

CHAPTER 1: MICHIGAN'S PUBLIC LAND BASE AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

Michigan's ten million residents and millions more visitors are blessed by the state's significant outdoor recreation resources and opportunities. Outdoor recreation provides an improved quality of life, economic opportunity and an abiding respect for the natural resources that sustain life on earth.

Michigan's Land and Water Resources

Michigan's 36 million plus acres of land and a significant share of the Great Lakes provide a wide range of environmental, commercial and recreational benefits. Michigan's water-related resources include:

- 3,288 miles of Great Lakes shoreline
- 38,000 square miles of Great Lakes waters
- 11,000 inland lakes
- 36,000 miles of rivers and streams
- 75,000 acres of sand dunes
- 5.5 million acres of wetlands

Michigan's land base is 53 percent forest, about a quarter in agricultural crops and other uses connected with agriculture, 13 percent in other vegetation or non-forested inland wetlands and almost 10 percent is built environment. The built environment is predicted to significantly expand over the next four decades, while all other uses are expected to substantially decline. Based on current rates of population growth and development, the built environment is now expanding at a rate eight times faster than the population (Public Sector Consultants 2001).



Michigan's public land base and outdoor recreation supply is divided into three sections: local, state and federal resources.

LOCAL RESOURCES

While local government has the smallest proportion (less than three percent of Michigan's public land base of 7.7 million acres, local parkland is extraordinarily valuable. Often it is located near major population centers, allowing easy and convenient access for many types of outdoor recreation by the full range of Michigan's population. Michigan's local government supply of outdoor recreation resources was assessed through examination of all local unit park and recreation comprehensive plans on file with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. This follows a baseline study in 2003 (Nelson et al. 2003). Please see Chapter 4 on local recreation planning for a detailed analysis of these plans.

STATE RESOURCES

Michigan has an extensive public outdoor recreation land base and infrastructure. State land ownership is approximately 4.5 million acres (12 percent of the state) with the majority (3.9 million acres) being state forests. Maps of the state's public recreation land base, including state parks, forests and wildlife areas, can be found in Appendix E.

State Forests

The six state forests accommodate dispersed recreational activities (e.g. hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, dispersed camping and picking wild edibles) and moderately developed recreational activities (e.g. hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, off-road vehicle riding, state forest campground camping, mountain biking and equestrian use). In terms of recreation facilities, they tend to be rustic. The state forests provide 138 developed state forest campgrounds with almost 3,000 campsites. In addition, there are 116 developed boating access sites, an additional 485 undeveloped water access sites and 880 miles of non-motorized state forest pathways for hiking, cross-country skiing, bicycling and equestrian use.

In conjunction with other providers, the state forests are the hub for Michigan's motorized trail system of 6,216 miles of designated snowmobile trail and 3,193 miles of designated off-road vehicle (ORV) trail. Of the ORV trail miles, 40 percent have a tread way 18-24 inches for motorcycle- only use, 43 percent have a tread way approximately 50 inches for motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle use and 17 percent have a tread way at least 72 inches for use by motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and larger off-road vehicles such as four-wheel drive trucks, dune buggies, etc.

One important type of trails, rail-trails, is being developed from legally abandoned railroad corridors. In 2006, the State of Michigan had 1,145 miles of rail-trail with 845 managed by the DNR Forest, Mineral and Fire Management Division, 198 managed by the DNR Parks and Recreation Division and 163 managed by local units of government and nonprofit organizations. Depending on the management regime, regulations, surfacing, etc. these rail-trails provide non-motorized and may provide motorized trail opportunity.

The state forests also provide the largest single ownership public land base for outdoor recreation east of the Mississippi River. The Michigan Forest Recreation Act of 1998 mandates that Michigan state forests provide an integrated forest recreation system while remaining working, multiple-use forests providing for wood, habitat, energy, recreational and environmental needs. The state forests are located in the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula.

In 2006, a draft 2006 State Forest Management Plan was developed and is currently out for public review at:

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-30301_30505_30506-144977--,00.html.

The plan details Michigan's state forest system, including its timber, recreation and other resources and charts a course for the future that highlights the use of best management practices. The purpose is to ensure sustainable forest management. This planning effort is one of the many steps that led to Michigan's state forest system being certified in 2006 under the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (two independent forest certification organizations) as practicing sustainable forestry.

