





**RESOLUTION NO. 11-2007-04**

**RESOLUTION OF THE CITIZENS COMMITTEE FOR MICHIGAN STATE  
PARKS TO RECOMMEND APPROVAL OF THE ‘FORT CUSTER  
RECREATION AREA - GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN’**

**ADOPTED: November 28, 2007**

**WHEREAS**, the Department of Natural Resources’ (Department) Parks and Recreation Division has completed Phase 1 of the General Management Plan for the Fort Custer Recreation Area; and

**WHEREAS**, the planning process reflects sensitivity to natural resource values, historic and cultural resource values, recreation and education opportunities, is inclusive of all Department programs and representative of eco-management; and

**WHEREAS**, the planning process was further inclusive of stakeholder, constituent, and public input; and

**WHEREAS**, the General Management Plan represents sound guidance for future planning phases that will be consistent with the mission of the Department and the Parks and Recreation Division, and reflective of the purpose and significance of the Fort Custer Recreation Area; and

**WHEREAS**, the General Management Plan has been reviewed and recommended for approval by the Parks and Recreation Division Management Team, the Department Statewide Council and its Southern Lower Peninsula Ecoregional Team, and has been recommended for approval by the Stewardship Subcommittee of the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks approves the Fort Custer Recreation Area Phase 1 - General Management Plan; and

**THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that greater emphasis be included in the Executive Summary, general text and maps for future, desired acquisitions; and

**THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks further recommends that the Department Director approve the Phase 1 – General Management Plan for the Fort Custer Recreation Area; and

**THEREFORE, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, that upon approval by the Department Director, the Parks and Recreation Division initiate the Phase 2 – Long Range Action Plan for the Fort Custer Recreation Area.

Submitted by: Michael McDonald, Chair of the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks’ Stewardship Subcommittee

|                     |                     |                |           |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------|
| <b>Motioned by:</b> | <b>Mary Pitcher</b> | <b>Yeas:</b>   | <b>12</b> |
| <b>Seconded by:</b> | <b>Todd Scott</b>   | <b>Nays:</b>   | <b>0</b>  |
|                     |                     | <b>Absent:</b> | <b>4</b>  |

This Resolution was adopted by the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks on November 28, 2007.

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**Fort Custer Recreation Area – General Management Plan**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Management Planning is a defined strategic process within the PRD Strategic Plan (2009), reflecting the following Goals and Objectives:

- **Goal 1, Objective 1.2:** “Strengthen, update, and implement Management Plans.”
- **Goal 3, Objective 3.1:** “Perform landscape level assessment of recreation opportunities in decision making.”
- **Goal 8, Objective 8.1:** “Continue to use the CCMSP, MSWC, NRC, SWC, and Ecoregion Teams and partners to advise in PRD planning, policy development, and issue resolution.”

Long-range planning for Fort Custer Recreation Area began in April of 2005 when a new MDNR planning philosophy was implemented. “Management Planning”, a comprehensive resource based process, is our adaptation of the National Park Service planning methodology. In our iteration, which focuses on the four tenants of our Mission Statement, we thoroughly inventory the (1) natural resource values of the park, establish its (2) historic/cultural resources, identify the (3) recreational opportunities and explore the (4) educational and interpretation opportunities.

With this base of knowledge and with input from the “Planning Team” (made up of Department resource staff, stakeholders and public), we established an ‘identity’ for the park. The key significance of Fort Custer Recreation Area (Fort Custer RA) is the following:

Fort Custer RA was transferred from the United States Government to the MDNR (formerly the Dept. of Conservation) in 1971 for recreational development and natural resource preservation. MDNR recognized the parks inherent natural values and the need to protect these natural features. It was also recognized that Fort Custer was situated close to areas of high population density and that there was a strong demand for local and statewide recreational needs. It is important to note that there was at that time, and still exists today, an equal emphasis on recreational usage and natural resource protection.



Entrance Sign



Eagle Lake Boat Access Site



Fishing pier on  
Whitford-Lawler Lake



Wetland south of Whitford-Lawler Lake



Marsh north of Eagle Lake



Dog sledding

In concert with the analysis of the park’s purpose and significance, the Planning Team also established the appropriate Management Zones and their extent of influence on the park. From a pallet of nine standard zones, we utilized eight for Fort Custer RA. The Management Zone Plan is found on the cover of this document and a thorough review of all zones is found within. A condensed review of those applied at Fort Custer RA is as follows:

- Primitive Zone – Of the total 3,030 acres in the park, 237 acres (8%) of undeveloped land fall into this zone description. This area represents the floodplain of the Kalamazoo River, the marsh area north of Eagle Lake, and the marsh area south of Whitford-Lawler Lake. Under the Primitive Zone designation, only foot traffic will be allowed. No mountain bike or equestrian riding will be permitted. An exception to this may be considered for continuance (on a seasonal basis) of an existing boating access location already established.
- Ecologically Sensitive Zone(s) (overlay) – This zone is designated for the protection of the trumpeter swan(s) during the nesting season on Whitford Lake, and/or Jackson Lake. (Note: zone designation in all areas of the park will be defined by wherever the protected birds nest). Historically the swans have nested on the east side of Jackson Lake. This zone makes up 16 acres (less than 1%) of the park.
- Backcountry Zone – This zone takes up 1,353 acres of the park (45%). The PRD Stewardship Unit actively manages several areas within the park where the natural resources are of higher quality. For example, Fort Custer RA contains excellent examples of oak barrens (widely-spaced oak trees in fields of grasses and wildflowers) and dry-mesic southern (oak-hickory) forest. The Stewardship Unit conducts prescribed burns and prairie reestablishment in identified areas of the park. This zone allows for a lower trail density usage. Of the 25 miles of multi-use trail in the park, about 1/3 of the trails exist within the Backcountry Zone. The Riverside Family Cabin, located across from the park headquarters, is located in this zone. A portion of the designated snowmobile trail will go through this zone (southwest corner of the park).

- Natural Resource Recreation Zone – The Natural Resources Recreation Zone comprises 1,135 acres of the park (37%). It is utilized for general recreation, including hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, and trail use for hiking, biking, equestrian, dog mushing, and cross-country skiing. To date, about 2/3rds of multi-use trails exist within this zone. The ‘Lakeview’ and ‘Trailside’ cabins, located just east of Whitford-Lawler Lake, are found in this zone. The park’s three lakes also fall under this zone classification. Finally, a new Snowmobile Trail is designated under this zone, and will be used as a multi-use trail in the off-season.
- Developed Recreation Zone – There are six different areas with this designation. The total area of the zone is 299 acres (10%), which includes a modern campground, day-use beach area, and four boating access sites. These are all well defined use areas and developed for intensive recreational use.
- Scenic Zone (overlay) – This zone recognizes the viewing opportunities along the Kalamazoo River, Jackson Lake, Whitford-Lawler Lake, Eagle Lake and view points at the Hilltop picnic shelter. This area is an overlay on other zones. The total overlay acreage is 289 (9.5%) of FCRA.
- Cultural Landscape Zone – The entire park falls within this zone because of its past history. The park’s southern boundary is Territorial Road, which was originally an old Native American Indian trail. As pioneers came to Michigan, the trail provided a major east/west route. Lawler Cemetery is located next to Territorial Road. Owned by Frank W. Lawler, a local farmer at the time, the cemetery contains tombstones of some of the state’s early settlers. Over time, the trail grew into a stage coach route between St. Louis and Detroit. Eventually, the area was farmed by early settlers. In 1917, Camp Custer was built for military training during World War I. The camp was named after Civil War cavalry officer General George Armstrong Custer. In 1940, Camp Custer was designated Fort Custer and became a permanent military training base for World War II. Several old homestead foundations and one silo (still standing) are scattered throughout the park. Lastly, a Veteran’s hospital used to be located just north of Eagle Lake. Interpretive opportunities using kiosks and interpretive signage exist in explaining the park’s vast history.
- Visitor Services Zone – This zone takes in the headquarters, shop area, and the old manager’s residence. The Visitor Services zone totals just over 6 (less than 1%) acres of land.

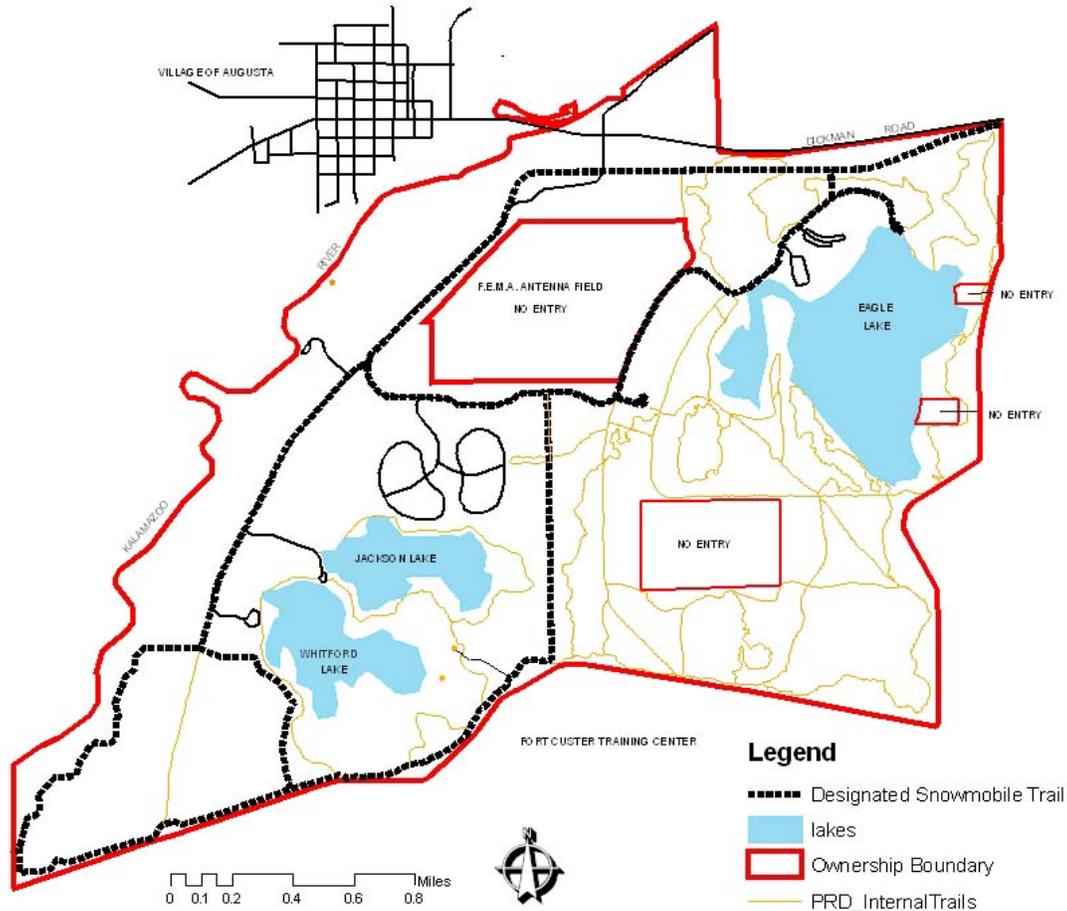
An important recommendation of the Natural Resources Commission, and endorsed by this planning process, is the long-range acquisition of the Fort Custer Training Center (FCTC) should the Department of Defense decide to

abandon this base in the future. Located adjacent to the park to the south and east, the FCTC consists of high quality natural resources. The combination of existing state ownership with this land holding would result in over 10,000 acres of high quality natural resources available for public use in a growing urban community.

Another important aspect of Fort Custer RA is its multi-use trails. Years ago, the main group of trail users formed a group called “Friends of Fort Custer” to help promote better communication between the different user groups. The major trail users include the Southwestern Chapter of the Michigan Mountain Biking Association (MMBA), Fort Custer Horse Friends Association – a chapter of the Michigan Horse Council, and the Mid-Union Sled Haulers. These groups play an active role in using and maintaining the trails. For example, MMBA has various work days each year to repair/improve the trails. The trails are color coded and consist of five main loops. Although there is support for individual trails for each user group, the overall consensus is that the trails will most likely remain multi-use trails and cooperation among all trail users is the best alternative. It was noted by MMBA that they do not want additional trail at the present time due to additional maintenance challenges.

An issue that was brought up throughout the management planning process was snowmobile usage within the park. At that time, snowmobiles could access all areas of the park as long as a minimum four inches of snow exists. After gathering information from local snowmobilers (Northside Snowmobile Club and Michigan Snowmobile Association), it was recognized that the park provides good beginner opportunities and local riding opportunities for snowmobiling. More advanced riders would be more likely to travel to other locations that provide longer riding distances. Also recognized was that not all areas of the park are conducive for snowmobile riding and several areas contain high value natural resources. Therefore, the Planning Team proposed designated snowmobile trails within the park. (See map below.)

The proposed trail follows the shoulders of main park roads, an existing two track on the north end of the park, and a loop at the south end of the park. The proposed trail also uses portions of the park where other winter users will not be in conflict. For example, the dog sledders and cross country skiers mainly use the southeast portion of the park, which is heavily wooded and not very popular for snowmobiling. In addition, erosion control measures exist throughout the trails in this area of the park. These erosion control measures are not compatible with snowmobiling. Designated trails would provide safer sledding for both snowmobilers and other trail users by providing separation (in most instances) between the users. This designated snowmobile trail will be a multi-use trail so that it could be used year round. In 2008, a Director’s Order was written to approve this designated snowmobile trail.



Fort Custer RA - Designated Snowmobile Trail



# INTRODUCTION

**Planning Process Overview** – The Management Planning Process develops a series of planning steps, each built upon the previous, that keep all planning and action decisions focused on (1) the mission of the Parks and Recreation Division, and (2) the specific Purpose and Significance of the park. Fort Custer is unique in the fact that its Management Zone Plan was amended midstream to expand the Developed Recreation Zone. Implementation of this change involved stakeholder and public input in line with the overall planning process. Following is an overview of how PRD addressed this change:

In early January of 2008, a proposal was received from representatives of a local disc golf club who approached PRD to construct a disc golf course within the park. Since disc golf courses were relatively new to the park system, it was determined that a Developed Recreation Zone would best accommodate a disc golf course. The proposal brought to light that the current management plan did not adequately accommodate an area for future developed recreational opportunities, such as disc golf or other activities.

The management planning process for Fort Custer was going through its final approval process when this request for a disc golf course appeared. It was recognized that the proposed management plan did not have sufficient 'Developed Recreation Zone' acreage to support a disc golf course. PRD decided to pursue the rezoning of 98 acres of park land, originally proposed as 'Natural Resource Recreation Zone', to 'Developed Recreation Zone' to support a disc golf course and allow for future activities that would fit into this zone.

It was explained that this area of the park contains high levels of black locust and invasive species, therefore lacking any quality natural resources. The layout of the course may involve the removal of some of the invasive species. The disc golf course will not interfere with the existing trails. In fact, the existing trails have precedence and the proposed course will have to work around the trail system. After stakeholder and public input there was consensus to proceed with the rezoning of this area.

There are four phases of planning, implemented in the following order:

- **Phase 1** - General Management Plan (GMP) - Long-range (20 yr) goals
- **Phase 2** – Long-range Action Plan – Long-range (10 yr) actions to attain the GMP (requires review of Phase 1)
- **Phase 3** - 5-Year Implementation Plan – specific actions to implement (requires review of Phase 1 and Phase 2)
- **Phase 4** - Annual Action Plan and Progress Report – what will be done this year and what progress was made on last year's plan

This is the **General Management Plan**, the first step in our planning process. In this phase of planning, we are defining what the park will look like in twenty years. What will be the condition of flora and fauna? How will we address historic and cultural resources? What recreational opportunities will be provided? What education and interpretation efforts will meet the visitor? What will guide the manager's operational decisions? What will be the visitor's overall experience?

A key tool of this plan is the identification of management zones which define specific characteristics of the land, addressing management for:

- Natural features
- Historic/cultural features
- Education/interpretation
- Recreational opportunities

These four elements represent the primary goals of the PRD Mission Statement, and provide guidance for both planning and management decisions. Within the parameters of this guidance, "Purpose" and "Significance" statements are developed for the park that establishes its unique identity and focus. No two parks are the same and this emphasis is directed at ensuring that the differences found from park to park are acknowledged, highlighted and celebrated.

**Planning Objectives** - The objective of this General Management Plan is to bring together Department staff, impacted and impacting stakeholders, and the public who use the park in a planning process that will define and clarify the unique "Purpose" and "Significance" of Fort Custer Recreation Area. Collectively, we will reinforce those attributes in the planning and management decisions that impact the park through the implementation of the Management Zone Plan. Future action plans, whether focused on a development proposal, a resource improvement initiative, an interpretive program, or day-to-day management of the park will be guided by this General Management Plan.

## PLANNING TEAM

Accomplishment of our planning objectives was and is dependent upon the valuable input provided by all members of the 'Planning Team'. The following persons were participants in this planning process:

| <u>Name</u>         | <u>Representing</u>                     |
|---------------------|---|
| Joe Strach          | MDNR-PRD, District Planner              |
| Paul Curtis         | MDNR-PRD, Management Plan Administrator |
| Claire Drolshagen   | MDNR-PRD, Student Intern                |
| Roland Johnson      | MDNR-PRD, District Supervisor           |
| Tony Trojanowski    | MDNR-PRD, Unit Manager                  |
| David Glenn         | MDNR-PRD, Park Staff                    |
| Ray Fahlsing        | MDNR-PRD, Stewardship Program Manager   |
| Doug Finley         | MDNR-EO, Education and Outreach Manager |
| Jay Wesley          | MDNR-FD, Supervisor                     |
| Kregg Smith         | MDNR-FD, Fisheries Biologist            |
| Kim Dufresne        | MDNR-FMFM, Supervisor                   |
| David DesJardin     | MDNR-FMFM, Fire Marshall                |
| Julia Grabowski     | MDNR-LED, Conservation Officer          |
| Christine Hanaburgh | MDNR-WD, Wildlife Biologist             |
| Jeff Johnson        | MDNR-PRD, Student Assistant             |
| Scott Lambert       | MDNR-PRD, Student Assistant             |

### Stakeholder Representatives

Michele Richards, Fort Custer Training Center  
Mike Needham, Southwest Chapter Michigan Mountain Biking Association (SWMMBA)  
Cathy Needham, SWMMBA  
Gordie Allen, SWMMBA  
Jo Oostveen, Mid Union Sled Haulers (MUSH)  
Marvin Shanley, MUSH  
Sandy Schreiber, MUSH  
Ken Vandervest, FCRA Horse Friends Association  
Sue Bertch, FCRA Horse Friends Association  
Melva Parker, FCRA Horse Friends Association  
Richard McIntosh, Bike/ski/hike  
Dale Isreals, Michigan Snowmobile Association  
Richard Skalski, City of Kalamazoo  
Carl Christensen, Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway  
David Rachowicz, Kalamazoo County Parks



# CORE VALUES

Guidance for the General Management Plan stems from the Mission Statements of the Department and the Division, and the Purpose and Significance Statements that have evolved through the planning process. The core values found in these statements must be reflected in this long-range General Management Plan for Fort Custer Recreation Area and subsequently reflected in any shorter range action plans:

**DNR Mission Statement** - *“The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, accessible use and enjoyment of the State’s natural resources for current and future generations.”*

**PRD Mission Statement** - *“The Parks and Recreation Division’s Mission is to acquire, protect, and preserve the natural and cultural features of Michigan’s unique resources, and to provide access to land and water based public recreation and educational opportunities.”*

The core values derived from these statements are that PRD will acquire, preserve and protect; (1) natural resources, (2) cultural resources, (3) provide public recreation, and (4) provide educational opportunities.

**Park Purpose** - Park purpose statements are based on park legislation, legislative history, special designations and DNR policies. These statements reaffirm the reasons for which Fort Custer Recreation Area was identified as part of the State Park system.

- Fort Custer RA was established in 1971 as an acquisition from the Federal Government for equal purposes of recreational development and resource protection. It was recognized that Fort Custer RA was located in close proximity to areas of high population density and the demand for local and statewide recreational needs.
- To preserve and protect the park’s unique natural resources for current and future generations.
- To preserve and protect the park’s historic/cultural resources.
- To provide opportunities for recreational uses and experiences in an area lacking in same, that are compatible with the park’s resource(s) base.
- To provide educational and interpretive opportunities for the public that reflects the mission of the DNR and the unique qualities of Fort Custer Recreation Area.

**Park Significance** - Park significance statements capture the essence of the park's importance to carry out the core values of our PRD Mission. They recognize the natural and cultural heritage values of the park and the recreational and educational opportunities afforded. These statements describe the distinctiveness of Fort Custer Recreation Area. Understanding these distinctions help managers make decisions that preserve those special resources and values necessary to accomplish the park's purposes.

- Fort Custer RA, located on the Kalamazoo River in Kalamazoo County, provides inclusive recreational opportunities in an area lacking in public lands. From its inception, Fort Custer RA has been planned, developed and used for a wide range of recreational, natural resource, and educational interests.
- Fort Custer RA has areas of high value natural resources. Several large areas of oak barrens and dry-mesic southern (oak-hickory) forest exist and they are one of the best examples of this landscape in Michigan.
- Together with the adjacent 7,570 acre Fort Custer Training Center (FCTC), a contiguous landscape of over 10,000 acres exists in public ownership. The DNR and FCTC have co-management relationships for both the natural resources and military usage within the park. Specifically, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A.) owns a section of land within the park that serves as an antenna field. Lastly, DNR Stewardship shares similar natural resource goals with FCTC Stewardship in managing the 10,000 combined acres of natural resources.
- Culturally significant, Fort Custer RA borders Territorial Road, once a stagecoach route, and contains a wide array of old house and farm foundations. In 1917, Camp Custer was built for military training during WWI. The camp was named after Civil War cavalry officer General George Armstrong Custer. In 1940, Camp Custer was designated Fort Custer and became a permanent military training base for WWII.
- Fort Custer offers a variety of water resources including Eagle Lake, Jackson Lake, Whitford-Lawler Lake, frontage on approximately three miles of the Kalamazoo River, and smaller unnamed wetland areas spread amongst the park.
- Occurrences of 'Threatened' (T), 'Special Concern' (SC), and 'Endangered' (E) species occur in the park for:
  - Lead Plant (SC)
  - White False Indigo (SC)
  - Yellow Harlequin (T)

- Downy Sunflower (T)
  - False Boneset (SC)
  - American Bittern (SC)
  - Trumpeter Swan (T)
  - Cooper's Hawk (SC)
  - Common Moorhen (SC)
  - Cerulean Warbler (SC)
  - Prothonotary Warbler (SC)
  - Louisiana Waterthrush (SC)
  - Hooded Warbler (SC)
  - Grasshopper Sparrow (SC)
  - Henslow's Sparrow (T)
  - Easter Box Turtle (SC)
  - Blanchard's Cricket Frog (SC)
- Trail usage is a large component of the park. Fort Custer is a popular year-round destination for mountain bikers, equestrians, hikers, cross country skiers, and dog mushers.

