



# MANISTEE COUNTY-WIDE PARK & RECREATION PLAN

2022-2026

Manistee County | Arcadia Township | Bear Lake Township | Village of Bear Lake  
Brown Township | Cleon Township | Village of Copemish | Dickson Township  
Village of Eastlake | Charter Township of Filer | Village of Kaleva | City of Manistee  
Manistee Township | Maple Grove Township | Marilla Township | Norman Township  
Onekama Township | Village of Onekama | Pleasanton Township  
Springdale Township | Stronach Township

Plan Prepared by Networks Northwest

Adopted by local municipalities

Adopted by Manistee County Board of Commissioners





# Acknowledgments

Thank you to the following entities for their support and invaluable input provided throughout this planning process, without which this plan would not have been possible:

- Local officials, elected leaders and citizens in each of the 21 participating jurisdictions
- The Manistee County Planning Department
- The Manistee County Recreation Commission
- SMARTrails

A special thank you to the Manistee County Community Foundation and the Minger Family for their financial contributions to this plan and for their continued support to the community.

Photos throughout the plan, including those on the cover, were provided by Al Taylor.

Prepared by:



**Networks  
Northwes**

Talent / Business / Commun







# Forward

The 2021 Manistee County-Wide Park and Recreation Plan tells a story of community engagement, consensus building, data and information gathering and plan development. The creation of the plan is the cumulative effort of leadership from 21 municipalities, as well as input provided by many stakeholders and members of the public. The plan meets each requirement for the State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources 5-Year Park and Recreation Guidelines for each of the 21 municipalities within Manistee County. This document will be utilized to guide policy and decision making processes oriented around recreation within Manistee County, while laying the framework for specific projects and site improvements and creating opportunities for funding and fund development.

Prior to 2015, bringing representation from each municipality to a single table to collaborate on a unified recreation plan had not occurred in Manistee, a feat that has not been replicated in an other county in Michigan. This plan update signifies the community's continued willingness to collaborate on important issues. It is important for local leaders to remember that this document is only as strong as the ongoing implementation of the goals contained within, so it is of utmost importance to continually strive to meet each goal.

This plan has been adopted by all 21 communities contained within, including Manistee County, through a well-advertised public hearing process.



## Disclaimer:

All information contained within this plan is intended for Recreation Planning Purposes. Information on public lands, recreation sites, trails, fishing locations, hunting areas as well as all water access sites may have specific rules in place which must be adhered to, dependent upon the recreational activity one is pursuing. Please contact the appropriate, municipality, agency, landowner or policy which governs the land on which the recreational activity is pursued to ensure all applicable regulations are being followed.



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# Glossary of Terms & Acronyms

## Terms

- Recreation Commission** - A formal 10-person advisory body to the Manistee County Board of Commissioners. They are an appointed body of members that is established under the authority of the County and Regional Parks Act 261 of 1965.
- Planning Commission** - A body of citizens that serves within local government, acting as an advisory group to the municipal governing body on issues and policies related to planning, land use regulation and community development.
- SMARTrails** - 501(c)(3) non-profit that is charged with advocacy for trail development and maintenance fundraising in Manistee County.
- Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund** - A restricted fund that was established in 1976 to provide funding for public acquisition of lands for resource conservation and outdoor recreation, as well as for public outdoor recreation development projects.
- Explore the Shores** - A network of sites designed to provide barrier-free accessibility, educational opportunities and a connection to recreation and fishing in Manistee County, where fresh water is in abundance.
- Dark Sky Location** - A location with qualities that complement nighttime viewing, such as the ability to limit the amount of artificial light.
- Complete Streets** - Streets designed and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users. Those include people of all ages and abilities, regardless of whether they are traveling as drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists or public transportation riders.
- Safe Routes to School** - An international movement—and now a federal program—to make it safe, convenient, and fun for children, including those with disabilities, to bicycle and walk to school.

## Acronyms

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>DNR</b> - Department of Natural Resources                      | <b>MOU</b> - Memorandum of Understanding                |
| <b>MDOT</b> - Michigan Department of Transportation               | <b>ACS</b> - American Community Survey                  |
| <b>GTRLC</b> - Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy           | <b>MCVB</b> - Manistee County Visitors Bureau           |
| <b>MCCF</b> - Manistee County Community Foundation                | <b>MEDC</b> - Michigan Economic Development Corporation |
| <b>SMARTrails</b> - Sensational Manistee Area Recreational Trails | <b>RFP</b> - Request for Proposals                      |
| <b>PVCC</b> - Pleasant Valley Community Center                    | <b>RFQ</b> - Request for Qualifications                 |
| <b>SRTS</b> - Safe Routes to School                               | <b>TNC</b> - The Nature Conservancy                     |

Please note, throughout this document the words village, township, city and county are sometimes presented in lowercase, and at other times, capitalized. The lower case usage refers to the geographic area of the community while the capitalized usage refers to the municipal government. For example, one would state that the “township” has a certain population or certain number of parks, while the “Township” will work to implement the stated goals over the next 5-10 years.



# 1

# Introduction

### **Regional Focus while Celebrating Community Individuality**

Although one intent of this plan is to foster greater collaboration between the 21 jurisdictions, it also recognizes that each municipality represented in this document is unique in its geography, local identity and parks and recreation needs. For this reason, each jurisdiction's action program features a tailored set of action steps to guide its decision-making.

These action steps are, however, linked together by a series of overarching goals and objectives. In other words, this plan's layout is organized from more general information and goals (i.e. at the county level) to a level of greater specificity for the individual township, village or city. Much of this jurisdiction-specific information can be found in Appendices A and F.

### **Benefits of a County-Wide Plan**

During the previous planning process, which led to the 2016-2020 county-wide plan, the leadership team identified a need for a more centralized entity to apply for grant funding to support improvements across the county, as well as to promote collaboration, primarily for trail implementation. Similar to the manner in which neighboring jurisdictions throughout Michigan share police, fire, water or transportation services, the leadership team recognized the utility in having a single body to handle grant applications for regional trail routes.

After exploring various options to facilitate this concept, the county introduced a 10-member Recreation Commission for Manistee County (also see Appendix D). Going forward, and in conjunction with the information provided in this plan, the goal is to provide the opportunity for local jurisdictions to lease recreation sites to a single public entity when multi-jurisdictional trail implementation is desired. Please note, that this best practice is only intended for trail implementation and should not give the impression that the County is seeking to manage recreation sites owned by local jurisdictions. This is simply a means to meet DNR requirements for grant applications and to manage trails in a fiscally prudent manner. The County and the municipalities would form Memorandums of Understanding (MOU's) to retain maintenance responsibilities at the local level while ceding the need for staff and resources dedicated to grant administration to the County.

With a single entity, the County, responsible for grant funding efforts, local jurisdictions would save significant time and resources. Municipalities across the state are often understaffed and simply do not have the resources to effectively apply for and manage parks and recreation grants. This is also true in Manistee County. Although this strategy is entirely optional for each community, and should primarily apply to trail implementation, the benefits of choosing to do so are key contributors to the development and purpose of this plan.





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## Project Initiation

Community planners from Networks Northwest began reaching out to municipal leaders in each of the 21 jurisdictions represented in this plan in January, 2021. Each community was briefed on the importance of this planning process, the logistics of completing the extensive effort and a tentative timeline for project completion. By March, 2021, all of the municipalities in the county signed resolutions of support to participate (see Appendix G).

## Public Engagement

An extensive public engagement process occurred as part of the previous park & recreation plan's development, described in Chapter 4. Because of the depth of the previous effort, and the relative difficulty in reaching stakeholders due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the 2022-2026 plan's public engagement portion sought instead to build on what was heard in 2016. In this iteration of the county-wide plan, there were three opportunities for the public to voice its opinions. These consisted of a public meeting, a public hearing and an online survey, the results from which helped the planning team to understand the perspectives that were the same, and those that had changed over the past five years.

## Without Map Boundaries

There are myriad reasons the County and the separate municipalities decided to partake in a county-wide recreation plan in 2015. One of the key rationale was the notion that natural resources, as well as many built environment features such as trails, function irrespective of political boundaries on a map. In order for the Manistee community to implement all of the park amenities sought by the public a collaborative planning process was deemed necessary.

Trails are perhaps the best example of this idea. Throughout the previous planning process, the planning team heard from residents in all corners of the county that they wanted to see more trail connections in Manistee. This is discussed further in

Chapter 3. This type of project and its implementation will require a great amount of collaboration. To avoid the costs associated with repetitive work, the planning team recognized the need to get localities on the same page as soon as possible. A shared vision for trails, expressed in an adopted plan, lays the foundation for implementation.

Aside from trails, natural resources such as forests, rivers, shoreline and dunes cross jurisdictional boundaries and therefore require collaborative planning on their behalf. For this reason, as previously mentioned, this plan is organized from macro to micro-jurisdictional. In other words, it understands the county's many recreational assets regionally, at the county level and then locally, without implying that one perspective is more valid or important than the other.

## Goals & Objectives

The goals and objectives found in Chapter 5 are meant to guide the community's recreation project implementation over the next five years. These goals were developed during the public meeting and, to an extent, build off of the goals found in the previous plan. The planning team worked with local leaders to review 1) what is working well in the community as it relates to parks and recreation, 2) what is not working well and 3) what they would like to see in Manistee if they were to float over the community in 10 years.

## Final Plan Recommendations

In this final planning stage, the team from Networks Northwest received input on the draft plan. In September, 2021, each of the jurisdictions received a copy of the draft plan and were allotted two weeks to provide comments and revisions. Following, the plan was sent to the Michigan DNR for a preliminary review. Finally, each municipality held a 30-day public review period followed by a public hearing in November or December, 2021.







**2**

# **Community Description**

Manistee, located in northwest lower Michigan, is widely revered for its abundant natural resources, picturesque lakefront, scenic vistas and ample recreation amenities. With a population of 24,457, the largely rural community is home to a mix of full-time and seasonal residents. Visitors from around the region visit Manistee to enjoy the many outdoor activities it offers, making tourism a key part of the county's economic base. This section describes the natural and built features of Manistee that are a draw for residents and tourists alike. It additionally includes a narrative

# Manistee's Wide Appeal

of the community's demographics, the value provided by parks and recreation and the efforts that have been made in connecting sites through trail development. While this chapter focuses on county-wide resources, a further jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction community description can be found in Appendix A along with the inventories and administrative structures described in Chapter 3. In addition, Appendices B and C contain maps of Manistee's ample natural and recreational resources.

## **Public Lands**

There are abundant public lands within Manistee County. The lands can be divided into different categories based upon ownership. The following land owner categories are summarized in this section and are displayed in Appendix B (See Map B-1).

### **State Lands**

State land ownership in Manistee County totals approximately 24,329 acres which are contained in State Forest, Game Area and Park lands. This accounts for about 6.8% of the land area in Manistee.

## **United State Forest Service Lands**

Federal lands contained within the Manistee National Forest total approximately 86,874 acres in Manistee County. This accounts for about 24% of the land area in Manistee County.

### **Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy Lands**

Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy has lands which are available for public use. These lands encompass approximately 2,454 acres. This accounts for about 0.7% of the land area in Manistee County.



## **Private Lands Open to Public Use**

Private land holdings open to the public are most often organizations such as the National Audubon Society, the Spirit of the Woods Conservation Club and privately owned but publicly open locations such as the Pleasant Valley Community Center in Arcadia Township. Total private lands open to public number approximately 124 acres. This accounts for about 0.03% of the land area in Manistee.

## **Consumers Energy Private Lands Open to Public Use**

Consumers Energy with two large hydroelectric dams within Manistee County located along the Manistee River, allows for public use on portions of their land holdings. Consumers energy lands open to public use encompass approximately 756 acres. This accounts for about 0.2% of the land area in Manistee County.

### **Local Government and School Lands**

Local units of government as well as local school system lands account for many public land areas with identified recreation sites. The approximate amount of lands totals 2,965 acres. This accounts for about 0.8% of the land area in Manistee County.

### **Rivers and Streams**

Rivers and Streams are plentiful in Manistee County. Predominantly cold-water fed, the streams and rivers support abundant trout and salmon species as well as other cool water species such as walleye, small-mouth bass and pike. The major river and creek systems are displayed on Map B-2.

### **Water Bodies**

Manistee County contains 3 harbor lakes which are connected to Lake Michigan via a channel (Manistee Lake, Portage Lake and Arcadia Lake), but also contains many inland lakes such as Bear, Lemon, Pine, Sand, Chief, Canfield, Healy, Glovers, Bar and Eleanor. Each of these lakes provides public access and myriad opportunities, from fishing to boating and swimming. The public and private water bodies of Manistee County are displayed on Map B-3.

