

Jerry Mahun, PLSjerry.mahun@gmail.com
715-896-3178*Website:*
<https://jerrymahun.com>

Wisconsin Professional Land Surveying Exam Information:

<https://dsps.wi.gov/Pages/Professions/LandSurveyorProfessional/Exams.aspx>

I. Background

Testing on the fundamentals of the practice of land surveying and the specifics of the profession relevant specifically to Wisconsin. The passing score is **70%**.

A. Exam Content

Emphasis / Subject	%	Ques
I. U.S. Public Land Survey and Retracement in Wisconsin	(30)	(15)
A. History of Local Land Surveying Systems and Practices in Wisconsin	8	4
B. Obliterated Corners and the Evaluation of Evidence	12	6
C. Deviations from Federal Method	6	3
i. Location of Center Section (1853 to 1869)		
ii. Special Instructions for Original Government Surveys		
D. Sources of Local Surveying Records--s.24,59 and 236	4	2
II. Wisconsin Statutes Relating to Land Surveying	(44)	(22)
A. Counties--s.59.45-46 and 59.72-75, s 83.11.	8	4
B. Towns--s.60.84, s. 82	4	2
C. Assessor's Plats--s.70.27	6	1
D. Platting--Ch. 236	12	6
E. Certified Survey Maps--s.236.34 and 236.45	6	3
F. Condominium Plats--s.703.11 through 703.13	2	3
G. Examining Board--s.443.01(8), 443.02, 443.06, 443.12, 443.14(8), & 443.14(9)	2	1
H. Other--	4	2
Limitations/Adverse Possession, Ch. 893, Subchapter III;		
Highways, s.84.09 and 84.095;		
Cemetery Plats, s.157.07;		
Storm Water Concentration and Impact.		

III. Wisconsin Administrative Code Provisions Relating to Land Surveying	(26)	(13)
A. Registration and Certification--A-E1, A-E2, and A-E6	4	2
B. Minimum Standards for Property Surveys--A-E7	12	6
C. Rules of Professional Conduct--A-E8	4	2
D. Land Divisions--DNR, DOT, and Court rulings	6	3

B. Reference Material

The Wisconsin Jurisdictional Licensing Examination is an online, **open book** exam.

1. Wisconsin Specific

Available from WSLs: <https://wsls.org/shop>

Mem/nonMem

Wisconsin Laws Relating to the Practice of Land Surveying, Wisconsin Society of Land Surveyors, Current Edition

\$35 / \$50

A Manual for retracement of Public Land Survey Corners and Sectionalized Subdivision Boundaries within the State of Wisconsin, Onsrud, Harlan J., 1979 Master of Science 1972 (2007 reprint)

\$20 / \$25
(\$16 student)

General Instructions and Survey Laws Governing the Original Government Survey of Wisconsin, Sprague, Tom, 1974 (2007 reprint)

\$20 / \$30

Free Downloads

Wisconsin Platting Manual, Wisconsin Dept of Administration, 2022

Complete: https://doa.wi.gov/DIR/WI_Platting_Manual_Full.pdf

By Section: <https://doa.wi.gov/Pages/LocalGovtsGrants/WisconsinPlattingManual.aspx>

Current Wisconsin State Statutes as indicated in the above content outline *

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/prefaces/toc>

Current Administrative Codes A-E 1,2,6,7, and 8; Trans 233, and NR 115 *

https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/code/admin_code

* These have been assembled into two documents for IPLSA session participants:

Wis_Survey_Statutes.pdf and *Wis_Survey_Admin_Codes.pdf*

Located at <https://jerrymahun.com>, Home | Recent Seminars | 2025 IPLSA

2. General

Brown's Boundary Control and Legal Principles, Robillard, et al 5th Edition or newer

Clark on Surveying and Boundaries, Grimes, J., Bobbs-Merrill, 7th Ed.