**Legal Mandates** - For all park General Management Plans, all legal mandates will be identified and will serve to further guide the development of the General Management Plan and subsequent Action Plans. For our planning purposes, the term "Legal Mandates" refers to not only state law, but also the administrative tools of "Policy" and "Directive" of the Natural Resource Commission, the Department, and Parks and Recreation Division. Specific to Fort Custer RA, the following legal mandates have been identified:

- PA 451 OF 1994, PART 741 - STATE PARK SYSTEM - NATURAL RESOURCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT - This act is the recodification of law that established the Michigan State Park System and defined the powers and duties of same. Notable in this law is Section 324.74102 which identifies the duties of the department and reinforces those core values cited above.

This section reads:

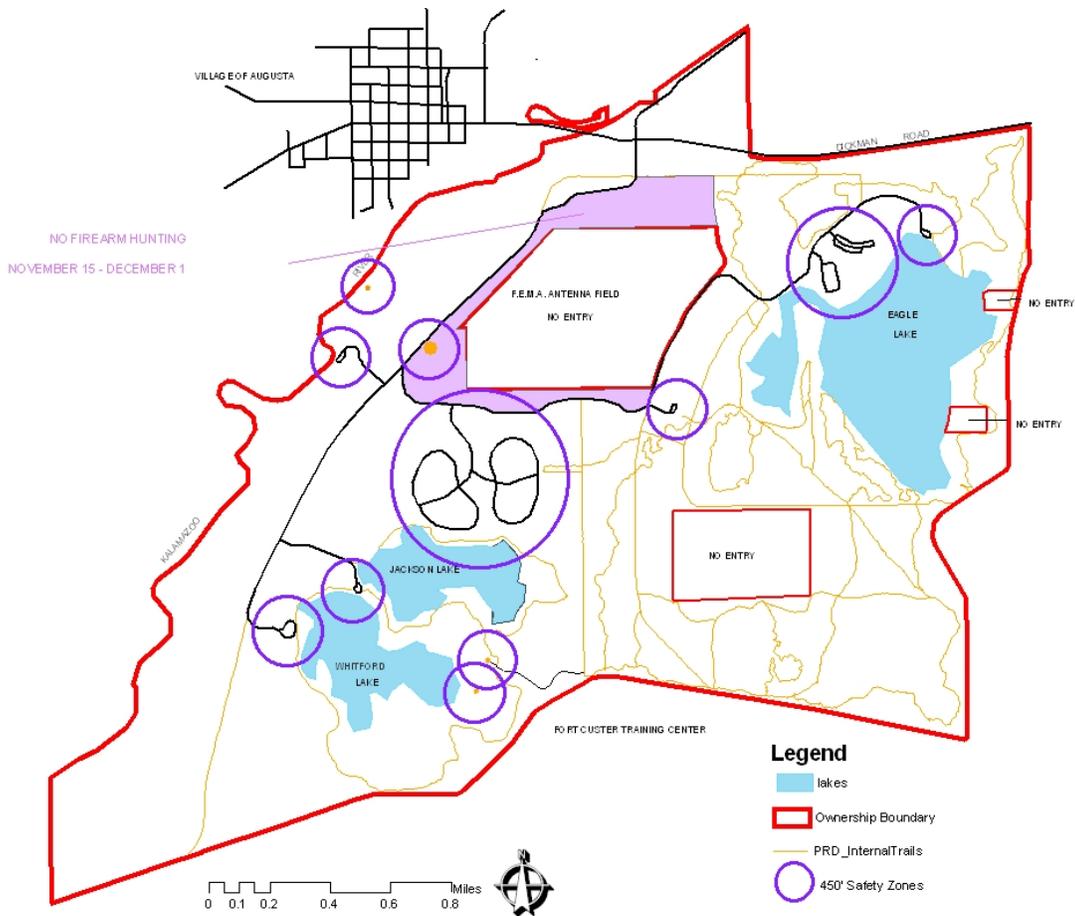
- (1) "The legislature finds:
  - (a) Michigan State Parks preserve and protect Michigan's significant natural and historic resources.
  - (b) Michigan State Parks are appropriate and uniquely suited to provide opportunities to learn about protection and management of Michigan's natural resources.
  - (c) Michigan State Parks are an important component of Michigan's tourism industry and vital to local economies.

- (2) The department shall create, maintain, operate, promote, and make available for public use and enjoyment a system of state parks to preserve and protect Michigan's significant natural resources and areas of natural beauty or historic significance, to provide open space for public recreation, and to provide an opportunity to understand Michigan's natural resources and need to protect and manage those resources."
- CONSERVATION COMMISSION DEDICATION OF FORT CUSTER RECREATION AREA – From 1957 to 1969, the DNR (formerly Department of Conservation) entered into a lease agreement with the United States Government for the recreational use of 1,228 acres of the Fort Custer Military Reservation. The State of Michigan was granted a lease for 2,889 acres in 1969, which now encompasses the present-day Fort Custer Recreation Area. The land was then gifted to the state in 1971 by Mrs. Richard Nixon under President Nixon's Legacy of Parks program. The 96 acres, located north of Eagle Lake and operated by the Michigan Department of Health, were transferred to the DNR in 1973.
  - PA 368 OF 1978, ARTICLE 12 - ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH, PART 125 – CAMPGROUNDS – Part 125 of the Public Health Code was established to protect and promote the public health by establishing health code requirements specifically addressing campgrounds. The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Drinking Water and Radiological Protection Division is the administering agency that is responsible for the promulgation of the Administrative Rules for Campgrounds.

All public (including DNR) and private campgrounds must meet these DEQ regulations.

- PA 451 OF 1994, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT (EXCERPT) – 324.41901 Regulation and prohibitions in certain areas; powers of department; area closures; hearings, investigations, studies, and statement of facts; regulations. – This part of PA 451 establishes the powers of the Department to establish safety zones for hunting. In accordance with the Administrative Rules established by Wildlife Division for hunting safety, a 450' "Safety Zone" is established around all occupied dwellings (which includes campgrounds). Under the State Land Rules, the Department also has the authority to expand the application of this 450' "Safety Zone" to encompass "Day-Use Areas" such as beaches, picnic areas, boat launches, and trail head parking areas, should the need arise. This is determined on a case-by-case basis. At Fort Custer RA, the Hunting Safety Zones are represented below:

## Hunting Safety Zones



Hunter Safety Zones

**Additionally, (from Wildlife Conservation Orders Re. goose hunting) State recreation areas open, exceptions; September 1 to September 15 open season, exceptions.**

(7) Those state recreation areas described in chapter VII as closed to the taking of animals shall be closed during the early September hunting season for Canada geese. All other state recreation areas not within the Saginaw bay unit shall have an open season from September 1 to September 15, except for those portions of the following areas which shall be closed and shall be posted in such a manner and at such locations as will provide reasonable notice of the closure to the public:

(n) Fort Custer recreation area, in addition to those areas closed to the taking of animals as described in section 7.60, a person shall not take any

animal from any state-owned lands or waters in the Fort Custer recreation area from September 1 to Labor Day.

**7.60 Fort Custer recreation area, unlawful acts, exceptions; posting required.** A person shall not do any of the following:

(1) Take an animal with a firearm from November 15 to December 1 or hunt or take Canada geese during September 1 to 15 on those portions of the Fort Custer recreation area described as follows:

(a) All lands in section 3, T2S R9W, lying southeasterly of the park entrance road; and all that part of section 2, T2S R9W, lying north and west of the old military road intersection with the Eagle lake day use area entrance road, and all lands in section 3, T2S R9W, north of the day use area entrance road to the intersection of the main park entrance road.

(2) A person shall not take an animal within the limits of the area commonly referred to as the Fort Custer campground and posted as closed to shooting.

(3) Signs containing the regulations listed in this section shall be posted in such a manner and at such locations as will provide reasonable notice of the closure to the public.

- LAND USE ORDERS OF THE DIRECTOR - By authority conferred on the Director of the Department of Natural Resources by Section 504 of Act No. 451 of the Public Acts of 1994, as amended, being section 324.504 of the Michigan Compiled Laws and in accordance with R 299.671 and R 299.922 of the Michigan Administrative Code, the Director of the Department of Natural Resources orders that the following order of the Land Use Orders of the Director shall read as follows:

**5.2 Possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages in certain state parks and recreation areas, prohibited conduct.** A person shall not do any of the following:

(a) Fort Custer – Entire park from April 1st through Labor Day

**5.4 Watercraft use in certain state parks, prohibited conduct.** A person shall not do the following:

(1) Operate a vessel in excess of a slow, no-wake speed on any of the following described waters:

(c) Fort Custer RA - Jackson lake; Lawler lake; Whitford lake; Eagle lake.

**5.12 Fort Custer recreation area, prohibited conduct.**

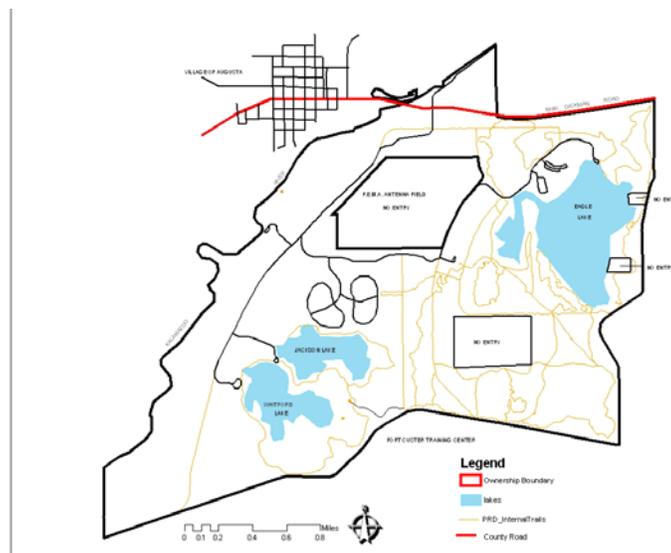
(13) A person shall not do the following at the fort Custer RA:

(a) Excavate, dig or probe the grounds, or remove ordnance without written permission.

- **MDEQ DAM SAFETY** – The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Dam Safety Program administers the provisions of Part 307 and Part 315 of The Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended. Part 307, Inland Lake Levels, regulates dams that establish legal lake levels while Part 315, Dam Safety, regulates all other dams over six feet in height and with more than five acres impounded during the design flood. A MDEQ permit must be acquired prior to any construction or repair of regulated dams. Additionally, these dams must be inspected every three to five years based on hazard potential rating. Staff at MDEQ is responsible for reviewing all inspection reports, inspecting all Department of Natural Resources dams, and inspecting municipal dams if requested.

PRD must comply with DEQ Dam Maintenance Requirements that result from their routine inspections of the dam. Additionally, routine maintenance recommendations (as specified by DEQ) shall be complied with.

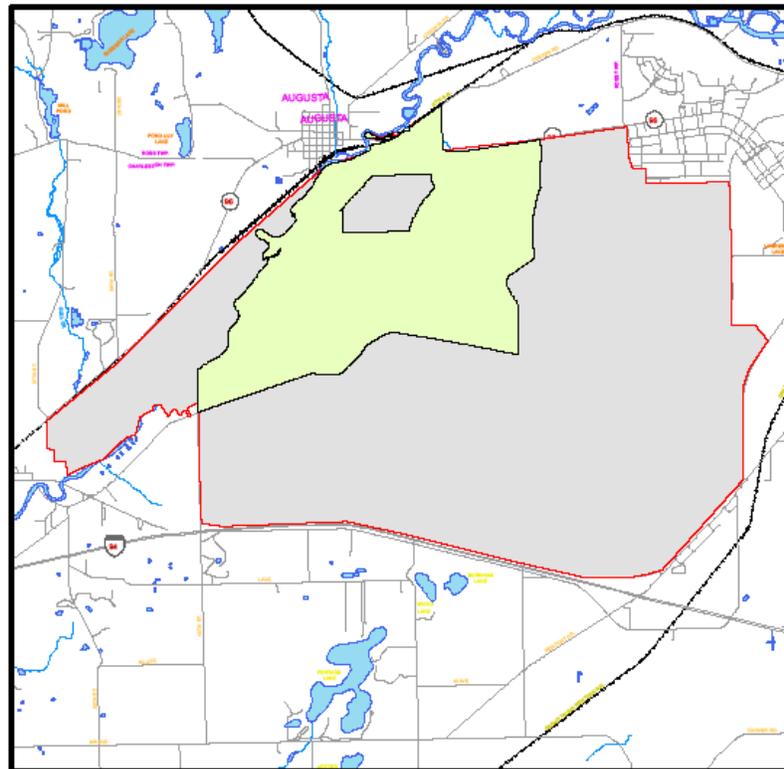
- **R.O.W. FOR COUNTY ROADS** – The Right-of-Way for M-96 (Dickman Road) county road is 200’ wide (100’ from center line), which is the only county road impacting Fort Custer RA. The Kalamazoo County Road Commission has the authority to require permits for any impacts to their ROW (i.e. crossings or new drives).



**Kalamazoo COUNTY ROAD(S) R.O.W. – 200’**

- 2004 NRC BOUNDARY - The Natural Resource Commission has approved a recommended boundary change for the park that includes additional land to the west, south and east ends of the park.

The Fort Custer Training Center, located adjacent to the park, consists of high quality natural resources. It is recommended that the DNR pursue acquisition of this land should the Department of Defense decide to abandon this base in the future.



**Legend**

- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
- Fort Custer Recreation Area
- Lakes
- Streams
- Trails
  - Equestrian
  - Hiking
  - Mountain Biking

## 2004 NRC Boundary Fort Custer Recreation Area



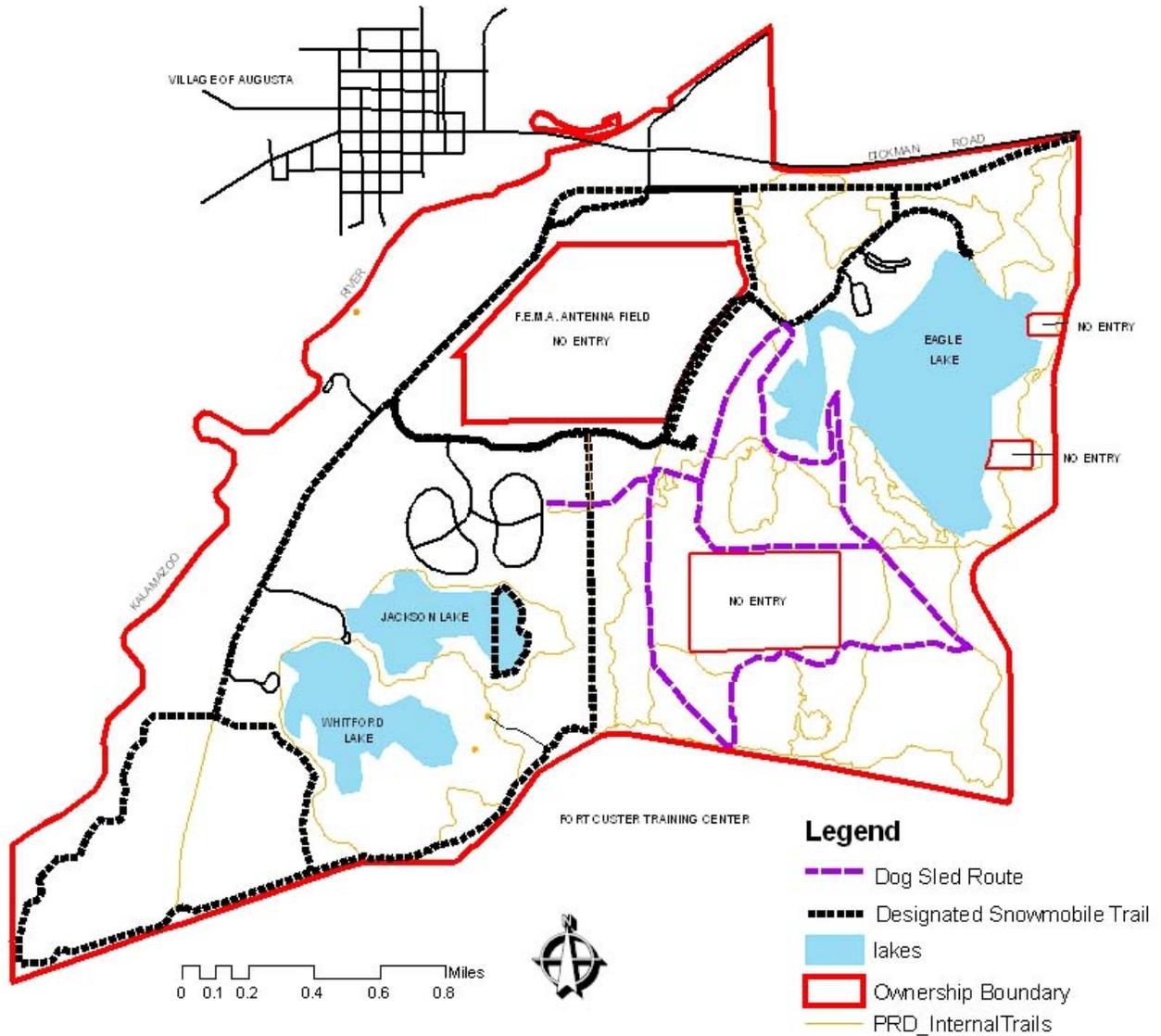
0 0.3 0.6 1.2 1.8 2.4 Miles



August 24, 2009

The Planning Team reviewed this new boundary designation and strongly supports the designations.

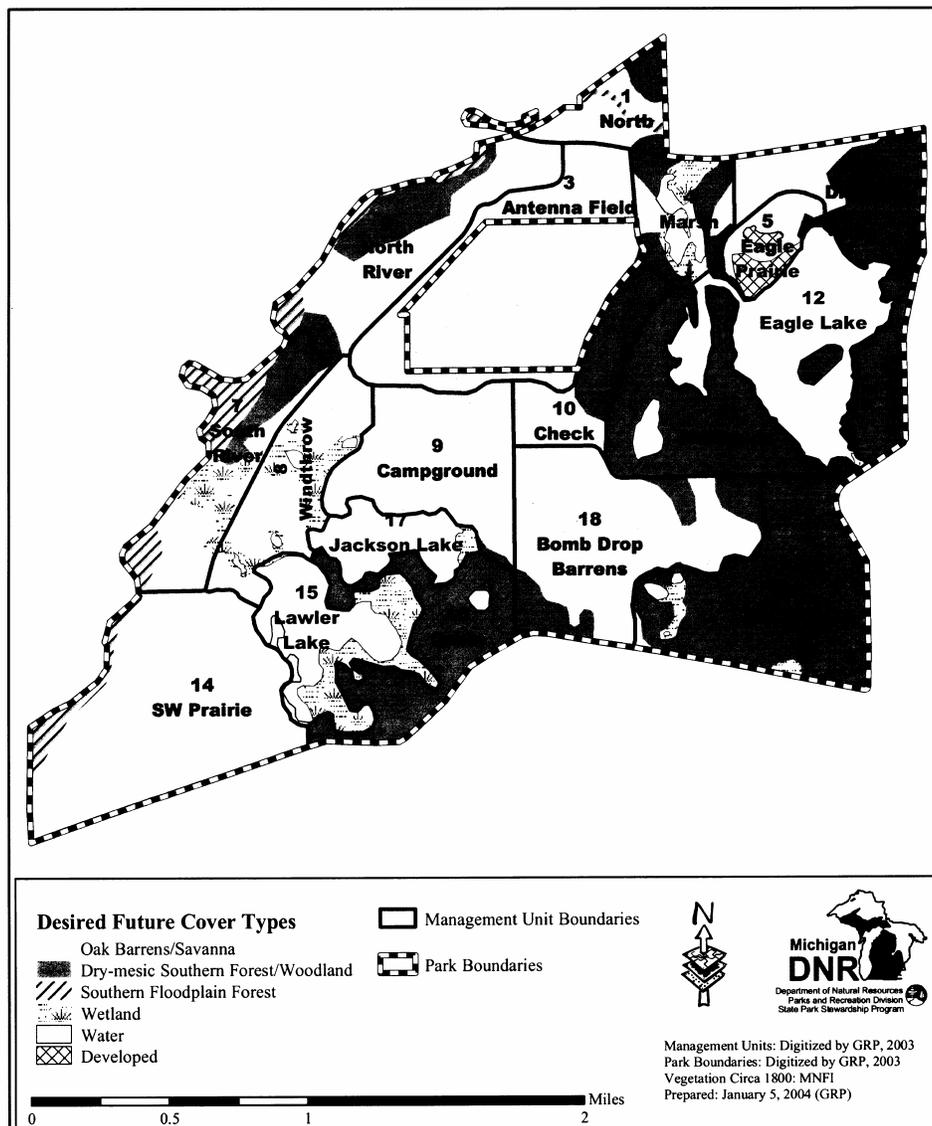
- **DOG SLED ROUTES** - The Mid-Union Sled Haulers is one of the major trail user groups at Fort Custer. The following map shows their three mile and five mile sled routes. The designated snowmobile trail was separated from the dog sled route to avoid user conflicts while providing quality trail usage for both groups. This route is also popular with cross-country skiers.