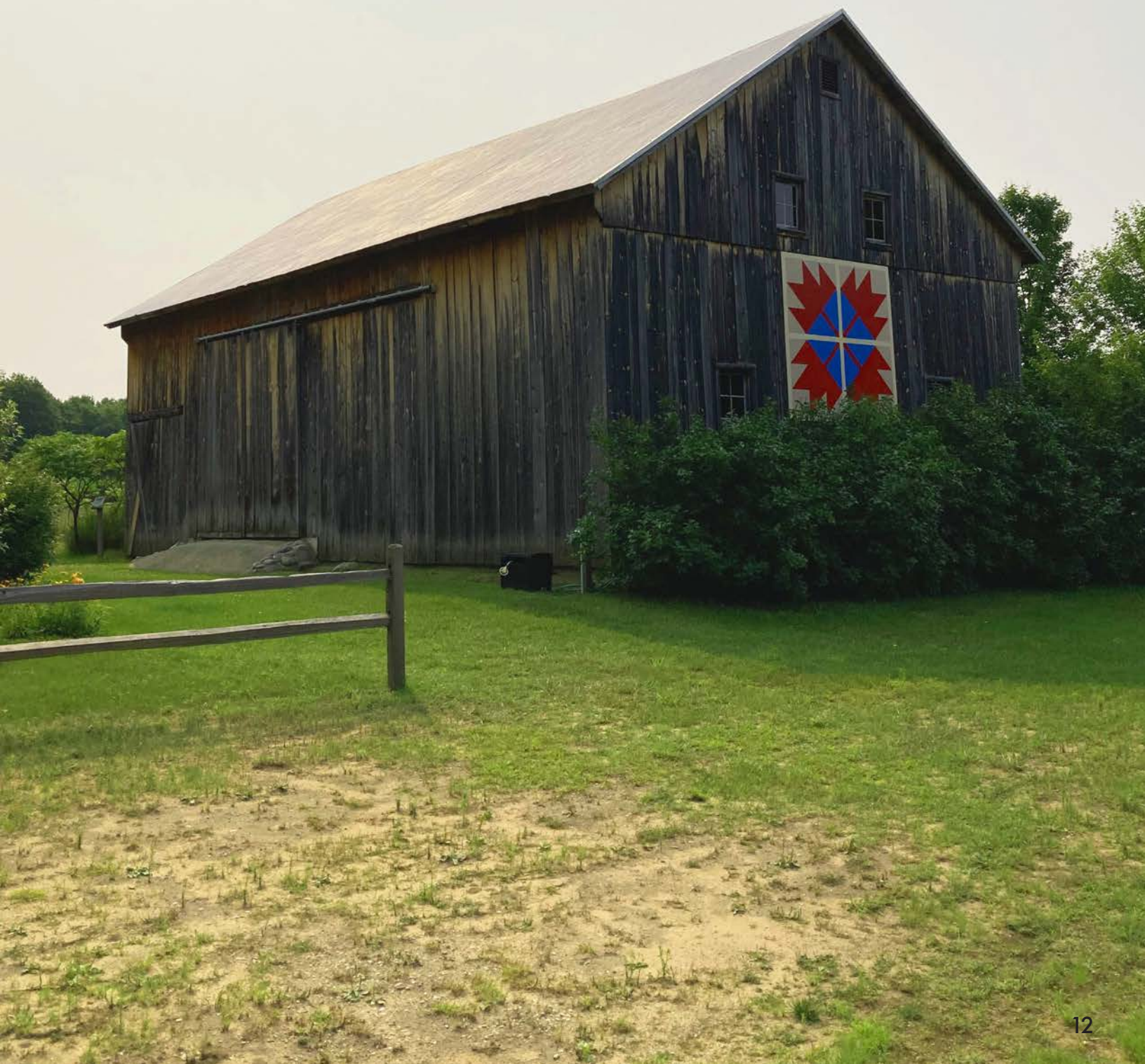
### **Wetlands**

The wetlands of Manistee County are an important resource as they serve as the primary recipient of overland storm water runoff and provide an aquifer base for the recharging of our inland lakes and streams. They also function as an important habitat for bird populations, as well as a host of other native species. The wetlands within Manistee County as identified by the State of Michigan are displayed on Map B-4.

### **Topography**

Manistee County has topography which is varied with river valleys, lowlands and rolling hills. These features are displayed on Map B-5.







Manistee County's population has remained steady over the past 10 years and is projected to continue along a similar trajectory through 2025. Shown in Figure 1, Manistee County's population grew from 24,733 in 2010 to 24,960 in 2020. Despite this slight growth, Manistee County is projected to decline in population by 2025 to 24,886 people.

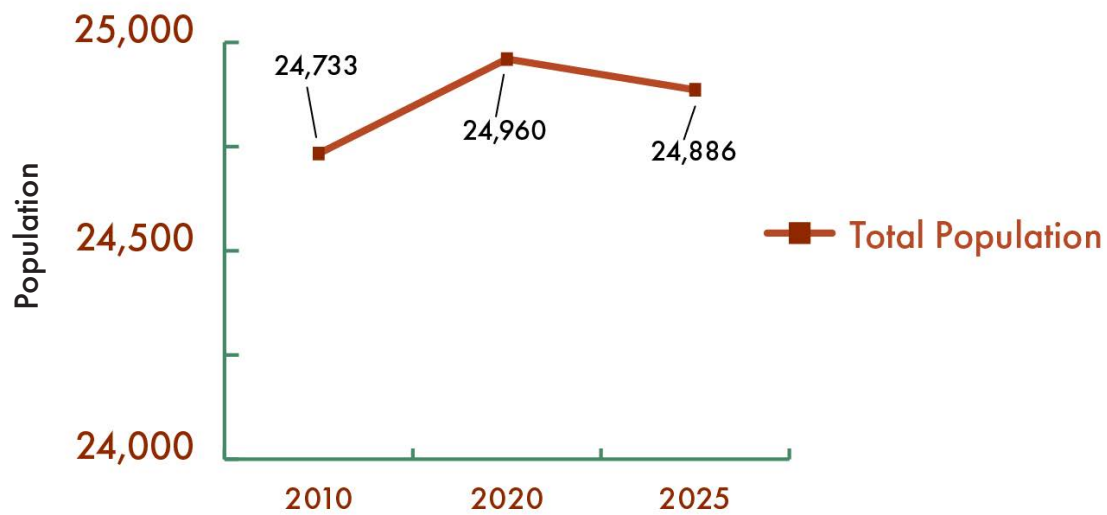
Figure 2 describes the breakdown of three age groups in Manistee. One can see that from 2010 to 2025, the county's median age will increase as the proportion of individuals age 65+ rises. For context, 22.1 percent of Michiganders are age 65+, meaning Manistee County's population is, on average, older than residents from other communities across the state. This provides some planning implications as jurisdictions within Manistee County may decide to shift some recreation programming and infrastructure developments to suit an aging population.

## Community Demographics

Breaking down the community's population change further, Figure 4 on page 15 shows trends for each Census Tract in Manistee County to illustrate what areas of the county are gaining and losing residents. One can see that growth in the community has largely occurred in Tracts 4 (Manistee Township), 7 (Filer & Stronach Townships) and 9 (City of Manistee & Manistee Township). However, consistent with population trends for the county as a whole, none of the local jurisdictions have seen a significant change in their population since 2010.

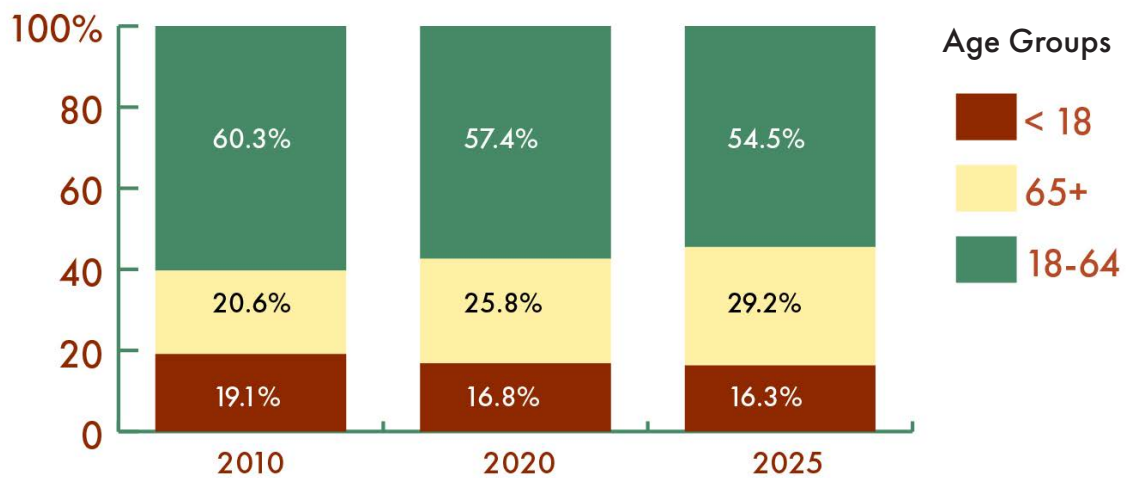
One important factor to consider when planning for parks and recreation is accessibility. Nearly one in five people (18.2%) living in Manistee County lives with at least one form of physical disability (see Figure 3). It is reasonable to assume that this number will go up in tandem with the median age increase. Discussed later in this plan, Manistee County strives to provide recreation opportunities that serve everyone regardless of physical ability. This is one of the key principles guiding the county going forward.

Figure 1. Manistee County Population, 2010-2025



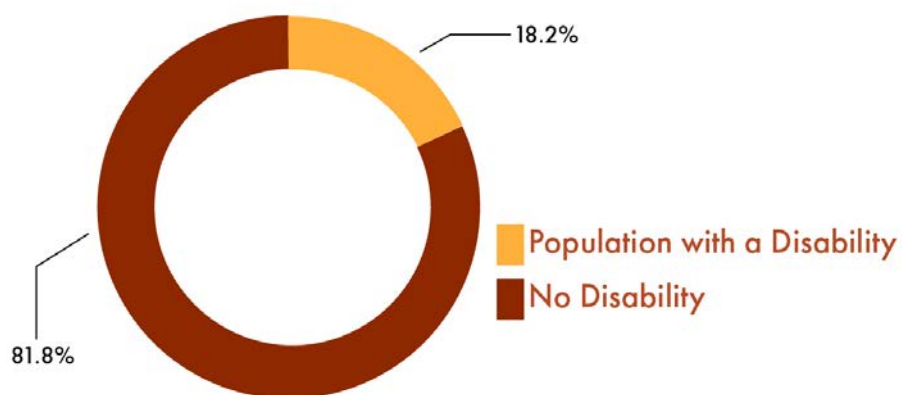
Source: Esri, Business Analyst Online - Community Profile

