

PLATE A: SAND AND GRAVEL RESOURCE POTENTIAL IN STEARNS COUNTY

Produced by the Aggregate Resource Mapping Program,
Division of Lands and Minerals, Minnesota
Department of Natural Resources
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PURPOSE
The purpose of this project is to identify and classify potential construction aggregate resources (sand and gravel) in Stearns County, Minnesota for use by local governments to plan for future supplies. This information is intended to assist local planners and others in making comprehensive land use and zoning decisions regarding aggregate resources, introduce aggregate resource potential, spread the burden of development, and promote orderly and environmentally sound development of the resource. Having locally available, low-cost construction aggregates is fundamental to building and maintaining public infrastructure and private sector development. To accomplish these goals, two plates and a comprehensive data set on a CD-ROM were developed. Plate A shows potential sand and gravel resources and Plate B shows potential crushed stone resources.

Aggregate materials are high-bulk, low-value commodities, which means transportation costs can account for a considerable amount of the delivered price. Lower construction costs for public and private projects can be achieved by using local aggregate supplies. In addition to transportation costs, land use conflicts can impact the availability, usability, and supply of aggregate. Land use conflicts, such as cities expanding into adjacent rural areas, aggregate resource deposits being covered by new developments, new development occurring adjacent to aggregate resources, and/or permanent conservation easements that exclude aggregate mining, are becoming more common in rural and urbanized areas. Specifications for the construction of roads and bridges require higher quality aggregate, which may be available only in limited and specific areas. At the same time, the need and increased use of aggregate material in and around cities are depleting permitted supplies. The end results are that aggregate resources are becoming less available and the transportation distances are increasing, which is passed on to the consumer.

With these and other issues in mind, the 1984 Minnesota Legislature passed a law (Minnesota Statutes, section 84.34, Aggregate Planning and Protection) that directs the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with the Minnesota Geological Survey (MGS) and Mn/DOT, to identify and classify potential aggregate resources. When the mapping is completed, the information is provided to local governments and the public. Since this is a reconnaissance-level survey of sand and gravel, site-specific evaluations are still necessary prior to any development of the resource, especially in regards to aggregate quality or environmental setting. Factors such as ownership, zoning, protected waters and wetlands, environmental permitting, and other individual site characteristics are not part of the geological resource data summarized here.

METHODLOGY
The method used for aggregate mapping integrates traditional geologic mapping techniques with the use of Geographic Information System (GIS). This allows multiple, discrete spatial data sets to be overlain and compared. Sand and gravel mapping is accomplished through three phases of work: 1) preliminary information gathering, 2) field work for verification, and 3) classifying aggregate resources.

Data Gathering: The first step in the mapping process is conducting literature and data searches to obtain a basic understanding of the regional geology. Some of the data gathered included aerial photographs, topographic maps, digital elevation models, shaded relief maps, surface data, gravel pit and quarry data, existing maps of surficial and bedrock geology, published papers and reports, and land use, as well as several datasets of background information, including roads, railroads, PLS township, range, and section boundaries, and other data.

The County Well Index (CWI) database and the Aggregate Source Information System (ASIS) are important datasets used to interpret subsurface geology and for creating sand and gravel resource maps. CWI is an online database with the well health status maps (dwc/hw) developed and maintained by MGS and the Minnesota Department of Health. These resources contain basic information for over 300,000 wells drilled throughout Minnesota. In Stearns County, there are 6785 wells with defined locations (Figure 2). An addition 136,618 unlocated wells are approximately placed within its corresponding section. The main use of CWI is to obtain geologic descriptions. ASIS is a dataset compiled and maintained by Mn/DOT that consists of aggregate quality data, sand and gravel grain size analysis, and pit sheets depicting the descriptions of shallow test-hole logs with diagrams of test-hole locations. This information refers to specific sites that Mn/DOT evaluated from approximately 1930 to 2000.