Fort Custer RA – Dog Sled Routes

- **NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN** - The Stewardship program developed the Phase III Natural Resources Management Plan for Fort Custer Recreation Area, which was drafted in February 2003 by Glenn Palmgren. This document presents an overall comprehensive plan for the ecological restoration, protection, and long term preservation of the interlobate ecosystems present within Fort Custer RA. Reference will be made to this report in the following zone descriptions.

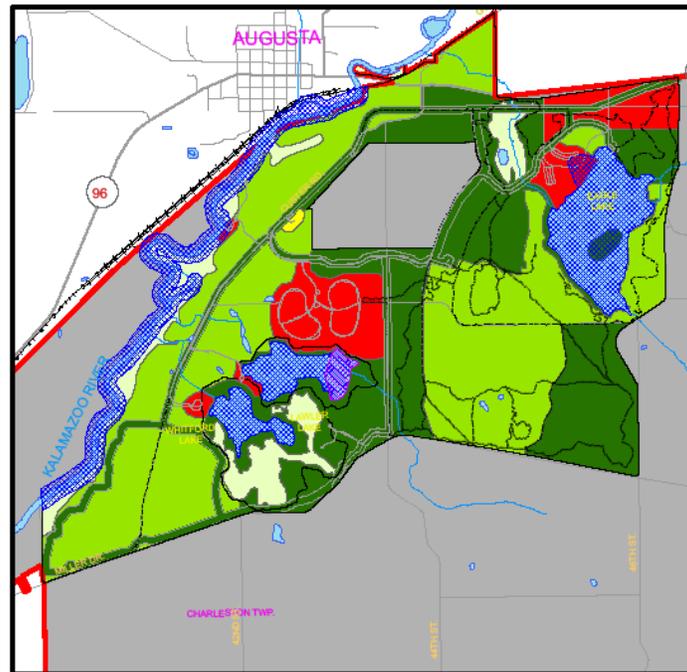
**APPENDIX A.8:  
FORT CUSTER DESIRED FUTURE COVER TYPES**



# GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

With the guidance of the Fort Custer RA Planning Team (made up of Department resource staff, stakeholders, and public), the park “Purpose and Significance” statements were drafted and adopted. These statements established an identity for the park, to include the following: Fort Custer RA was established for the purpose of providing recreational development and natural resource preservation. In addition, Fort Custer RA provides a variety of water based resources with recreational opportunities, contains several large areas of oak barrens and oak-hickory forest, has cultural significance dating back to presettlement times, provides over 25 miles of multi-use trails, and provides over 10,000 acres of land in public ownership when combined with it’s adjacent neighbor Fort Custer Training Center.

Based on this ‘identity’ for the park, a Management Zone Plan” was subsequently drafted and adopted with stakeholder and public support. The “Management Zone Definitions” apply to each zone used, with special considerations highlighted in the descriptive narratives of management guidance for each zone of the park.



### Legend

- Fort Custer Recreation Area
- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
- Lakes
- Stream
- Trails**
- Equestrian
- Hiking
- Mountain Biking
- Management Zones**
- Ecologically Sensitive
- Natural Resources Recreation
- Aquatic Overlay
- Primitive
- Backcountry
- Visitor Services
- Developed Recreation

August 24, 2009

## Management Zone Plan

Fort Custer  
Recreation Area

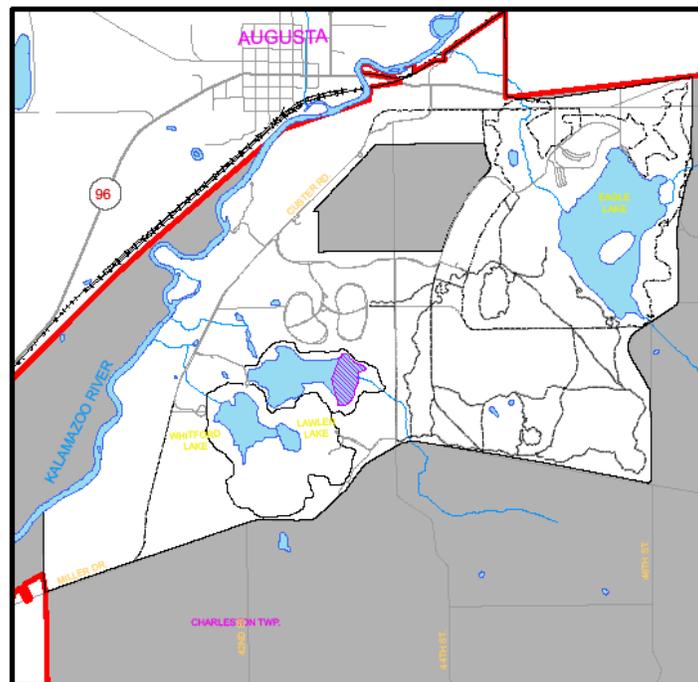


0 0.125 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles



## Ecologically Sensitive Zone

The purpose of this zone is enhancement and protection of the native community and natural process over and above any other uses. This zone identifies the nesting area(s) for trumpeter swans and is designated 'seasonal' to protect the nesting area(s). The restrictions would be in place only when the swans are actively nesting (February 1 to July 15) in the spring. Historically, the swans have nested on the east side of Jackson Lake. The Planning Team felt it was important to make note of this seasonal designation. There is an early hunt season for Canada Geese, which starts September 1<sup>st</sup>. The early hunt season should not affect the swans during nesting season. This zone (overlay) makes up 16 acres (less than 1%) of the park.



### Ecologically Sensitive Zone

Fort Custer  
Recreation Area



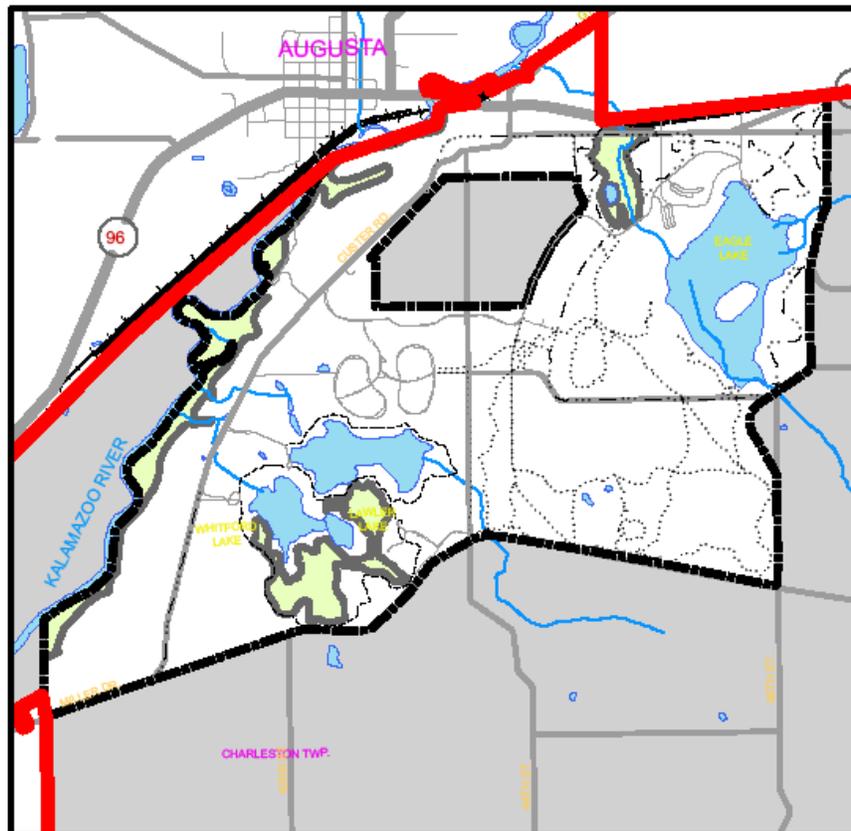
August 24, 2009

- Natural Resources – Maintaining the integrity of the natural habitat of the swan nesting area is the primary purpose of this designation. This zone will reflect natural processes, with vegetative management only allowed to restore and maintain natural ecological structure and processes (such as removing of invasive species), to address hazard trees, and to manage pests and disease.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – No known historic sites or cultural resources exist in the emergent marshes or floodplain.
- Recreational Opportunities – Public entry into this zone will not be allowed during the zone season, so that the trumpeter swans remain undisturbed during the time of nesting.
- Education Opportunities – Interpretation of the trumpeter swans can take place outside the zone. Conflict between the protective measures of the zone and hunting/recreational opportunities also represent a good opportunity for education.
- Visitor Experience – During the zone season, no access will be allowed. When outside of the season, the visitor will experience the high degree of ‘natural’ feel of the zone, a significant sense of solitude, and a lack of man-made improvements.
- Management Focus – Management of this zone will be focused on the recommendations of Natural Resources Management Plan, which includes maintaining the low-impact character of these areas with an emphasis on natural resource quality. To prevent disturbance of Trumpeter Swans.
- Development – Only trail improvements (can include boardwalks and/or overlooks) and educational or interpretive signage will be the evidence of man-made elements in this zone. Any improvements needed for resource protection, such as erosion control, shall be ‘natural’ in character. The focus is to maintain as little evidence of human activity as possible. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

## Primitive Zone

Of the total 3,030 acres in the park, 237 acres (8%) of undeveloped land fall into this zone description. This zone emphasizes the park's high quality natural resources. The zone is defined by the floodplain of the Kalamazoo River, the emergent marsh located north of Eagle Lake, and the emergent marsh located south of Whitford Lake. Attaining and maintaining a high quality natural resource condition dictates the extent to which recreational improvements or uses are allowed.



- Legend**
- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
  - Fort Custer Recreation Area
  - ~ Streams   ● Lakes   — Railroads
  - ~ Trails   — Roads
  - ~ Equestrian   — Highways
  - ~ Hiking   — Major Roads
  - ~ Mountain Biking   ~ Minor Roads
  - Primitive

## Primitive Zone

### Fort Custer Recreation Area



August 10, 2009



The two marshes are continually inundated with water and the floodplain along the Kalamazoo River typically receives spring flooding. The soils in these areas are loam or silt loam and are easily subject to damage. Under the Primitive Zone designation, only dispersed and low frequency use, such as foot traffic, will be allowed. No mountain bike or equestrian uses will be permitted.

One exception is the boating access site at the Kalamazoo River, located across from the park headquarters. This site is well established with a gravel drive, parking, vault toilet, and a lawn/picnic area.

The floodplain along the Kalamazoo River comprises of about 127 acres (4% of the park). Only a small portion of the Kalamazoo River's floodplain extends into the recreation area; the majority of the floodplain is to the west of the river at this point. A floodplain forest, which occurs in the floodplain of the Kalamazoo River, is a bottomland deciduous forest that occurs on loam or silt loam mineral soil along a large stream or river. It is not uncommon for spring floods to inundate the area.

The emergent marshes next to Eagle Lake and Whitford-Lawler Lake were common in the landscape prior to European settlement. Both marshes equal about 110 acres. The most important ecosystem process in an emergent marsh is a natural hydrologic flow. Wetland plants, such as cat-tail, bulrush, spike rush, arrowhead, and water lily can be found in emergent marshes. Following are the prescribed qualities for the Primitive Zone:

- Natural Resources – The Natural Resources Management Plan outlines several management objectives for the emergent marshes and floodplain. For the emergent marshes, a survey is proposed for non-native invasive species and then control of these invasive species as much as practical. Investigate the potential release of beetles to control purple loosestrife and monitor the success levels.

Cerulean and Prothonotary warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush are Special Concern species that have been documented in the floodplain forest along the Kalamazoo River. Blanchard's cricket frog and American bittern, both Special Concern animals, have been documented in wetlands within the park.

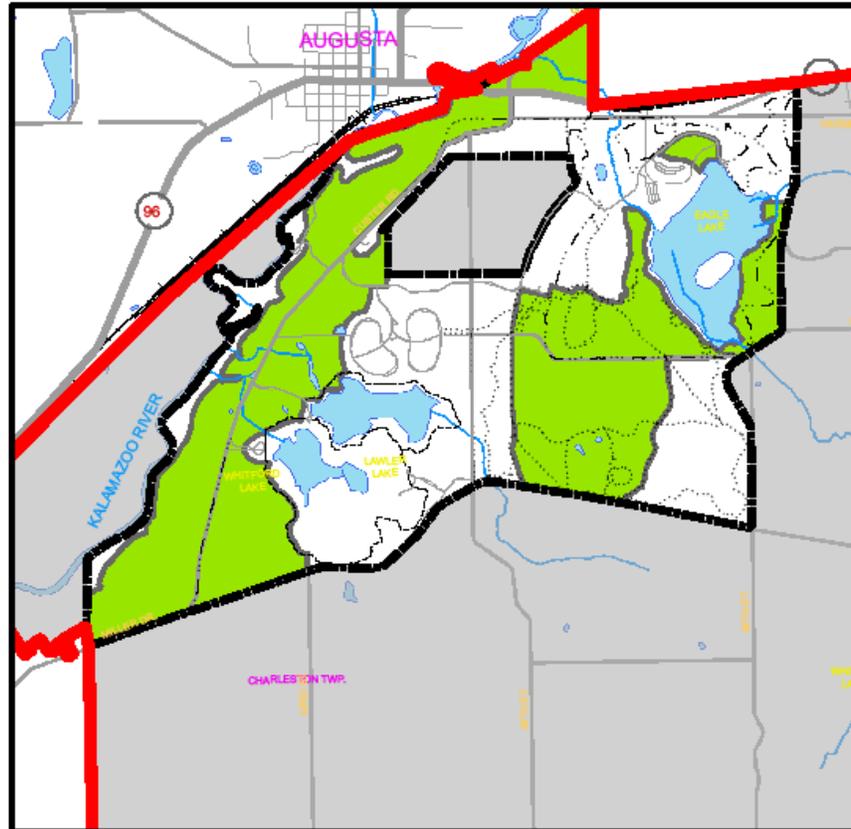
This zone will reflect natural processes, with vegetative management only allowed to restore and maintain natural ecological structure and processes (such as removing of invasive species), to address hazard trees, and to manage pests and disease.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – No known historic sites or cultural resources exist in the emergent marshes or floodplain.

- Recreational Opportunities – With the focus of this zone to maintain and restore the high-quality lowland areas and southern floodplain forest of Kalamazoo River, only low impact recreation (dispersed recreation such as hiking, hunting, trapping, birding, and fishing) will be allowed in this zone. No equestrian or mountain biking trails will be allowed.
- Education Opportunities – The ecological significance of the southern floodplain forest, and the habitat that supports the rare aquatic and emergent marsh species, provides excellent educational opportunities. Educational kiosks and off-site educational materials could be developed. Specific planning recommendations for education and interpretation will require input from the Office of Communications and others.
- Visitor Experience – These areas will reflect a ‘natural’ feel, a significant sense of solitude, and a lack of man-made improvements.
- Management Focus – Management of this zone will be focused on the recommendations of the Natural Resources Management Plan, which includes maintaining the low-impact character of these areas with an emphasis on natural resource quality.
- Development – Only trail improvements (can include boardwalks and/or overlooks) and educational or interpretive signage will be the evidence of man-made elements in this zone. Any improvements needed for resource protection, such as erosion control, shall be ‘natural’ in character. The focus is to maintain as little evidence of human activity as possible. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

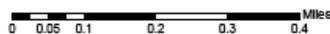
## Backcountry Zone

The Backcountry Zone is the largest zone with 1,353 acres of the park (45%).



- Legend**
- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
  - Fort Custer Recreation Area
  - Equestrian
  - Biking
  - Railroad Biking
  - Roads**
  - Highways
  - Major Roads
  - Minor Roads
  - Backcountry

### Backcountry Zone Fort Custer Recreation Area



July 30, 2009

The character of this zone is natural with minimal evidence of human impact. The Backcountry Zone allows for low density trail usage, including bicycle and equestrian and slight modifications of the landscape (i.e. trail development) to accommodate that use. The delineated 'Backcountry Zone' areas within the park were identified to contain higher value natural resources and are actively being maintained/restored by Stewardship.

Recently, Stewardship has been active in the tree blowdown areas located on both sides of the entrance drive. In October 2001, a powerful windstorm raced through Fort Custer RA causing massive tree blowdown that covered 130 acres. A project was initiated in the winter of 2002 to clean up the wind throw debris (predominately non-native black locust) and to begin restoring the native oak barrens landscape that once occurred in that area.

The Planning Team has proposed a portion of the designated snowmobile trail to be in the Backcountry Zone (specifically located in the southwest corner of the park). In the backcountry classification, only non-motorized (bicycle and equestrian use allowed) outdoor activities are permitted. An exception was made for Fort Custer RA. It was important to provide an area for designated snowmobiling that was located away from other trail users (when possible) in order to avoid trail user conflicts. The snowmobile trail would follow along the shoulder of the entrance road south along (former) River Road and connect to an existing trail south of Whitford Lake. No trails currently exist in the southwest corner of the park. In addition, this area is currently being share cropped by local farmers. The Stewardship Unit has a small area containing prairie grass propagation plots. Eventually, the Stewardship Unit will take over these share crop fields and reestablish native prairie grasses. The proposed snowmobile trail will be located to minimally impact the future planting plans in this area. This change in snowmobile usage will require a Director's Order.

The Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway has proposed a non-motorized trailway to access the park at the northeast corner, follow an existing east/west two track, connect to the park entrance road, and follow the park road to the southwest corner of the park and exit onto River Road. This proposed trailway will go through sections of the Backcountry Zone. Additional planning will be needed in order to best route the trailway through the park.

Three 'no entry' areas exist within the Backcountry Zone. These areas are closed until the Federal Government can clear any unexploded ordnance (if any still exists) from these areas. Stewardship has been coordinating with the Federal Government to first prescribe burn these areas prior to these areas being cleared.

- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities, provided it still falls within the guidance of the Natural Resources Management Plan, and does not interfere with the cultural values identified.

The windblown areas will be restored to native oak barrens and savanna habitat. Non-native invasive shrubs and trees will be removed from these areas. Once these areas are established, prescribed prairie burns will be introduced to maintain the native species.

The southwest corner of the park is currently being share cropped by local farmers. These areas will eventually be taken back and established with prairie grasses and oak barrens. Stewardship Unit also has small propagation fields of Little Bluestem, Big Bluestem, and Indian grass. A natural buffer should be maintained between the share cropping fields and the edges of Whitford and Jackson Lake so that fertilizer, pesticides, etc. have an opportunity to be filtered out before runoff can get to the lakes.

The forested areas south and east of Eagle Lake contain high quality dry-mesic southern forest/woodland. Non-native shrubs and trees will be controlled. Garlic mustard will also be targeted. Prescribed burns will be scheduled on a regular basis to maintain quality native plants/trees.

This zone will reflect natural processes, with vegetative management only allowed to restore and maintain natural ecological structure and processes (such as removing of invasive species), to address hazard trees, and to manage pests and disease.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from early settlements scattered throughout the park. Several building foundations and an old silo exist within this zone.
- Recreation Opportunities – Trail usage is a key component of the park. Many multi-use trails run through the Backcountry Zones. Some rerouting of the existing trails may take place, where appropriate, to help preserve the natural resources. Coordination will take place with the various user groups. Riverside Family Cabin exists within the Backcountry Zone.

The North Country National Scenic Trail runs through the section of park property that exists north of Dickman Road. The nation-wide trail runs for 4,600 miles through seven northern states. The footpath runs east/west through this northern section of the park and connects to Fort Custer National Cemetery to the east and M-96 to the west.

- Education Opportunities – Information regarding the cultural past can be made available at areas of congregation and fortified through educational opportunities in the Backcountry Zones. Informational kiosks are one good way to disseminate this information.
- Visitor Experience – The southwest corner of the park provides excellent birding opportunities. Stewardship Unit is restoring the wind blown areas along the park entrance road to prairie grass fields. These efforts will greatly benefit the park. A prairie grass propagation field exists at the Hilltop picnic shelters. Lastly, Stewardship Unit actively manages a

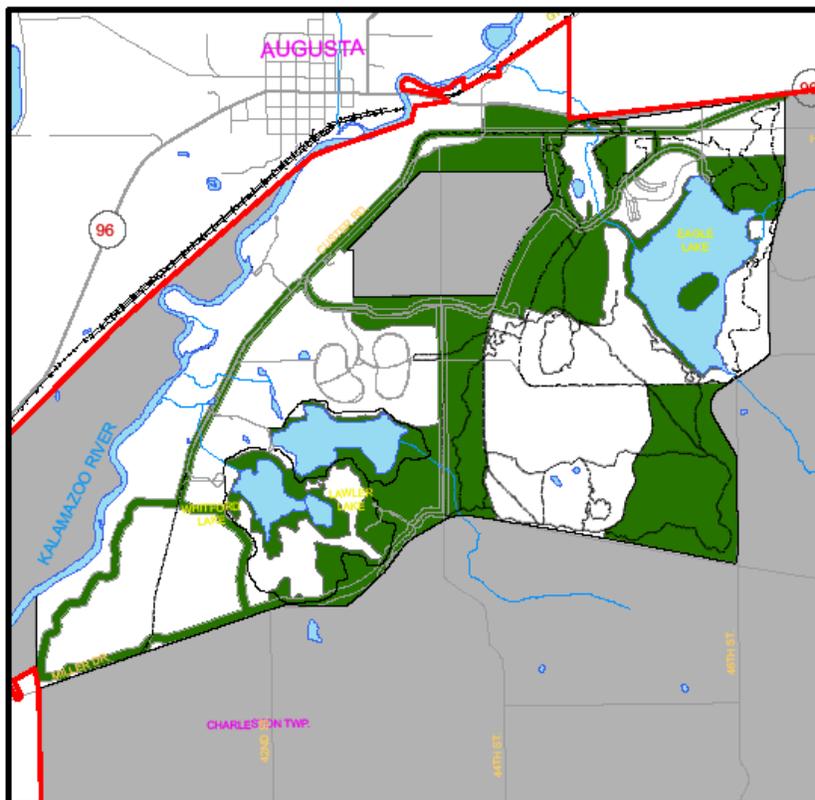
section of high quality wooded area in the middle of the park/south of Eagle Lake to provide quality visitor experiences.

