

Montana Aquatic Resources Services (MARS)



Yellowstone River Channel Migration Easement Program

MT DNRC 6th Annual Floodplain Resource Seminar
Helena, MT - July 24, 2014

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Montana Aquatic Resources Services, Inc.

Yellowstone River Channel Migration Easements (CMEs): An Effective Floodplain Conservation Tool



- Channel Migration Easement benefits include:
 - Site protection in perpetuity with easements held by a qualified Conservation Easement Holding Entity
 - Landowner agrees not to stabilize the bank of the river with riprap, building levees, rock revetments, etc.
 - Network of CMEs in the Yellowstone can maintain a channel migration zone sufficient to maintain river and floodplain function
 - Pallid sturgeon and other native fish benefit from river processes including sediment transport, deposition of islands and point bars, channel scouring, and others

MARS' Project Progress



- Milestones:
 - 24 Priority CME Sites identified in the following counties: Yellowstone (5 sites), Treasure (3 sites), Rosebud (6 sites), Custer (1 site), Dawson (3 sites), and Richland (6 sites)
 - Outreach to Yellowstone River CD Council and 6 Conservation Districts
 - Direct contacts with landowners from Laurel to N.D. state line
 - Working with Conservation Easement Holding Entities (CEHEs) to hold, monitor and steward easements
 - Partnering with other easement programs; e.g. NRCS easement programs to bring cost-share to projects to expand scope and effect of easement benefits

Yellowstone River Channel Migration Easements (CMEs)



- Priority areas identified from Yellowstone River Cumulative Effects Study, MARS selection criteria, advice from Conservation District personnel, conservation agencies & partners, and other sources
- Funding provided by conservation partners including Clean Water Act (Section 404) and Rivers and Harbors Act (Section 10) as well as non-mitigation sources
- Upper Basin Pallid Sturgeon Governing Board/WAPA/FWP collaboration resulted in completion of FWP/MARS Memorandum of Agreement in December, 2013

CME Site Parameters by Parcel



- County/Legal Description
- Property Type – (e.g. Agricultural Rural)
- CMZ Classification
- Habitat Type
- Shoreline Length
- Land Use
- Relative level of restoration opportunities
- Acreage by land type (fallow, forest, grazing, irrigated, etc.)
- Total parcel acreage
- Total Land Value
- Owner Name/Address



Property Values in Project Area

- Two Example Sources:
 - FWP Market Analysis 2007-2009; subsequent FWP purchases in the area as recently as 2012
 - 2014 Market Analysis by Montana Certified General Appraiser
- Working Assumptions:
 - % FMV will be applied to range of valuations for irrigated cropland and grazing land to derive a mutually agreeable price
 - Fixed Easement costs, including parcel appraisal, estimated to be ~\$35,000