Field Work: Several weeks were spent driving accessible roads in the county looking for outcrops and exposures of geologic materials, as well as drilling test holes to further define aggregate deposits. Sediments exposed in artificial (e.g. road cuts, trails, foundation excavations, construction projects) and natural (e.g. stream cuts and natural barrows) exposures offer sites where surface materials and glacial stratigraphy can be examined. A total of 2600 field observations were logged in Stearns County. Field work also included documenting sections in existing gravel pits, which provided additional quality data and views of stratigraphic cross-sections. These larger views into the structure of the subsurface layers allowed the geologists to better understand the depositional setting and thereby better predict the extent of the deposit. A drilling program was completed with the collaboration of Mn/DOT Foundation Unit and the Maplewood Materials Laboratory. A total of 78 test holes were drilled to depths ranging from 7 to 24 feet, which helped define the areal extent and thickness of aggregate resources. Samples taken from test holes for concrete aggregate lithological examination by Mn/DOT. The drilling program was a reconnaissance-level evaluation and the quality results do not represent an entire deposit.

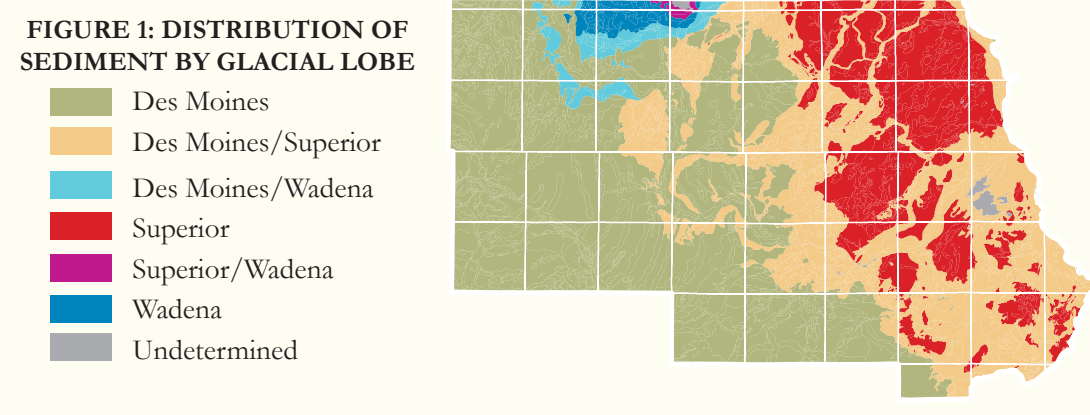
Sand and Gravel Data Compilation and Interpretation: Aggregate-bearing landforms are typically created by glacial meltwater and lakes. Sand and gravel-bearing landforms that were created in contact with, or beneath the ice are distinguished on this map using land-systems approach. This involves the identification of the processes by which glacial landscapes were created, thereby providing a context for individual landforms and making it possible to better predict the occurrence of a particular sediment type within a given feature. Other sediment characteristics such as color, texture, and grain size, also help determine how the sediment was deposited. For example, a particular vegetation type might prefer well drained soils, such as sand and gravel. These substrates also have distinctive tones or patterns when viewed from aerial photographs.

Using GIS software, aggregate resources were delineated by layering multiple datasets. Topographic maps (USGS 1:24,000, high resolution elevation data (LIDAR), shaded relief maps, aerial photographs, subsurface data, field observations, the location and distribution of existing pits, and soil surveys, were used to identify features containing sand and gravel resources. Aggregate resources were mapped at a scale of 1:50,000.