- Management Focus – Management of this zone will be focused on the recommendations of the Natural Resource Management Plan, which includes maintaining the low-impact character of these areas, with an emphasis on natural resource quality.
- Development – Low level of development activity will focus on any identified restoration/preservation needs, accommodating visitor access to the features, meeting universal access standards, and educational/interpretation needs. A snowmobile trail is proposed in the southwestern portion of the park where sharecropping presently takes place. This trail will be for multi-uses when no snow exists.

The Kalamazoo River Valley Trail (KRVT) is proposed to stretch from the northeast corner of Fort Custer RA down to the southwest corner. The KRVT will be designed as a multi-use, non-motorized trail that will link Battle Creek to the Kal-Haven Trail by creating a greenway along the Kalamazoo River. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

## Natural Resource Recreation Zone

The Natural Resource Recreation Zone is the second largest zone with 1,135 acres of the park (37%).



### Natural Resource Recreation Zone

Fort Custer  
Recreation Area

- Legend**
- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
  - Fort Custer Recreation Area
  - Lakes
  - Streams
  - Trails**
  - Equestrian
  - Hiking
  - Mountain Biking
  - Management Zone**
  - Natural Resource Recreation



0 0.125 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles



August 24, 2009

This zone is utilized for active recreation, including hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, snowmobiling, and trail usage (biking, hiking, mushing, equestrian, cross-country skiing, etc.). There is still an emphasis on resource quality over recreation, but in this zone higher levels of use are allowed. The ‘Lakeview’ and ‘Trailside’ cabins exist within this zone and overlook Jackson Lake. The park’s three lakes also fall under this zone classification.

- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities provided it still falls within the guidance of the Natural Resource Management Plan. Much of this zone falls within what the Stewardship Plan refers to as dry-mesic southern forest/woodland. Most of this area used to be a Beech-Sugar Maple forest in the early 1800's. Stewardship guidance calls for burning these areas periodically to control non-native invasive species.

Fisheries Division expressed interest in establishing a fish stocking program to increase fishing opportunities at the three lakes. A fishing pier exists at Whitford Lake. All three lakes have Boat Access Sites. All three Lakes contain areas with shallow waters that are impacted by Eurasian Water Milfoil. In the summer time, the shallow areas become choked with weeds.

This zone will reflect natural processes, with vegetative management only allowed to restore and maintain natural ecological structure and processes (such as removing of invasive species), to address hazard trees, and to manage pests and disease. Vegetation may also be managed to facilitate recreational use and maintaining an aesthetically appealing landscape.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from early settlements scattered throughout the park. Several building foundations and an old silo exist within the park.
- Recreation Opportunities – This zone is utilized for general recreation, including: hunting, fishing, trapping, birding, snowmobiling, and trail use for hiking, cross-country skiing, dog mushing, biking and equestrian riding. Hunting is not allowed within 450' (Hunting Safety Zone) of the campgrounds or buildings. Fishing opportunities are limited in the summertime due to the shallow areas becoming choked with weeds.
- Education Opportunities – Information regarding the cultural past can be made available at areas of congregation and fortified through educational opportunities. Informational kiosks are one good way to disseminate this information.

Signed kiosks currently exist at the horse/biking staging area, campground, and Whitford Lake. Expanded education opportunities exist on 'proper etiquette' when encountering different trail users. For example, what should a biker do when he encounters a horse rider? The trails are multi-use and there's a need to provide better communication to the different trail users.

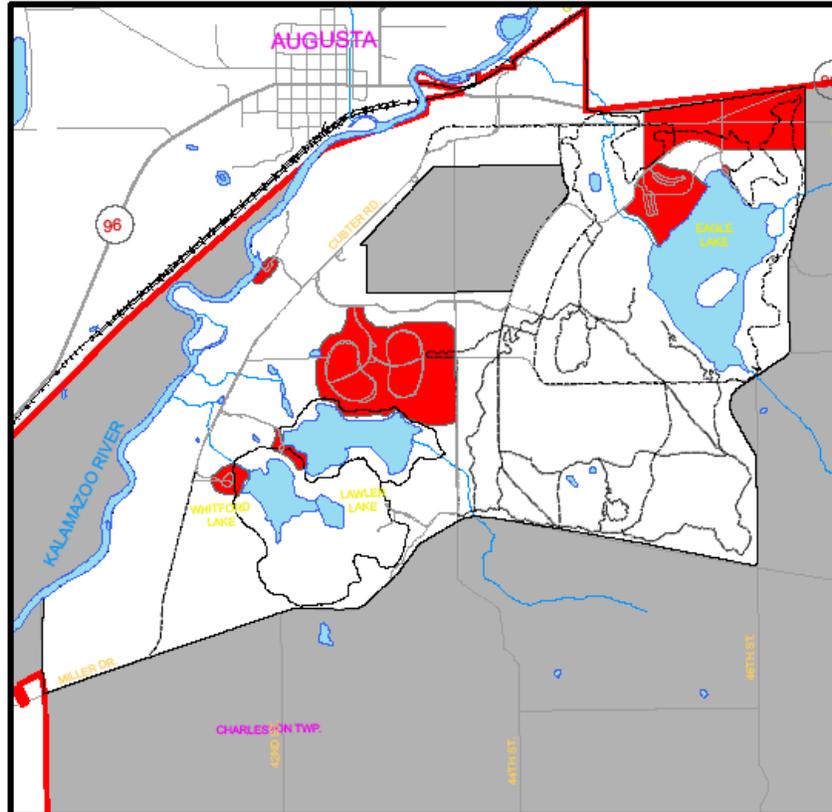
- Visitor Experience – The visitor can expect encounters with other park visitors during all four seasons. Hunting and fishing is popular and the multi-use trails cover the majority of areas within the park.
- Management Focus – The management focus in this zone is minimizing potential user conflicts and implementing educational efforts.
- Development – Development activity will focus on complementing the educational efforts to reduce user conflict. One example is development on the trail system to better accommodate user needs.

The horse/biking staging area is currently too small and is a cause of conflict between user groups. An opportunity exists to expand, separate, and/or designate parking spaces to provide more order to the parking lot. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

Opportunities on the trails system exist to provide improvements to old bridges over water crossings, improving the scenic value by restoring the natural resources along the trails system, and providing rest areas with picnic tables and tie lines for horses.

## Developed Recreation Zone

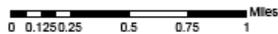
There are six areas with this designation. In this zone, active recreation takes place in areas not designated for natural resource significance. The total area of the zone is 299 acres (10%), which includes a modern campground, day-use beach area, and four boating access sites.



**Legend**

-  NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
-  Fort Custer Recreation Area
-  Lakes
-  Streams
- Trails**
-  Equestrian
-  Hiking
-  Mountain Biking
- Management Zone**
-  Developed Recreation

### Developed Recreation Zone Fort Custer Recreation Area



August 24, 2009

The largest area is the modern campground, which encompasses 145 acres. The modern campground includes roughly 35 acres for future expansion. The second largest area is the day use beach, and adjacent to that is the newly created disc golf course. Lastly, boating access sites provide water access to Eagle Lake, Whitford-Lawler Lake, Jackson Lake, and the Kalamazoo River.

- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities provided it still falls within the guidance of the Natural Resource Management Plan. For the campground, the proposed management includes the removal of non-native invasive shrubs and trees (black locust, autumn olive, honeysuckle, pine, glossy buckthorn, etc.) and excessive raspberry growth in oak barrens focus area. Stewardship has conducted prescribed burns in the campground.

Vegetative management in this zone will address hazard trees, invasive species, and pests and disease, and will also be allowed for purposes of facilitating development and recreational use and maintaining an aesthetically appealing landscape.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from early settlements and Native American Indians scattered throughout the park. Several building foundations and an old silo exist within the park.
- Recreation Opportunities – Recreation is the main focus of this zone. Camping, picnicking, boating, fishing, swimming, disc golf, hiking, and other general recreational activities are provided and encouraged. Hunting is not allowed within 450' (Hunting Safety Zone) of the campgrounds or buildings.

The Kalamazoo River Valley Trail (KRVT) is proposed to stretch from the northeast corner of Fort Custer RA down to the southwest corner. The KRVT will be designed as a multi-use, non-motorized trail that will link Battle Creek to the Kal-Haven Trail by creating a greenway along the Kalamazoo River.

The need for additional camping was recognized. The Developed Recreation Zone was designated to accommodate additional/future camping sites, located to the east of the existing campground. Fort Custer Horse Friends Association has expressed interest in an equestrian campground for this area.

Reflective of the expanded zone designation discussed earlier, this zone accommodates a new disc golf course that opened July of 2008.

- Education Opportunities – This zone naturally has the most visited areas of the park, which provides a great opportunity for education and interpretation. The 'State Park Explorer Program' could take advantage of this opportunity for their interpretive programming, and this program can

be expanded upon. The current explorer program runs various programs including 'Fishing in the Parks' and nature/interpretive walks.

A sign kiosk currently exists at the horse/biking staging area. Expanded education opportunities exist on 'proper etiquette' when encountering different trail users. For example, what should a biker do when he encounters a horse rider? The trails are multi-use and there's a need to provide better communication to the different trail users.

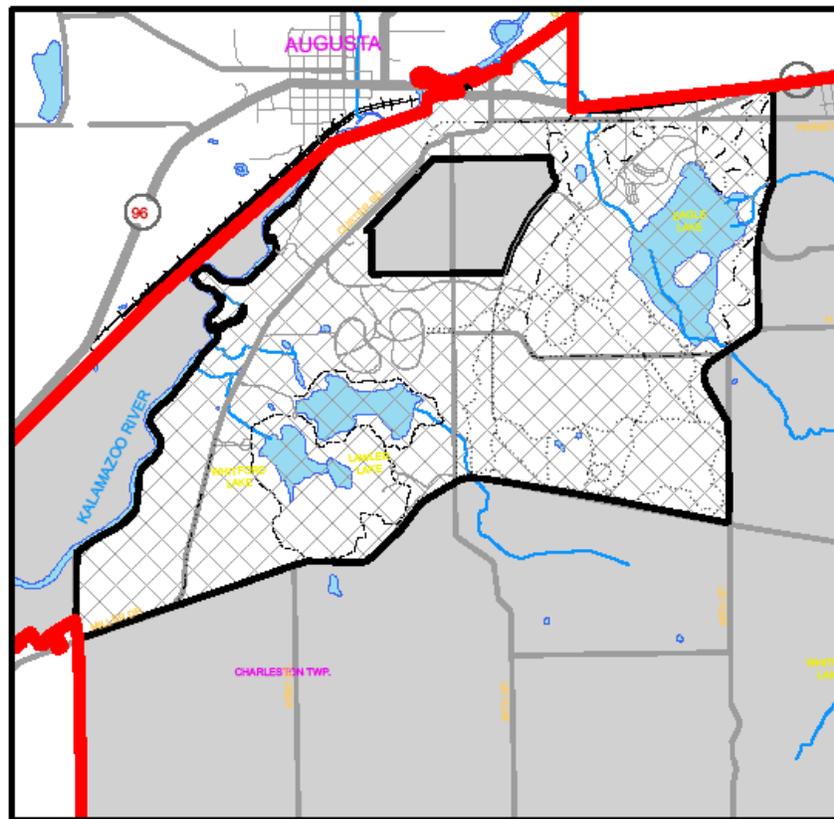
- Visitor Experience – With the focus of this zone being the developed campgrounds and other attributes, the visitor will experience a high level of encounters with other park visitors during the summer months. As with many parks, early and late season use is greatly diminished. Hunting is not allowed within 450' (Hunter Safety Zone) of the campgrounds or buildings.
- Management Focus – To maintain the infrastructure that serves the intense public uses of this zone. In addition, provide educational opportunities in the zone for the entire park develop and maintain universal access (ADA) access in the zone, and maintain public safety and good hospitality services.
- Development – Provide universal access (ADA) improvements as needed to attain 'program' accessibility. Development is also needed to improve facilities to complement education. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

The modern campground is at capacity on the majority of the summer weekends and opportunity exists to expand the campground. The Developed Recreation Zone includes the modern campground and an area for future expansion. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

Fort Custer Horse Friends Association has expressed interest in an equestrian campground. The area for future expansion at the modern campground should also be explored for equestrian needs.

## Cultural Landscape Zone

This zone identifies the entire recreation area as within the Cultural Landscape Zone. Recognition needs to be given to the fact that the recreation area was originally a military training base dating back to World War I. Prior to early European settlement, Native American Indians were present in this area. Territorial Road, which defines the southern border of the park, was originally an old Indian trail. The trail later grew to an east/west route for pioneers and later became a stage coach route. Over time, several old farmsteads were constructed throughout the park as the area eventually became settled. In 1917, Camp Custer was built for a military base. The State of Michigan acquired 2,899 acres in 1971 and an additional 96 acres in 1973.



- Legend**
- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
  - Streams
  - Lakes

- Trails**
- Equestrian
  - Hiking
  - Mountain Biking

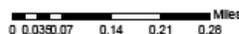
- Management Zones**
- Cultural Landscape Zone

## Cultural Landscape Zone

### Fort Custer Recreation Area



August 10, 2009



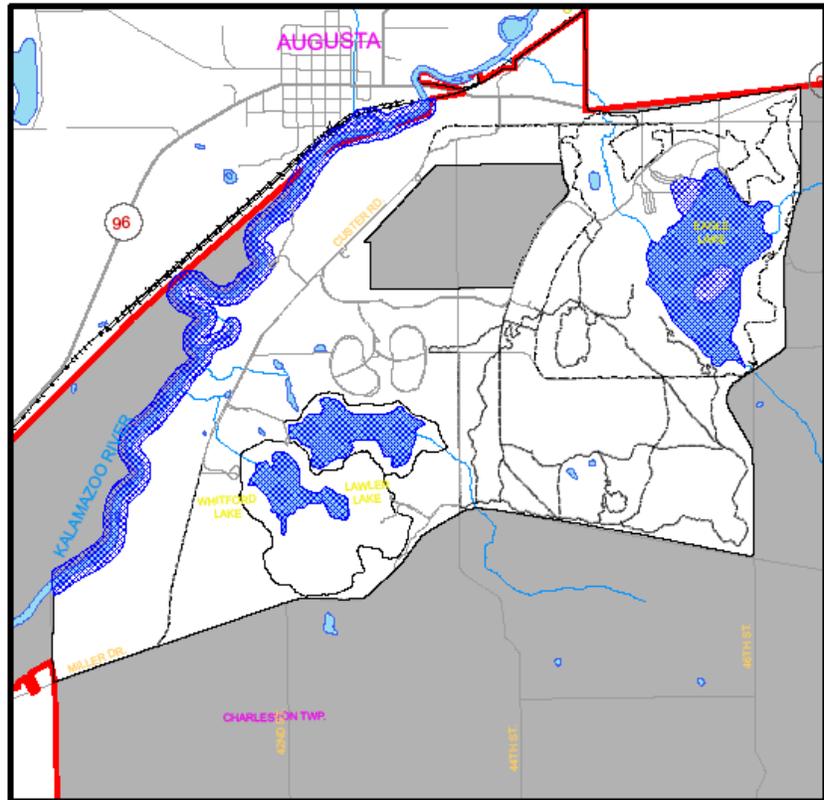
- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities, provided it still falls within the guidance of the Natural Resources Management Plan, and does not interfere with the cultural values identified.

This zone will reflect natural processes, with vegetative management only allowed to restore and maintain natural ecological structure and processes (such as removing of invasive species), to address hazard trees, and to manage pests and disease. Vegetation may also be managed to enhance education/interpretation uses and maintaining an aesthetically appealing landscape that is sensitive to the historical resource and interpretation of the zone.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from early settlements and Native American Indians scattered throughout the park. Numerous building foundations and an old silo (still standing) exist throughout the park.
- Recreation Opportunities – This zone is established to highlight the historic and cultural qualities of times past.
- Education Opportunities – Fort Custer RA contains a cultural past dating back to the Native American Indians through its military training period of World War I and II. Information regarding this cultural past can be made available at areas of congregation and fortified through educational opportunities in the Developed Recreation Zones. Informational kiosks and signage are one good way to present this information.
- Visitor Experience – The cultural features are unique to this area and would be appreciated by visitors with an interest in history.
- Management Focus – To preserve the historic integrity of the zone elements identified and implement educational efforts.
- Development – Development activity will focus on any identified restoration/preservation needs, accommodating visitor access to the features meeting universal access standards, and educational/interpretation needs. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

## Scenic Zone

This zone recognizes that there are aesthetic qualities to be preserved and protected in the park. The Scenic Zone incorporates the Kalamazoo River frontage of the park, Eagle Lake, Whitford-Lawler Lake, Jackson Lake and the hilltop picnic shelters on the north side of Eagle Lake. The total overlay acreage is 289 (9.5%) of FCRA.



**Legend**

- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
- Fort Custer Recreation Area
- Lakes
- Swamps
- Trails**
- Equestrian
- Hiking
- Mountain Biking
- Management Zone**
- Scenic Overlay

August 24, 2009

### Scenic Zone Fort Custer Recreation Area



The Kalamazoo River frontage is approximately 3 miles in length and is bordered by the floodplain of the Primitive Zone. The shoreline is natural and undeveloped on both sides of the river. The DNR owns all of the lakeshore property for all three lakes, which provides beautiful views of the largely undeveloped

shorelines. Scenic views not only include views from the shore looking onto the water, but also views from the water looking onto the shoreline and beyond.

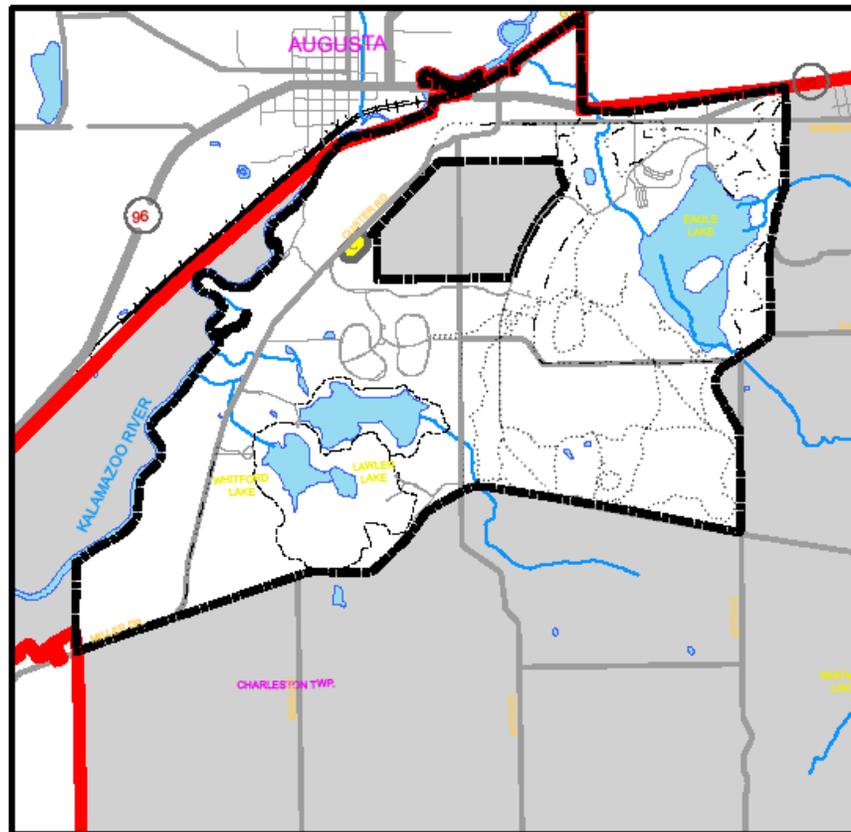
- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support visitor activities, provided it still falls within the guidance of the Natural Resources Management Plan. In addition, any modification must not hinder existing scenic opportunities.

This zone will reflect natural processes, with vegetative management only allowed to restore and maintain natural ecological structure and processes (such as removing of invasive species), to address hazard trees, and to manage pests and disease. Vegetation may also be managed to enhance the views of the zone.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – **If any activity in this zone requires earthwork, it must first be reviewed and approved by Stewardship.** It is known that there are cultural resources from early settlements and Native American Indians scattered throughout the park. Numerous building foundations exist throughout the park.
- Recreation Opportunities – The Kalamazoo River offers a boating access site with 10 designated parking spaces for water access. The river can either be viewed from the water looking onto the natural areas or views from the shore down to the water. For example, Riverside Family Cabin, located on top of a natural bluff, has views looking down to the river. Jackson Lake, Whitford-Lawler Lake, and Eagle Lake all have boating access to the water. All three lakes are ‘no wake’ lakes. The “Hilltop” picnic shelter offers views onto Eagle Lake. Lastly, various viewing locations exist from the trails throughout the park and the campground.
- Education Opportunities – There are great opportunities for interpretive signage along the trails and boating access sites (where people congregate).
- Visitor Experience – Except for the “Hilltop” picnic shelter, the scenic view locations are in areas of low visitor impact to provide an experience of solitude. At “Hilltop” picnic shelter, more contact with other visitors can be expected. From this location, views onto Eagle Lake will be maintained.
- Management Focus – Management must focus on maintenance of the views and protection of the natural resource.
- Development – Any development in this zone must complement the viewing opportunities. Educational kiosks and improvements to augment educational opportunities are desirable actions. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

## Visitor Services Zone

This zone is located about 1 mile south of the park entrance. It consists of 6 acres (less than 1%) of the park. Included in the zone are the park headquarters building, contact station, old manager's residence, and shop yard behind the headquarters building.



- Legend**
- NRC Dedicated Boundary (2004)
  - Fort Custer Recreation Area
  - Lakes
  - Streams
  - Traffic**
  - Equestrian
  - Hiking
  - Mountain Biking
  - Management Zone**
  - Visitor Services

August 10, 2009



## Visitor Services Zone

**Fort Custer  
Recreation Area**

This zone encompasses the developed areas required for program administration and operations. Typically, it will include offices, contact stations, maintenance facilities and all related land base required to conduct the business of operating a state park or recreations area.

- Natural Resources – In general, the natural resources can be modified to support the needs for administration of the park.