The Forest Management Advisory Committee is a 19-member committee appointed by the DNR director. It includes those in the forest products industry, other public and private land managers, outdoor recreation interests, environmental interests and university representation. The committee assists the DNR in balancing environmental, social and economic issues regarding forest management. In addition, the ORV Advisory Committee, the Snowmobile Advisory Committee and the Pigeon River Country Advisory Committee provide important input on outdoor recreation within their purview.

State Game and Wildlife Areas

The state game system includes 66 state game areas, 6 wildlife areas and 4 wildlife research areas. It is approximately 340,000 acres. State game and wildlife areas are mostly located in the southern Lower Peninsula, close to 85 percent of the state's population. This makes them highly popular with a wide variety of recreationists and all who appreciate undeveloped land near urban centers. This also makes these areas vulnerable to outside development pressures impacting the resource quality and recreational opportunity inside game area boundaries. For example, hunting is restricted by a safety zone with a radius of 450 feet around any structure on adjacent private lands. Hence one acre of private lands (an inholding) in a state game area may remove up to 16 acres of public land from public hunting recreation. Acquisition of such inholdings provides additional habitat protection and DNR management authority and also protects outdoor recreation opportunities already purchased in existing state-owned lands within the game or wildlife areas dedicated boundaries. The same challenge holds true for all other public lands where there is public hunting opportunity. In Michigan, taking into account public hunting available in state forests, federal lands, state park and recreation areas, state game and wildlife areas and Commercial Forest Act lands, you are never more than 30 minutes from a public hunting opportunity.

State Park and Recreation Areas

There are 80 state parks and 18 recreation areas consisting of more than 270,000 acres. The 17 recreation areas encompass 84,070 acres and are distinguished from state parks in that they are open to hunting unless posted closed, whereas state parks are closed to hunting unless posted open. State recreation areas have typically used funds generated by hunters to acquire some proportion of the property. In some cases there are specific memorandums of understanding between DNR Park and Recreation Division and the DNR Wildlife Division about the management of the recreation area. In other instances, management coordination tends to be more informal. The state park and recreation area system provides almost 100 boat launches, 880 miles of non-motorized trails and over 12,000 mostly modern campsites. Eight have major interpretive facilities and almost half have a seasonal interpretation program that highlights park area resources, activities, culture and history. Three parks in the Upper Peninsula, Porcupine Mountains, Tahquamenon Falls and Craig Lake, focus on preserving wilderness resources and fostering wilderness recreation. The Mackinac Island State Park Commission (part of the Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries) operates three

major parks with a focus on the Straits of Mackinac's natural and cultural resources. This includes operating what was the nation's second national park (1875-1895) on Mackinac Island. You are never more than an hour from a state park or recreation area in Michigan.

In 2004, the Citizens Committee on Michigan State Parks was created by statute to provide regular citizen input on state park matters for the DNR. The committee includes representatives of tourism, outdoor recreation, cultural/historical and university interests and is appointed by the DNR director.

State Boating Access Sites and Harbors of Refuge

The state also owns and manages 57,000 acres of designated public water access sites and boating access sites. This acreage includes 746 state operated developed boat launches (under the auspices of DNR Parks and Recreation Division, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management Division and Wildlife Division) and 16 harbors of refuge on the Great Lakes. In addition, local units of government, partially through the Waterways grants-in-aid program for capital improvements, provide and operate 278 public boat launches and 61 harbors of refuge. Harbors of refuge are located approximately 30 miles apart on Michigan's Great Lakes shoreline, providing refuge for boaters during dangerous weather/water conditions, services such as fuel, and convenient access to the Great Lakes for larger craft.

The Waterways Commission is responsible for the acquisition, construction and maintenance of recreational harbors, channels, and docking and launching facilities. In addition, they administer the commercial docks in the Straits of Mackinac. Commission members are appointed by the governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Underwater Preserves

There are 11 Michigan Underwater Preserves under the Great Lakes that were established under the authority of Michigan Public Act 451 of 1994 as amended Part 761. The preserves encompass 2,450 square miles of Great Lakes bottomlands. In addition, the National Park Service manages bottomlands near Isle Royale National Park. In 2000, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the state of Michigan partnered together to establish and administer the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary and Underwater Preserve. It is the only National Marine Sanctuary in the Great Lakes and includes Michigan's Thunder Bay Underwater Preserve. Within the confines of these areas, approximately 150 shipwrecks have been discovered and another 300 are suspected to exist. A maritime museum/interpretive center is located in a nearby coastal community for 10 of the 11 Michigan preserves and is typically operated by a community-based organization (Vrana 2002).