RESULTS

Overall, Stearns County has abundant sand and gravel resources; however, the resources are not evenly distributed throughout the county. Several large, areally extensive sand and gravel deposits were mapped within the county. The largest and most notable is an outwash feature (see Glossary of Terms) located in the southwest corner of the county and extends eastward towards St. Cloud. The deposit grades from cobble-rich sand and gravel, observed in the western part of the deposit, to sandier textures observed in the eastern portion of Crow Wing Township. Thin to no overburden (sediment removed to access a resource) is associated with this landform. The deposit thickness varies from 10 to 60+ feet of sediment, and some areas may have a high water table. In general, quality data from test hole sample analysis (TH-120 and TH-121) and Mn/DOT ASIS data indicate high percentages of limestone, ranging between 44-51% by weight. Although this exceeds the Mn/DOT concrete specification for limestone (30% by weight, 3137.2D3a), the deposit has the potential for meeting bituminous quality specifications. The width of this outwash valley narrows as it continues eastward in the direction of St. Cloud. Also, higher potential exists in some portions of the outwash valley as it encounters and incorporates Superior loess outwash deposits. Terrace and outwash features deposited adjacent to the Mississippi River are also large and areally extensive, however, the texture is generally sandier and may lack >1/4-inch-sized rock particles. The thickness ranges from 10 to 70+ feet of sorted sediment consisting of layers of silt, sand and gravel. The predominant rock lithology increases in limestone content from north to south-southeast. Similarly, an outwash deposit in the northwest corner of the county is listed as having moderate to better; however, portions of the deposit may be sandy and lack >1/4-inch-sized rock particles. Some deposits in northeastern Stearns County are not associated with typical sand and gravel landforms. These deposits tend to be exposed in gullies along dissected hillsides. Finally, high quality sand and gravel deposits in west-central Stearns County are scarce. Deposits in this region tend to be small, thin, and discontinuous.

Stearns County has a complex glacial history. The surface deposits date to the most recent glaciation (>10,000 years ago) where three distinct lobes of ice transported and deposited sediments from discrete and far-off source areas, sometimes directly interacting with one another. The quality of sand and gravel deposits varies with the specific geology of the landform. The Wadena lobe sand and gravel deposits are of the highest quality. The Wadena lobe sand and gravel deposits are of the highest quality. The Wadena lobe sand and gravel deposits are of the highest quality. The Wadena lobe sand and gravel deposits are of the highest quality.



Des Moines loess sand and gravel is present in the western half of the county. Quality issues associated with Des Moines loess sand and gravel include higher amounts of shale and limestone that can make it unsuitable for concrete applications. Sand and gravel originating from the Superior lobe generally contain more durable rock types like basalt and rhyolite from the North Shore Volcanic Group. Deposits observed in the central and southwestern portion of the county have higher percentages of a detritaceous rock type called iron-oxide, which is interpreted as local incorporation of Cretaceous-aged bedrock. Iron-oxide content in this region ranges from 0.2 to 1.5 percent. (Test holes 101-103, 106, 114-115, 130-141, 141-142, and 160) which exceeds 0.3 percent weight for Mn/DOT specification TH-120D3b for non-oxide in concrete. Wadena lobe sand and gravel deposits contain granite and limestone rock types and are generally considered to be higher in quality. Wadena lobe deposits are at the surface in northern Stearns County. Because the deposits of all three ice lobes are in close proximity and even overlap one another in places, sand and gravel in some areas can contain rock types from multiple glacial sources. The distribution of sediment by glacial lobe and dominant rock lithology was mapped in association with this assessment and shown in Figure 1.