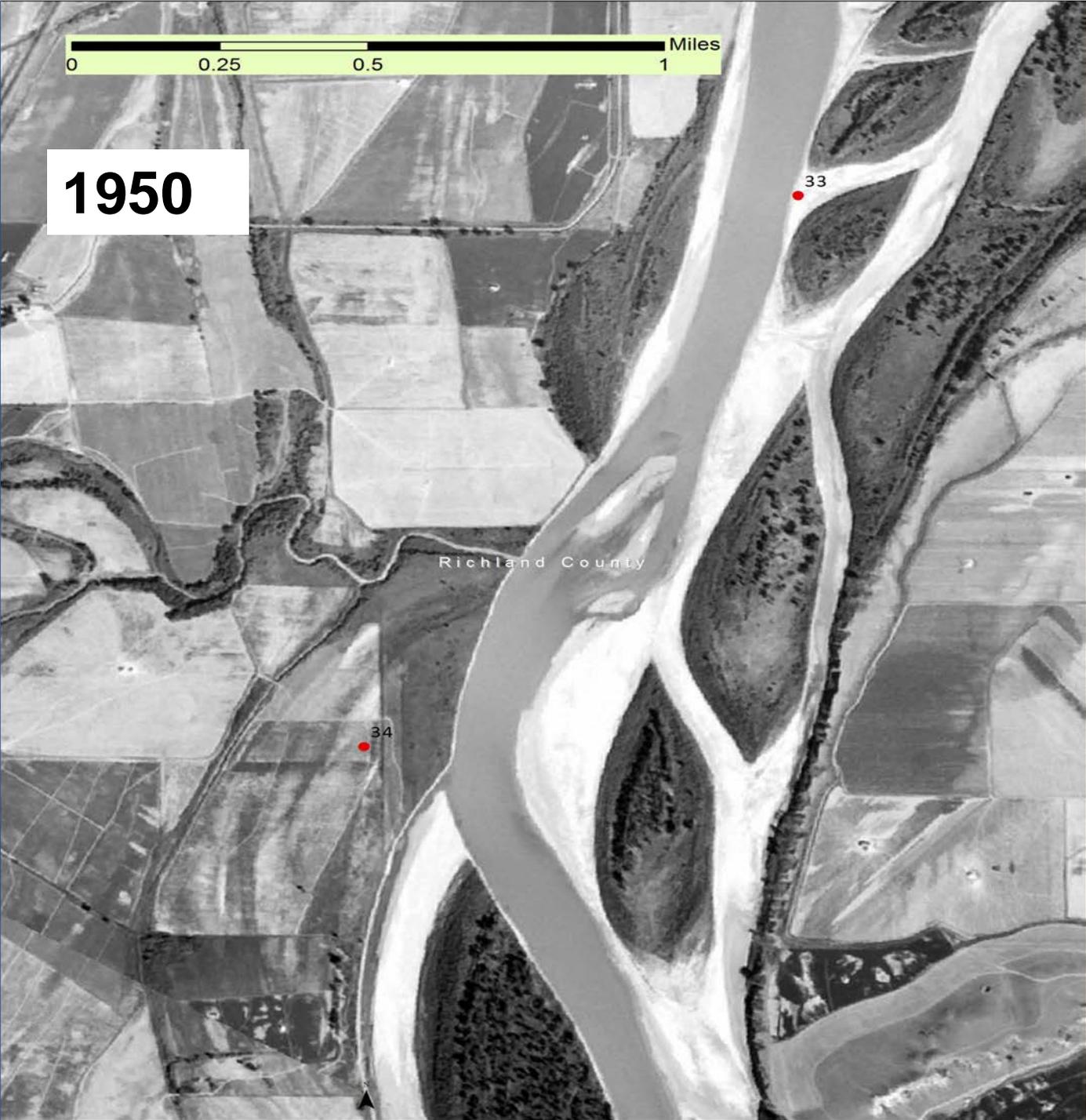


CME Site Example Richland County

(Slides from Boyd & Thatcher)



