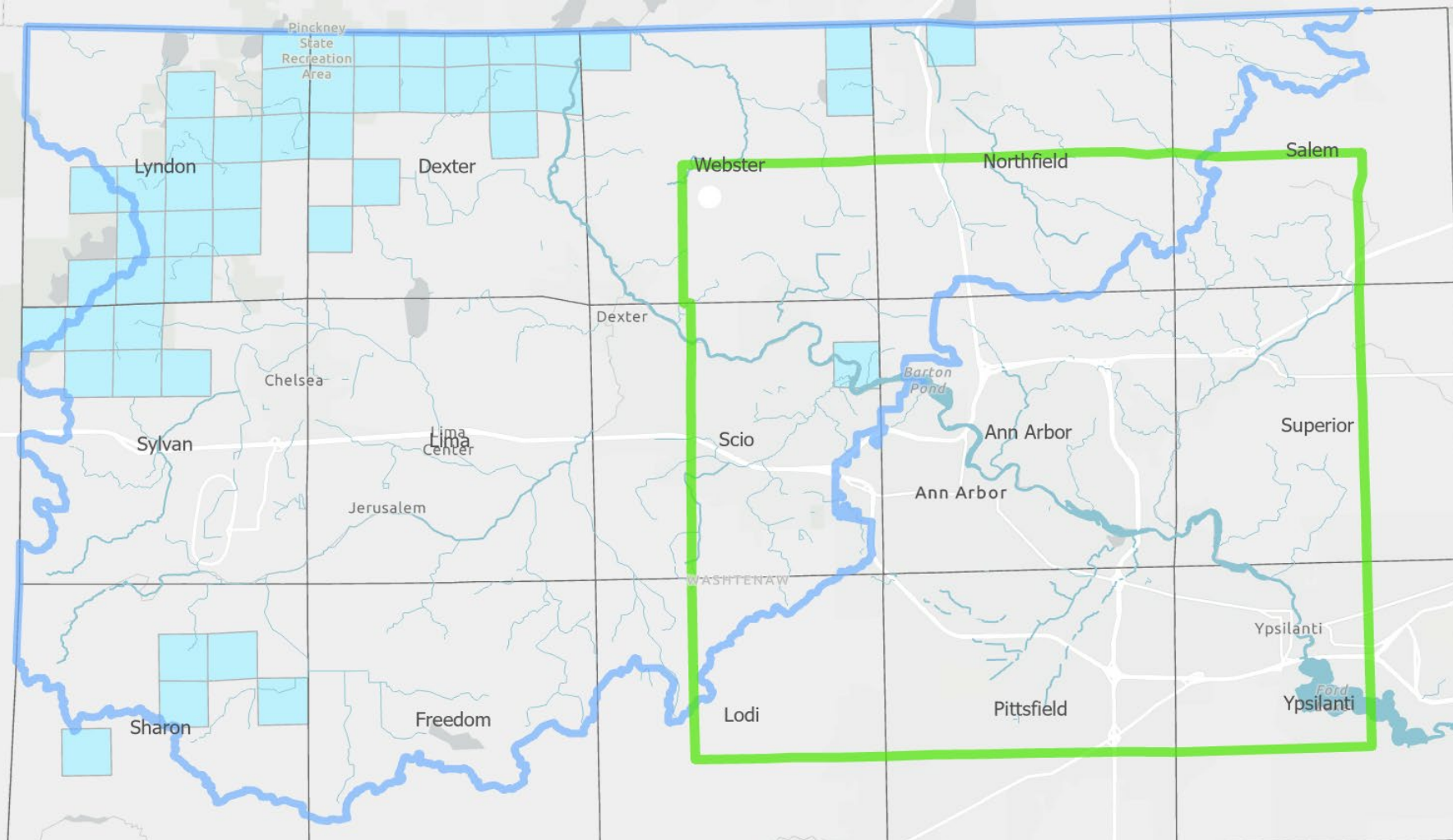
Pathways to Bluebelt Eligibility



GROUNDWATER RECHARGE PROTECTION: PROJECT REQUIREMENTS



Not Michigan

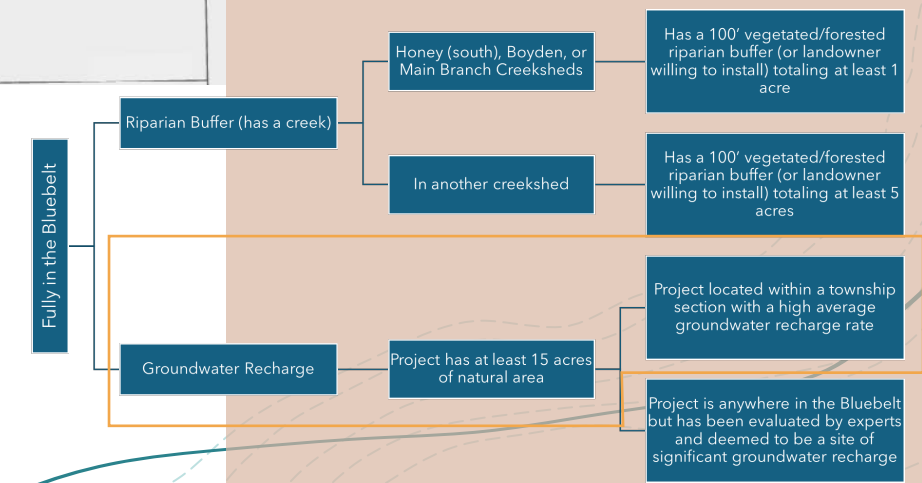


OPTION #1

- a) Has at least 15 acres of natural area; and
- b) In one of these sections

Data used: "Estimated Groundwater Recharge" by EGLE, MSU, and USGS

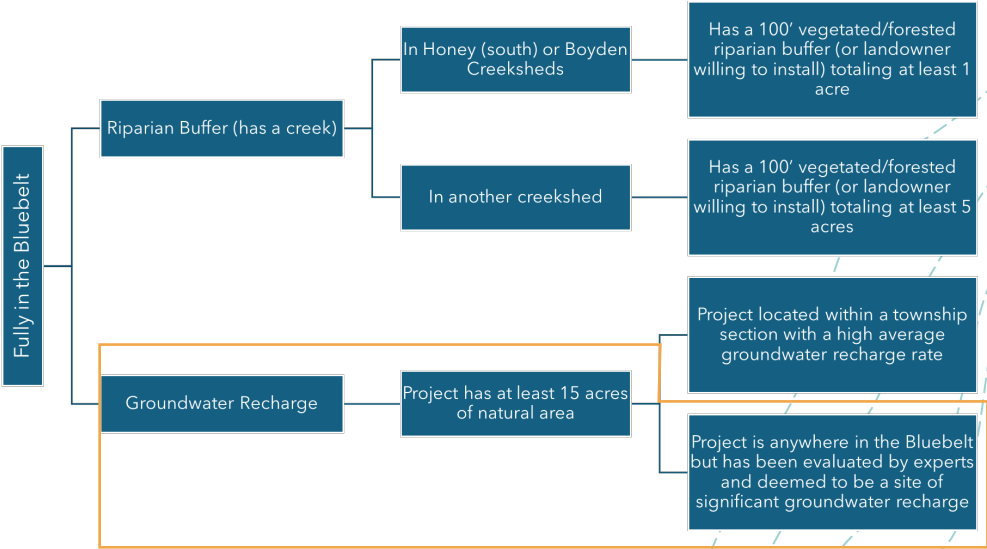
Among the PLS Sections in the Bluebelt, these have an average recharge rate greater than 1 stdev from the mean recharge rate.