Evidence and Procedures for Boundary Location, Robillard, et al, 5th Edition or newer

Manual of Surveying Instructions, U.S. Dept of Interior, 1973 / 2009
(see **C. Resource Links**)

Elementary Surveying, Ghilani & Wolf, 12th Edition or newer

3. Additional Wisconsin-specific materials

Assessor's Plat Process, Rhode

Assessor's Plat FAQ, Rhode

Wisconsin Water Law, Kent & Dudiak, UW-Ext, Stevens Point

These are available at <https://jerrymahun.com>, Home | Recent Seminars | 2025 IPLSA

C. Resource Links

Professional Land Surveyor Section of the Examining Board

<https://dsps.wi.gov/Pages/BoardsCouncils/AE/LandSurveyor/Default.aspx>

Board of Commissioners of Public Lands; Original PLSS notes and plats

<https://bcpl.wisconsin.gov/Pages/WisconsinPLSRecords.aspx>

State Cartographers Office: <https://www.sco.wisc.edu/>

Control Finder/PLSS Finder: <https://maps.sco.wisc.edu/surveycontrolfinder/#7/44.730/-90.143/NGS,county,USGS,CORS/terrain>

[Wisconsin Coordinate Reference Systems Handbook, 2nd edition](#)

Attorney General Opinions: <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/opinions/ag-opinions>

Copies of patents, original notes and plats are online at BLM's GLO Records website:

<https://glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>

pdf versions of *Manuals of Instructions* and other PLS materials are available at BLM KRC Historical Library: <https://www.ntc.blm.gov/krc/legacy/course/538>

II. PLSS & Retracement in Wisconsin

A. History

1. Timeline

- 1831 Initial Point for WI 4th Principal Meridian placed by Lucius Lyons
- 1831 General Instructions of 1831
- 1833 Instructions for OH, IN, & Terr of WI
- 1846 General Instructions of 1846
- 1847 Fourth Principal Meridian Completed to Lake Superior
- 1848 WI Statehood
- 1851 General Instructions of 1851
- 1855 Manual of Surveying Instructions – 1855
- 1865 Substantial Completion of All Township Line surveys
- 1873 Substantial Completion of Section Line surveys

2. Procedure Evolution

a. Closing Corners

- Prior to 1834, closing corners were set along the west and north township boundaries.
- 1834 Instructions required them only along the north township boundary.
- General Instructions of 1846; Closing corners placed only on Correction Lines

b. Correction Lines

- Prior to 1851 spacing left to discretion of surveyor
- 1851 Manual, spaced every 4 townships north of the BL & every 5 townships south.

Wis: spaced every 10 townships except for last which is at 6 townships.

c. Guide Meridians

- Introduced by General Instructions of 1881, called Auxiliary Meridians; every 4 townships east and west of the PM
- General Instructions of 1890 change Auxiliary Meridians to Guide Meridians.

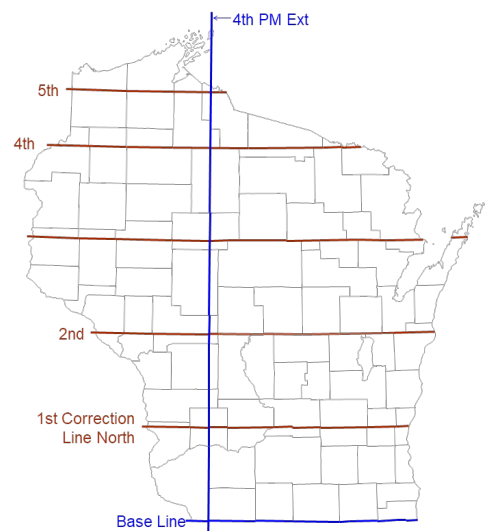


Figure 1: Correction Lines

Wis: Has no Guide Meridians.

B. Board of Commissioners of Public Lands

Scanned original notes and plats

C. Corner Perpetuation

1. Definitions

Existent – Obliterated – Lost as per *Manual of Instructions*

2. Re-establishment

a. Existent

- Original monument and or accessories
- Acceptable replacement monument

b. Obliterated

- Strength of evidence
- 2009 Manual*- Considers them a special kind of existent corner. No longer uses “beyond reasonable doubt” terminology

c. Lost

- Re-establish by measurement to surrounding corners
- Single- and Double-proportionate measurement, 1-, 2-, 3-point control, Irregular boundary adjustment.