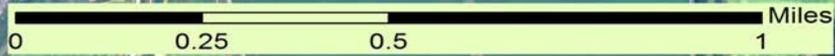
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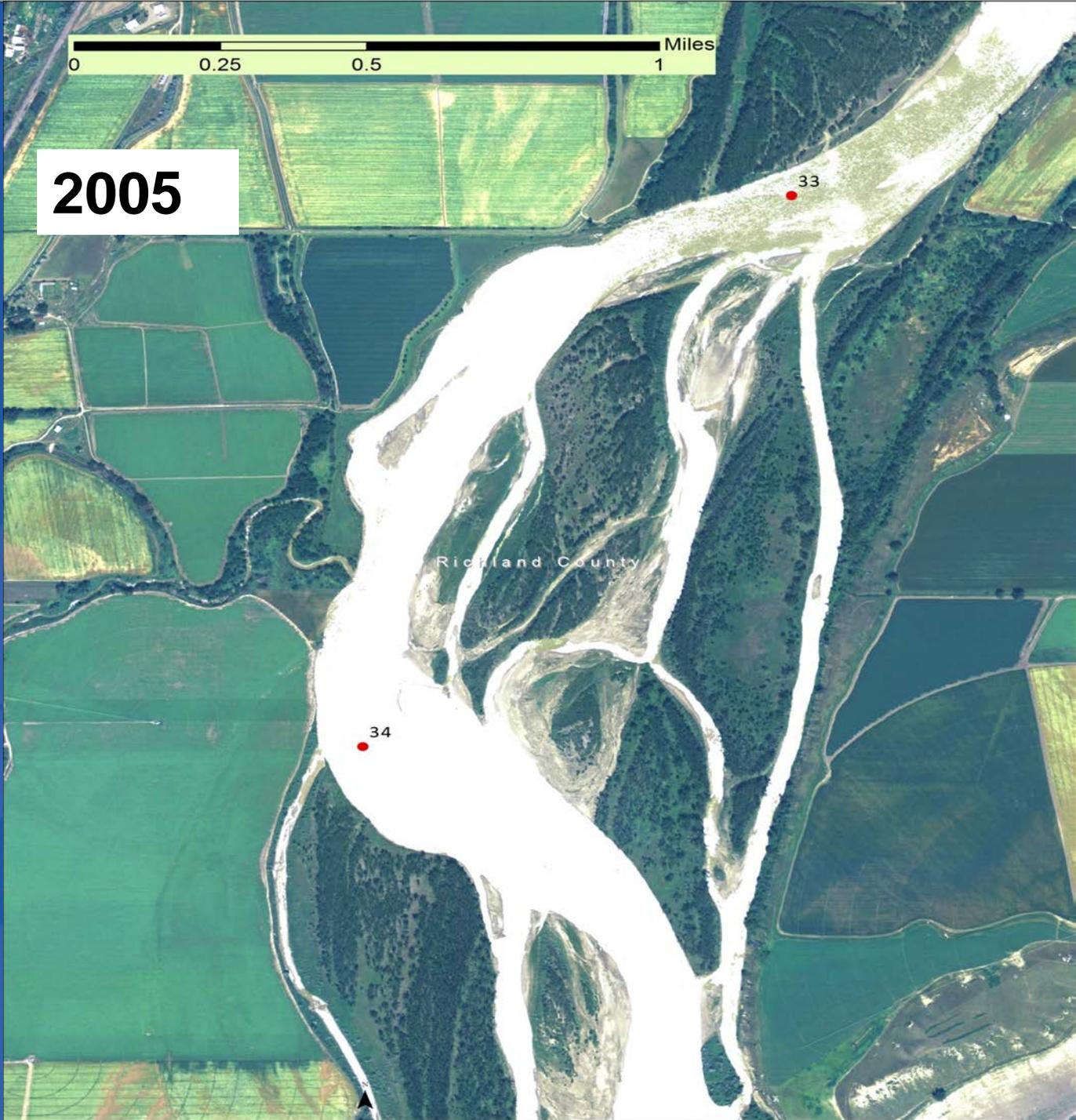