Figure 2. Population by Age, 2010-2025



Source: Esri, Business Analyst Online - Community Profile

Figure 3. Population with a Disability, 2019

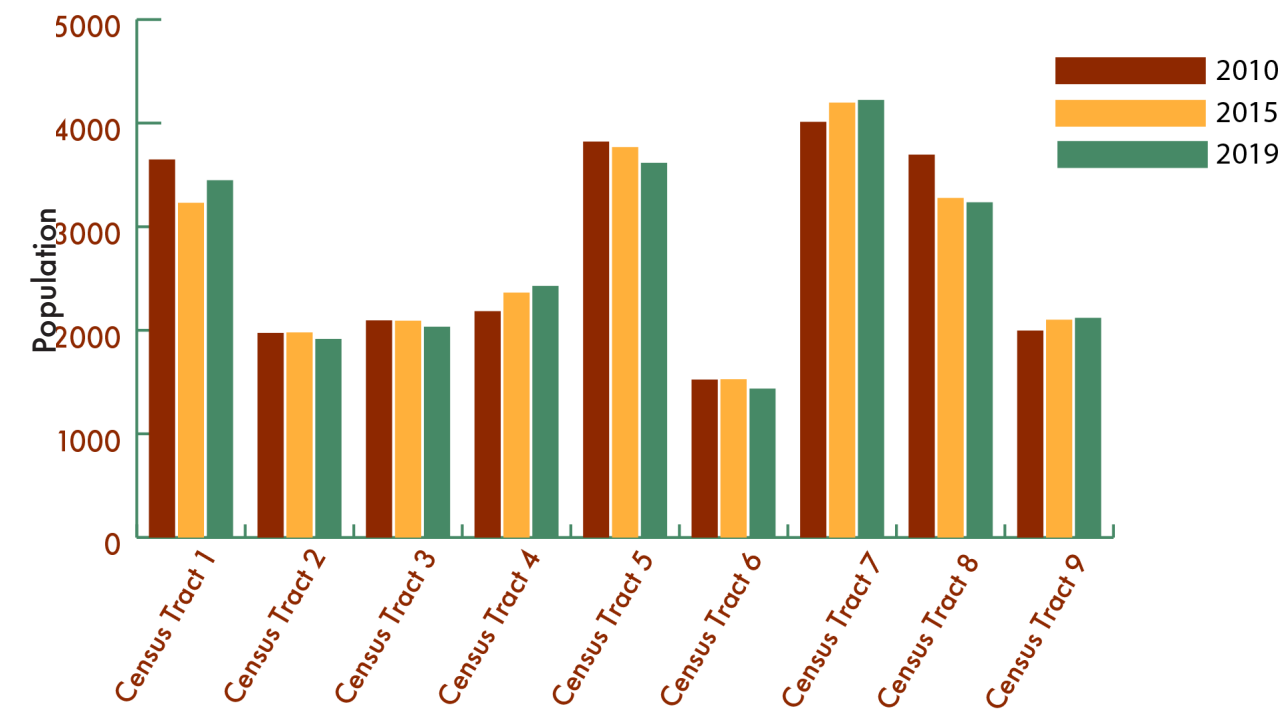


Source: ACS 2019 5- Year Estimates





Figure 4. Population by Census Tract, 2010-2019

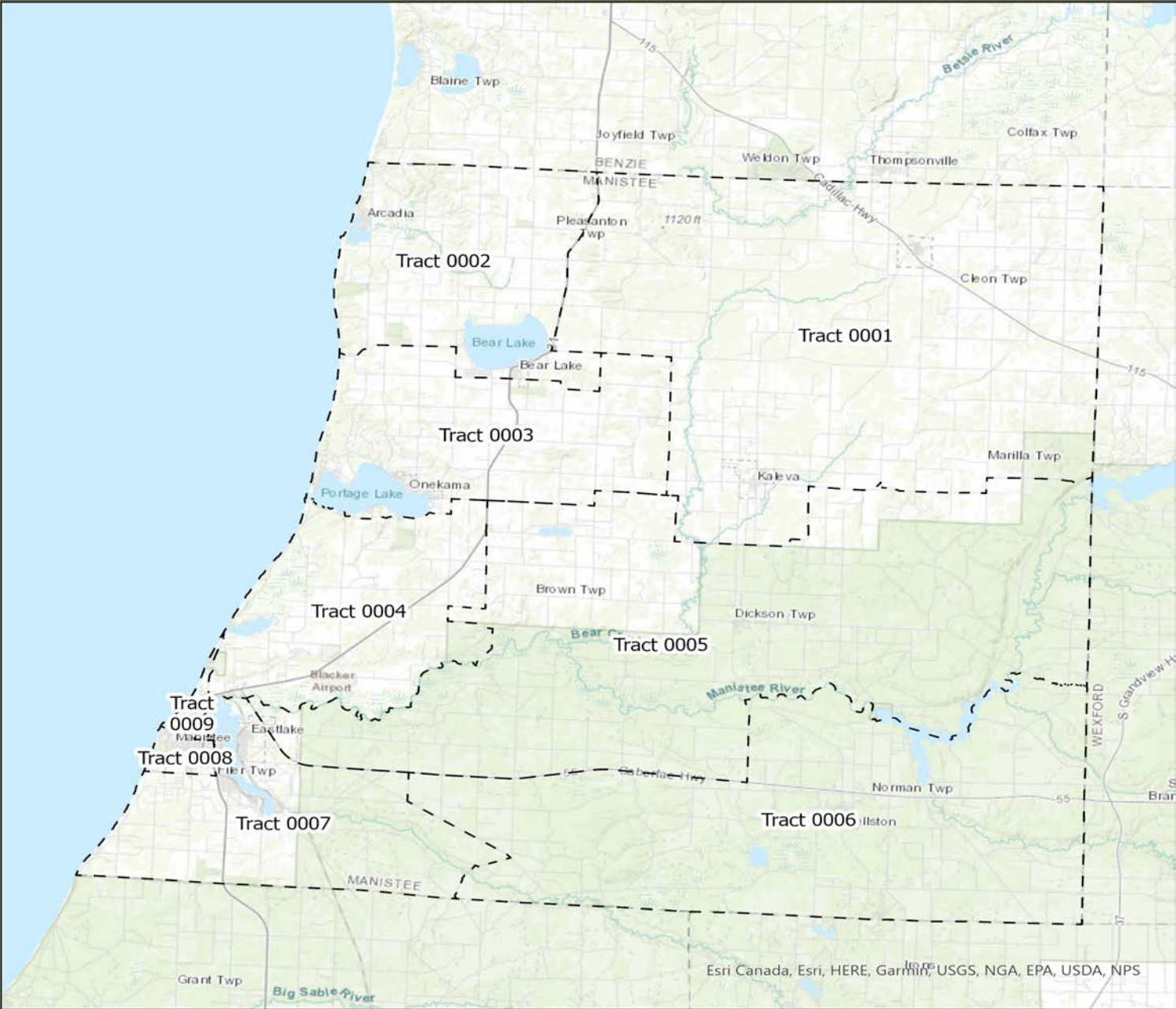


Source: ACS 5-Year Survey for 2010, 2015 & 2019





Map 1. Manistee County Census Tracts



The quality and quantity of recreation sites cannot be understated as their positive effects are now well-documented in academic literature as well as local studies. According to a February, 2021 press release issued by the Manistee County Visitors Bureau (MCVB) citing a study by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), "Visitors spent \$157.8 million in Manistee County in 2019, up 2.9 percent from 2018 and 11.3 percent from five years ago." The same study describes positive economic impacts from visitor spending (lodging, retail, food and beverage, recreation and transportation), as well as from direct and indirect employment increases as a result of tourism.

## All that Green Space Offers

Aside from the recently known economic benefits of green spaces, there are also the various benefits of which many people are already aware. Quality green spaces contribute positively to physical health, mental health, social networks and environmental sustainability. For all of these reasons it remains critically important for Manistee County to understand its recreation offerings and to continue planning for these.

This section discusses the recreation industries that help make up Manistee County's economic base, the cited benefits to different park features and the importance of spacing recreation sites close to residents.

## Location Quotient Analysis

To further acknowledge the relationship between quality recreation and the local economy, the planning team for this county-wide plan update used a Location Quotient (LQ) analysis. Location quotient analyses are useful for local officials and other decision makers in understanding the makeup of the local economy. This analysis, in simplest terms, estimates the concentration of a particular industry in one area compared to that industry's concentration in the rest of the country, thereby highlighting the uniqueness of Manistee.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides county-level data on a quarterly basis. A LQ score of 1 or higher indicates that an industry sector is a key part of the local economic base and that the municipality is likely exporting that industry outside of the community (e.g. a local restaurant serving many visitors in addition to locals).

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By calculating the LQ score for different types of industries, a community can better:

1. Determine which industries make the regional economy unique,
  2. Identify which industries the community is exporting,
  3. Recognize emerging export industries that are starting to bring economic activity into the local market, and
  4. To identify export industries that have the potential to threaten the region's economic base.
- 

Often, municipalities work to ensure that various industry sectors have a LQ score close to 1, indicating that the economic base is diverse and not heavily reliant on one or two industries. Communities with a diverse economic base are considered more sustainable because if one industry declines, for whatever reason, the impact on the community will be minimal compared to a community that relies entirely on one or two industries.





Table 1. Location Quotients for Manistee County Industries

NAICS 5-Digit Industry	Annual Average Employment	Total Annual Wages	Annual Average Employment Location Quotient
Restaurants and other eating places (NAICS 72251)	394	\$5.96 million	0.75
Gasoline stations with convenience stores (NAICS 44711)	190	\$4.31 million	4.66
Hotels and motels, except casino hotels (NAICS 72111)	99	\$1.44 million	1.23
Other traveler accommodation (NAICS 72119)	59	\$947,470	36.02
Rv parks and recreational camps (NAICS 72121)	37	\$800,690	11.00
Gift, novelty, and souvenir stores (NAICS 45322)	12	\$140,757	1.70
All other amusement and recreation industries (NAICS 71399)	11	\$245,528	1.07

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

For this park and recreation plan, Manistee County was analyzed using the NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) 5-digit industries. Only industries that relate to parks and recreation are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that Manistee County has a very high concentration of gasoline stations with convenience stores, RV parks and recreational camps and other traveler accommodations. 'Other traveler accommodations' largely consists of establishments primarily engaged in providing short-term lodging (except hotels, motels and casino hotels) such as bed-and-breakfast inns, tourist homes, guest houses, youth hostels and housekeeping cabins and cottages. These industries are representative of the direct and indirect economic stimuli the county receives as a result of its ample recreation and natural resources.

This further highlights the importance of effectively planning for the management of these sites as they drive employment in a variety of industry sectors.

### Studied Park Benefits

In addition to economic benefits, the prevalence of parks and recreation opportunities in a community has been shown to have a positive relationship with other forms of capital. A 2017 study found that the number of parks and the total acreage of green space within walking distance to residents had a positive relationship with self-reported mental wellbeing (1).

Additionally, researchers from UC San Diego conducted an expansive review of the literature around the built environment and its effect on the following: physical health, mental health, social benefits, environmental sustainability, safety/injury

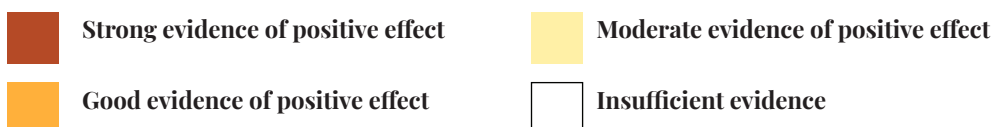


prevention and economic benefits (2). Table 2 displays the results of this review and the strength of evidence between the built environment and certain outcomes. One key takeaway from this table is that presence and proximity to parks and recreation shows 'good' to 'strong' evidence of having a positive correlation with physical health, mental health, social benefits, environmental sustainability and safety/injury

prevention. Trails show 'good' evidence of a positive relationship with economic benefits and pedestrian/bicycle facilities show a 'strong' positive correlation with safety/injury prevention and economic benefits. These findings support the notion that best practices in design, as well as the availability of parkland can lead to a quality community where people choose to live, work and recreate.

Table 2. Built Environment Features and their Co-Benefits

Summary Scores for Built Environment Features & Public Outcomes						
Built Environment Attribute	Physical Health	Mental Health	Social Benefits	Environmental Sustainability	Safety / Injury Prevention	Economic Benefits
Presence, proximity						
Design features						
Trails						
Physical activity programs/ promotion						
Public gardens						
Pedestrian / Bicycle facilities						
Safe routes to school						
School recreation facilities						



1 - Wood, L., Hooper, P., Foster, S., & Bull, F. (2017). Public green spaces and positive mental health - investigating the relationship between access, quantity and types of parks and mental wellbeing. *Health & Place*, 48, 63-71. doi: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2017.09.002.

2- Sallis, J.F. & Spoon, C. (2015). Co-benefits of designing communities for active living: an exploration of literature. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 12(30). doi: 10.1186/s12966-015-0188-2.

### Getting Everyone to the Parks

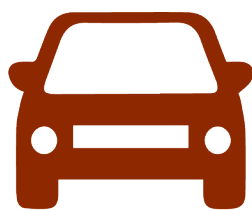
Residents and local officials alike largely understand the important value of well-planned parks and recreation. In addition, recreation sites are most valuable to the community when everyone has the opportunity to use them. As a predominantly rural community, Manistee should continue to consider the spatial relationship between its parkland and various user groups, taking into consideration two largely interconnected variables: poverty and access to a personal vehicle.

A national peer-reviewed study found that rural households are often beyond walking distance to a park (median of 6.2 miles nationally) and rural households living below the poverty threshold are more likely to be spatially distanced from recreation sites than others in the community (3).

In Manistee County, as with many low population

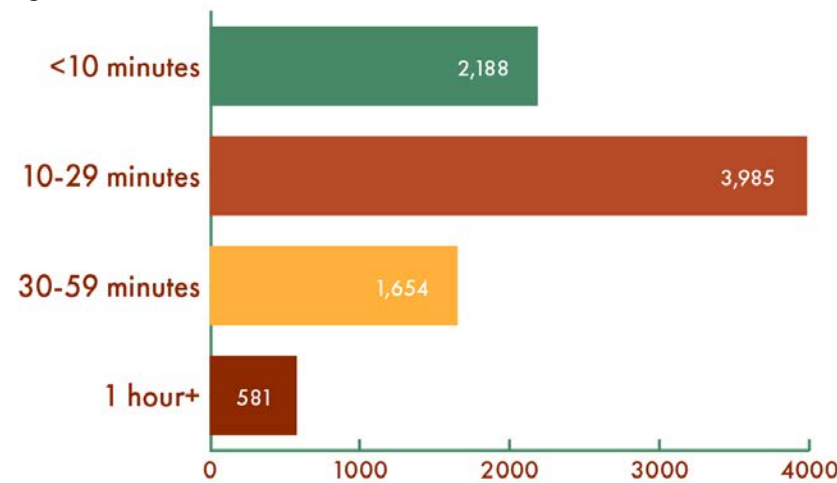
density communities, access to a personal vehicle is paramount for both work and recreation. This notion is best illustrated by the data below. 74 percent of workers in Manistee County take 10 minutes or more to travel to work.

According to the 2019 ACS Survey, 11.5% of Manistee County’s population lives below poverty level. And while most (93.7%) have access to a vehicle, more than one in 20 (6.3%) do not. One recreation benchmark that Manistee should strive for in the coming years is to not only improve current recreation sites, but to also facilitate stronger non-motorized connections to these places. The next chapter describes the work completed to date that provides some of these needed connections, in addition to the various other recreation amenities found in Manistee County.



According to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey, 79.7% of Manistee County workers age 16+ drove alone to work. 10.7% carpooled, 2.5% walked and just 1.0 percent rode their bike.

Figure 5. Travel Distance to Work



Source: ACS 2019 5-Year Estimates

3 - Wen, M., Zhang, X., Harris, C.D., Holt, J.B., & Croft, J.B. (2013). Spatial disparities in the distribution of parks and green spaces in the USA. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 45(1). doi: 10.1007/s12160-012-9426-x

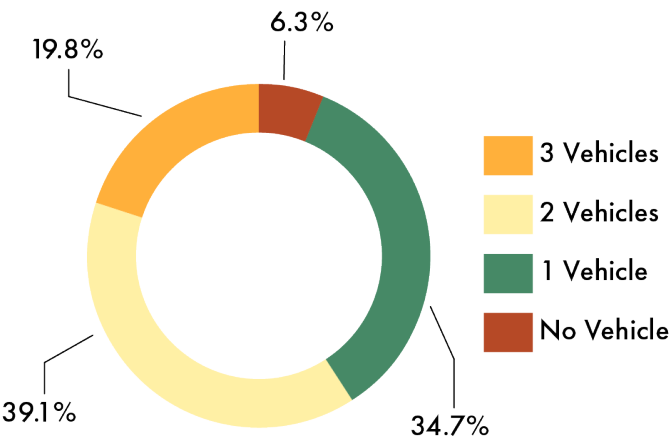


Table 3. Median Household Income

	2020	2025
Median Household Income	\$44,620	\$48,741
Median Home Value	\$138,796	\$149,242

Source: Esri, Business Analyst Online - Community Profile

Figure 6. Vehicle Ownership by Household



Source: ACS 2019 5-Year Estimates









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# **Recreation Inventory**



Manistee County's perception as a recreation destination can be attributed to the sheer quantity of public lands and water access, as well as the overall quality of those sites. This chapter describes each of the various recreation site types in the county.