3. Lost corner control

a. Manual rules

Witness and meander corners control distance and direction.

b. Wisconsin rules

- Witness corner controls distance and direction
- Meander corner controls direction only

Thunder Lake Land Company v. Carpenter, 184 Wis 580, 583, 200 N.W. 302 (1924)



Figure 2: USPLSS Records Search

4. PLS Survey Monument Record

Wis Admin Code A-E 7.08

- (1) When Monument Record Required
- (2) Form Required
- (3) Monument Record Requirements
- (4) Monument Record Addendum Requirements

D. Center of Section: C1/4

The Instructions always said to connect opposite quarter corners with straight lines. This is called the Federal Method.

Wisconsin Legislature passed laws which differed from the Federal Method:

- a. pre-1853 Federal Method
- b. 1853-1860 Equidistant E/W and N/S
- c. 1860-1862 Equidistant E/W
- b. 1862-1867 Equidistant E/W and N/S
- a. post 1867 Federal Method

Onsrud, Sec 5-1 through 5-5

Example: S25 T36N R10E 4th PM Oneida County

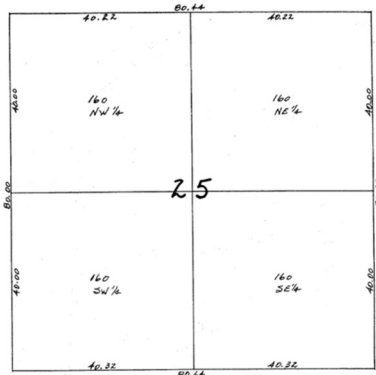
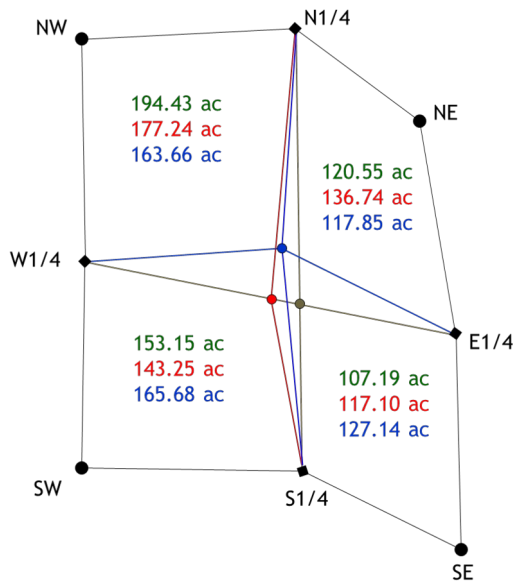


Figure 4: Record



Figure 3: retracement



Aliquot Part	Area %		
	Fed	E/W	E/W-N/S
NE	21.0	23.8	20.5
SE	18.7	20.4	22.1
SW	26.7	24.9	28.8
NW	33.9	30.9	28.5

Figure 5: Aliquot Differences

III. Statutory Land Divisions

A. Subdivision

Chapter 236

Definition, Stat 236.02(12)(am)(1)

Act of division creates 5 or more parcels or building sites of 1 1/2 acres each or less in area....

B. Certified Survey Map

Stat 236.34 & 236.45

Definition, Stat 236.34(1)(am)

A certified survey map of not more than 4 parcels of land,...

C. Condominium

Chapter 703

Definition, Stat 703.02(4)

“Condominium” means property subject to a condominium declaration established under this chapter.

D. Cemetery

Wis Stat 157.07

E. Transportation Project Plat (TPP)

Wis State 80.095

Plan for future land acquisition by WisDOT for transportation purposes.

Replaces older Right of Way plats

Does not create new boundary until acquisition takes place.

IV. Retracements

A. Parcel

Wis Admin Code A-E 7 Minimum standards for property surveys

Chapter A-E 7

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR PROPERTY SURVEYS

A-E 7.01	Scope.	A-E 7.05	Maps.
A-E 7.02	Definitions.	A-E 7.06	Relative positional accuracy measurements.
A-E 7.025	Survey report, requirements.	A-E 7.07	Monuments.
A-E 7.03	Boundary location.	A-E 7.08	U.S. public land survey monument record.
A-E 7.04	Descriptions.		

A-E 7.01 Scope. (1) The minimum standards of this chapter apply to any property survey performed by professional land surveyors in this state, except where otherwise provided in this chapter.

(2) The minimum accuracies in s. A-E 7.06 apply to any property survey performed by professional land surveyors in this state.

(3) If other standards for property surveys are prescribed by statute, administrative rule, or ordinance, and the standards are more restrictive than those in this chapter, the more restrictive standards govern.