1977





2005





2011

Richland County

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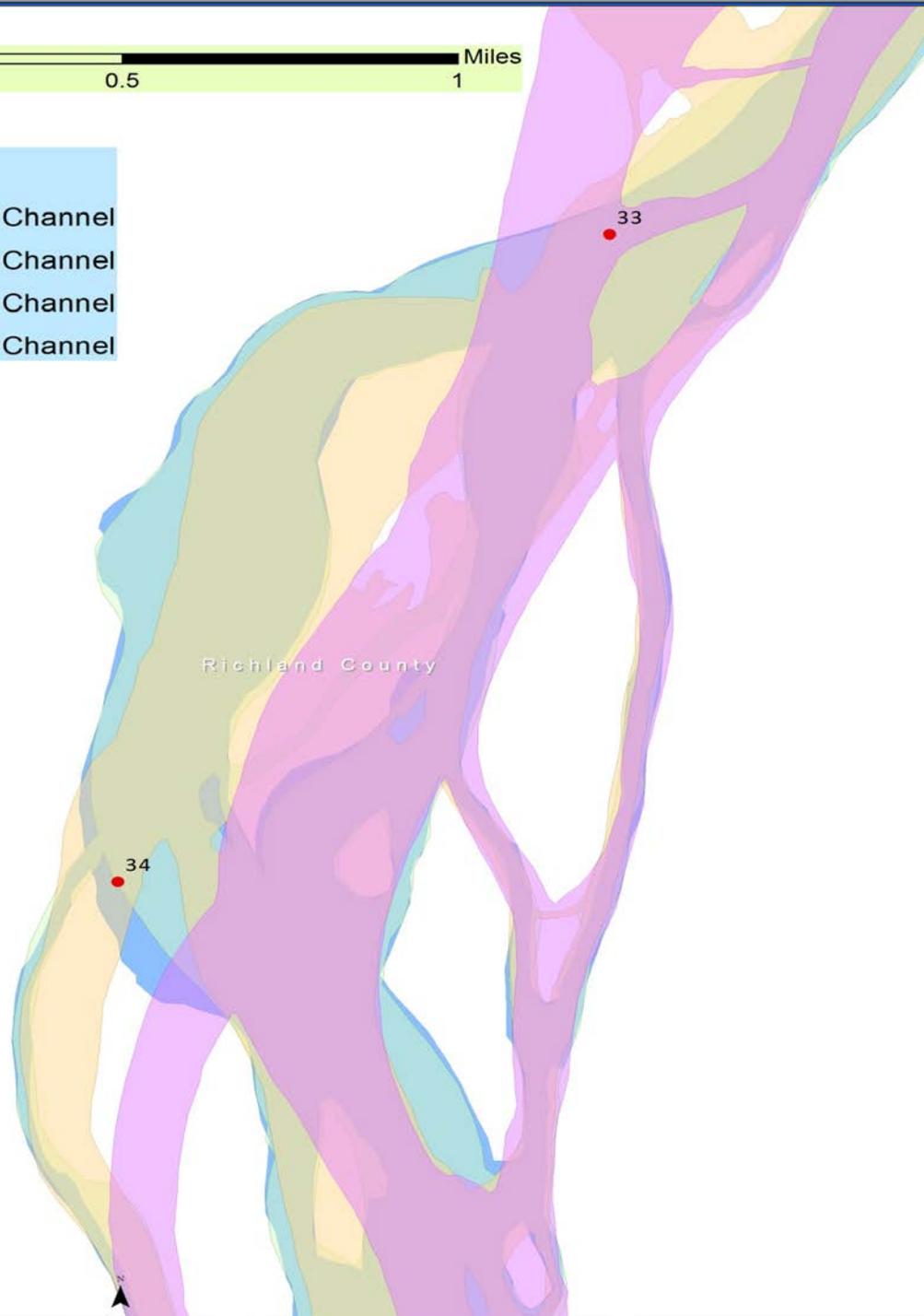
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Legend