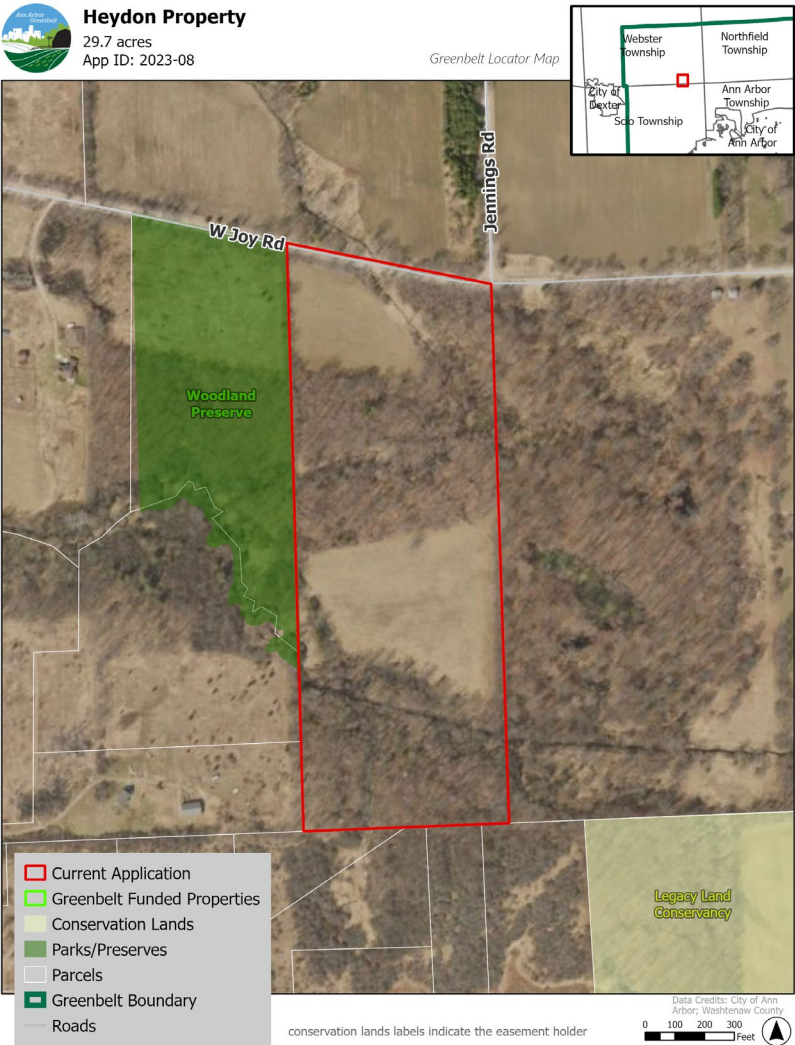


OPTION #2

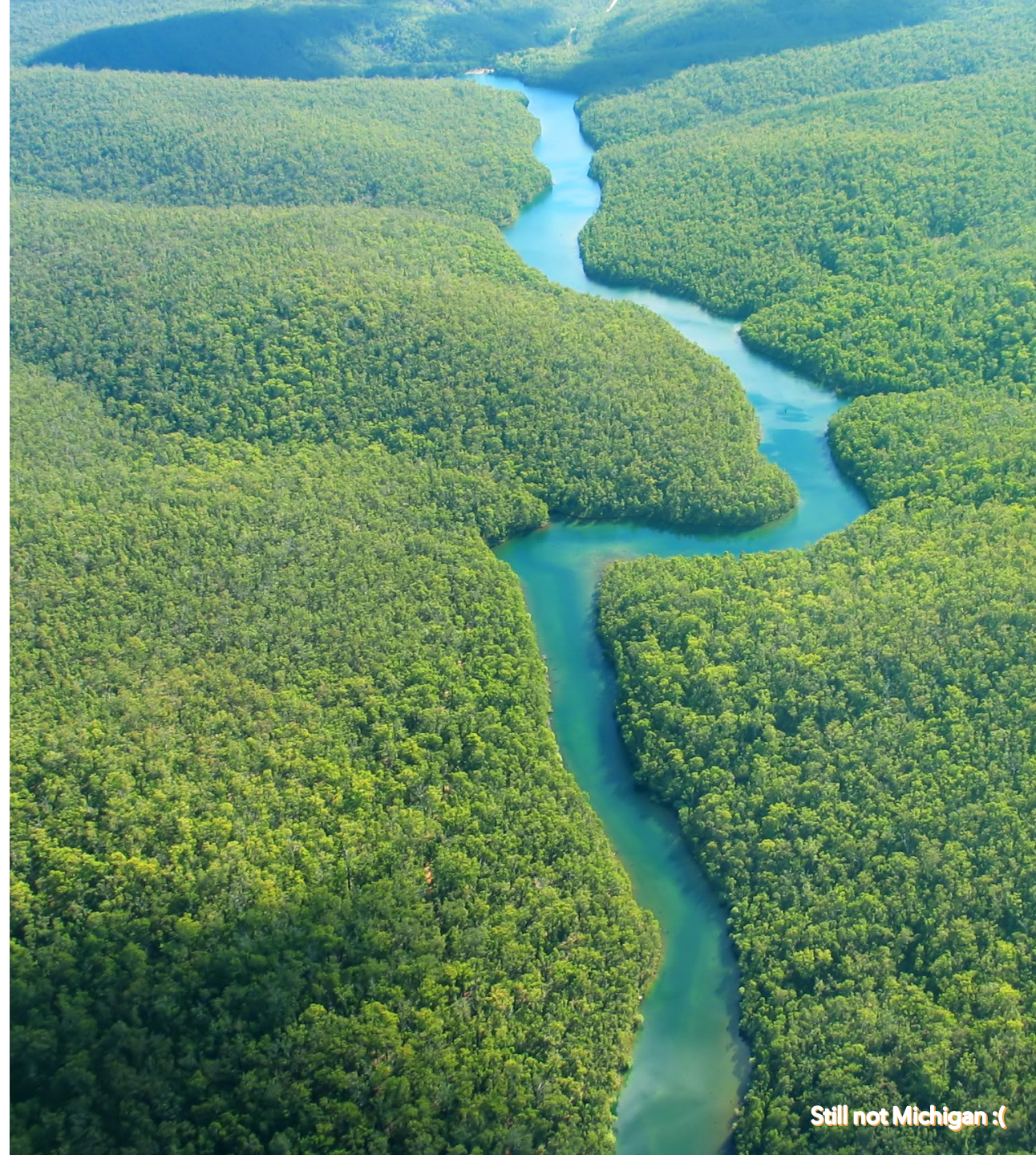
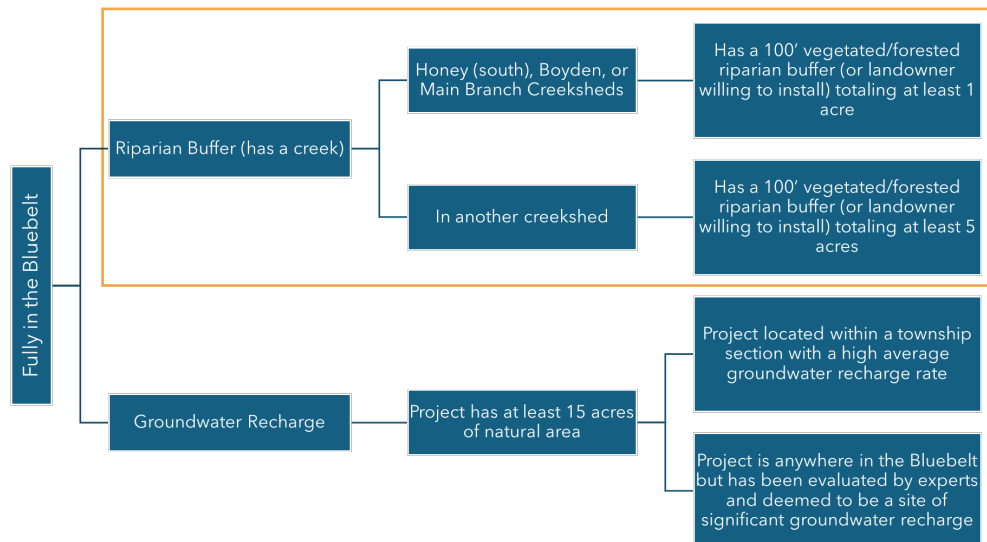
- a) Has 15 acres of natural area; and
- b) On-site, documented evaluation of significant groundwater recharge