(4) Except with regard to a U.S. public land survey monument record or addendum and a map of work performed, the professional land surveyor and client may enter into a written agreement, signed by both parties, to exclude land surveying work from the requirements of ss. A-E 7.03 (2), 7.05 (5) and (7m), and 7.07, where all of the following are performed:

(a) The professional land surveyor certifies on the face of the map the existence of the agreement.

(b) The map includes a note which states that an agreement to exclude work from the requirements of this chapter has been made and a list of those exclusions.

B. Assessor's Plat

Wis Stat 70.27

Stat 70.27(1) WHO MAY ORDER. Whenever any area of platted or unplatted land is owned by 2 or more persons in severalty, and when in the judgment of the governing body having jurisdiction, the description of one or more of the different parcels thereof cannot be made sufficiently certain and accurate for the purposes of assessment, taxation or tax title procedures without noting the correct metes and bounds of the same, or when such gross errors exist in lot measurements or locations that difficulty is encountered in locating new structures, public utilities or streets, such governing body may cause a plat to be made for such purposes. Such plat shall be called "assessor's plat," and shall plainly define the boundary of each parcel, and each street, alley, lane or roadway, or dedication to public or special use, as such is evidenced by the records of the register of deeds or a court of record.

An Assessor's plat is a retracement.

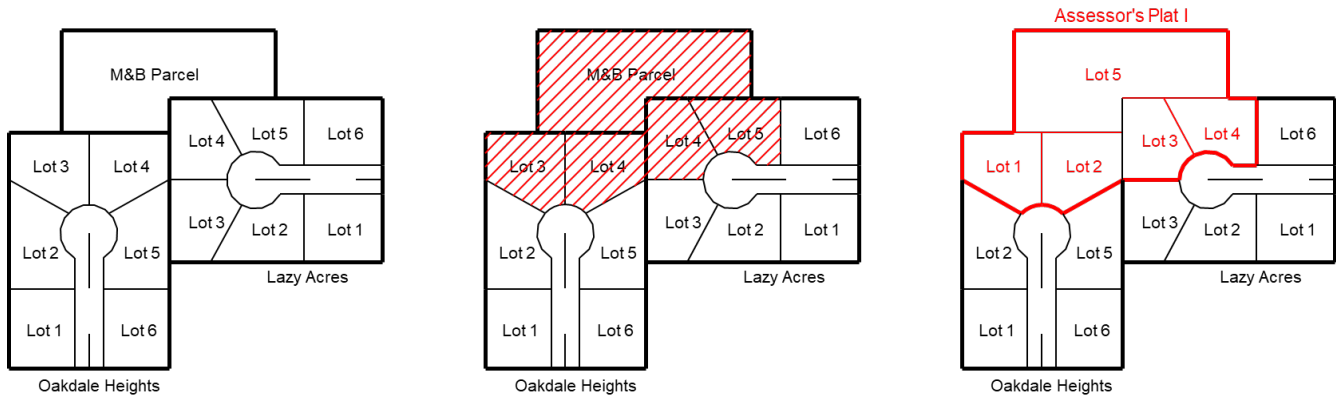
Does not create new boundaries

It can cover all or parts of existing subdivision plats and metes and bounds parcels

A plat is created and covered lands are conveyed and described with respect to it.

Existing metes and bounds descriptions become lot and block

Any existing subdivision areas covered are vacated



V. Wisconsin Notes

A. Riparian ownership

Navigable waterways

Lake: Bed owned by state (public) inside ordinary high mean watermark (OMHW)

River: Upland owner owns bed to thread (center between opposite OMHW)

Muench v. PSC, 261 Wis 492, 53 NW 2d 514 (1952)

Mayer v. Grueber, 29 Wis. 2d 168, 138 NW 2d 197 (1965)

B. Adverse Possession Periods

<i>Stat</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Major conditions</i>
893.25	20 years	Not founded on written instrument.
893.26	10 years	Founded on written recorded claim. Recorded within 30 days of entry.
893.27	7 years	Founded on written recorded claim and payment of taxes Recorded within 30 days of execution

C. Coordinate Systems

1. Allowed systems for subdivisions

Wis Stat 236.18(2) ALLOWABLE SYSTEMS. An approving authority under s.236.10 may select any one of the following systems:

- (a) The Wisconsin coordinate system of 1927, which is based on the North American datum of 1927.
- (b) The Wisconsin coordinate system of 1983 (1986), which is based on the North American datum of 1983 (adjustment of 1986).
- (c) The Wisconsin coordinate system of 1983 (1991), which is based on the North American datum of 1983 (adjustment of 1991).
- (d) A county coordinate system as approved by the department of transportation or a coordinate system that is mathematically relatable to a Wisconsin coordinate system.