- 1950 Channel
- 1976 Channel
- 1995 Channel
- 2001 Channel

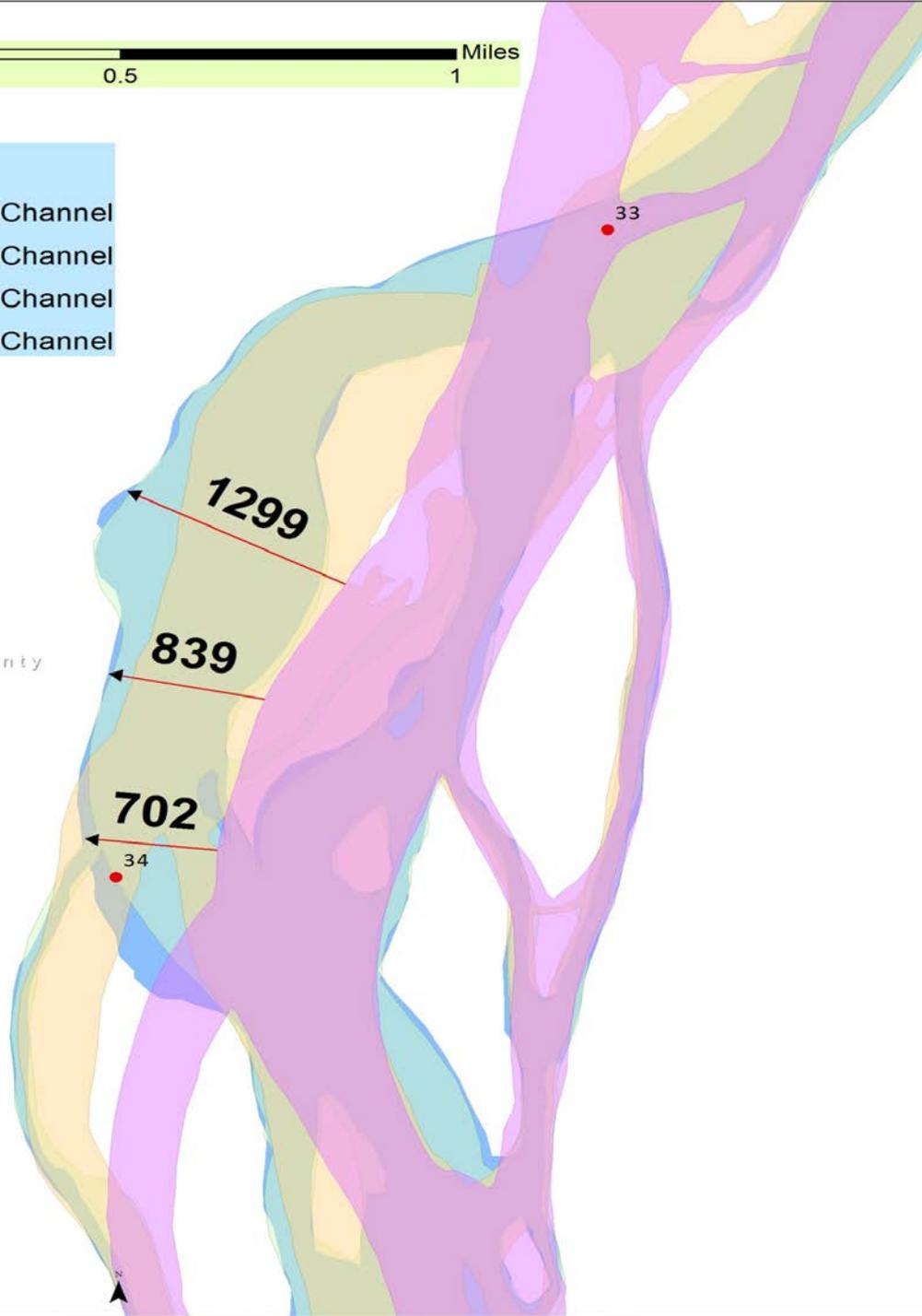




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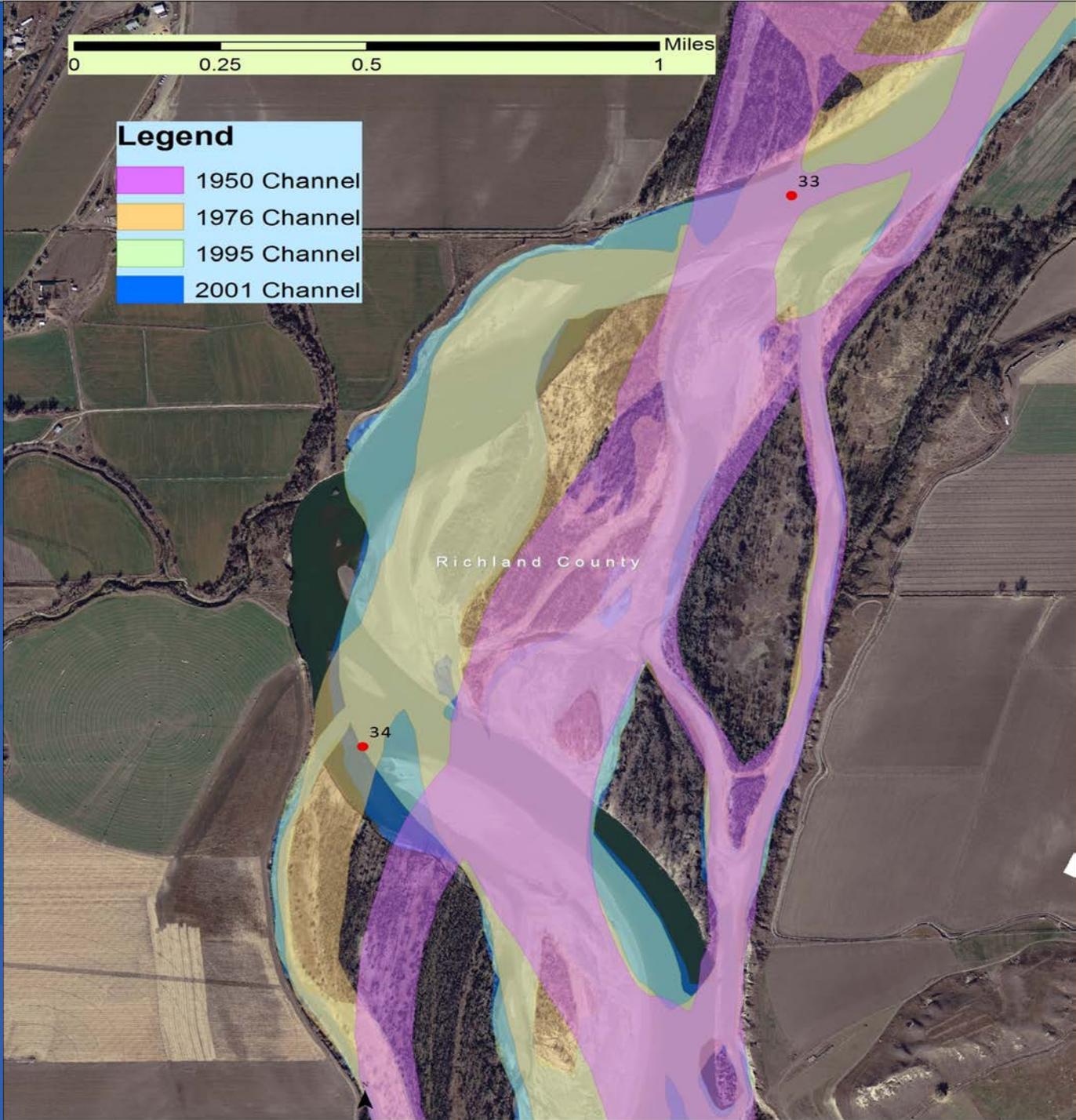
Richland County





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Looking Forward with the Yellowstone CME Program

Future considerations

- Channel migration (conservation) easements are time-intensive and require considerable capacity including ongoing financial investment as landowner interest builds over time.
- Conservation of the Yellowstone River floodplain, river function, native biota/communities, other functions and values from Park County to the N.D. border needs CEHEs committed to the goals of the CME program.



MARS Contacts

- Patrick Byorth, MARS Chair
- Tom Hinz, MARS Vice-Chair
- On the Web at *MontanaAquaticResources.org*
- 10 board members with varied and extensive Business and Natural Resources experience
- Experience conserving Montana wetlands, streams, watersheds and other aquatic sites is statewide and spans four decades
- Project needs or questions contact:

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