PROJECT EXAMPLES THAT WOULD QUALIFY



RIPARIAN BUFFER PROTECTION: PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

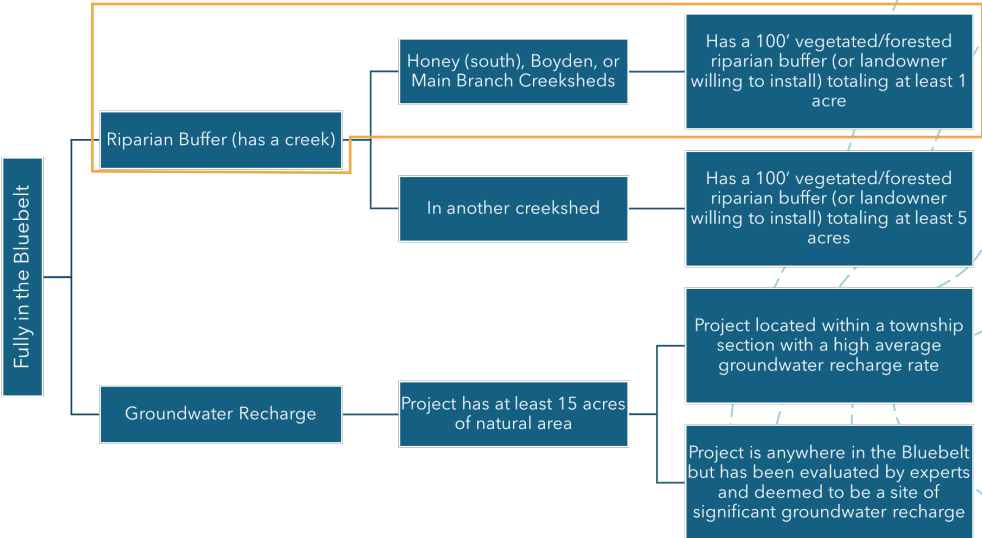


Still not Michigan :(



OPTION #1 – “THE BEST”