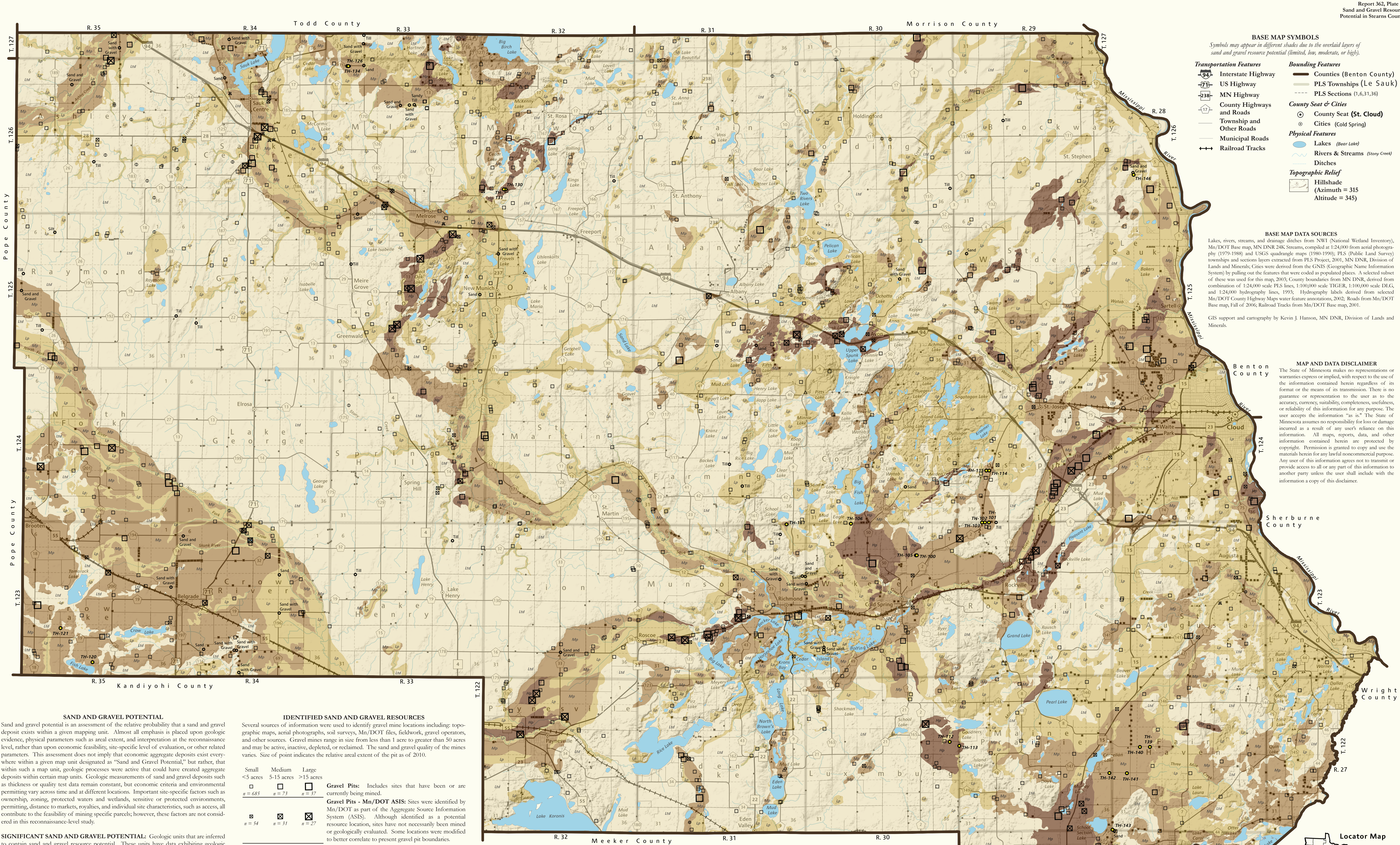
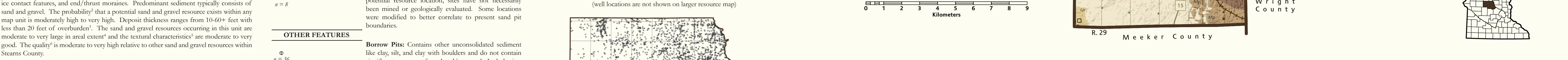


FIGURE 2. COUNTY WELL INDEX DATABASE—LOCATED WELLS (well locations are not shown on larger resource map)