FEDERAL RESOURCES

There are three million acres (eight percent of Michigan's land mass) in federal ownership open to outdoor recreation. The largest ownership (2.7 million acres) is in the four national forests; Ottawa and Hiawatha in the Upper Peninsula and Huron and Manistee in the northern Lower Peninsula. National forest recreation activities include camping; trail-based recreation; and dispersed activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and picking edibles.

The National Park Service (<http://www.nps.gov/state/mi>) manages six units in the state. These include Isle Royale National Park (the largest unit) which is located on an archipelago of 400 islands 50 miles north of the Keweenaw Peninsula in Lake Superior; Two national lakeshores, Pictured Rocks and Sleeping Bear Dunes; the Keweenaw National Historic Park that commemorates the copper mining era in the Upper Peninsula; the new Motor Cities Heritage

Area; and the North Country National Scenic Trail which has a total of 748 miles that are hikeable, certified and located off the designated road system.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service operates three major refuges. These include the Seney National Refuge in the Upper Peninsula, the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge near Saginaw, and the Detroit River International National Wildlife Refuge along the Detroit River and western Lake Erie basin. Each is primarily focused on wetland habitats that serve migratory birds as well as a host of other wetland dependent plant and animal species. The Service also manages many islands in the Great Lakes for colonial nesting birds and shorebirds within the Michigan Islands National Wildlife Refuge and the Harbor Island National Wildlife Refuge (<http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>).

SUMMARIES

Supply Summary

1. Michigan has a substantial public outdoor recreation land base at the state, federal and local level. However, with that land base come significant challenges. One is that much of the infrastructure that supports outdoor recreation is aging and in need of substantial renovation to meet safety and security needs, universal access, greater longevity with reduced maintenance and flexibility to adapt to future shifts in outdoor recreation demand. Much of this infrastructure also is not energy efficient.
2. Although there is a substantial public estate for outdoor recreation, land fragmentation, especially as manifested by development of in-holdings within dedicated public land management and acquisition boundaries, threatens outdoor recreation opportunities on public land investments. Fragmentation also threatens the integrity of natural resources that support outdoor recreation. Acquisition, either by fee simple or less than fee simple is an important tool in protecting existing public lands for recreation and habitat, and acquiring additional targeted public recreation land assets.
3. The supply of recreational lands and facilities is not always readily accessible for much of the state's population and visitors, with the majority of public land in the northern two-thirds of the state where 15 percent of the population reside. However, restoration of urban environments coupled with development/renovation of outdoor recreation facilities in or near population centers is feasible and can provide significant outdoor recreation opportunities for the majority of the state's population. Land acquisition by local and state agencies in and near urban areas also provides increasingly valued islands of green space. Linking such islands together with greenways and blueways provides outdoor recreation opportunity as well as ecologically important corridors and connectors for a host of plant and animal species.

Demand Summary

1. Demand for land and water trail recreation, motorized and non-motorized, appears to be increasing. This suggests a need to better link existing trail systems. It also suggests integrating trail systems with goods, services and key destinations in ways that promote social harmony through walkable communities and rail-trails for motorized users that allow safe, non-disruptive access to businesses while not using surface streets, thereby promoting safety. Finally, properly integrating trail corridors, as part of greenways and green space, are critical to strategies to help protect sensitive environments such as floodplains and wetlands by appropriate facility location and through design and educational efforts.
2. Outdoor recreation activities – hunting, fishing and trapping -- that closely link with the earliest survival and recreation traditions of our country have declined over the past 20

years. In 2006, hunting and trapping showed a moderate increase while fishing remained steady. It is critical that we provide opportunities for those in urban environments to have the opportunity to understand and participate in these activities. It is also critical that we provide information about the location of the supply of hunting and fishing opportunities, especially to new participants and visitors to Michigan.

3. Outdoor athletic activities continue to be popular, even as tastes shift among activities. Designing flexibility and multiple team sport uses into public outdoor athletic sport complexes will broaden the clientele served and lengthen the useful life of these facilities.
4. Better assessing demand for and participation in the range of outdoor recreation activities on a predictable, systematic basis could improve planning processes. This is especially imperative for activities where participants do not register, purchase a license or obtain a permit, as often no baseline estimate of participation is available.
5. Population shifts to suburbs and northern Lower Michigan will increase demand for outdoor recreation facilities in these areas. However, urban environments, often with aging facilities, are also in need of facility renovation and new facilities and may struggle with stagnant tax bases.