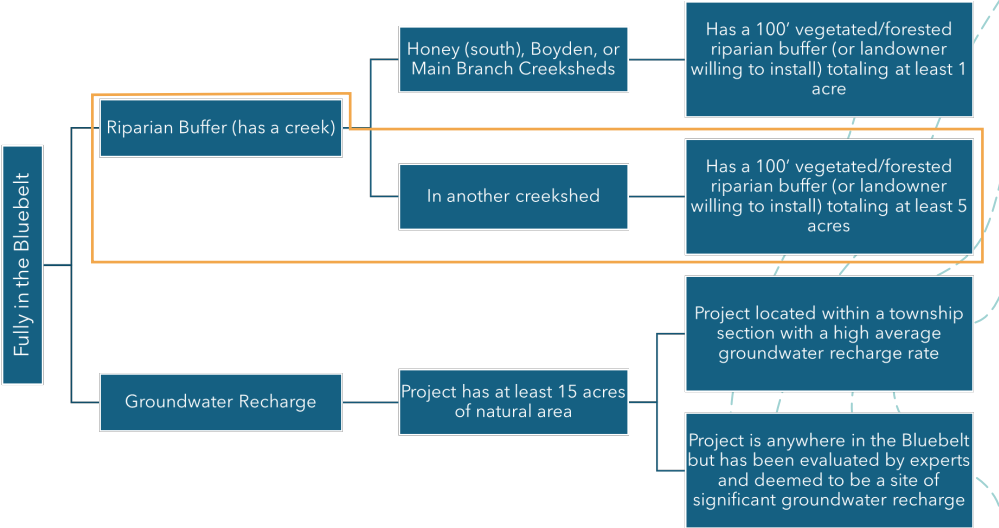
- a) The property has “naturally” occurring surface water that flows into the Huron River
- b) Main Huron branches, Boyden Creek, Honey Creek (south)
- c) That water has a ~100’ forested or vegetated buffer, or the landowner is willing to install one; and
- d) The buffer w/ streambed is equivalent to at least 1 acre
- e) **Headwaters would be nice