Vegetative management in this zone will address hazard trees, invasive species, and pests and disease, and will also be allowed for purposes of facilitating development and recreational use and maintaining an aesthetically appealing landscape.

- Historic/Cultural Resources – There are no known H/C Resources in this zone.
- Recreation Opportunities – None.
- Education Opportunities – Educational materials are made available in the office ‘public space’ and office staff can provide further verbal information. There is a great opportunity to direct visitors to other informational locations in the park. An informational plaque exists at the sidewalk entrance, which describes stewardship’s efforts in restoring the windblown areas. It should be noted that the Visitor Services Zone could be expanded to support a possible/future welcome center for education and interpretation opportunities.
- Visitor Experience - Visitor access is limited to the office for informational purposes.

Useful information can be gathered by monitoring types of park usage in the park to assess what types of activities occur within the park. Park services then can be directed towards the types of activities that are taking place to provide a greater visitor experience. Monitoring can take place at the entrance booth.

- Management Focus – Provide public universal access to the office from the parking lot and ADA access within the building. Assure security of offices, facilities and equipment (including outdoor equipment). Provide a safe working environment for park staff.
- Development – Development in this zone will be for the purposes of complementing the administrative needs of the park, and meeting the needs for ADA compliance. All development will meet the approval requirements of the planning process.

# FUTURE PLAN INSERTS

**10-Year Action Plan** (LONG-RANGE ACTION GOALS TO ATTAIN GMP) - Phase-2 of the Management Planning Process. Includes review and update of General Management Plan.

**5-Year Implementation Plan** (SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO IMPLEMENT) - Phase-3 of the Management Planning Process. Includes review and update of General Management Plan and Phase 2 Plan.

**Annual Action Plan and Progress Report** - Phase-4 of the Management Planning Process.

**Operational/Management Resources** - The following categories are established as a guide for the park manager to use to supplement this working document. Other categories can be added as needed.

- Annual Work Plan (NOTE...this should tie-in with Phase 4 – Annual Report of Management Planning)
- Phase III Natural Resources Management Plan
- Staffing plan
- Budget plan
- Equipment inventory and needs
- Training (required and desired)
- Public relations / marketing / outreach
- Programming (special events, MCCC activities, volunteers, etc.)
- Public health, safety and welfare
  - Water system
  - Wastewater system
  - Electrical system
  - Law enforcement
  - Emergency access plans
  - Wildfire management plan
  - Dam Safety reports
- CRS
- FOIA
- Raster Image Index
- Raster Images of historic park plans
- Park Infrastructure data
- Parcel mapping of land ownership
- Other...



# SUPPORTING ANALYSIS

Fort Custer Recreation Area - 3,030 acres

Charleston and Ross Townships, Kalamazoo County

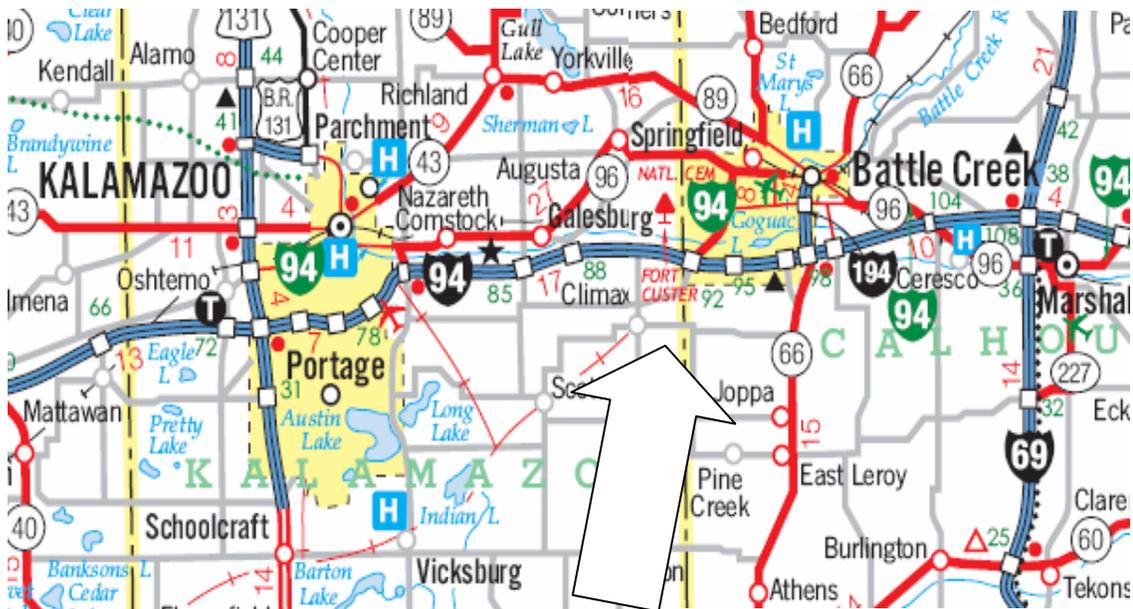
Latitude 42.32429

Longitude -85.35185

(Park Headquarters)

## PARK SETTING

- **Location And Surrounding Community** – Fort Custer Recreation Area is located approximately one-quarter mile southeast of the village of Augusta, between Kalamazoo and Battle Creek, in Kalamazoo County. It is bounded by State Highway M-96 (Dickman Road) to the north, Longman Road to the east, Territorial Road to the south and the Kalamazoo River to the west. The park is in both Charleston and Ross Townships, with the majority in Charleston Township. The only entrance to the park is located off of State Highway M-96. It is accessed off of Interstate Highway I-94 at exit 92, then north on Martin Luther King Highway four miles to M-96 (Dickman Road). M-96 road is a four-lane paved unlimited access road.



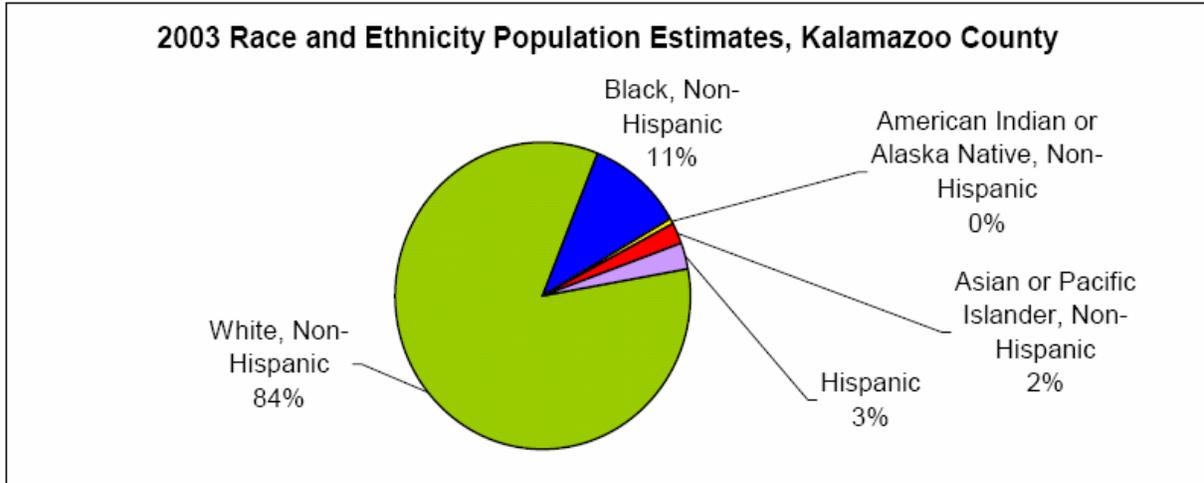
- Demographics** – The village of Augusta has a 2000 Census population of 899. The city of Kalamazoo, due west of the park has a 2000 Census population of 77,145. The city of Battle Creek, due east of the park has a 2000 Census population of 53,634. The 2000 Census population of Kalamazoo County is 238,063, which reflects a 6.8% increase over the 1990 Census figures. The relative density of Kalamazoo County is 424.7 persons per square mile (p/sm). This is significantly greater than the state average of 175 p/sm and is reflective of the areas growing manufacturing industry, as well as being home to Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo College, Davenport College, and Kalamazoo Community College.

### Job Distribution in Kalamazoo County

| <b>EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY (Number of Jobs)</b> |             |             |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Components by Type</b>                      | <b>1997</b> | <b>1998</b> | <b>1999</b> | <b>2000</b> |
| Total Employment                               | 151,406     | 150,757     | 151,970     | 151,946     |
| Wage and Salary Employment                     | 131,231     | 130,698     | 131,410     | 130,870     |
| Proprietor's employment                        | 20,175      | 20,059      | 20,560      | 21,076      |
| Farm Employment                                | 1,647       | 1,564       | 1,658       | 1,607       |
| Non-Farm Employment                            | 149,759     | 149,193     | 150,312     | 150,339     |
| <b>Components by Industry</b>                  | <b>1997</b> | <b>1998</b> | <b>1999</b> | <b>2000</b> |
| Private  | 131,568     | 130,239     | 131,007     | 130,609     |
| Ag. serv., forestry, fishing, and other        | 1,207       | 1,190       | 1,236       | 0           |
| Mining   | 204         | 186         | 188         | 0           |
| Construction                                   | 7,103       | 7,233       | 7,514       | 7,583       |
| Manufacturing                                  | 26,811      | 26,510      | 27,295      | 26,607      |
| Transportation and public utilities            | 4,550       | 4,775       | 4,561       | 4,816       |
| Wholesale trade                                | 5,298       | 5,432       | 5,515       | 5,775       |
| Retail trade                                   | 26,319      | 25,332      | 26,327      | 26,831      |
| Finance, insurance, and real estate            | 13,912      | 12,188      | 11,766      | 9,680       |
| Services                                       | 46,164      | 47,393      | 46,605      | 47,848      |
| Government and government enterprises          | 18,191      | 18,954      | 19,305      | 19,730      |
| Federal, civilian                              | 1,426       | 1,616       | 1,544       | 1,500       |
| Military                                       | 501         | 464         | 459         | 461         |
| State and local                                | 16,264      | 16,874      | 17,302      | 17,769      |

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce - Economics and Statistics Administration - Bureau of Economic Analysis, Issued May 2002

While the relative density of Kalamazoo County is significantly greater than the state average, the growth in population does not illustrate a wide range of diversity. 84% of the county is White, Non-Hispanic, 11% is Black, Non-Hispanic, 3% is Hispanic, and 2% is Asian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic.



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Vintage 2003 postcensal series, prepared in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau

**2003 Kalamazoo County Population Estimates by Race, Sex and Hispanic/Latino Ethnicity**

|   | All ethnicities | Hispanic | Non-Hispanic |
|---|-----------------|----------|--------------|
| <b>All races</b>                        | 242,110         | 6,718    | 235,392      |
| Males                                   | 117,451         | 3,439    | 114,012      |
| Females                                 | 124,659         | 3,279    | 121,380      |
| <b>White</b>                            | 209,174         | 5,985    | 203,189      |
| White Males                             | 101,477         | 3,081    | 98,396       |
| White Females                           | 107,697         | 2,904    | 104,793      |
| <b>Black</b>                            | 25,988          | 543      | 25,445       |
| Black Males                             | 12,415          | 268      | 12,147       |
| Black Females                           | 13,573          | 275      | 13,298       |
| <b>American Indian or Alaska Native</b> | 1,255           | 126      | 1,129        |
| AI or AN Males                          | 583             | 56       | 527          |
| AI or AN Females                        | 672             | 70       | 602          |
| <b>Asian or Pacific Islander</b>        | 5,693           | 64       | 5,629        |
| Asian or PI Males                       | 2,976           | 34       | 2,942        |
| Asian or PI Females                     | 2,717           | 30       | 2,687        |

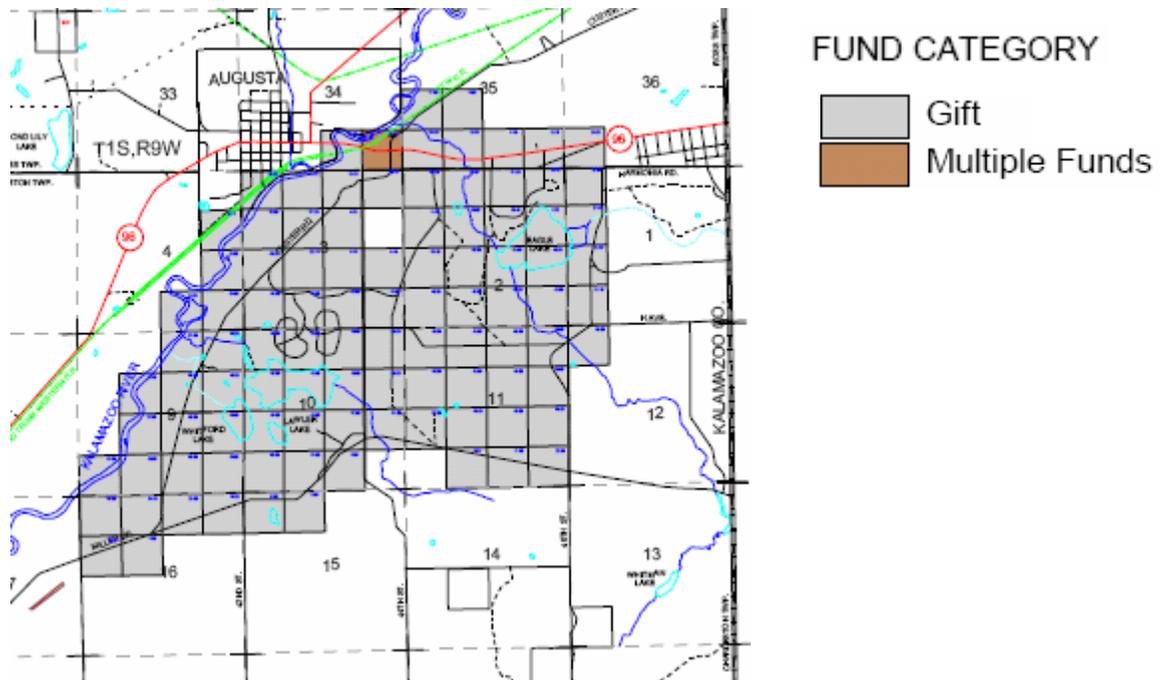
Source: National Center for Health Statistics, Vintage 2003 postcensal series, prepared in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau

- **General History Of The Park** – In March of 1957, the DNR (formerly Department of Conservation) entered into a lease agreement with the United States Government for the recreational use of 1,228 acres of the Fort Custer Military Reservation. This lease agreement was renewed annually until January of 1969, when the State of Michigan was granted a new lease for 2,889 acres. This land, which changed to 2,937 acres, was then gifted to the state in 1971 by Mrs. Richard Nixon under President Nixon’s Legacy of Parks program. Two years later, 96 acres were transferred to the DNR. This 96 acre parcel is located north of Eagle Lake and was operated by the Michigan Department of Health.

Fort Custer RA is within one hour’s drive of greater metropolitan Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Jackson, and 13.6% of the population of Michigan. (1,375,901 people)

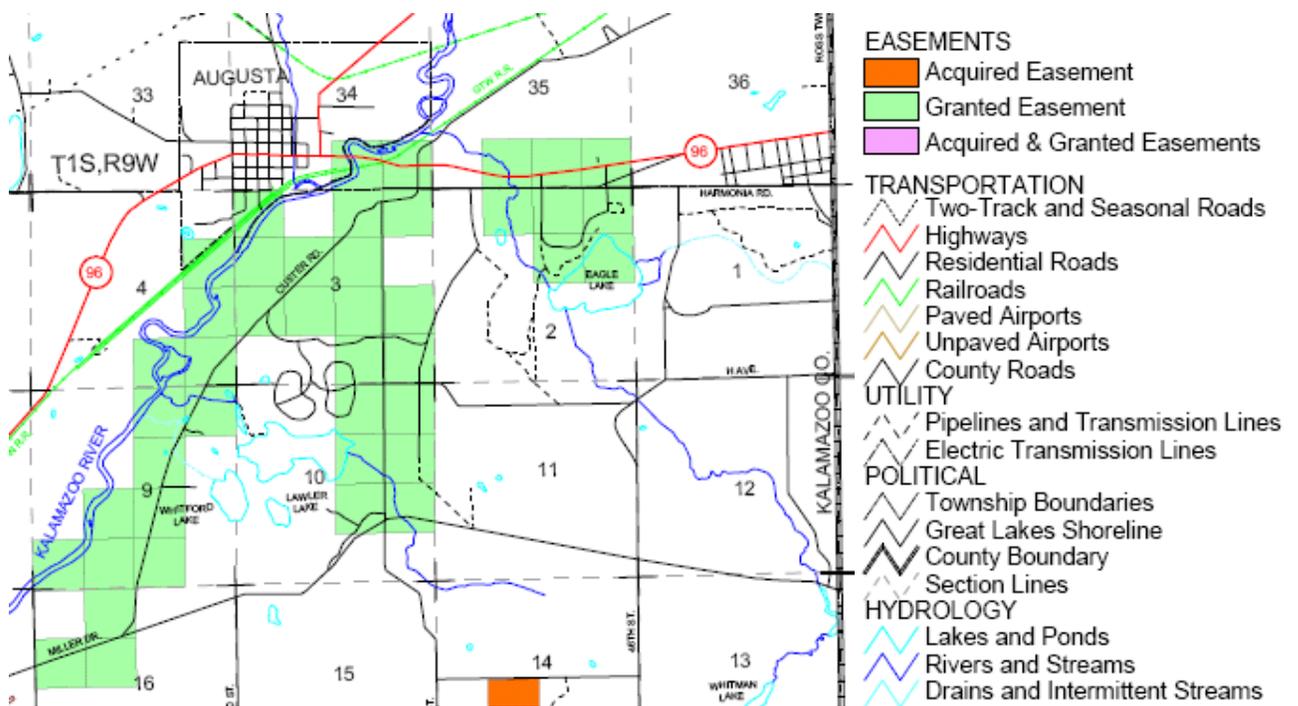
- **Land Ownership And Issues** – State ownership of the lands that make up Fort Custer RA has been acquired through two funding sources.

**LAND PURCHASE FUNDING SOURCES**  
(from MDNR – Land Information System)



- Following are descriptions of the impacts of these various sources:
  - Gift – The majority of the park acreage was acquired by gift from the Federal Government. It is utilized for general program purposes.
  - Multiple Funds and Other Funds – Is utilized for general program purposes.

**GRANTED AND ACQUIRED EASEMENTS**  
(from MDNR – Land Information System)



- **Easements:**
  - Consumers Energy Company – Easement for underground natural gas fuel line, as well as overhead power lines.
  - Communication Corporation of Michigan – Easement for telephone cables and lines.
  - United Telephone Company – An easement exists on park grounds for this company.

- **R.O.W.:**

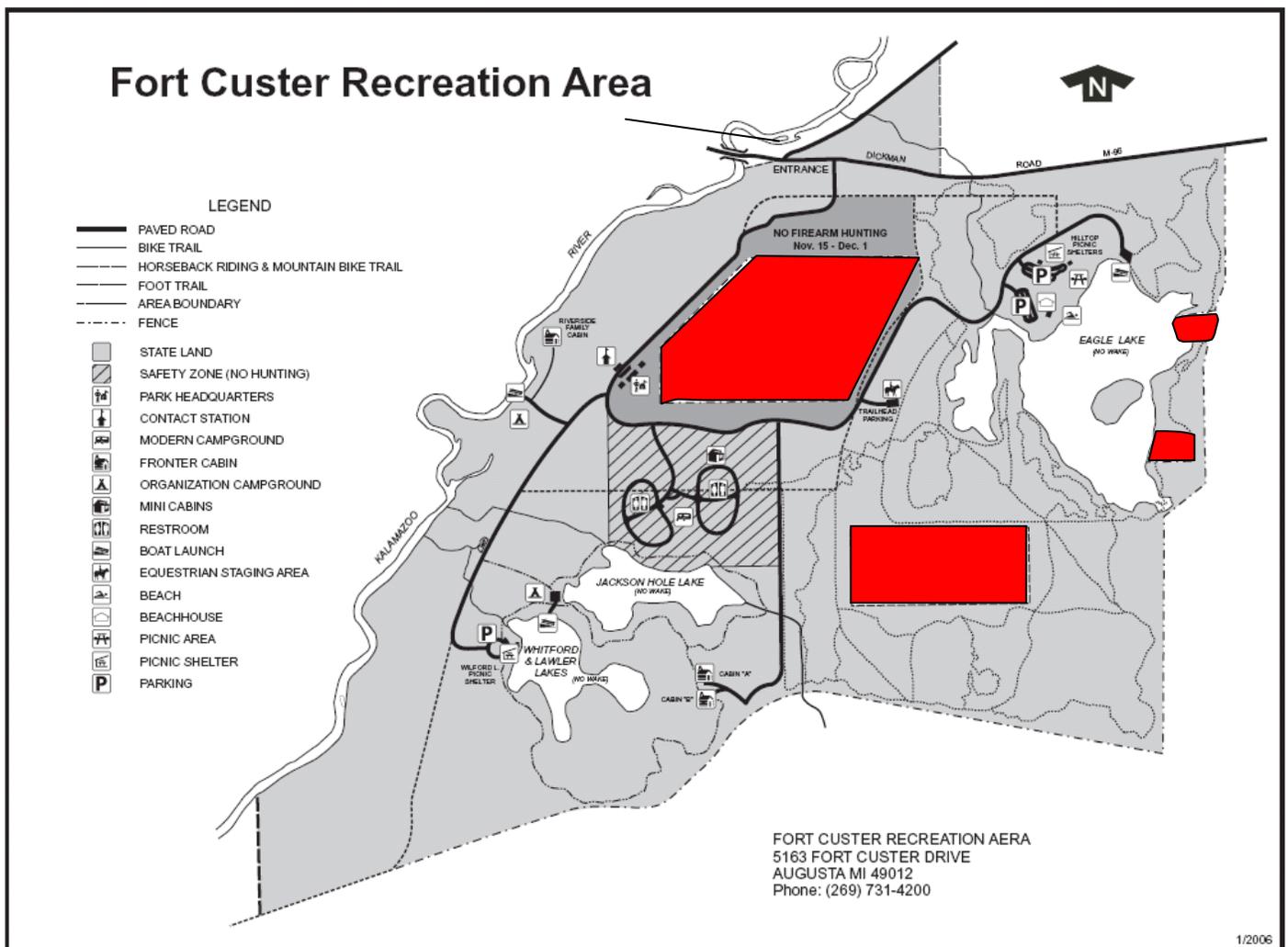
- M-96 (Dickman Road) – A 200 ft. right-of-way exists from the center of the road.