Because of the relatively large number of sites, the planning team worked with residents and local officials during the 2015 planning process, and again in 2021, to categorize locations as primary, secondary or tertiary. This practice served two purposes. First, it

## Recreation in Manistee: Variety, Quantity, Quality

documents which sites at the local and county levels are the greatest contributors to recreation in the community. Subsequently, this prioritization of sites then gives the entities in charge of park improvements a better sense of which projects should happen first.

The following recreation types are described and mapped in this plan: public lands open to hunting, beach access, boat launches, canoe and kayak access, camping, dark sky locations, Explore the Shores sites and trails. Because of the extensive work that has occurred in recent years around trail development locally and regionally, this recreation type has its own section. This chapter displays park and recreation locations in a county-wide context. See Appendix A for each local jurisdiction's inventory, description and mapping.

## Public Lands Open to Hunting

Manistee County hosts over 115,000 acres of public lands open to hunting. The vast majority is managed as state or national forest land by the State of Michigan and US Forest Service. Other entities, including the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Consumers Energy and local school districts also manage land open to hunting by the public. While these areas are distributed throughout the county, the southernmost jurisdictions enjoy the greatest amount of public hunting lands. (See Map C-2).



## Boat Launches

At the time of this writing, Manistee County holds 36 boat launches. These launches are well-dispersed throughout the community, allowing access to various water bodies including Lake Michigan, the Manistee River, Bear Creek and various others. This is an important county-wide asset as Michigan is third in the nation in terms of registered recreational boating vessels, trailing behind only Florida and Minnesota (See Map C-4).

## Canoe and Kayak Access

As of 2021, Manistee County features 117 canoe and kayak launches. The vast majority of Manistee's launches can be found on Portage Lake, Bear Lake, the Manistee River and the Little Manistee River. There are also sites to launch along Lake Michigan, which are part of the Manistee-Frankfort section of the Lake Michigan Water Trail. The Lake Michigan Water Trail is a 1,638 mile water trail managed by an array of public and private entities in Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana (See Map C-5).

## Beaches

The Lake Michigan shoreline is a key recreation attraction for the state of Michigan, and Manistee County boasts some of the most pristine lakefront views in the state. With 39 public beaches, there are many options to choose from. The majority of these beach sites are located along Lake Michigan, though some of the inland lakes also feature beaches. These include Portage Lake, Bear Lake, Healy Lake, Lake Elinor and Crystal Lake (See Map C-3).





## Camping

There are around 80 public camping areas in Manistee County as of 2021. Campers and hikers can find a place to spend the night throughout the county. The greatest concentration of rustic backcountry campsites are located along the Little Manistee River and Tippy Dam Pond. Campers of varying skill levels will be able to find an accommodating campground in Manistee. From rustic sites in the Huron-Manistee National Forest to RV-accommodating sites elsewhere, there is a site for everyone (See Map C-6).

## Dark Sky Locations

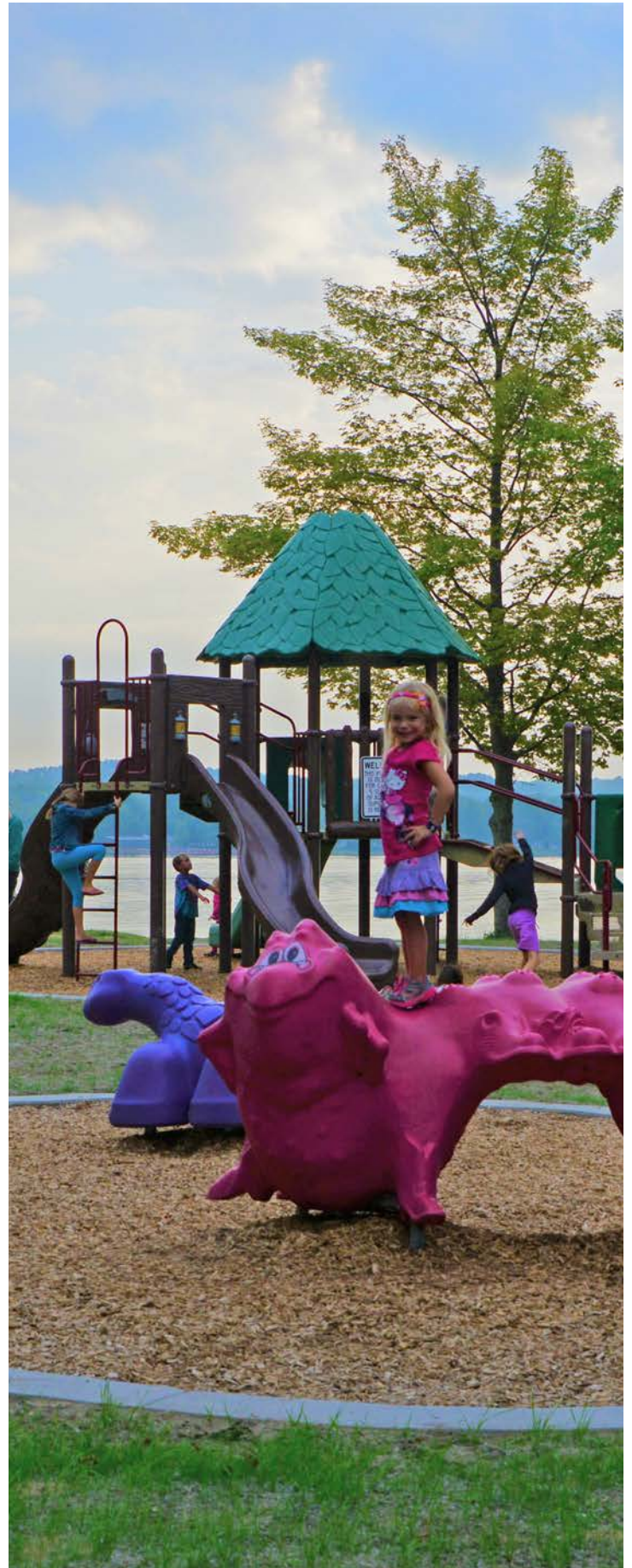
There are 236 recreation sites in Manistee without lighting on-site, making them candidates for a “dark sky” designation. Dark sky initiatives require areas that do not compete with development and the resulting lights that are required for a dense population. With much of Manistee County undeveloped as a result of large land holdings owned by the US Forest Service, the Department of Natural Resources, energy companies (Consumers Power), and Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, opportunities to develop dark sky initiatives are plentiful.

Dark sky initiatives meet the triple-bottom-line of sustainability: they provide a quality space to enjoy nature; they generate eco-tourism dollars; and they promote a reduction in light pollution (See Map C-7).

## Explore the Shores Program

The establishment of the Explore the Shores Program in 2008 within Manistee County began an endeavor which seeks to develop Universally Accessible Water Access Sites throughout Manistee County.

Recreation in Manistee County has greatly benefited from the establishment and continued expansion of the Explore the Shores program. The previous county-wide plan set the goal to have 50+ sites by 2020. While this ambitious goal was not accomplished, two sites went from nominees to designated: Magoon Creek Natural Area and the state-owned Portage Lake Boat Launch. For a map of Manistee’s Explore the Shores program see Map C-10.







Local Planning Commissions, Boards and Councils completed the task of ranking recreation sites through a 3-tiered system of primary, secondary and tertiary sites. The ranking of recreation sites was completed for those sites within each community boundary. The ranking followed an anecdotal formula of identifying the most utilized sites, those which were in need of improvement, sites which could serve as trailheads or stops along a trail route and those desired to become an important

## County-Wide Primary Sites

location for activity within the municipality. Each site's ranking was recorded and is provided within the recreation site inventories for each community within Appendix A. The purpose of this ranking exercise, which is not a DNR requirement, was to:

- 1) Help newly appointed and elected officials understand which sites are most important to the community in the coming years; and
- 2) Facilitate collaboration between Manistee County's municipal governments, non-profits, businesses, civic organizations and other stakeholder groups on projects that cross municipal borders, namely trail connections to recreation sites.

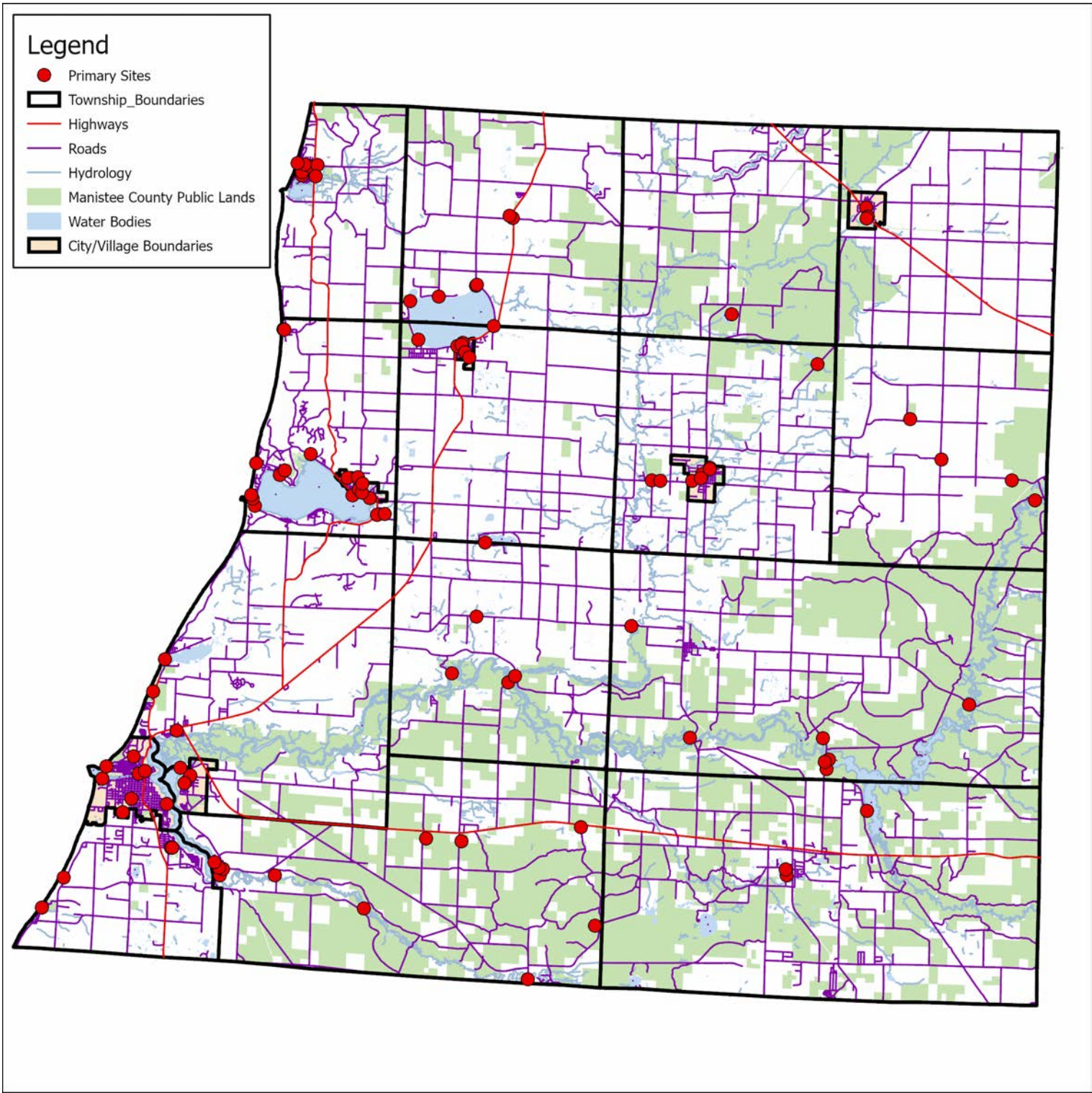
It is important to note that this ranking system is not an official planning categorization. Local governments can and should pursue funding for a secondary or tertiary site if desired by the public or if site-specific funding becomes available.

There are a total of 307 identified recreation sites within Manistee County. Of those, 98 sites are considered primary, 95 are considered secondary and 114 are tertiary. All of the county's primary sites can be seen on the map on page 28.





Map 2. County-Wide Primary Recreation Sites



Few goals galvanize an entire community. However, as the public input data shows in Chapter 4 and subsequently the goals developed by each of the 20 communities in the County in Chapter 5, residents have articulated that they want multi-use trails. While the county has some established snowmobile trails, the North Country Trail, Manistee River Trail, Big M Trail System as well as a few other local trail systems found scattered throughout Manistee, the trails system is uncoordinated, is lacking connections, has limited loops, and does not facilitate connections in a meaningful way to population centers or service areas. In addition, they lack signage and way-finding, are not maintained for multiple user types, and lack basic facilities. Put simply, there are great needs to the existing trail system, and conversely, there are great opportunities and widespread support.

