Taking Inventory of Minnesota Wetlands

August 2015 Snapshots

Since the mid-1970s, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been producing wetlands maps and providing wetlands data via the National Wetlands Inventory. The data provided through the NWI is used by public agencies, private industry, and academic institutions for wetland management, research, policy development, education, and planning activities.

When you rely on data for these kinds of purposes, its value is dependent in large part on how accurate (and current!) it is. The data in the NWI is in some cases over 30 years old, and doesn't reflect landscape changes, new or lost wetlands, or changes in wetland classifications that have happened over that time period. A collaborative, multi-agency effort is currently underway in Minnesota to update the state's NWI information.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), is a member of the technical advisory committee for this project, led by the Ecological Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources. The committee is engaged in providing input and support through the update.

There have been significant improvements in data collection techniques since the last time the NWI was updated here in Minnesota. Air photographs significantly higher resolution, and LiDAR technology provides reliable topographic information, allowing for a greater degree of accuracy. To make sure mapping efforts result in a quality product, BWSR field staff have assisted project contractors with ground-truthing the draft data.

To date, the east-central and southern parts of Minnesota are complete, providing far more accurate maps and GIS data than has previously been available. The northeast part of the state is expected to be completed by April 2016.

The yellow polygons in the bottom picture, labeled "updated version," are wetlands that exist on the landscape today that have been identified in the NWI. The old version didn't always identify even the obvious wetlands on the landscape.