- **Permit Issues:**

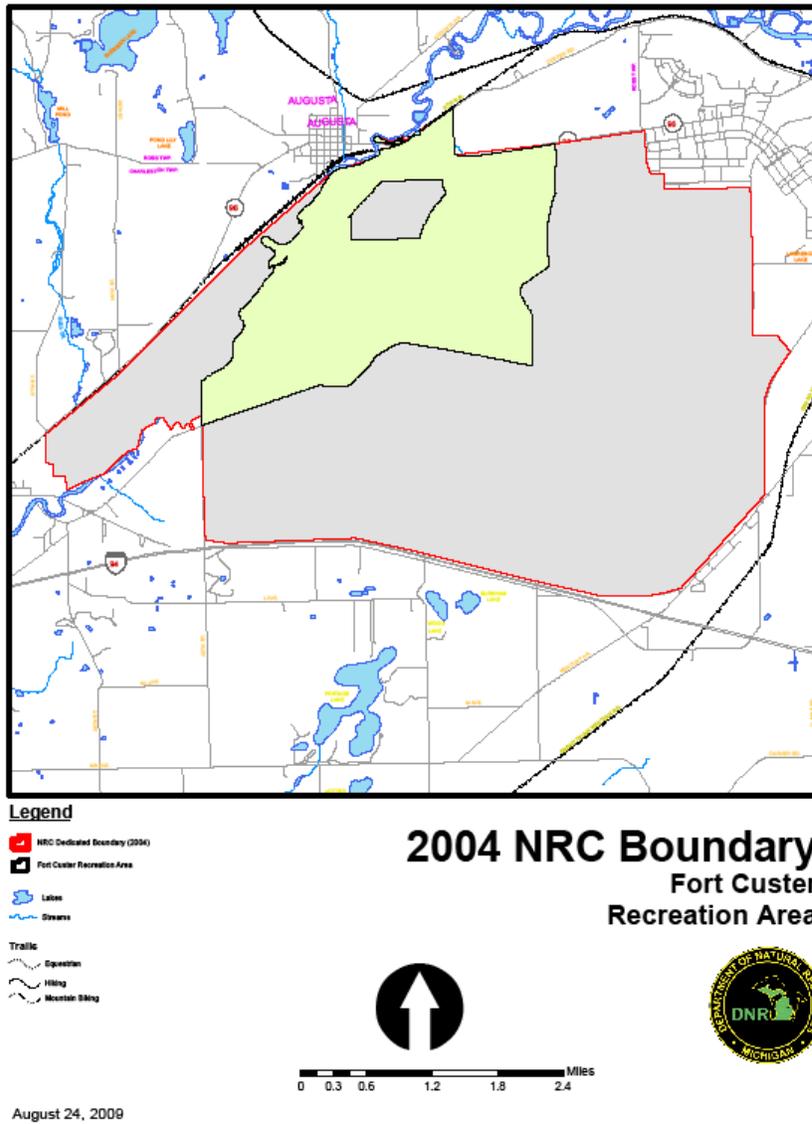
- Water Supply:
  - . Battle Creek Municipal water is at Eagle Lake Beach only
  - . The majority of the park is on a well system (Kalamazoo County Human Services Health Department)
- Sewage Disposal System:
  - . MDEQ, Water Bureau
  - . Battle Creek Public Works/Wastewater Department is solely responsible for Eagle Lake sewage
  - . Kalamazoo County Human Services Health Department
- Lake Water Quality:
  - . Kalamazoo County Human Services Health Department monitors and tests Eagle Lake Beach once a week from Memorial Day through Labor Day
- Dam Safety Requirements:
  - . Eagle Lake Dam (#00799), Jackson Lake (#00649), and Whitford-Lawler Lake (#00707)
  - . Part 315, Dam Safety of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451

- One 40 acre parcel of land in the northern portion of the park, west of Eagle Lake, is still owned and maintained by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A). This section of land serves as an antennae field and is off-limits to the public. In addition, other closed areas of the park or “No Entry” zones include two small fenced off pieces of land east of Eagle Lake and a large rectangular piece of land in the southeastern portion of the park. These “No Entry” zones have been identified as needing further environmental investigation by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The “Formerly Used Defense Sites” program investigates properties once owned by the military to find if they are responsible for any environmental concerns on the property.



- A person cannot excavate, dig or probe the grounds, or remove ordnance without written permission. (Land Use Order 5.113a)

- The Natural Resource Commission has approved a recommended boundary change for the park that includes additional land primarily to the south and east of the park, with a lesser amount to the west. Should the military abandon the base, we would desire to incorporate the adjacent land currently owned by the Department of Defense into Fort Custer SRA.

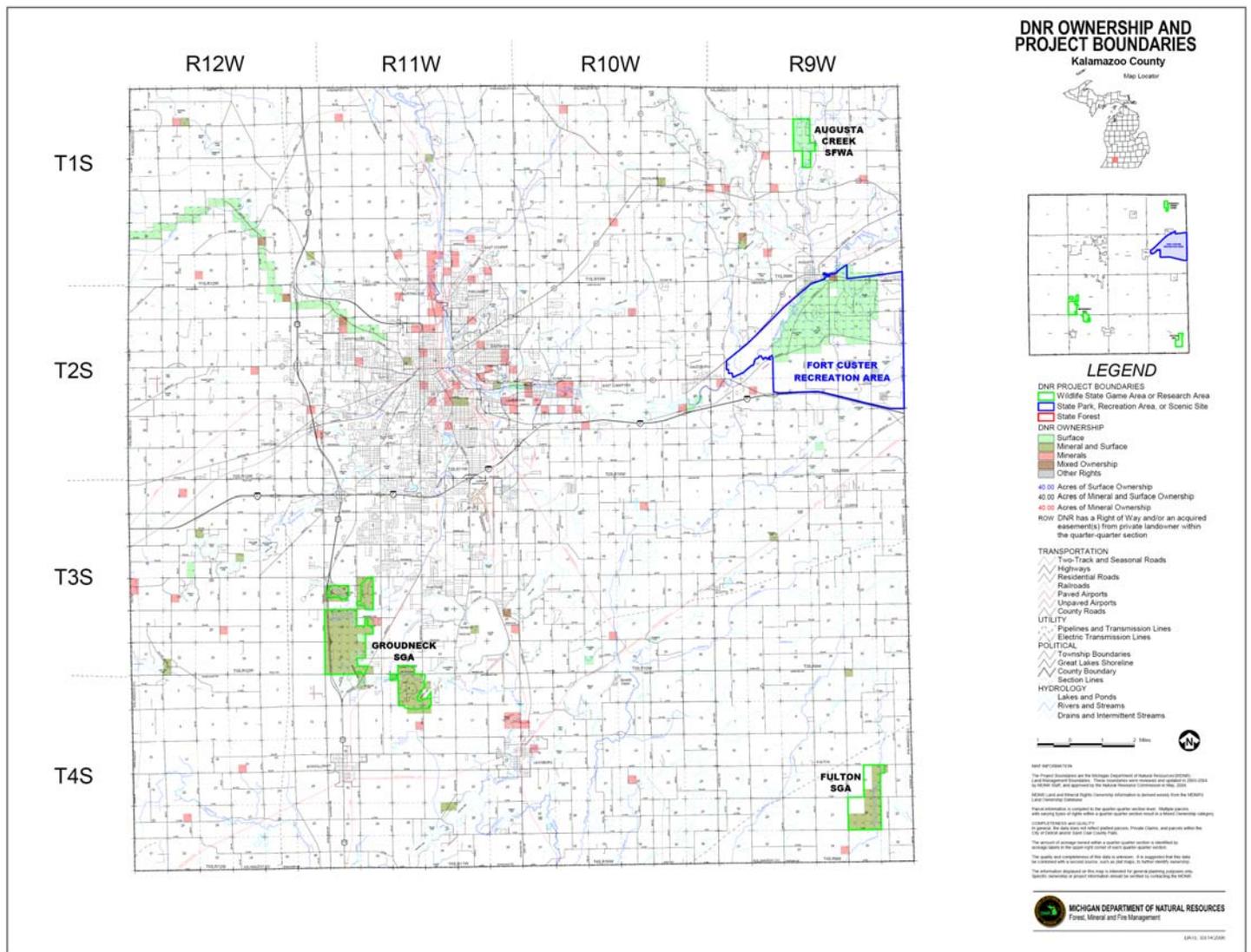


The Planning Team reviewed and strongly supports this change.

- **RELATIONSHIP OF FORT CUSTER SRA TO OTHER RECREATION RESOURCES** – In Kalamazoo County, Fort Custer SRA is the only State Recreation Area. There are no State Parks in Kalamazoo County. There are two Wildlife Division administered ‘State Game Areas’ (SGA) and one ‘Fish and Wildlife Area’ (FWA). They are Grouneck SGA, Fulton SGA, and Augusta Creek FWA.

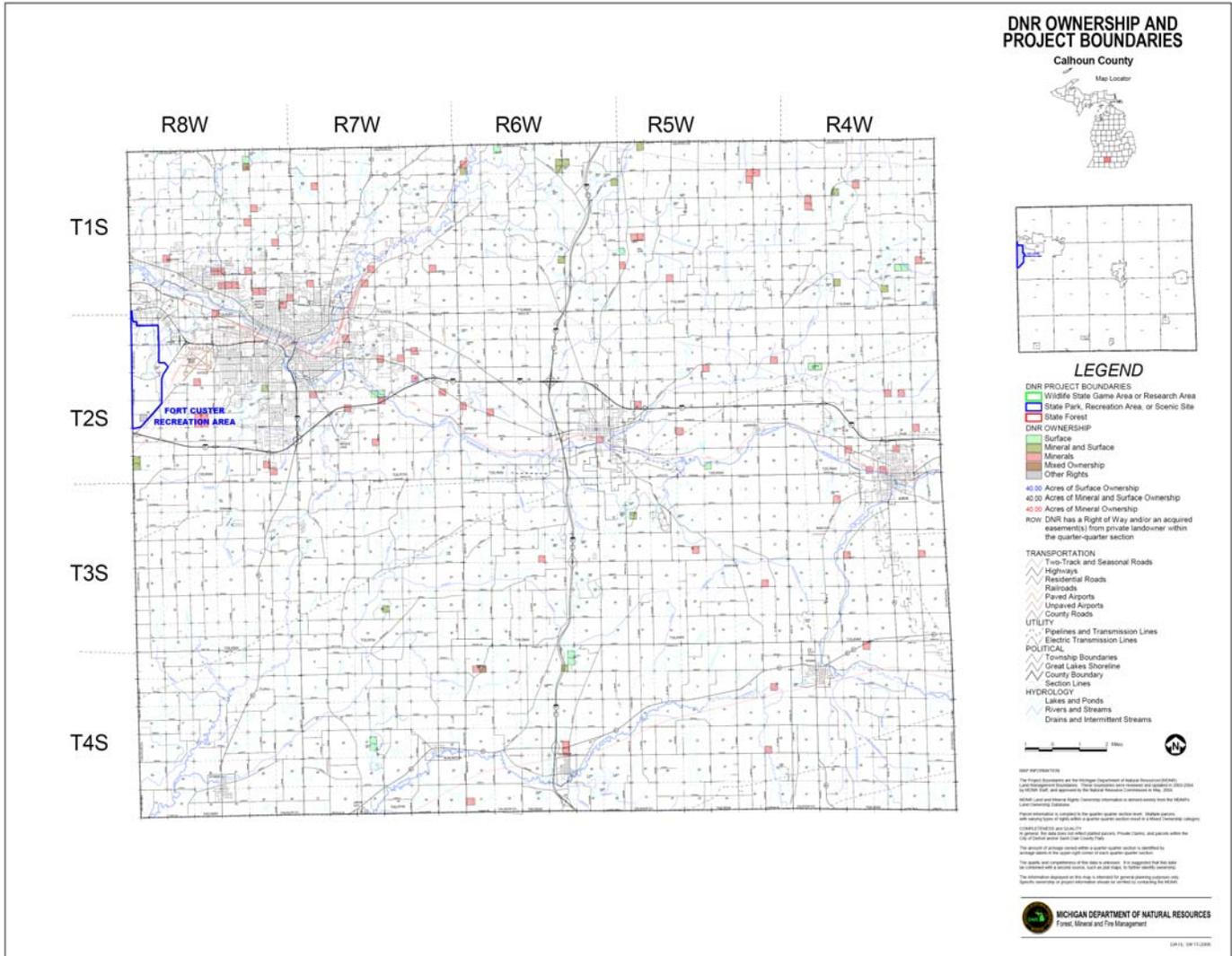
Additionally, there are 14 Department administered “Boating Access Sites” in Kalamazoo County.

### Map of DNR Major Land Holdings in Kalamazoo County



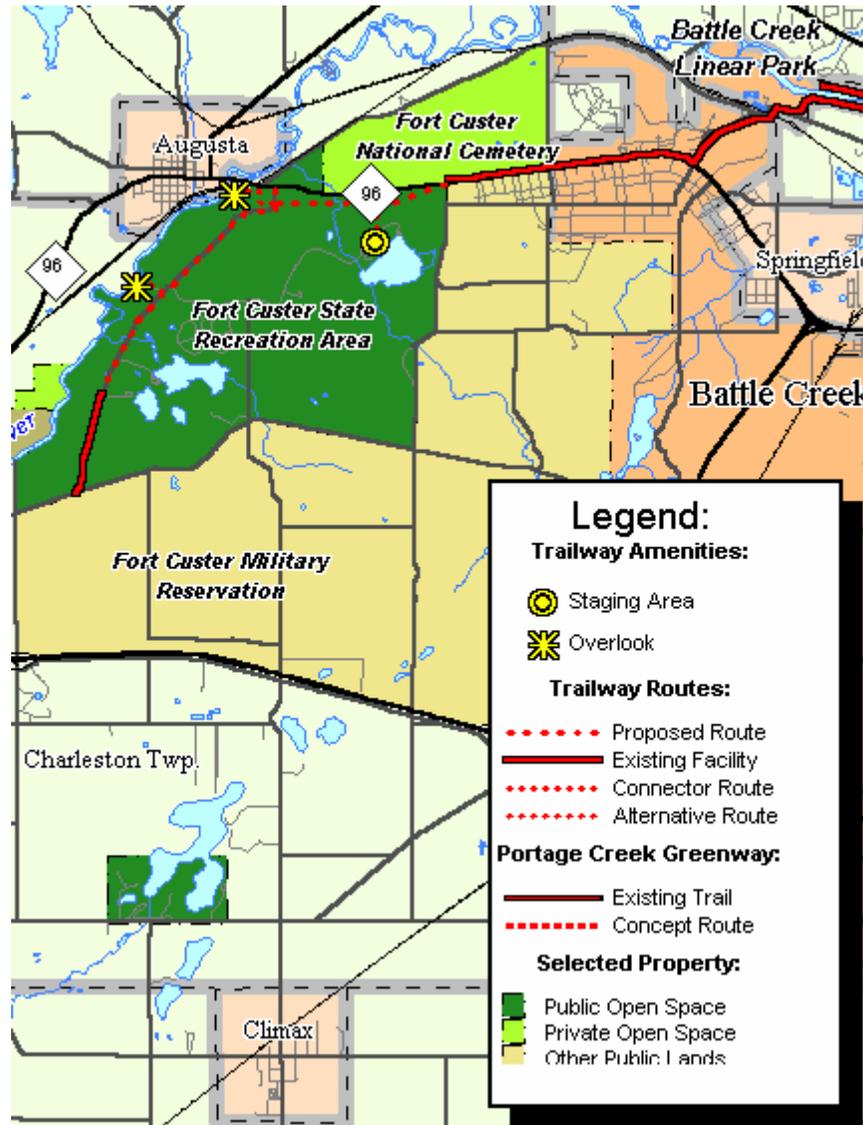
## Map of DNR Major Land Holdings in Calhoun County

Calhoun County is located east of Kalamazoo County. Project boundaries for Fort Custer RA extend into this county.



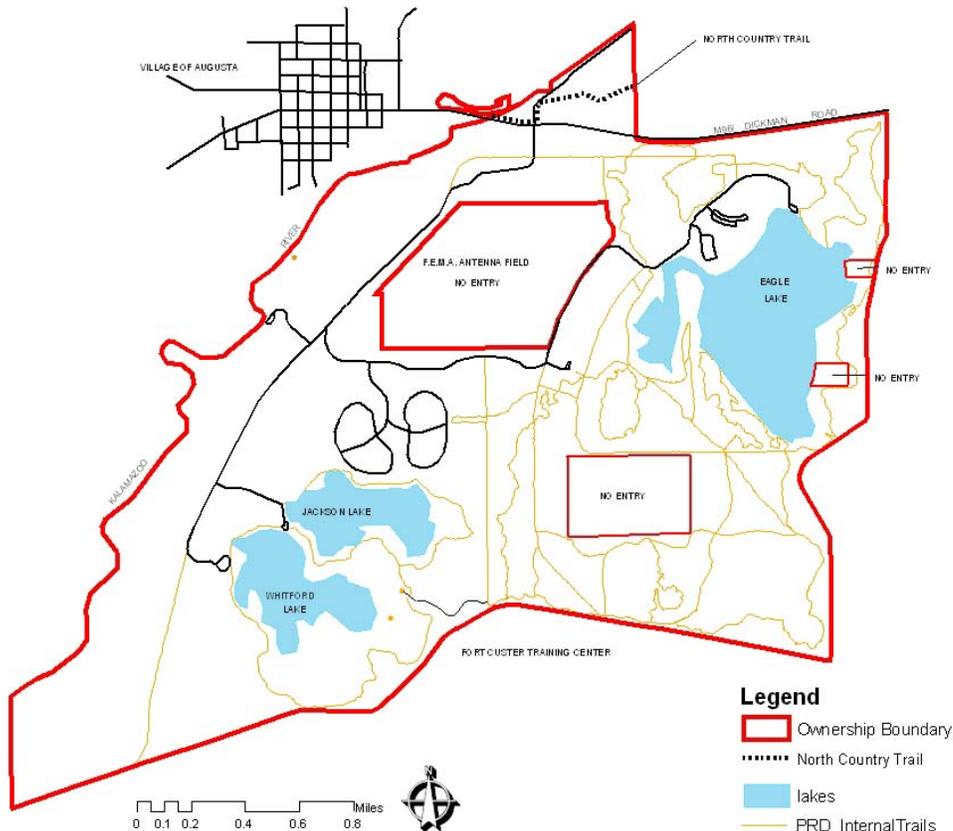
- In the region, the next closest state park is Yankee Springs SRA. It is located west of Hastings in Barry County, approximately 30 miles northwest of Fort Custer SRA. Kal-Haven Trail State Park, west of Kalamazoo in Van Buren County, is the second closest state park and links South Haven to Kalamazoo through a system of trails.
- The Kalamazoo River Valley Trail is planned to stretch from the northeast corner of Fort Custer SRA down to the southwest corner. The proposed

route would follow M-96 (Dickman Road) west and then south by way of Custer Road. The Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway is designed as a multi-use non-motorized trail that will link Battle Creek to the Kal-Haven Trail by creating a greenway along the Kalamazoo River. Proposed trail located to the north of the park will be sharing an existing equestrian trail. Trail surface material will accommodate both uses.



**Kalamazoo River Valley Trailway**

- The North Country Trail is located just north of the State Recreation Area within Fort Custer National Cemetery. This national scenic trail travels from North Dakota to New York, covering 4,400 miles in five states. Michigan has the largest stretch of trail with 1,500 miles. In close proximity to the park, the trail travels from Battle Creek westward following the Kalamazoo River. The trail is under construction near Augusta and is planned to extend north to Yankee Springs Recreation Area.