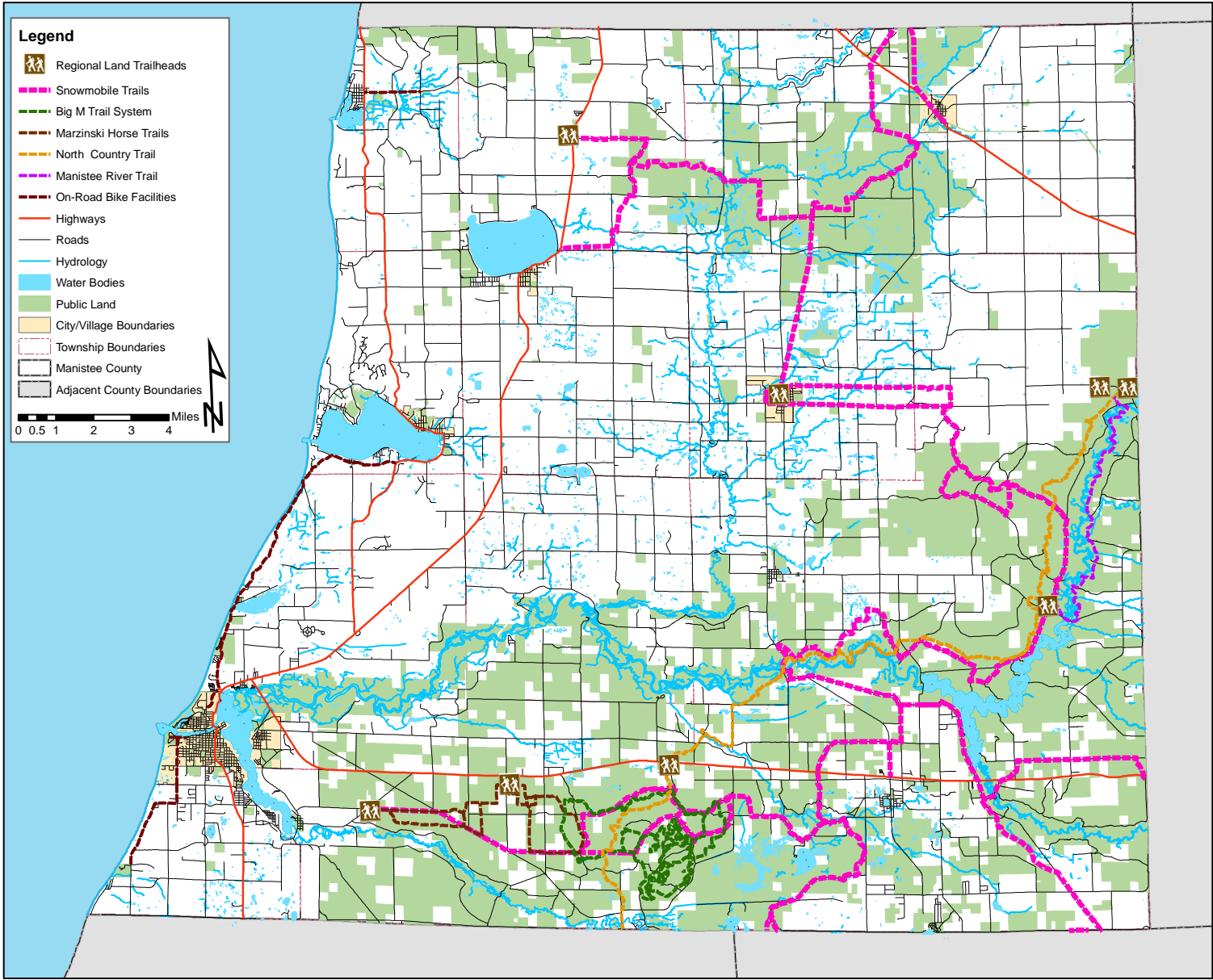
## Trails

The existence of many localized trails and a few existing regional connection calls for increased connectivity. A strong showing of support through the public input processes described in this plan provides the evidence needed that trail connections are desired throughout the community and a variety of trail types are needed. In Manistee, there are abundant localized trail systems with few regional connectors and even fewer connections to some of the most densely populated areas.

The utilization of regional trail connections to link population centers, recreation sites, private business districts, historic locations and various amenities and existing localized trail systems can provide an avenue with which residents and visitors can explore and recreate throughout the county. This recreation plan provides the framework for moving forward to plan and establish the regional trail network.

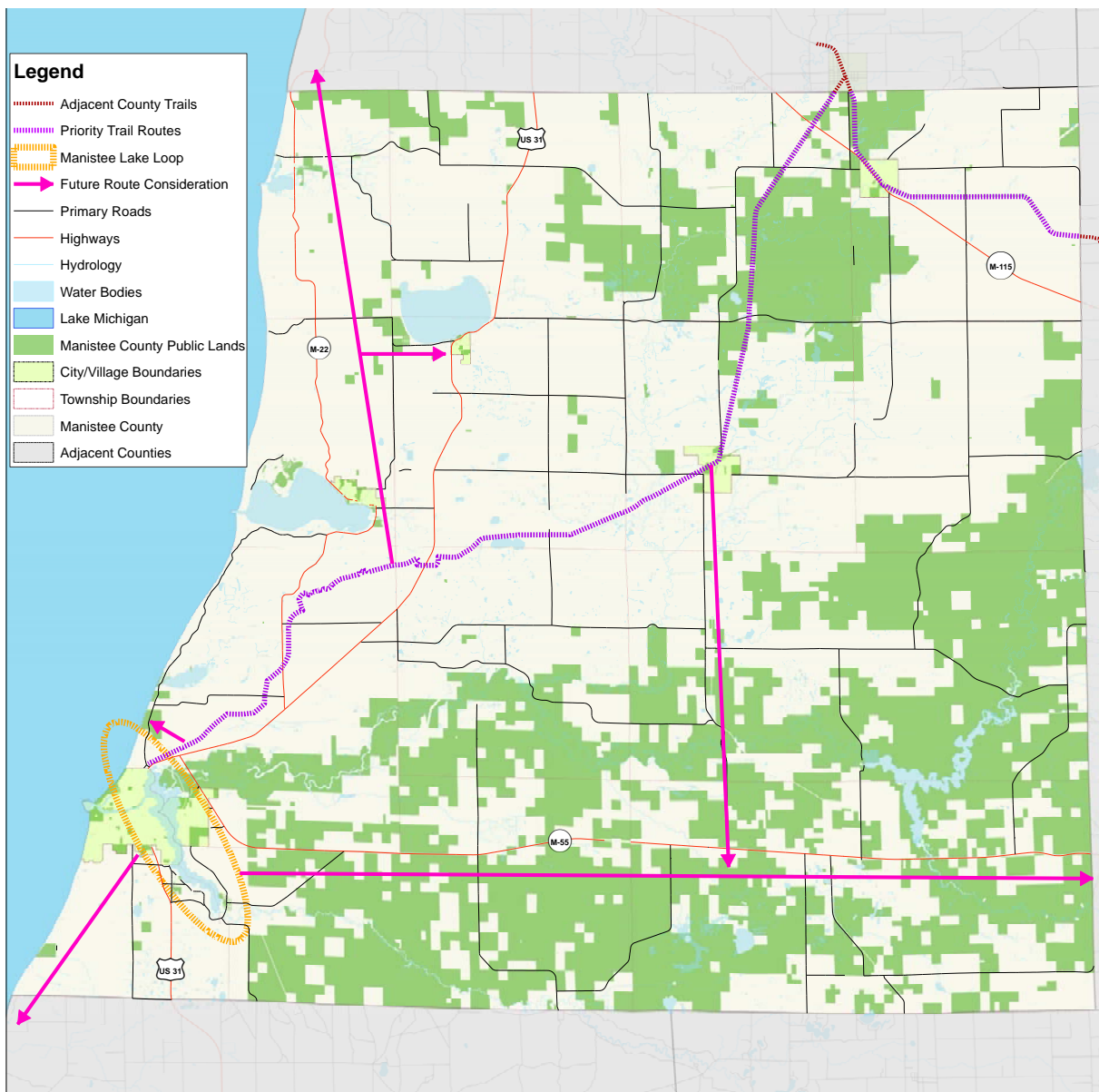
See Appendices D and E for further trail information.

Map 3. Existing Trails





Map 4. Broad Brush Stroke Future Trail Connections



Map 4 (above) displays delineated priority routes and future route objectives. Priority routes are displayed as the hashed purple line that extends from the existing “Betsie Valley Trail” in Thompsonville in Southern Benzie County into Manistee County. The trail extends from the single route in Benzie County to two routes in Manistee County.

One branch of the trail leads east through the Village of Copemish and Cleon Township and into Wexford County. This trail is envisioned to connect Mesick to Cadillac, connecting to the White Pine Trail, allowing for connection of the White Pine Trail to the Betsie Valley Trail.

The second branch leads south out of Thompsonville and connects to the Village of Kaleva, then turns west, passing through Chief and running just south of

Onkama and ultimately passing through tribal lands of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians before ultimately connecting to the City of Manistee. This route is also envisioned to have a spur linking the trail to Orchard Beach State Park.

Each of these routes earned their priority designation because of the connections they facilitated to existing trail systems and communities, large swaths of the trail corridors being under public ownership and the continuous railroad bed that is existing from the former, now-removed, railroad line. These priority routes are seen as the most feasible for immediate implementation, due to the characteristics noted previously, but also due to landowner conversations that have and are occurring in regard to trail placement.

# Support Structure & Advocacy for Trail Development

## Friends of SMARTrails (501c3 non-profit)

The Friends of SMARTrails is a formally established non-profit that is charged with advocacy for trail development fundraising and maintenance. The organizational structure is led by a formal Board of Directors, with additional participation from members of the public as non-board member participants. The Friends group acts in multiple capacities:

- They keep a pulse on the community as they interact with neighbors and visitors supporting advocacy for trail development;
- They communicate with local governmental elected and appointed officials;
- They strategize and prioritize for implementation efforts, acting as advisors to the Recreation Commission;
- They hold and attend events to spread awareness of the benefits of trails to the community;
- They fundraise for grant matches and trail maintenance efforts; and
- They assist with maintenance efforts as able.

The Friends of SMARTrails is a non-public body and therefore is not held to the same requirements as the Recreation Commission. Agendas, minutes and meetings are not required to be open to the public, allowing the group to discuss more sensitive subjects such as landowner concerns or funding of efforts outside of the public eye. There is sometimes a need for closed door discussions for sensitive subjects, but it is advised that this support organization act largely within view of the public with abundant transparency in order to establish and maintain trust with the residents of Manistee County.

## Recreation Commission

The Manistee County Recreation Commission is a formal advisory body to the Manistee County Board of Commissioners. They are an appointed body of ten members that is established under the authority of the County and Regional Parks Act 261 of 1965. The body membership includes 6 at large seats which are appointed by the County Board upon submittal of an application, with 4 statutorily required seats to be filled by a member of the County Board, a representative of the Road Commission, a Planning Commission member and the Drain Commissioner. The Recreation Commission acts in the following capacities:

- The formal body that is charged with seeking and obtaining grant monies for implementation of projects;
- Provide coordination with other County entities and departments; and
- Recommendation of approval of Recreation Plans and efforts to the formal legislative body.

This governmental commission functions in the public realm, therefore meetings must be advertised and open to the public. The County Board of Commissioners establishes the budget of the Recreation Commission. A well-functioning Recreation Commission is supported with staff.









# 4

# Planning Process

As the 2016-2020 Manistee County-Wide Park & Recreation Plan was the first of its kind in the county, there was a great need for an extensive public input process. Because this had been the first time Manistee planned for parks and recreation in a coordinated and cross-jurisdictional manner, the planning process itself required an in-depth look at what was working well, what needed to be improved and what residents wanted to see for their community in the coming years.

July) which allowed seasonal residents to participate as well. Paper versions of the survey were available to those who did not have online access. The 1,009 responses gathered from the 2016 survey helped to inform the county-wide goals and objectives found in the previous plan. The most cited improvements and additions to Manistee's inventory of recreation opportunities were trails, sports complexes, the ability to rent canoes and kayaks, climbing walls, an indoor

# Building Consensus Around Recreation

Analogous to other planning processes, the successful implementation of a project is often determined by the public's support for it. Therefore, it was critical to understand public sentiment early in the process to ensure that future park and recreation improvements in Manistee are representative of what people want to see in their community.

This chapter summarizes the public input and planning process that informed the 2016-2020 county-wide plan, as well as the more recent process used to update this information for this 2022-2026 plan. The input process from the previous county-wide plan is described here because the information it produced informed the bulk of this current plan. The 2022-2026 planning process was largely a review and update to the information gathered in 2015.

## 2016-2020 Public Input Process

The 2016-2020 Manistee County-Wide Park & Recreation Plan was informed by three overarching outreach methods: a county-wide survey, public visioning sessions and stakeholder meetings. The objective in using a variety of outreach methods was to garner sentiments from people representing different geographic locations in the county, people with different recreation interests and people of different age groups.

The survey was well advertised throughout Manistee with the use of traditional and social media, flyers, personalized invitations to stakeholders and public announcements at community events. The online survey was open for three months (May through

fitness/exercise facility and a nature center. Trail planning has continued to be a focus for community members and local leaders. Chapter 3 discussed this further, including what efforts have been made since 2016.