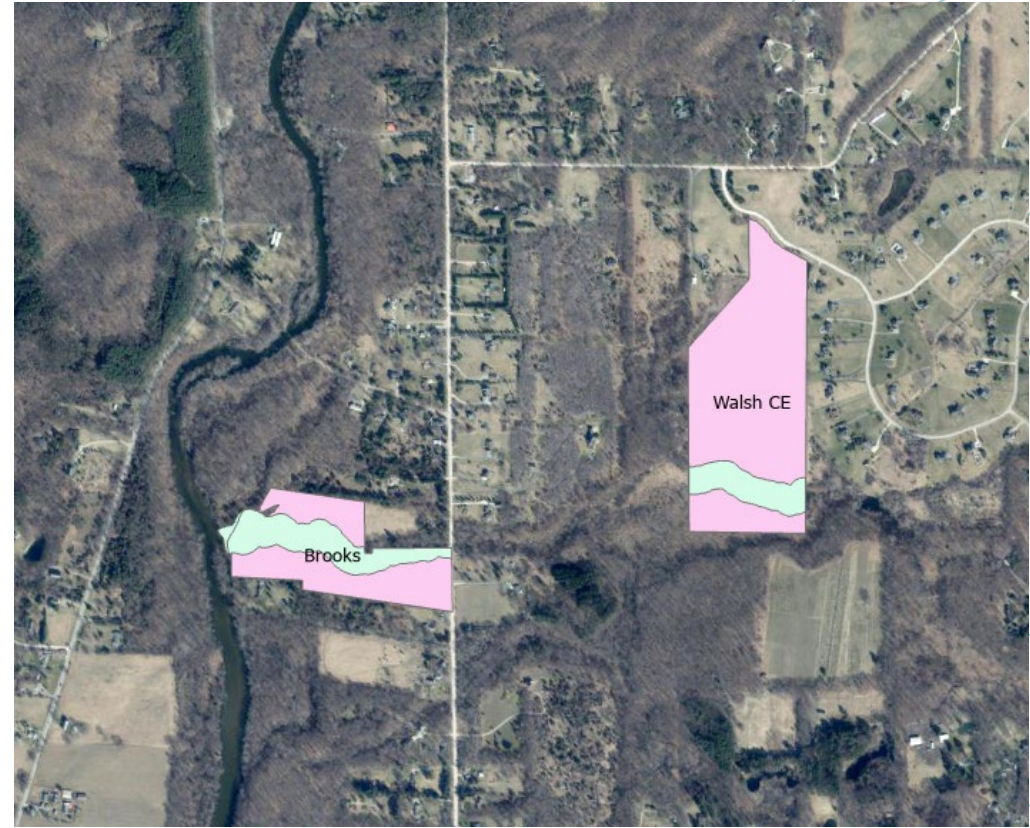
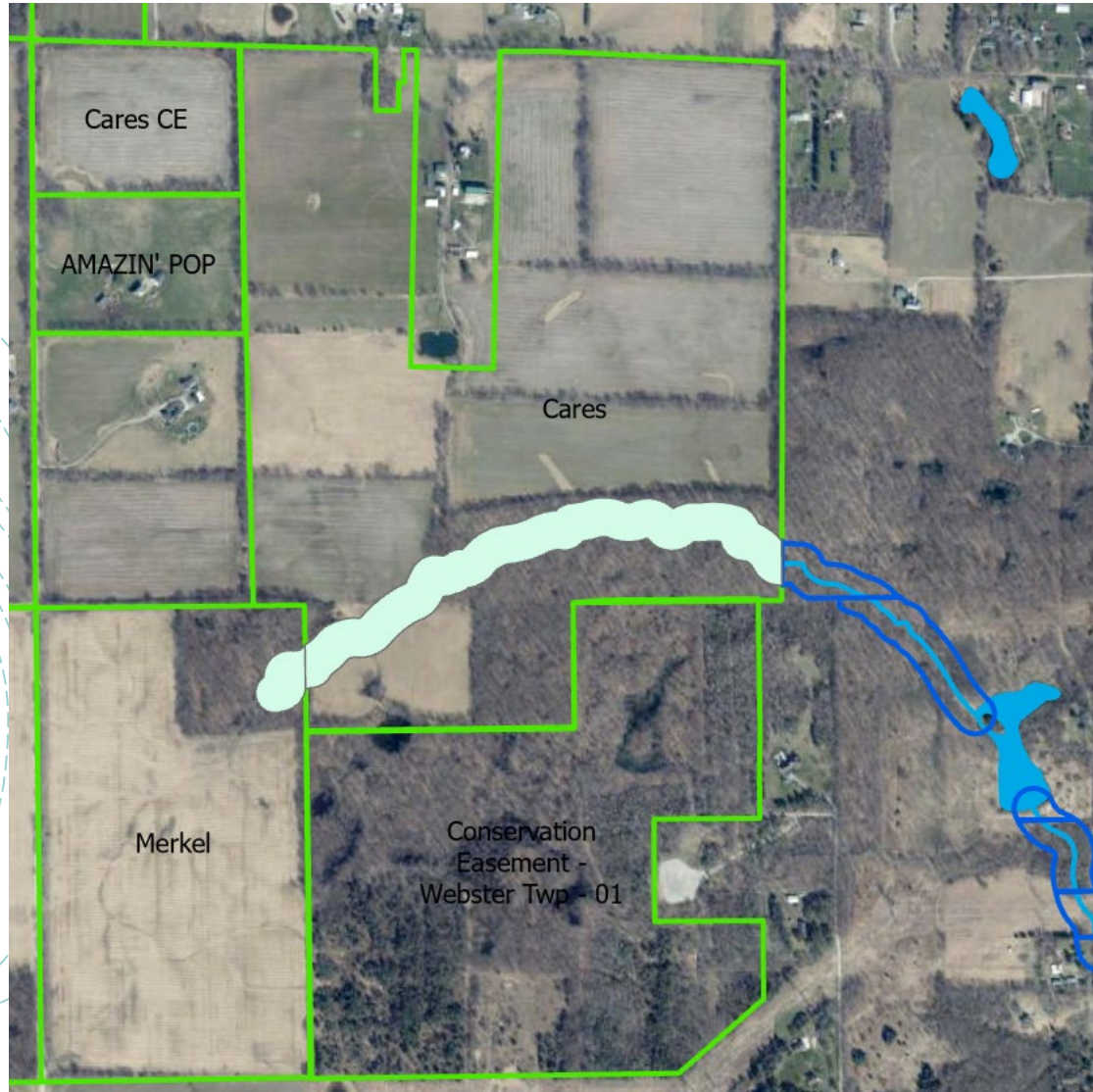


