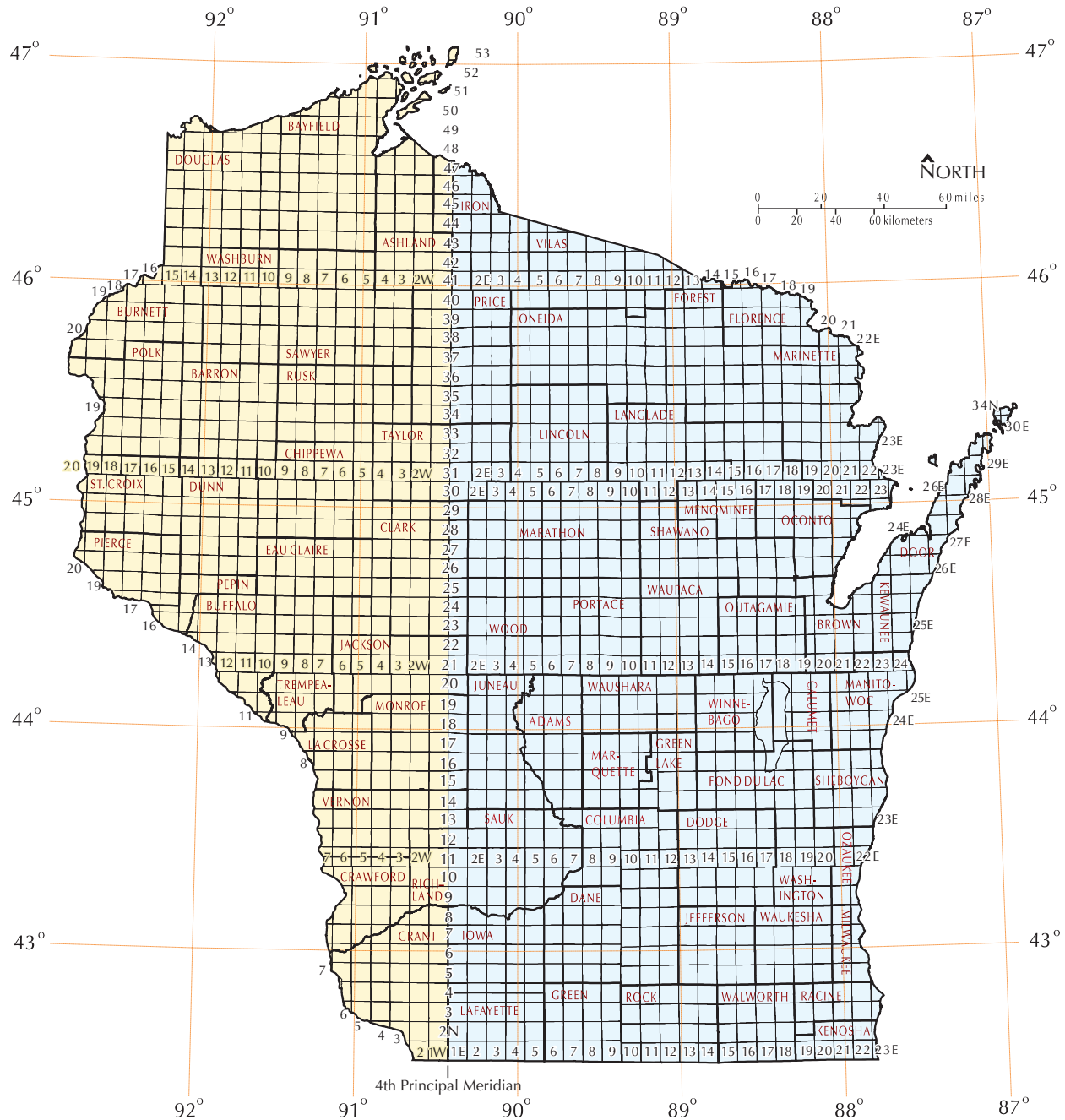


# Wisconsin township and range reference map

## Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey

Factsheet 06 | 2012



# Wisconsin township and range reference map

I.D. Lippelt, Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey

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This publication is intended as a guide to understanding the basics of township and range in Wisconsin.

Locations of land in most of Wisconsin are described using the Public Land Survey System, referred to as PLS or PLSS. This system dates back to 1785 and was conducted in Wisconsin between 1833 and 1866. By legal definition, the PLS is the foundation for the description and conveyance of land ownership for most of Wisconsin.

Areas of Wisconsin that had already been surveyed using a different system before the PLS survey were not resurveyed and the older system was left in place.

In Wisconsin, land descriptions are referenced from two lines that are perpendicular to each other: the principal meridian, which runs north and south, and a base line, which runs east and west. Wisconsin's base line coincides with the southern boundary of the state. The 4th principal meridian is Wisconsin's east-west dividing line; it starts at the junction of Grant and Lafayette Counties in the south and extends northward through Outer Island in the Apostle Islands in Ashland County.

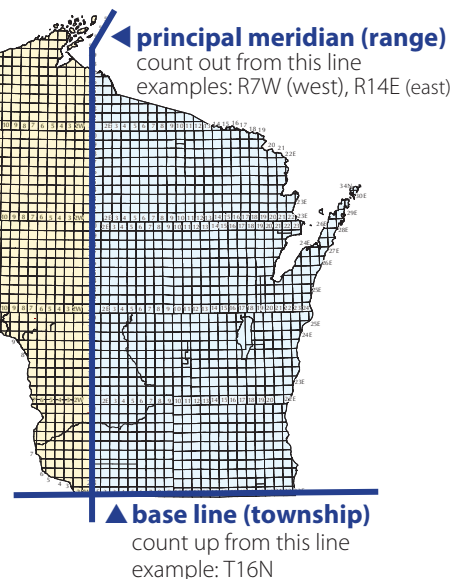
*Each township is numbered based on how far north it is of the base line and how far east or west it is from the principal meridian.*

## What is a township?

The original government survey of Wisconsin established township boundaries at 6-mile intervals north of the base line and range boundaries at 6-mile intervals east and west of the principal meridian. Each approximately 36-square-mile area (6 miles by 6 miles) in this grid is called a township (or congressional township). Townships are identified by a township (T) number that indicates the number of townships north of the base line and by a range (R) number that indicates the number of townships east (E) or west (W) of the principal meridian. For example, the city and town of Ripon are located in Township 16 North (T16N), Range 14 East (R14E). They are about 96 miles (16 miles x 6 miles) north of the Wisconsin-Illinois border and about 84 miles (14 miles x 6 miles) east of the principal meridian).

## About correction lines

Each township would be exactly 6 miles by 6 miles, or 36 square miles—if the Earth were flat, and if the original survey had been perfect. Instead, mainly because of the curvature of the Earth, and



also because of measurement error, corrections have been made to the size of the surveyed townships. All corrections are accumulated in the northernmost and/or westernmost part of each township. In addition to minor corrections, five major correction lines have been established across Wisconsin. As a result, township boundaries do not always line up from one township to the next. For example, any township in the T20N row will not line up exactly with any township in the T21N row. For all but the southernmost of these correction lines, the farther east or west from the 4th principal meridian, the greater the east-west displacement. There is also a north-south displacement between R9E and R10E in all townships between T1N and T11N.

## More information

To learn more about Wisconsin's townships and ranges, please refer to *Understanding Wisconsin Township, Range, and Section Land Descriptions* (Educational Series 44).