Aside from the survey, and perhaps most importantly, the planning team organized various public visioning sessions in 2015 to inform Manistee County's first county-wide park and recreation plan. There were nine visioning sessions in total. Three of these were at local area high schools: Manistee High School, Onekama High School and Brethren High School. The intent was to engage area youth to understand their recreational needs, an age group that is often left out of planning processes.

For the wider public, the planning team hosted public input sessions at six different locations. These meeting sites were chosen because they could be easily identified by members of the public, they were in relatively close proximity to higher population centers and they were spaced apart enough so that residents throughout the county could attend a session close to their home. These meetings took place at Marilla Township Hall, Stronach Township Hall, Brethren High School, Bear Lake United Methodist Church, Springdale Township Hall and Manistee High School.

All nine public visioning sessions followed a similar format. Participants identified their preferred recreation activities and the locations they most often frequent in Manistee to give the planning team an anecdotal understanding of the county's recreation sites and hubs of activity. This activity then led into



a Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities (SWO) discussion. In summary, participants stated that the area's unique and pristine natural resources are its main strength. The main concerns, or weaknesses included a shortage of access points to water resources, shortcomings in regard to trails and the perceived inability for communities to adequately fund and maintain the recreation sites that they own.

Finally, in 2015, the planning team concluded the public planning process through discussions with key stakeholders. These stakeholders included the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, the State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the United States

Forest Service, Consumers Energy and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

Though each group had specific stances on how they perceive recreation within Manistee, all felt it was a worthwhile endeavor to move forward with the collaboration and consensus that had been built through the planning process. One notion that was reiterated in each discussion was to remain transparent and to ensure that each of these groups is included in any initial conversations concerning recreation in which they have a stake and/or own property. In other words, collaboration and open communication should remain a priority.





During 2021, the planning team met with local officials and members of the public in Manistee County and each of the 20 jurisdictions therein. These meetings provided participants the opportunity to edit their community descriptions, re-prioritize their recreation sites, note changes to their recreation inventory, update the details in their administrative structures and draft updates to their goals and objectives. Planners from Networks Northwest met with each municipality at least once with an optional follow-up meeting. These meetings were scheduled with township boards, village councils, parks and recreation commissions, planning commissions and parks departments, depending on the preferences of the individual communities.

## Updating the 2022-2026 Plan

In addition to these planning meetings, Networks Northwest also maintained an online survey from February to August, 2021. Survey respondents had the option of either participating online or through a mail-in copy. Key findings from the survey can be found later in this chapter.

Final recommendations and edits to this plan were made during the 21 thirty-day review periods for the County and each municipality and the subsequent public hearings. In this way, the plan is reflective of public sentiments towards parks and recreation in Manistee County. The information garnered during this process did not deviate greatly from the input gathered for the 2016-2020 plan. This plan and the goals and objectives found in the next chapter function primarily as a check-in with each community to understand the status of their planned projects and what successes or barriers they have experienced.

Prior to this plan's next update in 2026, the County would be prudent in continuing to collect public opinions around parks and recreation. Maintaining ongoing communication with members of the public will help to ensure that the projects and associated funds in Manistee effectively meet the needs and desires of the people who live and recreate there.









## Survey Results

The 2021 survey received 395 responses. Many of the questions were repeated from the surveys administered during the previous county-wide park and recreation planning process as well as the survey used for trail planning efforts in 2019. Of the 395 responses, 292 people stated they are permanent residents of Manistee County. A large portion of the responses (159) came from the City of Manistee and Arcadia Township. There were no respondents from the Village of Bear Lake and Marilla Township. Therefore, these survey results should be considered an anecdotal look at public preferences as they are not statistically significant. However, these results nonetheless provide local officials with information they can use in prioritizing projects and planning in the future.

Survey participants were asked what recreation activities they participate in during warm-weather and winter months (see Figures 9 & 10). For warm-weather months, at least 50% of respondents stated that they participate in Swimming/Beach Activities (82%), Hiking (69%), Kayaking (53%) and Walking/Running (74%). For winter months, at least 50% responded that they participate in Hiking (51%) and Walking/Running (59%). When asked where they go to recreate in Manistee, 90% said they go to beaches and Lake Michigan, 79% use public land such as state forests, 52% use interior lakes, 62% go to the county's rivers and 41% use parks, schools and

sports fields.

The greatest barrier to recreation participation in Manistee was a lack of park/recreation features that interest the respondent. This received 62 choices.

The survey also featured a series of statements that asked the degree to which the respondent agrees or disagrees with a given sentiment. Ninety-seven percent agree or strongly agree that Manistee County should make it a priority to preserve natural areas and water access. Seventy-five percent agree or strongly agree that parks in Manistee County are well-maintained and 78% agree or strongly agree that parks in Manistee County offer amenities that appeal to their recreation interests. There is resounding agreement that Manistee County should implement more non-motorized trail connections (80.6% agree or strongly agree).

There is also strong support for a range of funding mechanisms to support parks and recreation improvements in the county (see Figure 11). Of the 326 responses to the question, "Which recreation funding methods do you support for parks and recreation in Manistee County", 74% support donations, 81% support grants, 56% support a re-appropriation of existing taxpayers funds and 49% support a millage to fund site improvements.

For a full set of survey responses, see Appendix H.



Figure 7. Which of the following recreation activities do you participate in within Manistee County during the warm-weather months? (Choose all that apply)

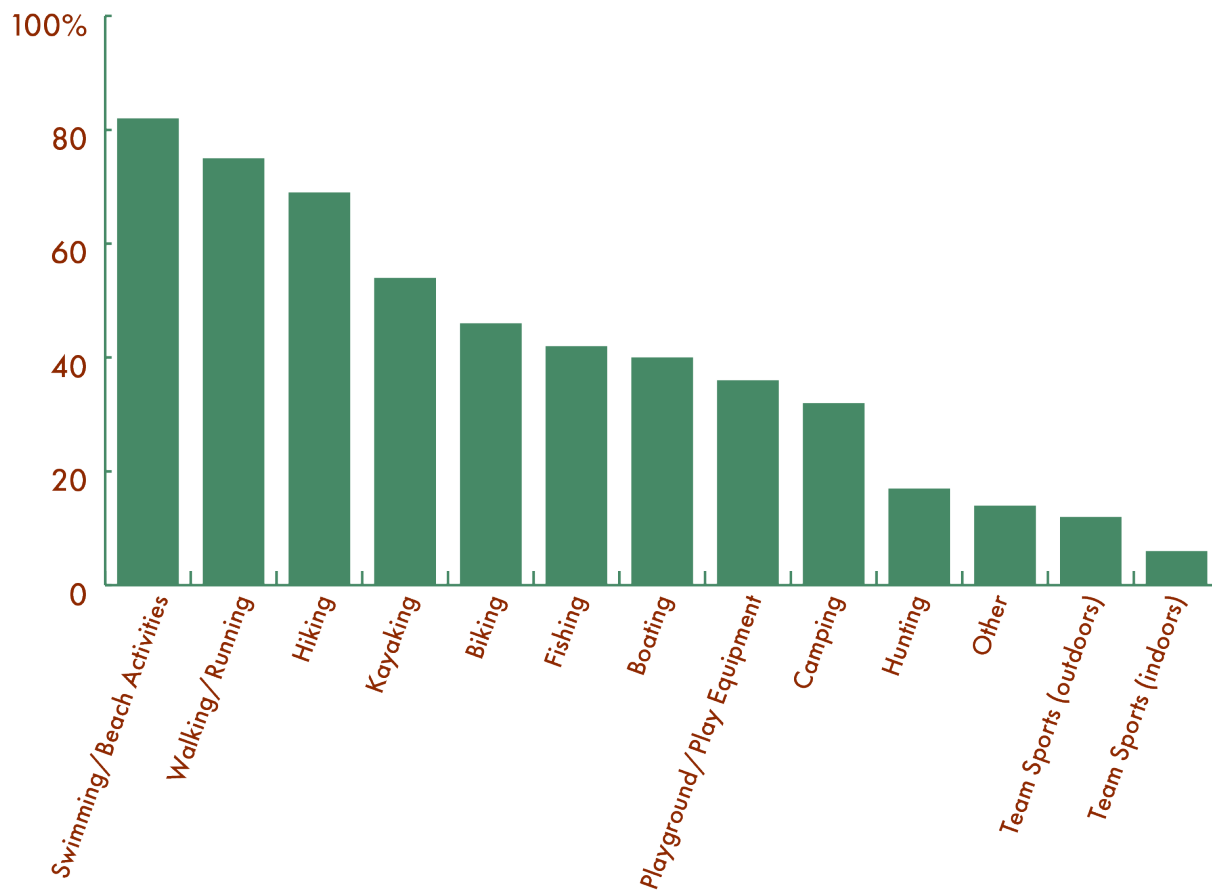


Figure 8. Which of the following recreation activities do you participate in within Manistee County during the winter months? (Choose all that apply)

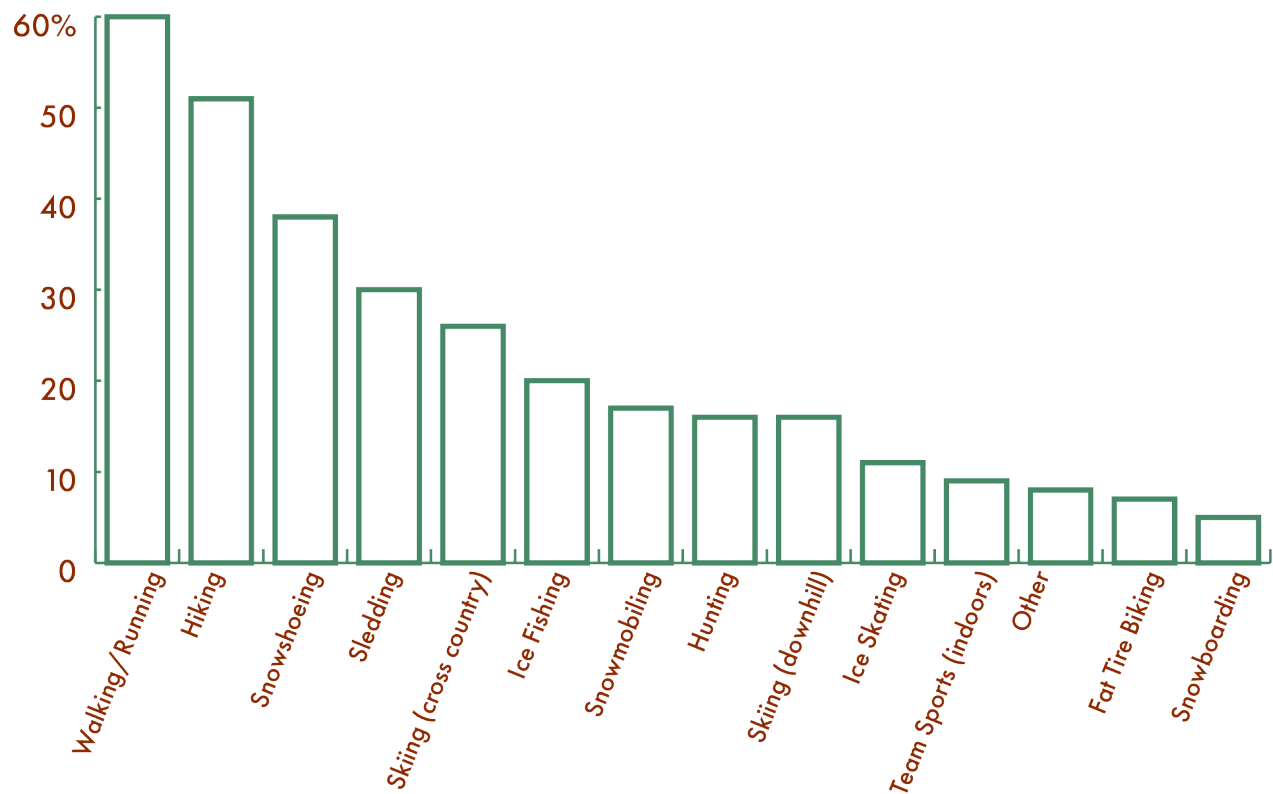


Figure 9. Where do you go in Manistee County to recreate?  
(Choose all that apply)

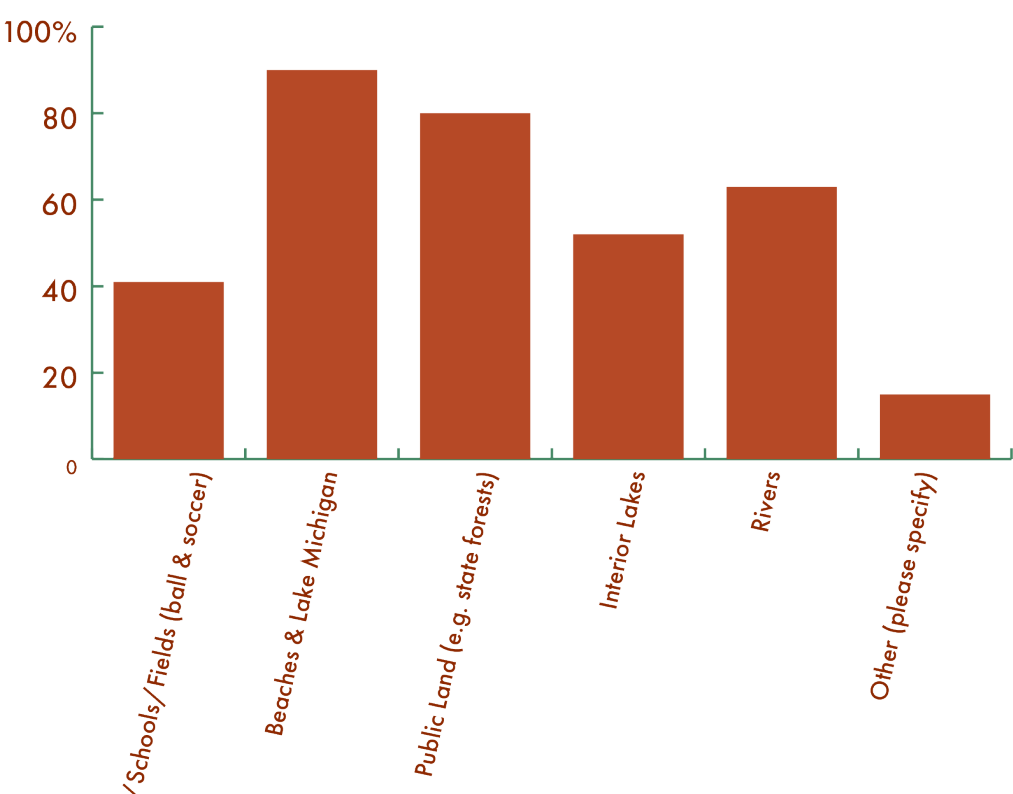


Figure 10. How often do you visit a public park, beach, trail or other recreation site in Manistee County?