Characteristics	SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES	NONSIGNIFICANT RESOURCES
Surficial Geology Landforms	High Potential Outwash features like contact features, end/thrust moraines, and palimpsest topography.	Low Potential/Limited Potential Alluvial features, moraines, collapsed channels, and bedrock.
Predominant Sediment Description	Sand and gravel	Silt, sand and gravel
Probability?	Moderately high to very high	Low to moderately low
Sand and Gravel Thickness (in feet)	16-60+	0-50+
Overburden? Thickness (in feet)	0-20	0-20+
Sand and Gravel Deposit Size (areal extent)	Moderate to very large (10-30+ acres)	Very small to moderate (0.5-15+ acres)
Sand and Gravel Textural Characteristics?	Moderate to very good	Poor to good
Sand and Gravel Quality?	Moderate to very high	Low to high

FIGEOLOGIC DATA SOURCES FOR MAP UNIT INTERPRETATION
Field observations, County Well Index (CWI) database, and test-hole data were data sources used in the interpretation of sand and gravel potential.

Field Observations: A total of 2600 field observations were logged throughout the course of the project. Pits were also inventoried and include 932 gravel pits, 16 sand pits, and 28 borrow and clay pits. Surficial geologic sediment, glacial stratigraphy, and bedrock formations were observed in road cuts, stream exposures, excavations, such as basements, judicial ditches, construction projects, and cable, pipe, utility, and animal holes. Field observations of gravel pits and sand pits are shown on the map as G and S and Sand Pits (See Identified Sand and Gravel Resources).

Test Hole Sampling by Mn/DOT for Construction Aggregate Quality: Sample quality has been characterized at the reconnaissance level by 23 samples and more than 2600 visual field observations. The Mn/DOT concrete lithological exam identifies certain detritaceous rock types present within a sample and calculated as a weight percent.

Classifying Sand and Gravel Potential: Sand and gravel resources were divided into four categories based on the type of geologic feature, probability (certainty), sand and gravel thickness, overburden thickness, deposit size, areal extent, textural characteristics (grain size distribution), quality (soundness and durability), and the sediment description as observed in the field (Table 1 - see definitions of terms in Footnotes at left). For example, a classified landform, such as an ice contact feature, typically contains sand and gravel. The resource has a high probability of containing aggregate when the landform has gravel pits located within its boundaries, sand and gravel is observed at or near the surface, and sand and gravel is encountered in surrounding water wells. Historical laboratory test results of aggregate quality are compiled, interpreted, and extrapolated from Mn/DOT pit sheets. In addition to Mn/DOT quality data, observations of quality characteristics can be assessed during field work. Thickness of overburden and sand and gravel were determined from observations and water well information. For example, if a deposit has areal extent greater than 20 acres, has thickness greater than 15 feet, has overburden thickness of 5 feet or less, has high quality, good texture, and an existing gravel pit, then the resource is classified as having high potential (Table 1).

Footnotes Associated with Sand and Gravel Potential:
 *Nonviable: Aggregate resources that do not meet the criteria for high or moderate aggregate potential according to the characteristics listed in Table 1. This is a relative classification that changes from one mapping region to another.
 *Probability: The degree of certainty that aggregate exists within a mapping unit largely defined by the amount of available information. Many gravel pits verify the certainty for many map units classified as high potential.
 *Overburden: The material that lies above the sand and gravel that must be removed to access a deposit.
 *Areal Extent: The size, horizontal extent, or distribution of a unit (e.g., area in acres). This attribute does not necessarily reflect the size of an individual polygon but the size of a deposit found within that polygon.
 *Textural Characteristics: Particle size distribution, defined as the percentage of gravel or sand vs. silt or clay (e.g., sieve analysis).
 *Quality: The physical characteristics of the material, such as soundness (e.g., magnesium sulfate test), durability (Los Angeles Bar test), and percent of detritaceous rock types such as iron oxide, disintegrating rock, or unsorted chert. Field observations supplement habitat data.

The areas classified as nonsignificant sand and gravel resource potential (low and limited potential) meet the criteria listed in Table 1. Deposits that are too small in areal extent, are too thin, have too thick of overburden, contain significantly more sand than gravel, lack identified resources, or do not meet quality specifications are in these categories.