### North Country Trail

- The Battle Creek Parks and Recreation Department provides approximately 20 miles of linear trailway and 30 community parks. The community parks range from small ¼ acre lots to areas with 50+ acres. Other recreational areas include the Binder Golf Course, Leila Arboretum, and Willard Beach.
- The Kalamazoo County Parks and Recreation Department administers Cold Brook Park, a 276 acre park located less than 15 miles southwest of Fort Custer SRA. This park offers recreational activities such as hiking, horseshoes, volleyball, softball, disc golf, fishing and swimming. Cold Brook provides access to Blue Lake, Long Lake, and Portage Lake, all no

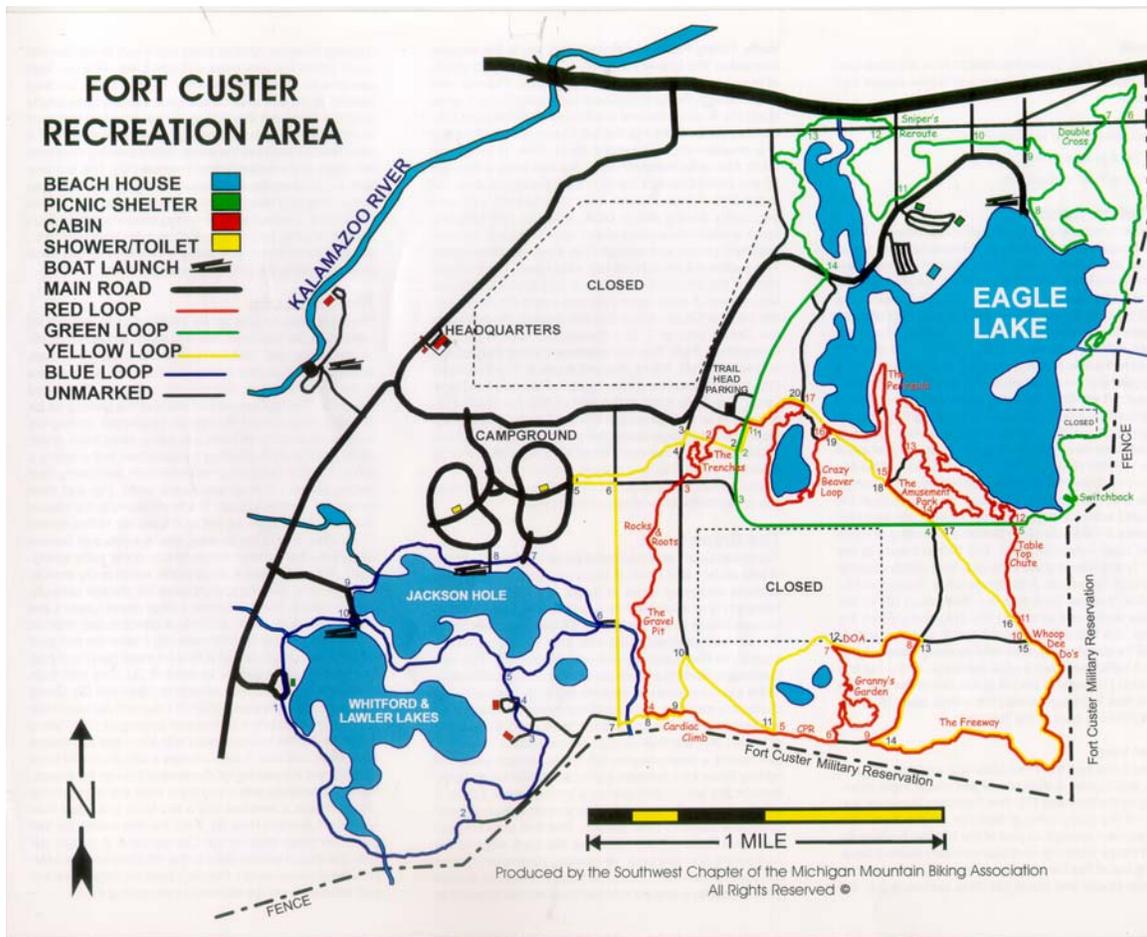
wake lakes. Camping is offered through 29 developed sites that include electricity and shower facilities and 22 rustic sites with vault toilets.

Kalamazoo County Parks and Recreation also offers four additional parks. These parks include: Markin Glen County Park, Prairie View County Park, River Oaks County Park, and Scotts Mill County Park. Kalamazoo's County Parks contain over a thousand acres of recreation area and all are within 25 miles of Fort Custer SRA.

Kalamazoo County also includes a scattered amount of small day-use recreation parks.

- Seventeen Public Boating Access Sites (BAS) are located in Kalamazoo County. Fourteen are operated by the DNR and three are operated by local units of government. Specific information on these sites can be accessed through the DNR. The "Michigan Recreational Boating Information System" (MRBIS) is an excellent source of information about all Boating Access Sites and the water bodies they access. It is accessed at <http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/MRBIS>.
- There are no federally owned or managed recreational areas in the area. The Department of Defense owns and operates the Fort Custer Training Center and it is open for hunting by permission and lottery only. (Wildlife Conservation Act Order Sec 3.300a)
- **Current Land Use** – Fort Custer Recreation Area is considered a multi-use park with recreational opportunities that include camping, picnicking, disc golf, swimming, boating, equestrian trails, hiking, cross-country ski trails, mountain bike trails, dog-sled trails, snowmobiling, wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting, and trapping. The most intensive development of the 3,033 acre Park is closest to Eagle Lake, where developed recreation includes a boat launch, picnic facilities, concession, and beach house.

The Kalamazoo River forms the easterly boundary of the park and is of significant impact. Both sides of the river form a considerable wooded floodplain that runs in a north-easterly direction.

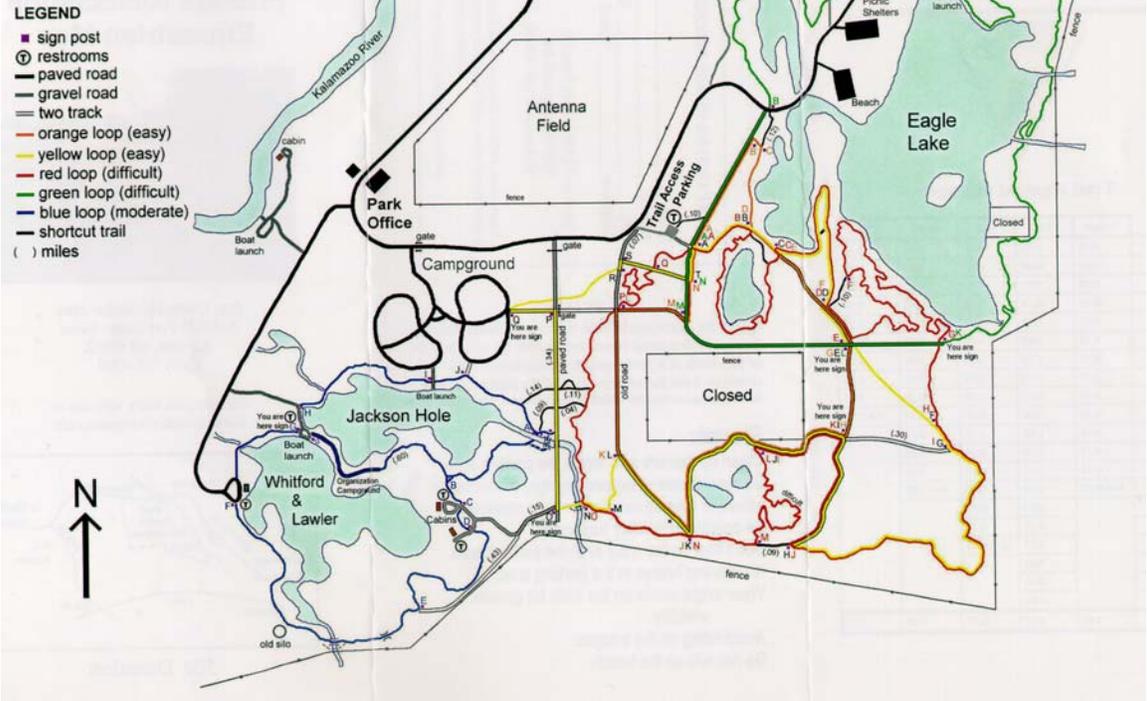


**Map from Southwest Chapter Michigan Mountain Bike Association**

The Michigan Mountain Bike Association (Southwest Chapter) shares the maintenance of approximately twenty-five miles of trails.

# Fort Custer Recreation Area

## Equestrian Map



**Map from FCRA Horse Friends Association**

The majority of the Recreation Area is characterized by a large landscape that can be described as a mosaic of oak barrens and dry-mesic southern (oak-hickory) forest, which is one of the best remaining examples of this landscape in Michigan. This land is accessed by a variety of trails, including shared equestrian, mountain biking, and hiking. It is also enjoyed by hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts.

Outlying land use is characterized primarily as military and some industrial use. The village of Augusta is located ¼ mile northwest of the park. The south and east borders of the park contain 7,570 acres of land which is administered by Michigan Army National Guard. Beyond the military base, further to the east, is an industrial complex. To the northwest of park, the Kalamazoo River floodplain is characterized by residential and agricultural use of land. Beyond the Kalamazoo River lies the Fort Custer National Cemetery and to the west runs the Grand Trunk Western Railroad. The Kalamazoo River floodplain is protected by the Nature Conservancy.

## NATURAL RESOURCES

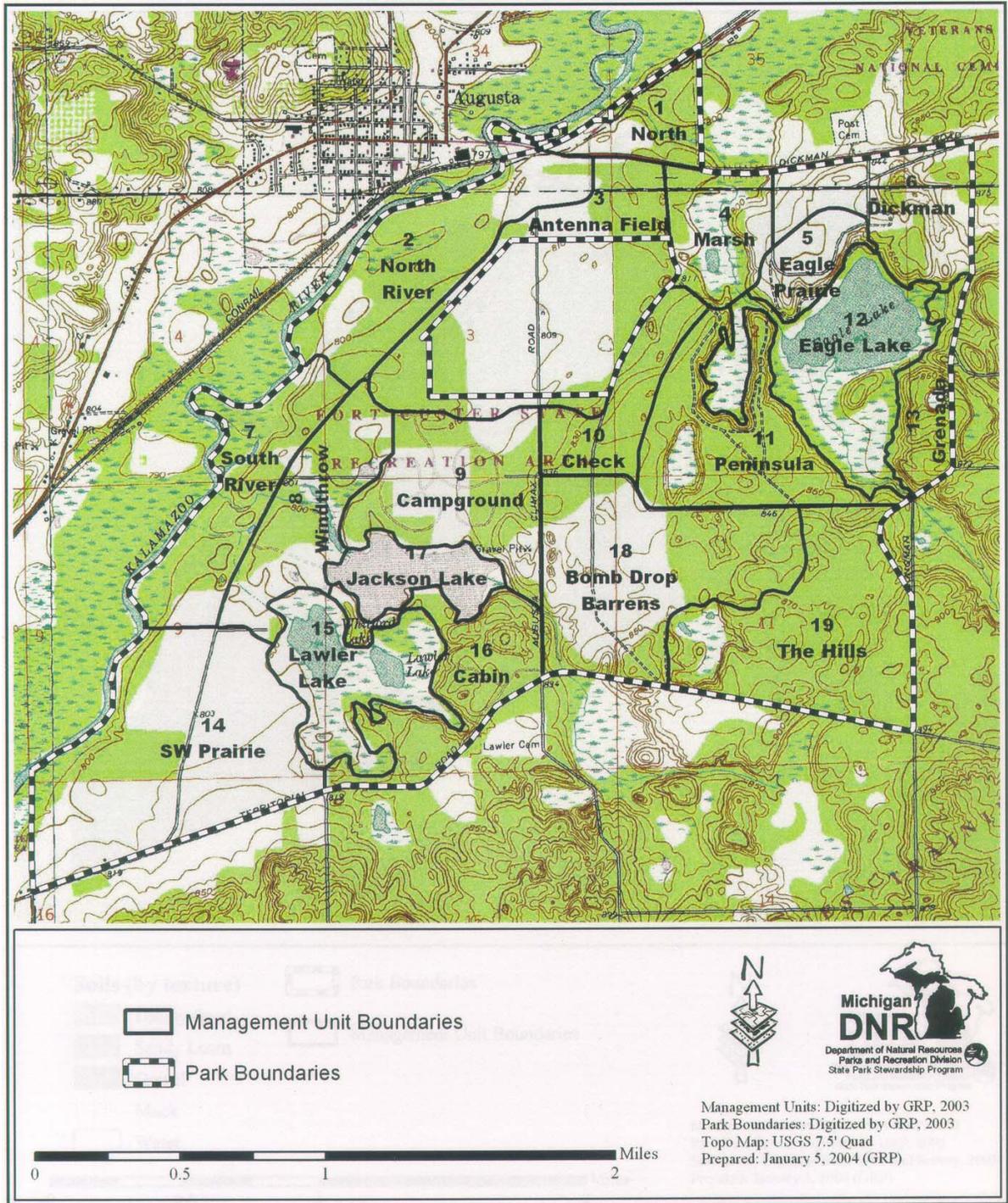
- **Geology and Ecoregional Context** – This topic is most effectively discussed in the Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) Report (“Fort Custer State Recreation Area – Natural Resources Management Plan Phase III– February 2004”).

The surface geology of Michigan is made up of glacial deposits. The MNFI report states “those that dominate include glacial moraines, till plains, outwash plains, ice-contact terrain, and lake plains.” Fort Custer SRA is located in the Kalamazoo interlobate subsection. “...the Kalamazoo interlobate subsection is underlain by Mississippian shale. The shale is exposed at the surface in local areas in the east, and glacial deposits are up to 350 feet thick in the western portion of the subsection.”

The general description of Fort Custer SRA is that of a relatively sandy, flat outwash area, that slowly develops into gravel and coarse-textured rock in the south-eastern portion of the park. The MNFI report also states “aggregate mining and military land use (i.e., land shaping, impact craters, and tank barriers) have also caused significant changes to the topography of portions of the recreation area.”

The elevation change in the park is significant, ranging from 784 feet above sea level at the banks of the Kalamazoo River to 904 feet at the highest point in the park, a total change of 120 feet.

## FORT CUSTER TOPOGRAPHIC MAP



### Prescribed Burn Unit Map

The Stewardship Unit actively manages the natural resources through controlled burns. The prescribed burn unit map shows how the Stewardship Unit divides the park into burn regions.

- **Water Resources** – Fort Custer RA provides approximately 3 miles of frontage on the Kalamazoo River. The Kalamazoo River watershed drains approximately 2,020 square miles in the southeastern region of Michigan. Fort Custer SRA is located on the mainstream area of Kalamazoo River, in the Upper Kalamazoo watershed. In this area, the river runs 80-100 ft wide, one to two feet deep, and has a moderate current. The shoreline of the river that impacts the park remains undeveloped as a floodplain area. This portion of the river flows through the northwest corner of the park.

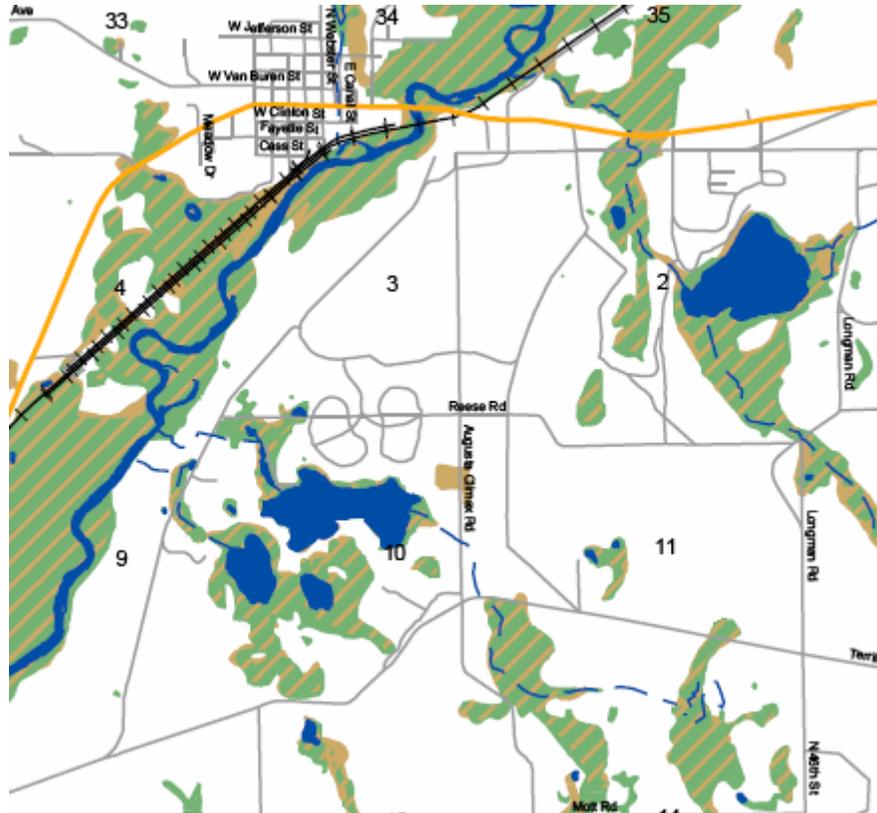
Within the park, there is access to Whitford-Lawler Lake, Jackson Lake, and Eagle Lake. In the early 1970's low-head dams were constructed at the outlets of Whitford-Lawler Lake and Jackson Lake to increase the lake size and add valuable waterfowl habitat. A 225 ft. long earth dike separates Jackson Lake from Whitford-Lawler Lake. In 1982, the Eagle Lake dam was constructed. The dam increased the lake size and depth which provided improved water-based and general recreational opportunities to the growing population of Southwestern Michigan. The dam consists of a 600 ft. long earth filled embankment and concrete spillway. The designed head of the dam is approximately 14 ft. The dams are regulated by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality Dam Safety Program. Director's Letter No. 65 required the inspection of all Department of Natural Resources owned dams once every three years.



Eagle Lake Dam

There are also smaller, unnamed lakes scattered throughout the park, as well as wetland areas.

**Designated Wetland Areas**  
(DEQ Preliminary Wetland Inventory)



- **Climate** – Its location is significant with being near Lake Michigan and prevailing westerly winds, causing Kalamazoo to be the heart of the “Lake Snow Belt”.

(MDEC – Economic Profiler)

Source: NOAA Climate Summary, 1995

| <b>CLIMATE</b>        |                           |                           |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>MONTH</b>          | <b>AVG. MIN TEMP</b>      | <b>AVG. MAX TEMP.</b>     |
| January               | 17F./-8C.                 | 31F./-1C.                 |
| July                  | 61F./16C.                 | 85F./29C.                 |
| <b>PRECIPITATION</b>  | <b>RAINFALL</b>           | <b>SNOWFALL</b>           |
| Average Annual        | 35in./89cm.               | 73in./185cm.              |
| <b>GROWING SEASON</b> | <b>DAYS ABOVE 90F/32C</b> | <b>DAYS BELOW 0F/-18C</b> |
| 164                   | 18                        | 6                         |

- **Soils** – Soils in the park vary considerably. The higher elevations in the park are characterized by well drained to excessively drained soils, while the wetland areas are characterized by poorly to very-poorly drained soils.
- **Flora** – The recreation area was once covered by openings of prairie grasses and savannas. These open areas were surrounded by a variety of forest types. With European settlement, the circa 1800 land cover was greatly impacted by agricultural practices. Currently, the upland areas that were once used for farming are now covered by degraded oak barrens and oak-hickory forest. The areas that were once open as prairie or savanna are now overrun by black locust and brush. The significant change in vegetation has developed primarily from the elimination of fire and the decline in grazing.



The natural wetland communities of Fort Custer SRA are, “emergent marsh, inundated shrub swamp, southern floodplain forest and southern (hardwood) swamp.” (MNFI)

In October of 2001, a large storm subjected 130 acres of Black Locust to wind throw. This area that suffered the most damage is between the park headquarters and Whitford-Lawler Lake. Most of the fallen trees were uprooted, while some stumps still remain in the area. Slash contracts included: Integrity Tree Service, Asplundh, and the DNR - Allegan Construction Crew. All debris was kept on site and the park staff is completing debris removal in preparation for restoring the 130 acres to native prairie.

MNFI identified the following occurrences of rare species at Fort Custer SRA:

- Downy sunflower (*Helianthus mollis*) – State threatened
- False boneset (*Kuhnia eupatorioides*) – State special concern
- Leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*) – State special concern
- Pale corydalis or Yellow fumewort (*Corydalis flavula*) – State threatened
- White false indigo (*Baptisia lactea*) – State special concern
- Large open-grown oaks (*Quercus* spp.)

- **Fauna** – Mammals commonly found at Fort Custer SRA (from the MNFI report) include white-tailed deer; gray, red, and fox squirrels; eastern chipmunk; eastern cottontail; and woodchuck. A variety of birds include downy woodpeckers; eastern wood-pewees; savanna sparrows; red-eyed vireos; black-capped chickadees; white-breasted nuthatches; northern cardinals; and red-tailed hawks frequent the park.

Reptiles commonly found at Fort Custer SRA include the eastern box turtle and common garter snake. Amphibians include a variety of frogs such as the green frog, the bullfrog, eastern gray treefrog and Blanchard's cricket frog.

Aquatic species vary with water body. Eagle, Whitford-Lawler, and Jackson Hole Lakes all contain bass, blue gill, crappie, pike, and channel catfish.

The Kalamazoo River is a warm water fishery. Species found in these waters include northern pike, large and small mouth bass, panfish, channel catfish, carp and suckers.

MNFI identified the following occurrences of rare species at Fort Custer SRA:

- American bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) – State special concern
- Blanchard's cricket frog (*Acris crepitans blanchardi*) – State special concern
- Cerulean warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*) – State special concern
- Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) – State special concern
- Eastern box turtle (*Terrapene carolina*) – State special concern
- Grasshopper sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – State special concern
- Henslow's sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*) – State threatened
- Louisiana waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*) – State special concern
- Prothonotary warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*) – State special concern
- Trumpeter swan (*Cygnus buccinator*) – State threatened

Additionally, MNFI does acknowledge that the following rare animal species could occur in the park:

- Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – State threatened
- Prairie vole (*Microtus ochrogaster*) – State endangered

## HISTORIC/CULTURAL RESOURCES

- **Physical Environment** – Territorial Road originated from an old Indian trail. As pioneers came to Michigan, the trail provided an east to west route. Lawler Cemetery, located off Territorial Road, was once owned by Frank W. Lawler and contains tombstones of some of the earliest state’s settlers. Over time the trail grew to become a stagecoach route between St. Louis and Detroit. Eventually, the area was farmed by settlers. The evidence of historic/cultural resources reflects this prominent agricultural use of the land.



- **Cultural Environment** – Camp Custer, a military training facility, was built in 1917 and used to demobilize and train over 100,000 men during World War I. The camp was named after General George Armstrong Custer, a Civil War legend and Michigan native. In 1929, Camp Custer was one of five Citizens’ Military Training Camps in the Great Lakes region. Men between the ages of 17 and 24 would enroll for a 30 day period and were “instructed in leadership, citizenship, sanitation, athletics and all subjects that a growing man should receive training in.” (Citizens Military Training Camps, History of Michigan Camps 1929) During this time the enrollment campaign was in full-force and was aided by groups such as the American Legion, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and C.M.T.C. committees from around the state.

Camp Custer 1928



MICHIGAN C. M. T. CAMPS

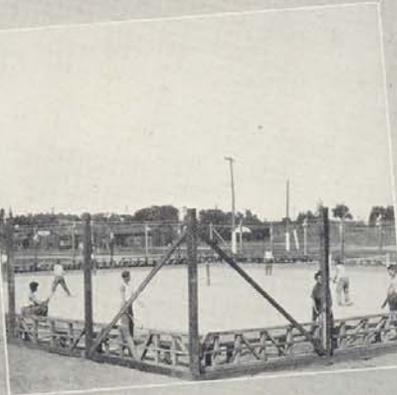
# History of Michigan Camps 1928



## BIG CAMP CUSTER THEATER BURNS UP

Battle Creek, Nov. 10.—A federal investigation into the cause of the destruction by fire of the Liberty theater building at Camp Custer last night loomed today. The structure, one of the largest frame buildings in southern Michigan, was built in 1917 at a cost of \$200,000.