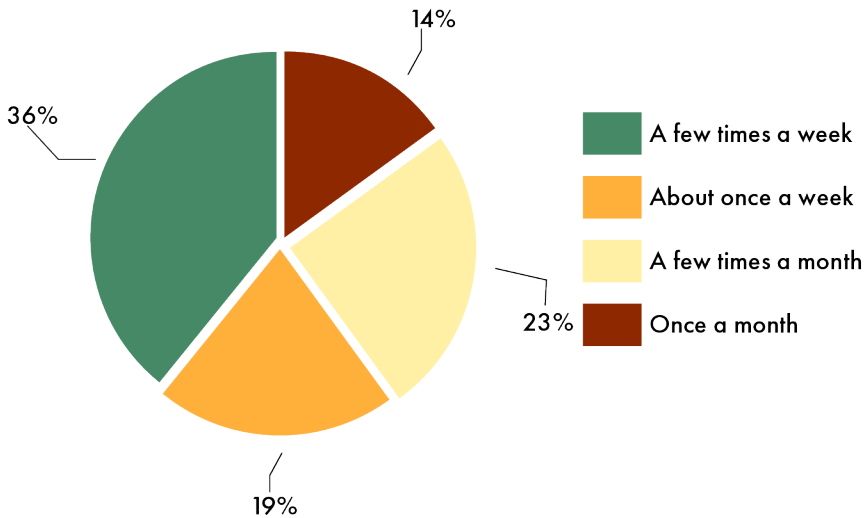
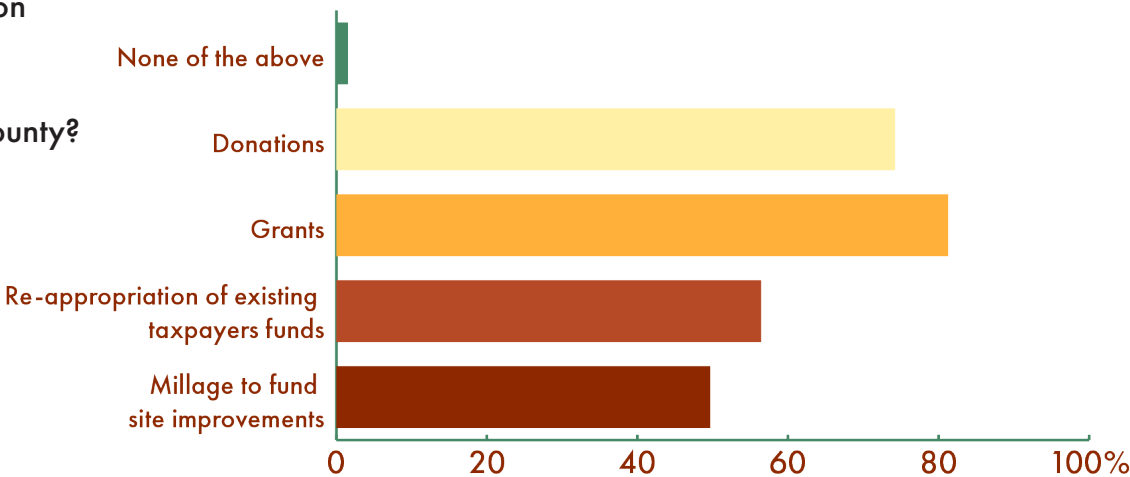


Figure 11. Which recreation funding methods do you support for parks and recreation in Manistee County?



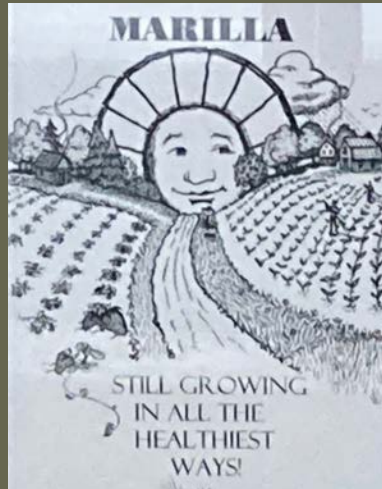




# 5

## Goals & Objectives





## Next Steps for Success

The goals and objectives section of any plan are key in that they are the final result of the combined data collection and community input processes. By understanding where the community has been and what challenges it is currently experiencing, it can proceed with deciding what changes should come next. Goals and objectives capture the image that the community wants to manifest in itself through organized and community-supported change. While not as specific as the action programs and individual project implementation strategies that will come later, these goals and objectives detail all of the efforts that Manistee has built consensus around and for which funding may be sought. For each individual jurisdiction's goals and objectives, see Appendix F.



## **Goal 1: Review, update and implement the 5-Year Manistee County Park & Recreation Plan.**

- Regularly update the map that identifies the large natural resource features/systems found within the County (i.e. Manistee River, DNR land, USFS land, Lake Michigan shoreline)
- Allocate and assign the various goals, where appropriate, identified by each community to the natural resource features/systems map.
- Use the Natural Resource Features/Systems and Community Goals Map to seek funding sources for implementation.
- Convene and host a Recreation Summit to seek volunteers for parks and recreation related committees and to assist these entities in getting started. The Recreation Commission will also attend the county-wide Trails Summit and the Regional Summit.
- Invite the DNR Grants Coordinator to Manistee County to speak and educate the communities about recreation, grants, and other implementation opportunities.
- Encourage Manistee's municipalities to share facilities and programming efforts where feasible.
- Support local jurisdictions in adopting concepts such as walkability, connectivity between points of interest, the development of pathways and trails, the protection of natural resources, improved access to recreational assets and watershed protection in their planning documents, zoning ordinances and other municipal documents.



## **Goal 2: Improve access to natural resources and recreational facilities for recreational purposes.**

- Continue to support the creation and development of Explore the Shores sites.
- Develop a County wide Blue Water Trail system complete with way-finding and accesses which meet the criteria of the National Water Trails System under the National Park Service.
- Develop a system of way-finding throughout the County's river systems with information about river segments, including degree of difficulty designation.
- Identify gaps and opportunities for new access points to land.
- Identify, evaluate, and make improvements to existing access points.
- Identify hubs of the trail system and seek funding to create the facilities necessary for the trail users.
- Evaluate the trails to determine if they are meeting the needs of the user.

## **Goal 3: Continue to steward the county's natural resources.**

- Support, or initiate, traffic calming measures as requested by the public for the Hodenpyl Stretch of Manistee River.
- Support watershed plans once adopted by their respective communities.
- Support the work of the Manistee County Conservation District, Grand Traverse Land



Conservancy, United States Forest Service, Consumer Energy, Railroad Corporations, the Department of Natural Resources and other large landowners and seek ways to strengthen their ties with recreational development.

- Collaborate with the Manistee County Land Bank Authority to identify and evaluate properties with higher ecological significance to plan for their management and potential recreational uses.

### **Goal 4: Develop nature and natural resource based tourism within the county.**

- Conduct an annual tour of the county-wide priority recreation sites.
- Support the M-22 Pure Michigan Byway project.
- Create a County Recreation Ambassador Program that uses volunteers to help promote the area by providing person to person contact to give tours, information, etc.
- Create identifiable segments along the rivers that are marketed, designated for difficulty, and have clearly identifiable points of access. This may be completed by designating certain river segments as water trails.
- Work with the Visitors Bureau to link planning work with their Mobile Application.
- Create a strong partnership between the Manistee County Planning Department, the Visitor's Bureau, the Manistee Area Chamber of Commerce and any other organization working toward improved eco-tourism.
- Encourage recreation outfitter business development.
- Encourage the development of businesses that sell or lease recreational equipment.
- Continue to support the development of "pop up" businesses in the county at recreation sites.

### **Goal 5: Look for ways to improve collaboration and partnerships to support recreation.**

- Meet with the Manistee Recreation Authority, local recreation organizations, educational institutions and the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians to explore ways to increase natural outdoor recreation by offering lessons/programming that teaches kiteboarding, sailing, paddle boarding, fly fishing, and other recreational activities that utilize our natural assets.
- Continue to maintain working relationships and a regular meeting schedule with Consumers Energy, the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, the Department of Natural Resources, US Forest Service, and the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians in order to implement this Recreation Plan.

### **Goal 6: Help improve and promote the use of community parks.**

- Create opportunities for linkages and connections between the parks.
- Support efforts by communities to implement their park improvement goals.
- Work with the Visitors Bureau and other related organizations to promote recreation sites.

### **Goal 7: Improve pedestrian and non-motorized travel in Manistee County.**

- Support safe crossing points on major roads by working with MDOT, the Manistee County Road Commission and local units of government.
- Support the adoption of Complete Streets resolutions and ordinances at the local level to promote traffic calming measures along state-managed roads.
- Support safe non-motorized travel best practices at the local level.







### **Goal 8: Develop a county wide, multi-use, trail system that connects communities, natural features and is universally accessible.**

- Create a wayfinding plan for the county.
- Coordinate with SMARTrails and the local jurisdictions to implement the Manistee Lake Area Non-motorized Trail Plan, the Railroad Relocation for the Manistee Lake Area Communities Plan and the 2017 Manistee County US-31 Corridor Enhancement Plan.
- Develop trail plans for the identified trail hubs throughout the county.
- Plan a Blue Water trail system with links to neighboring Counties.
- Mark designated trail uses on the county's trails and trailheads.
- Continue to identify trail opportunities that are off road and would be procured by purchasing land, seeking easements, utilizing railroad grades, and/or converting snowmobile trail leases into multi-use easement lease agreements.

- Keep an open line of communication with all of the county's municipalities. Conduct periodic discussions concerning the current status of the recreation plan and ongoing projects.
- Publish, maintain and market ORV, snowmobile and non-motorized trails in Manistee.

### **Goal 9: Plan for the maintenance and funding of recreational facilities.**

- Create a county-wide dialogue about the importance of creating a line-item budget for recreation expenditures within an individual community's budget.
- Create a county-wide dialogue about the importance of creating a recreation savings account to save money for the matching funds needed when applying for grants.
- Facilitate a seminar to discuss potential funding sources to implement the Manistee County-Wide Park & Recreation Plan.







Welcome to Field Camp

ATTENTION: Please do not feed the animals. Feeding the animals is strictly prohibited. The animals are not used for entertainment purposes. They are wild animals and should be treated as such. The staff will not be responsible for any injuries or damages caused by the animals. The staff will not be responsible for any injuries or damages caused by the animals.

Only All of us can prevent wildfires.

NOTICE



Please Donate Here







# 6

# Action Program

This planning process and the updates to this planning document are the first steps in guiding the community towards an improved culture of parks and recreation. These planning efforts are an important start to any implementation phase because of the noted importance in ensuring that key stakeholders and members of the public agree on the direction that the community should take. However, for a plan to be truly effective in creating community-wide change, responsible stakeholders must commit to their roles and work collaboratively to take projects from planning to development. This chapter broadly defines these roles and provides a framework for successful project implementation. Many aspects of this action strategy are intentionally ambiguous to allow local jurisdictions to cater the strategy to their unique processes and needs.

# A Framework for Success

Manistee County and each of its jurisdictions should continue to work collaboratively to implement the goals and objectives listed in the previous chapter, recognizing that quality recreation does not end at jurisdictional boundaries, but instead forms a mosaic of sites that ultimately define the quality of the community as a whole.

Success in implementation relies upon several sequential factors including: Organization and Support, Project Selection & Planning, Eligibility & Ability for Funding, Grant Administration, Project Management, Project Completion and Project Maintenance. This chapter will describe these factors as they pertain to parks and recreation.





## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Elected officials and appointed officials serve in a capacity of not only representation of residents, but also in a broader sense of community building, economic development and environmental stewardship. The structure of local governments guides the appointed planning commission and park and recreation commission members to coordinate with staff to research, develop, review and critique plans such as this, offering recommendation to the elected body when they are satisfied with the direction of the document. Elected bodies, upon recommendation of an appointed body, hold public hearings prior to the formal adoption of a plan. This process of support and adoption, with a properly crafted plan containing the appropriate content, leads to eligibility for various funding opportunities at state and federal levels as well as a support case for non-profit funding. The plan adoption process includes the following steps: Plan Development, Plan Review (internal and then public), Recommendation for Adoption and Formal Adoption by the Elected Body.