OPTION #2 – “THE MOST”

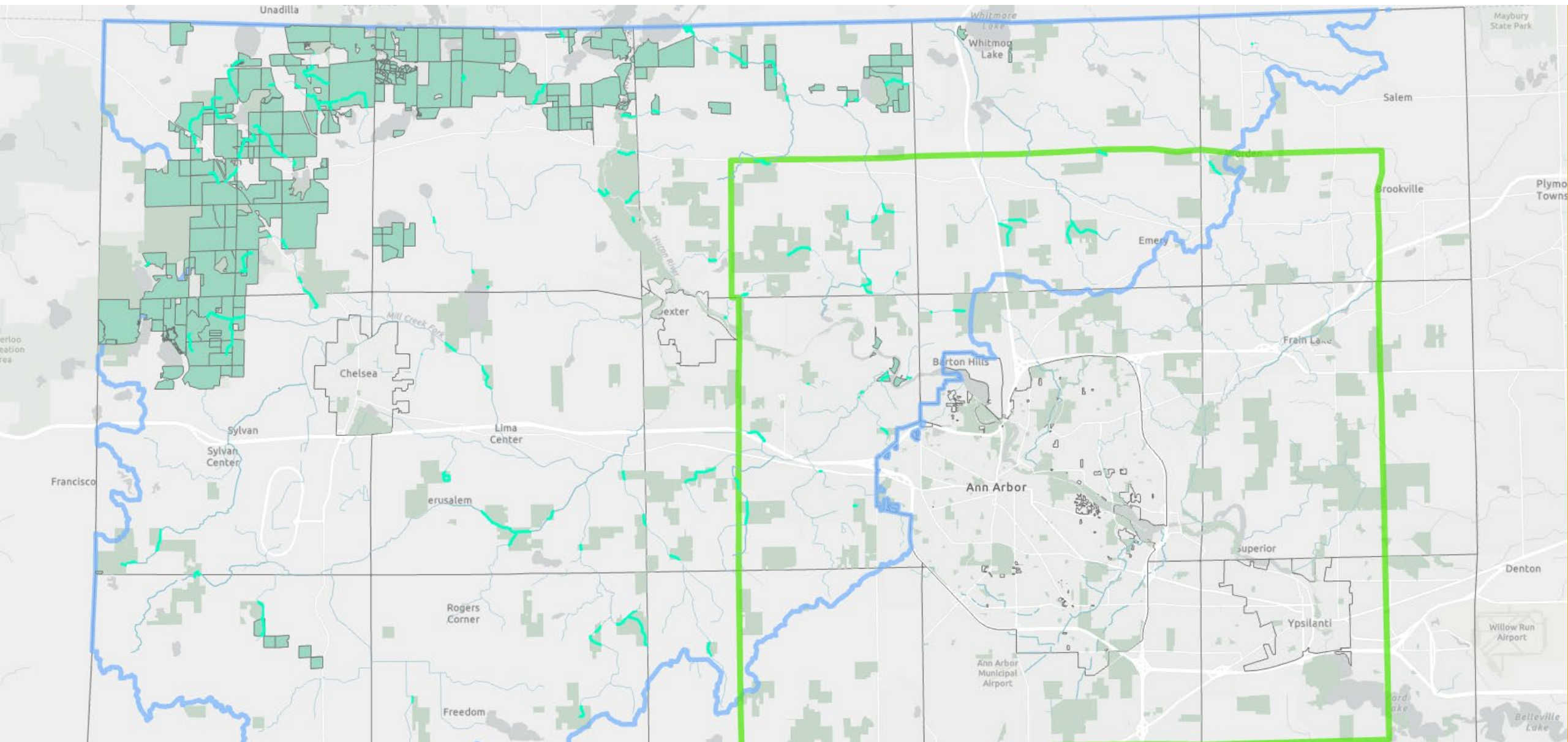
- a) The property has “naturally” occurring surface water that flows into the Huron River; and
- b) That water has a ~100’ forested or vegetated buffer, or the landowner is willing to install one; and
- c) The buffer w/ streambed is equivalent to at least 5 acres



PROJECT EXAMPLES THAT MAY QUALIFY



ALREADY DONE



EASEMENT LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS



LANGUAGE USUALLY REQUIRED

- Forest Management Plan
- No watercourse or wetland alteration
- Off-Road Vehicular Restrictions
- No mining
- No dumping
- Etc.