The cause of the fire was not determined, but Capt. James N. Gray, in charge of the Camp Garrison, believed it to have been of incendiary origin. The blaze was discovered about 8:30 p. m. and appeared to have started beneath the stage. A water supply was available, but the small Camp Custer fire department was powerless to save the building. However, with the aid of soldiers and patients and attendants at the U. S. Veterans' bureau and American Legion hospitals, the department managed to keep the flames from spreading to the Hostess house and the camp exchange building.



Top, left to right—Writing Room, Hostess House; Movie Theatre  
Middle, left to right—Reading Room, Hostess House; Eagle Lake.  
Bottom, left to right—Arrival Trainees; Tennis Court.

Post World War I, the camp continued in training men for the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Officer Reserve Corps. Camp Custer became Fort Custer on August 17, 1940 when the training facility became permanent.

During World War II Fort Custer served many purposes. It held 5,000 German prisoners as a war camp until 1945. It also trained the legendary 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division which left for Normandy, France in June of 1944. During this time, Fort Custer trained over 300,000 troops.

In the early 1950's, Fort Custer prepared 17,000 troops for the Korean War. Then in 1959 Fort Custer came to include the North American Air Defense System. A decade later, Fort Custer was taken over by the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Currently, the area is state operated and federally owned. In early September of 2005, approximately 330 evacuees of New Orleans' Hurricane Katrina were housed at the training center.



In 1971, part of the Fort Custer Training land was gifted to the State of Michigan. On August 16<sup>th</sup>, Mrs. Richard Nixon, under President Nixon's Legacy of Parks program, dedicated the land as a State Recreation Area. In 1973, more land was added with the addition of the northeast corner of the park. Present day, the DNR and Fort Custer Training Center have a co-management relationship with both natural resources and military usage within the park. The Training Center holds 7,570 acres and the State owns 3,033, totaling over 10,000 acres in public ownership.

- **Archaeological Resources** – Once a stagecoach route and a farming community, Fort Custer SRA has numerous building foundations and open wells scattered through the park.
- **Buildings And Structures** – The most visibly obvious structure left in the park today is remnants of a barn and silo that can be seen off the “Blue Loop” hiking trail just south of Whitford-Lawler Lake. Although, a numerable amount of building foundations are scattered amongst the park. Once acquiring this land the State disposed of fourteen buildings, which



included houses, out-buildings of stone, shingle, and wood frame, woodsheds, garages and chicken coops.

- **Historic Landscape** – Between 8,000 and 4,000 years ago the area now known as Fort Custer SRA was a developing prairie community. The Coquaiack Prairie was maintained by Native Americans and the use of fire as a management tool. Early settlers of the land converted areas of wetland, forest communities and prairie to agriculture through grazing, orchards, and grain fields. These areas are now overgrown by a variety of forest communities.



## EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

- **'Kids In Park' Program** - This statewide program is available at all state parks in Michigan. It offers 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers the park as an outdoor classroom in support of the Department's popular L.A.P.'s program. As of date, no local schools have participated in this program at Fort Custer RA.
- **Interpretive Programming And Displays** – Fort Custer RA is one of 40 parks in Michigan where the "State Park Explorer Program" is an active part of the educational experience. At the park, the Explorer Guide conducts outdoor classroom sessions, and has focused on general natural resource education as the key element of those learning experiences. The Department's "Fishing in the Park" program is also run by Explorer Guides, and is a very popular activity for park visitors.

Interpretive signage can be seen at various locations in the park describing the successful prairie restoration program.

- **Volunteer Programs** – Fort Custer RA is popular with the 'Campground Host Program' whereby volunteers, often retirees, stay at a campground and provide visitor services for the campers. They greet campers, provide information on campground rules and regulations, promote educational and interpretive opportunities in the park, and offer a social gathering (coffee hour) once a week.

The State Park Stewardship Program and volunteers hand collect native prairie seed such as big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass, and wildflowers. They meet in the month of October for collection to later plant and restore native ecosystems.

'Friends of Fort Custer' is very active multi-user group within the park. Horse Friends of Fort Custer, Mid-Union Sled Haulers (M.U.S.H) and Michigan Mountain Bike Association Southwest Chapter work together in maintenance of the trail system, where 25 miles of trail are shared by the hikers. They are a part of the "Adopt-a-Park Program".

Fort Custer SRA benefits from volunteer activities for park clean-up days or special projects from Boy Scout troops, interested individuals, and court workers (as a 'Community Service' requirement placed on local offenders by the court system).

## RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

- **Developed Opportunities** – Fort Custer SRA offers a diverse array of recreational opportunities through both day-use activities and camping. Following are the recreational features of this park:

- **Camping** – There are a variety of campground facilities at the park. The modern campground is divided into two loops. Each loop is served by a flush-type toilet/shower building. All 219 sites in the campground have an electrical pedestal, fire ring, picnic table, and access to water. There are eight ADA approved camping sites available.

Fort Custer SRA offers two mini-cabins. The mini-cabins accommodate four people each and contain electricity, heaters, two sets of bunk beds, a table and chairs. Picnic table and fire rings are located outside the mini-cabin.



Three rustic cabins are available in more remote areas of the park. They have a capacity of six to 12 people. One cabin sits on the banks of the Kalamazoo River while the other two are located just east of Whitford-Lawler Lake.



There are two 'Organization' Campgrounds at Fort Custer SRA. The first is located southwest of the boat ramp area near the Kalamazoo River and the second is between Whitford-Lawler Lake and Jackson Lake. It is used for group camping and events.

- Day-use Picnic Areas and Shelters – There are several picnic areas available for public use and enjoyment in the park.
  - The “Whitford-Lawler Picnic Shelter” is located along the western portion of Whitford-Lawler Lake, near the parking facility. This area offers a group picnicking site, open space area and pit toilets. Nearby is main access to the “Blue Loop” trail, an ADA fishing pier, and bird watching opportunities.
  - The “Hilltop Picnic Shelter” is located near the north lot parking area of Eagle Lake. This area offers a group picnicking area and a scenic overlook to Eagle Lake
  - The “Eagle Prairie Picnic Shelter” is located just south of the “Hilltop Picnic Shelter” and offers picnicking, as well as access to the concession area, beach house, and swimming area.



- Boating - Eagle Lake is a 270 acre lake with a public beach and boating access site with a barrier free dock. Whitford-Lawler Lake is 54 acres and Jackson Hole is 57 acres. Both lakes have boating access sites and concrete ramps. There is also a boat launching site on the western boundary of the park along the Kalamazoo River. All boat ramps are hard surfaced ramps, in areas of limited water depth or limited size of water body, where launching and retrieving large boats may be difficult and not recommended.

There are watercraft controls on these lakes. By the Department of Natural Resource’s Directors’ Land Use Order 5.4c, you cannot “operate a vessel in excess of a slow, no-wake speed.”

- Fishing – Fishing access to Whitford-Lawler Lake, Jackson Lake, and Eagle Lake is by boat, from a pier, or by dispersed access along the shore. Whitford-Lawler Lake also provides a universally accessible fishing pier. The three lakes offer bass, blue gill, crappie, pike, and channel catfish. The lakes are currently not stocked by the DNR, although the Fisheries Division is considering making Eagle Lake a managed fishery.

The Kalamazoo River offers warm water fishing opportunities for northern pike, large and small mouth bass, channel catfish, sucker, carp, and panfish. The Kalamazoo River from Battle Creek to

Morrow Pond Dam has restrictions on eating carp, channel catfish, and smallmouth bass due to PCB contamination.



- Trails – There are five defined trail systems in the park which progress through a variety of landscapes. Three of the four trails begin at the trailhead parking area, west of Eagle Lake. The trails are open to all users. Refer to pages 59 and 60 for maps of the multi-use trail system. Following are descriptions of these trails:
  - The “Green Loop” trail circles Eagle Lake and is slightly less than eight miles. It has 14 trail markers along the path. The trail begins at the trailhead parking area. Friends of Fort Custer have rated this trail as “moderately difficult.”
  - The “Red Loop” trail also offers just less than eight miles of path but is rated “difficult” by Friends of Fort Custer. The trail has 17 markers to identify the path and is located in the south-central area of Fort Custer SRA.
  - The “Yellow Loop” has been designated as the easiest trail and stretches just over eight miles. There are 20 trail markers on the path and has several areas where the user has the choice to return to the trailhead if needed. The trail is located in the south-central area of the park and is a less difficult version of the “Red Loop.”
  - The “Blue Loop” trail is a series of two interconnected trails that loop around Whitford-Lawler and Jackson Hole Lake, and connect between the two. This trail does not start at the trailhead area, but at the Whitford-Lawler parking area. This trail can be easily accessed near the campground.

- **Dispersed Recreation Opportunities**

- Snowmobiling – Currently, snowmobiling is allowed in the park when there is four or more inches of snow on the ground. The Planning Team is recommending a change to snowmobiling on designated trails only.
- Hunting and Trapping – During the fall and winter seasons, from September 15 to March 31, Fort Custer SRA is open for hunting. Small game hunting is primarily for rabbit and squirrel, and large game for deer. Trapping also occurs at the park, with excellent opportunities for muskrat near Whitford-Lawler Lake. Early goose season is allowed within the park. Turkey hunting at Fort Custer RA is during the last two weeks of April and all the month of May. November 15 to December 1 a portion of the park is closed to taking an animal with a firearm. This area in the northern portion of Fort Custer SRA surrounding the gated antennae field. Other areas closed to hunting are those around the campground, cabins, and park headquarters. (Wildlife Conservation Act 7.60)

- **Areas Of Conflict** – With diverse use for multiple interests comes the potential for conflict between users and/or between users and the natural resource or historic/cultural values of the park. Fort Custer SRA is no exception. Following are the identified conflict issues for this park:

- Consumption of Alcohol – From April 1 to Labor Day, the possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages within the entire park is banned. Special permission may be granted for group events, by application only, within day use areas by the park manager. (DNR Land Use Order 5.2a)
- Trail Conflicts – Approximately 25 miles of trail are open to all user groups without restrictions. The trails have a limited use of signage that can cause some confusion between users concerning issues such as designated trail direction and yielding courtesies. There is only one developed trailhead access site at Fort Custer SRA. Because the trails are an extremely popular activity at the park, high user density and limited parking area can create conflicts between various users in this area.
- Hunter Conflicts – Hunting is permitted in the park during fall and winter seasons. The possibility for conflict arises within safety zones of the park where hunting is not permitted within 150 yards (450') of an occupied building, house or cabin. Another possibility for conflict arises when injured animals enter the fenced antennae

zone. Conflict occurs when the hunter desires to retrieve the animal from that area, which is not permissible.

Because the trails remain open during hunting season, there is also conflict between hunters and other recreationists using those trails. Safety is a consideration.

Lastly, conflicts can occur because of dissimilar dog rules. Under normal operating rules dogs are allowed on a leash which doesn't exceed six feet in length and are not allowed on the beach. Yet when the park is open to hunting game, when a valid hunting license is possessed, the dog is allowed off-leash and is permitted on Eagle Lake beach. (Wildlife Conservation Order, Chapter 6)

- Snowmobile Conflicts – Currently, snowmobiling is permitted in all areas within the park with four inches of snow or more. This creates conflict between the snowmobile user and natural resources within the park. With increased efforts toward prairie restoration, as well as being home to many sensitive species, snowmobiling could directly and indirectly harm sensitive areas. There is also the possibility for conflict between snowmobilers and other trail users caused by an undetermined speed limit, blind corners on the trail that make it difficult to view other recreationists, excessive noise and physical damage caused to trails.

## **PARK USE STATISTICS AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS** (based on 2004 data)

- Park Use – Fort Custer RA is within one hour's drive of greater metropolitan Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Jackson, and 13.6% of the population of Michigan. That proximity helps to account for why more than 526,135 people visited the park in 2004. Of these, 15% were campers and 85% were day-users. Total revenues (Motor Vehicle Permits and Camping Fees) generated by the park in 2004 exceeded \$321,600.

Characterization of park use is described as follows: (based on 2004 MDNR-Park Attendance Statistics)

- Peak-Use Season – While the park shows strong visitor use all throughout the year, the highest use period occurs from the months of May to October. During this time, Fort Custer RA averaged 75,000 visitors per month for six months.

- Moderate-Use Season – April and November show less use, while winter use from December to March average 15,000 visitors per month. A steady attendance during the winter months illustrates the popularity of trail use at Fort Custer RA.

From “MI CRS Statistics 2004” report by Spherix, the state contractor that administers the Campground Reservation System (CRS), Fort Custer RA was the second ranking park (out of five) in the Mid-Michigan Region of Michigan with 7,194 campground reservations in 2004. Yankee Springs RA was first of the five parks in the region with 7,208 and Newaygo SP was lowest with 2,273.

From the same source, the following statistics (2004 data) are attributable to Fort Custer Recreation Area:

- Nearly 9% of campground use is from locations within one hour of Fort Custer RA. The majority of these come from Kalamazoo, Portage and Grand Rapids. Surprisingly, Battle Creek residents, only a few miles away, do not rank in the top 10 campground use.
- Fort Custer RA ranked #33 of all state parks for gross revenue from camping. Of the \$321,626 generated by camping in 2004, \$297,812 came from the Modern Campground, \$11,393 from the ADA Campground Sites, \$10,185 from the Mini Cabins, and \$2,236 from the Organization Camp.
- The average amount paid per reservation at Fort Custer RA was \$56.28, similar to the same as the state average of \$56.60. The highest amount paid per reservation in the state system was \$105.55 at Grand Haven SP on Lake Michigan, and the lowest paid per reservation was \$22.19 at Fisherman’s Island SP.
- The average number of people per reservation was 2.69, slightly less than the state average of 2.83.
- The average length of stay was 2.28 days, which is below the state average of 2.44 days. Parks in the system that exceed this number are the Lake Michigan beach parks and very few others.

- **Economic Impacts** - Michigan State University (Dr. Dan Stynes) developed an economic analysis model known as “MGM2”. This model is an update of the MGM model developed by Dr. Ken Hornback for the National Park System in 1995. The purpose of the updated MGM2 model is to estimate the impact of park visitor spending on the local economy. These economic impacts are reflected in terms of sales, income, employment, and value added.

This analysis tool, like others, relies on three primary factors in the common equation:

Economic Impact of Tourism Spending = Number of Tourists (x)  
Average Spending per Visitor (x) Multiplier (to estimate extended effects of direct spending).

For our purposes of conducting a very basic review of impacts, we have utilized the “MGM2-Short Form” version of the program, which simplifies the extent of analysis required for input, and utilizes more generalized multipliers for spending outputs. For the non-economist, this provides an excellent tool for this desired baseline assessment of the economic impacts of our parks.

Economic impacts of Fort Custer RA to the local community are significant. Kalamazoo County is a high density county, with 424.7 persons per square mile versus a statewide density of 175 persons per square mile (2000 data).

Kalamazoo County is a mixed land use of agricultural in the outlying areas of the county and industrial/commercial uses in the areas in and surrounding the major population center of Kalamazoo.

Following are the relative economic impacts (based on 2004 data) of Fort Custer RA to the economy of Kalamazoo County:

- **Direct Economic Effects To The Community**
  - Direct spending attributable to Fort Custer RA visitors totaled \$7,951,000, of which \$4,388,000 came from Day-Use, and \$3,562,000 from Camping.
  - Jobs totaled 210, with 116 related to Day-Use activity and 94 to Camping. (Note...jobs are not full-time equivalent. They include part-time and seasonal positions.)
  - Personal Income total is \$2,760,000, with \$1,523,000 associated with Day-Use of the park and \$1,236,000 associated with Camping.

- Value added (total income plus business taxes) totaled \$4,182,000. Day-Use accounted for \$2,308,000 and Camping accounted for \$1,873,000.
- **Total Economic Effects To The Community** (NOTE...this reflects ‘Direct Effects’ plus the ‘Secondary Effects’ of visitor spending on the local economy. Secondary Effects (sometimes called ‘Multiplier Effects’) capture economic activity that results from the re-circulation of money spent by the park visitors in the community.
  - Total spending = \$11,476,000 (44% over direct spending)
  - Jobs = 263 (25% over direct job impacts)
  - Personal Income = \$4,033,000 (46% over direct spending)
  - Value added = \$6,382,000 (52% over direct value added)

For purposes of updating economic values, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) is often used to adjust values over time. At the following site, <http://www.bls.gov/home.htm> a CPI Inflation Calculator is located in the category of “Inflation and Consumer Spending”.

## STAKEHOLDER INPUT

- **DNR Programs** – Fort Custer RA maintains a relationship of cooperative management with other Department programs.

The Forest, Mineral, and Fire Management Division (FMFM) administers prescribed burns at Fort Custer RA. Ecologists evaluate possible sites and prepare an ecological prescription for FMFM. The fires are coordinated and monitored by trained officers who follow a burn plan. The prairie restoration program, which is conducted by Stewardship, is dependent on fire to maintain the natural ecosystem. Fort Custer is one of nine parks that participate in prescribed burns.

Wildlife Division oversees sharecropping in the southwest corner of the park. They have indicated that this management regime will be phased out in the near future.

The Fisheries Division does not currently work with the park, but there is potential for future management of Eagle Lake.



Another DNR program with a stake at Fort Custer RA is 'Office Of Communication.' Fort Custer is one of many parks where an "Explorer Guide" is located. This person conducts educational programming for park visitors, tailored to the unique resources of the park.

The Office of Land and Facilities (O.L.A.F.) is responsible for all land ownership records on DNR land, as well as land transactions. If the DNR were ever to acquire additional land from the adjacent Training Center, O.L.A.F. would coordinate all activities related to the acquisition of that land.

Finally, the Law Division provides enforcement of state law and Natural Resource regulations on the park property.

- **Federal Agencies** – There are Federal Agencies that serve as stakeholders to Fort Custer Recreation Area.
  - Fort Custer National Cemetery – The national veteran's cemetery entrance is within short distance of Fort Custer RA and serves as a stakeholder.



- The Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Defense – These agencies are concerned with "Formerly Used Defense Sites" (F.U.D.S.) on park property.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – FEMA serves as an active stakeholder owning and managing the fenced antennae field in the northern portion of the park.
- **Local Agency Programs** – There are several local agencies within the surrounding area that serve as stakeholders.
  - The Galesburg-Charleston Township Fire Department – The agency serves as first responders to the park.
  - Local Law Enforcing Agencies – Two departments which enforce laws in and around the park are the Augusta Police Department and the Kalamazoo City Sheriffs Department.

- The Kalamazoo County Human Services Department – Conducts tests for water quality at Eagle Lake beach.
- The Kalamazoo County Parks and Recreation Department – Their close proximity to the park and shared public causes Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation to be a stakeholder at Fort Custer SRA.
- **Other State Agencies** – Fort Custer Training Center is managed by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The Training Center’s adjacent location to the park, as well as the State Recreation Areas desire to acquire their land if it ever becomes available, makes their input significant to the park. There are also cooperative efforts with Military Affairs for stewardship activities (sharing seed, etc.).

Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is responsible for maintaining Dickman Road (M-96), the northern boundary of the park.

Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) is responsible for campground permits and dam inspections.

- **Private Sector** – All adjoining property owners are categorically a stakeholder. Additionally, local business interests in the village of Augusta, Battle Creek and Kalamazoo are as well. Park users don’t spend their money just at the park. A significant amount of commerce takes place at local stores, restaurants and lodging locations.
- **Sporting Clubs** – The following clubs or associations are very active in the park:
  - Friends of Fort Custer – This group is a loose association of recreationists who work together to reduce conflict and increase enjoyment between user groups. Groups representing Friends of Fort Custer include: mountain bikers, cross country skiers, equestrians, dog mushers, hikers, hunters, campers, and any other park user that would like to participate.
  - Mid-Union Sled Haulers (M.U.S.H.) – Formed in 1980 as a group of amateur dog-sledders in the Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana region. M.U.S.H. is a member of Friends of Fort Custer and schedules multiple organized races each winter.
  - Fort Custer Horse Friends Association – This group is a segment of Friends of Fort Custer RA and works with MMBA to maintain trails and resolve conflict.

- Michigan Mountain Biking Association (MMBA) – The Southwest Chapter of MMBA is responsible for organizing trail workdays in the park. They also plan organized bike rides and are an active group in Friends of Fort Custer.
- Northside Snowmobile Club – During the winter months, the Snowmobile Club uses the park.
- **Special Interests** – The following groups have an interest in the use of Fort Custer RA:
  - Chief Noonday Chapter– The North Country Trail Association hiking group from southwest Michigan.
  - Southwest Michigan Amateur Space Hobbies (S.M.A.S.H.) – Local model rocket users who would like to use the backcountry zone to retrieve model rockets.
  - Thunderbirds – A local remote control airplane group who would like to fly their remote controlled airplanes in the park.
  - Friends of the Kalamazoo River Trailway – Would like to connect Fort Custer from Battle Creek to Kal-Haven Trail.
- **Public** – Many of the 520,815 +/- park visitors who come to Fort Custer RA each year are repeat customers. This is true system wide. From the Public Policy Associates 1997 “Michigan State Parks Study”, 80% to 89% of visitors to State Parks in Southern Michigan are “Likely” to return to the park within twelve months. From the same study, the likelihood of a park visitor ‘recommending’ a particular park to others was also high in Southern Michigan, with a range of 85% to 88% saying that they would recommend visiting the park.

# PLANNING OVERVIEW

## Meetings:

- April 5, 2005 Start-up meeting with park staff
- May 18, 2005 Planning team meeting
- July 19, 2005 Planning team meeting
- October 6, 2005 Stakeholder meeting
- November 17, 2005 Stakeholder meeting
- January 11, 2006 Public Input meeting

## Plan Reviews:

- PRD - Section Chiefs
- PRD – Management Team
- SLP – Ecoteam
- Citizen’s Committee for Michigan State Parks