2. For retracements

A-E 7.05(11)

Shall comply with s. 236.18, Stats.

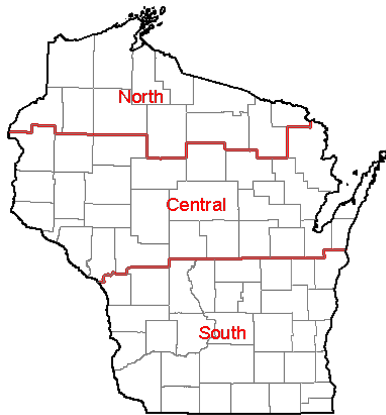
3. Formal Wisconsin Systems

a. State Plane (SPC)

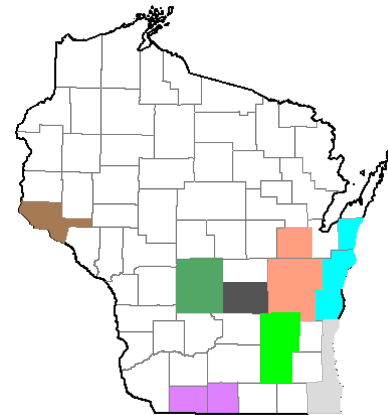
North, Central, South Lambert Conic systems

b. County Systems

- (1) Wis County Coordinate Systems (WCCS) : original low distortion systems. conic or cylindrical
- (2) Wis Coordinate Reference System (WisCRS):updated version of WCCS



State Plane Coordinate Systems



WCCS/WisCRS

Counties color the same share a zone

D. Statute of Limitations

Stat 893.37 Survey. No action may be brought against an engineer or any professional land surveyor, as defined in s. 443.01 (7m), to recover damages for negligence, errors, or omission in the making of any survey nor for contribution or indemnity related to such negligence, errors, or omissions more than 6 years after the completion of a survey.

The discovery rule applies to statutes of limitations that limit the time to sue from the time when the action "accrues," being the time of discovery. The discovery rule does not apply to this section because it is a statute of repose, a statute that specifies the time of accrual (in this statute the time when the injury occurred) and limits the time suit can be brought from that specified date. Tomczak v. Bailey, 218 Wis. 2d 245, 578 N.W.2d 166 (1998), 95-2733.

E. Correction Instrument

1. Deed

Wis Stat 706.085 Entitled to be recorded; purposes. An instrument correcting a previously recorded conveyance shall be entitled to record in accordance with s. 706.05 in the office of the register of deeds of the county in which the conveyance is recorded and shall include one or more of the following:

- (a) The correction of a legal description, including a distance; angle; direction; bearing; chord; lot, block, unit, or building number or letter; appurtenant easement; section number; township name or number; municipality, county, or state name; range number or meridian; certified survey map number; or subdivision or condominium name.
- (b) The addition, correction, or clarification of information other than a legal description, including any of the following information:

2. Subdivision plat, Certified survey map

Wis Stat 236.02(2m) "Correction instrument" means an instrument drafted by a professional land surveyor that complies with the requirements of s. [236.295](#) and that, upon recording, corrects a subdivision plat or a certified survey map.

3. Condominiums

Wis Stat 703.02(6m) "Correction instrument" means an instrument drafted by a professional land surveyor that, upon recording, corrects an error in a condominium plat. "Correction instrument" does not include an instrument of conveyance.

VI. Continuing Education

Wis Admin Code A-E 10

Minimum of 20 hours or equivalent every 2 years

Minimum of 2 hours each in

- Wisconsin statutes and rules that regulate professional land surveyors and surveys.
- Professional conduct and ethics.
- Professional land surveying or related sciences.

Admin Code A-E 10.03(2)

Acceptable learning formats

Admin Code A-E 10.04(2)

Education providers