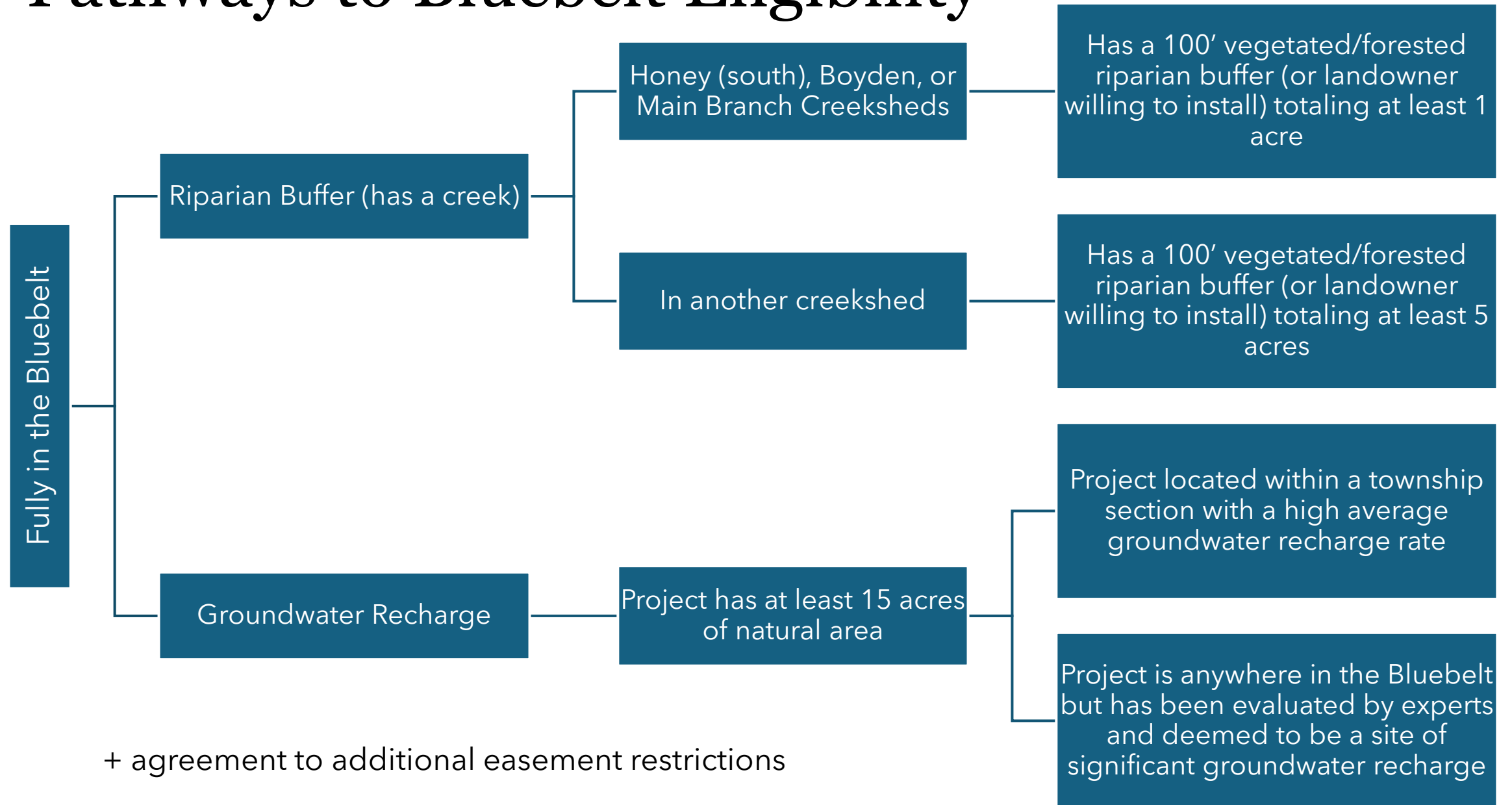


NEW LANGUAGE MAY BE REQUIRED

1. Riparian zone restrictions
2. Specialized conservation value[s]



Pathways to Bluebelt Eligibility



A series of light blue, dashed, wavy lines that flow from the left side of the slide towards the center, creating a sense of movement and depth.

BLUEBELT SCORING

We're going to use our regular Greenbelt scoring system 😊

Move to adopt a Bluebelt District framework for the qualifications, evaluation, prioritization and implementation of Open Space & Parkland Preservation Millage land acquisition and protection expenditures for the purpose of safeguarding the City's sourcewaters or drinking water supply, as presented by City staff at the September 11th, 2025 meeting of the Greenbelt Advisory Commission.