## **Role of Staff**

Local governments often provide staff or support for staff to see that processes are initiated and completed appropriately. Staffing is necessary for organizing support, managing projects and grants, as well as continual maintenance of facilities into perpetuity. Staff work closely with appointed bodies such as Park and Recreation Commissions and Planning Commissions, which provide support for plan adoption, selection of projects and the seeking of grants.

## **Role of Friends Group**

Friends Groups are tasked with raising funds to assist with the development and maintenance of sites and facilities as well as making recommendations for projects. The members maintain a pulse on the community. They spread awareness and nurture support that builds within communities for projects from a grassroots level. The success of many projects can be traced back to the establishment and support of a friends group.

## **Role of Stakeholders**

Stakeholders have a role as a participant, user, business owner or steward of facilities or resources. Stakeholders were consulted for this planning process as they hold valuable information, unique points of view and experience that shapes the plan's content. In part, stakeholders often function to provide support for specific improvements and facilities, access to funding, fundraising and capacity building.

## **Role of the School System**

The school system plays a vital role with non-motorized transportation facilities. The denser residential areas in the Manistee area provide the opportunity to connect school age children with the ability to access their schools via non-motorized routes. These routes must be designed appropriately to provide safe and efficient travel from home to destinations. A primary role of the school system is support through "Safe Routes to School".

A table of all roles and responsibilities and accompanying parties is provided on the next page.

Table 4. Project Implementation Roles & Responsibilities

Roles & Responsibilities	Project/Plan Support & Input	Plan Development	Plan Adoption & Recommendations	Plan Adoption	Obtain Request for Quantifications from Design & Construction Firms	Project & Facility Selection	Obtain Request for Proposals from Qualified Firms	Obtains Preliminary Design & Cost Estimate	Grant Applicant	Grant Writing	Grant Administration	Obtain Final Project Design (from selected firm)	Invoice Payment & Grant Fund Capture	Fund Development	Capacity Building	Maintenance
Elected Government Bodies or Official	X			X					X				X			X
Planning Commissions	X		X													
Parks & Recreation Commissions	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X			X	X
Friends Groups	X					X			X					X	X	X
Stakeholders & Members of the Public	X															
Staff	X	X			X		X	X		X	X					X

## Next Steps

The Manistee community has accomplished much in recent years in its effort to promote, maintain and improve recreation. However, there are several actions that should be undertaken in the near future in order to ensure that the community is in a strong position to further build on its successes. The following actions should remain points of focus for the County and the municipalities therein.

## Continued Public Outreach

The Manistee County community has now completed multiple public input processes around parks and recreation. While these planning projects have resulted in a strong exchange of information between local officials and members of the public, this dialogue should not cease taking place in the community. The County and each of the local units of government are wise in continuously seeking public





opinion on local decision making. This may include focus groups, surveys or other public events meant to ensure the community's decision makers have a keen understanding of public sentiments. Communities that regularly exchange information with members of the public are often in a better position to effect change through project implementation.

## **Complete Streets Policies and Resolutions**

In 2003 an Executive Directive was handed down from the Governor's Office that directed "Context Sensitive Design For Transportation Projects". Later, in 2010, two pieces of legislation were adopted: Public Acts 134 and 135, under the influence of the 2003 executive directive. These two acts established complete streets legislation and the Complete Streets Advisory Council (CSAC). The CSAC was charged with providing education and advice to local governments, road agencies and stakeholders on the benefits and importance of adopting Complete Streets Ordinances at the local level and the benefits of doing so. The CSAC was disbanded in 2015 under a sunset repeal of that portion of the act having met their charges and believing that the MDOT and local road agencies could carry the effort forward.

The legislation supports the adoption of resolutions and the establishment of policy at the local governmental level. These resolutions and accompanying policy seek to develop roadway infrastructure that meet the needs of all users including pedestrians and bicyclists, not just automobiles. Act 134 points to the planning process for incorporation of these facilities and seeks to tie them directly into Community Master Plans or in this case a Recreation Plan, as it directly references the 2008 Planning Enabling Act and amendments.

## County-Wide Grant Writer

By hiring a grant writer for the entire County, Manistee would be in a much stronger position to acquire grant funding for parks and recreation improvements. This hire would greatly assist the local units of government in grant acquisitions by lessening the burdens of under-staffing and often lacking technical expertise in this regard. Prior to the adoption of this plan, the County has already discussed the likelihood of such an addition. It should also be noted that localities wanting to handle grant writing and administration in-house are encouraged to continue doing so. This practice would largely aim to assist those communities without the staff capacity or budgeting to apply for the myriad grant opportunities from the state, federal government, community foundation and others.

## Grant Writing Workshops & Continuing Education

Funding for improvements can be a difficult prospect when budgets are tight and often grants are relied upon to fill in the gaps. Seeking and obtaining grants is a multi-faceted process that incorporates identifying a project, finding eligible grants, soundly completing a grant application, achieving application selection and project awards, tracking invoices and payments for eligible costs, seeking reimbursement of funds and managing the grant award through proper reporting. All of these tasks incorporate more than one individual within the process in order to achieve success. This often includes staff who can write grants and administer the process, treasurers who manage the invoicing and payments of reimbursable funds, and supervisors or presidents of local governments who sign off on the grant applications.

Complexity of grant writing and administration is a known impediment to the success of obtaining grants.

Therefore, many opportunities exist to participate in workshops and trainings that teach the skills necessary to be successful in grant writing. The State of Michigan utilizes grant workshops each spring that educate on changes to grant programs, and offers refreshers and pointers on building a successful grant application.

## Safe Routes To School

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) is a federal program that seeks to make it safe, convenient and fun for children of all abilities to bicycle and walk to school. Eligibility for the granting program is available to any school with at least one grade in the K-8 range, whether public, charter, tribal or private. The program is managed by the Michigan Department of Transportation with support provided by the Michigan Fitness Foundation. The program seeks to:

- Enable and encourage students in K-8, of all abilities to walk and bicycle to school;
- Make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation choice, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age; and
- Facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution in the vicinity of elementary and middle schools.

A cooperative approach to this program should be explored with the local governments in the Manistee area providing a supporting role to school board. School districts should understand the various benefits to these planning efforts and should be encouraged to actively participate.



# Funding Mechanisms

Project implementation is often dependent on the availability of funding and local capacity. Fundraising and success in obtaining funds often relies upon well-developed and supported plans. This section will outline different sources of available funds and funding mechanisms that are available for parks and recreation.

Grants are available in many different forms through both the public and private sectors. The most common grants stem from the state and federal government. These grants often have match requirements that rely upon a percentage of the total grant allotment to be met. They include administrative

reporting that often requires monitoring of the project, expenses, invoicing and payment reimbursements.

The State of Michigan has funding sources for which many of these projects meet eligibility through two primary agencies, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). Each agency funds different types of improvements, but there overlap exists between the two. The tables on the next page provide details on eligible grant opportunities.

The federal government provides ample grant opportunities for non-motorized mobility, a key aspect of this plan. Programs are administered



through the US Department of Transportation Transit, Highway, and Safety Funds.

The Manistee County Community Foundation serves the community of Manistee with a wide array of endowments that impact all facets of the community. The Minger Family Endowment was created through the generosity of Forest R. Minger. Upon his passing, he provided significant funds to the MCCF for the purpose of recreational trail and site development. This granting program is available on a yearly basis and will be a critical source of funding to see the recreational visions of the community become a reality.

Another important piece to the funding equation includes performing fundraising and seeking donations. Most grants require a match in order to receive the grant award. Meeting that match percentage can mean the difference between a project meeting completion or being left on the

drawing board. The establishment of the Friends of SMARTrails non-profit provides the avenue for setting up and scheduling fundraising events and seeking and obtaining donations. Since the previous county-wide plan's adoption, this important non-profit has been established and members are now actively working to implement parks and recreation projects. This is just one example of how non-governmental and inter-jurisdictional collaboration can help to offset project costs.

Over the next few years the Friends Group should be setting work plans for events that support and build upon the development of non-motorized, multi-modal and multi-use facilities. These events could become annual, which may further build and increase support for a succession of projects that work to complete the desired system.

The last piece in the capacity building and funding discussion is that of utilizing tax dollars to fund

Table 5. MDOT Grants

Grant/Loan Name	Type	Match	Allotment	Eligible Applicants	Priorities	Eligible Projects
Safe Routes to School	Grant	No	\$200,000	School Districts (K-8)	School route improvements	Sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, bike racks, signage
State Infrastructure Bank	Loan	No	\$2 million	Act 51 Public Entities	Reduce borrower costs, investment, accelerate delivery of projects	All phases of a transportation project with road right of way
Transportation Alternative Program	Grant	20%	No max	Local units of government, tribal governments, road agencies	Multi-modal and non-motorized facilities	Trails, bike lanes, crosswalks, signage, bike racks, etc.



facilities. Often discussed apprehensively, the use of tax dollars to fund projects and facilities is commonplace in several rural Michigan communities. The advantage of having a set amount of tax dollars on a yearly basis to implement projects is immense. With the abundance of grant dollars available through several sources, including the Manistee County Community Foundation, which requires that their grant funds be expended within Manistee County, it is strategically advantageous to have a fund of monies that are specifically for a grant match. Survey results from both the 2015 and 2019 surveys displayed support for a millage specific for recreation, with 57% supporting a millage in 2019. Forty-nine percent of respondents stated the same in the 2021 survey. The 2019 and 2021 surveys went further and asked the relatively controversial question of whether re-appropriation of existing

taxes should be a consideration for non-motorized, multi-modal, multi-use facility and recreation site development. Sixty-six percent of respondents were in favor of re-appropriation in 2019 and 56% were in favor in 2021. It should be noted that the 2021 survey received fewer responses and is thus likely less representative than the 2019 survey.

The percentages in support of these measures through three consecutive surveys with six years of separation should be heeded by local and regional elected officials. With immense projects on the horizon supported by large majorities of the community, funding from governmental entities displays a full “buy-in” to the process and implementation. This shows both local support to the community’s residents and visitors, and also to granting agencies that favor approving applications that are both morally and financially supported by local units of government.

Table 6. MDNR Grants

Grant/Loan Name	Type	Match	Allotment	Eligible Applicants	Priorities	Eligible Projects
Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund	Grant	25%	\$300,000* No min**	Local units of government, school districts	Development of recreation sites, land acquisition	Trails, recreation facilities, land acquisition
Land and Water Conservation Fund	Grant	50%	\$300,000	Local units of government	Recreation development projects	Trails, recreation facilities
Recreation Passport Grant Program	Grant	25%	\$150,000	Local units of government, school districts	Multi-modal and non-motorized facilities	Trails, bike lanes, crosswalks, signage, bike racks, etc.

\* Site Development \*\* Land Acquisition

Table 7. USDOT Grant Table

Grant/Loan Name	Type	Match	Allotment	Eligible Applicants	Priorities	Eligible Projects
Build Discretionary	Grant	20%	No min	State, local, tribal governments	Safety, economic, sustainable	Sidewalks, crosswalks, bridges, bike lanes, etc.
Infrastructure for Rebuilding America	Grant	40%	No min	State, local, tribal governments	Economic, fund leverage, innovation, performance	Sidewalks, crosswalks, bridges, bike lanes, etc.
Surface Transportation Block Grant Program	Grant	NA	NA	State, regional planning authority	Improve mobility, economic growth, innovation	Project must be in a State Transportation Improvement Program; sidewalks, crosswalks, bridges, bike lanes, etc.

Table 8. MCCF Grant

Grant/Loan Name	Type	Match	Allotment	Eligible Applicants	Priorities	Eligible Projects
Minger Family Endowment Fund	Small & large grants	10%	\$5,000 or \$100,000	Local and tribal governments, school districts, non-profits	Trail acquisition and development, indoor and outdoor recreation, water sites	Trails, boardwalks, water trail access, recreation sites



# Implementation Steps

The Implementation Steps on this page provides a sequential order of operations for successful implementation of this plan.

## 1. Responsible Role-Players & Support

Initial assignment of responsible role-players and support of project(s) type(s).

## 2. Project Selection

Role-players determine specific project from plans and project options.

## 3. Eligibility & Funding Ability

Determine routes for funding (grant, government general fund, etc.); is match needed?

## 4. Formal Project Selection

Obtain resolutions of support from governmental units. Obtain letters of support from governmental agencies, stakeholders & residents.

## 5. Project Preliminary Design & Cost Estimate

Determination of design and cost for inclusion within grant application(s). The request would be made to selected firms following a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) & Request for Proposals (RFP).

## 6. Grant Application Preparation

Grant application is prepared for the selected project.

## 7. Grant Application Submittal

Grant application is submitted under the authority of respective agency or nonprofit with accompanying support materials (resolution(s)/letter(s) of support, and project design/cost estimate.

## 8. Grant Award

Grant Applicant is notified of success of application.

## 9. Final Project Design

Success of grant award triggers a final design for the project with updated costs.

## 10. Grant Administration

Accountability to granting agency of project status, payments and reimbursement requests through completion of project and close-out of grant.

## 11. Project Construction Management

Contracted firm initiates construction of project.

## 12. Project Completion

Project is constructed and made available to the public.

## 13. Grant Close-Out

Final reporting of grant administration and close-out of grant.

## 14. Project Maintenance

Continual maintenance of the project and site is important to preserve the quality of the site for use into perpetuity

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