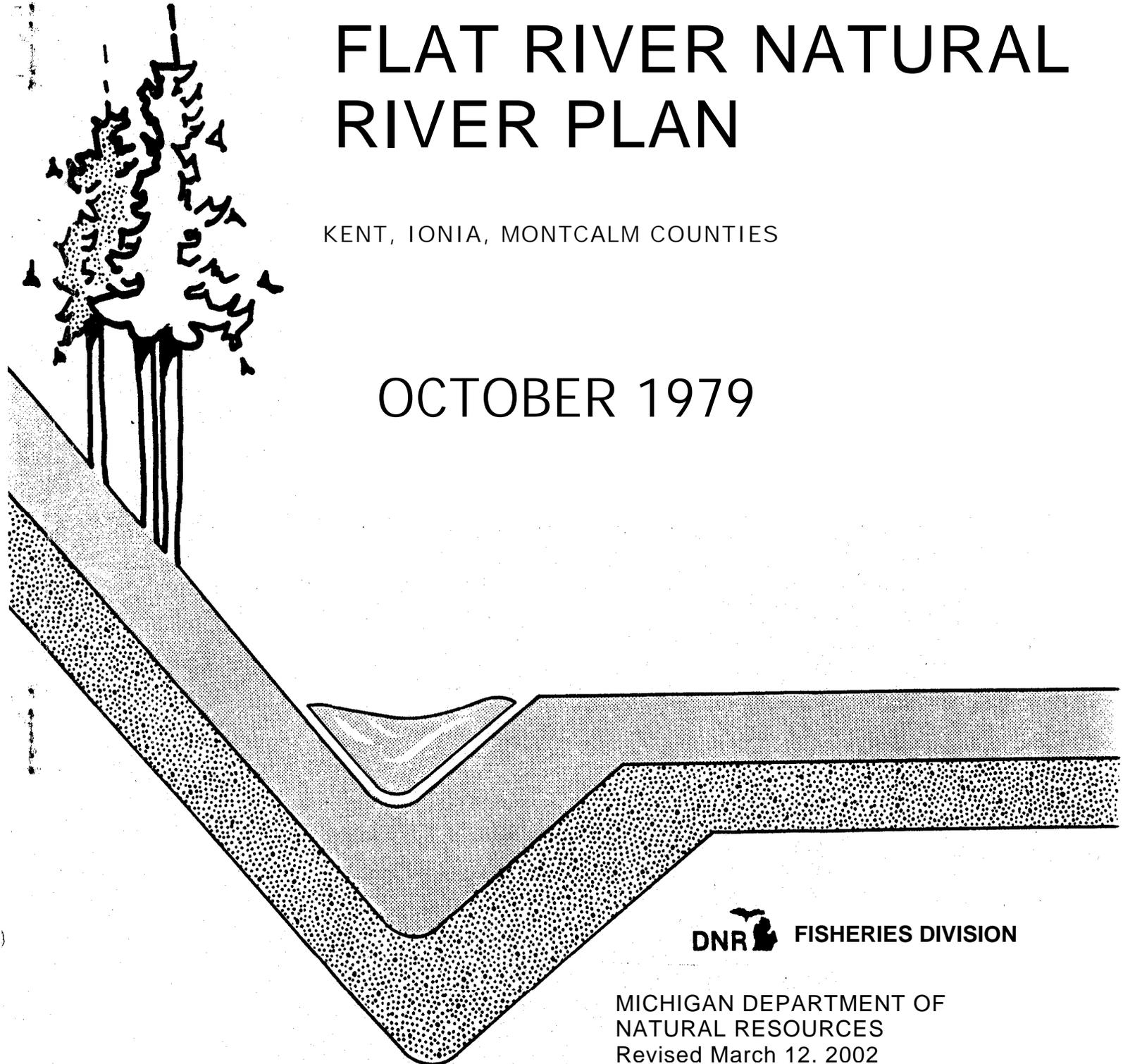


# FLAT RIVER NATURAL RIVER PLAN

KENT, IONIA, MONTCALM COUNTIES

OCTOBER 1979



**DNR**  **FISHERIES DIVISION**

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
Revised March 12, 2002



FLAT RIVER  
NATURAL RIVER PLAN

At its November 9, 1979 meeting, the  
Natural Resources Commission  
Formally adopted this plan and designated the Flat River as a  
country-scenic river under authority  
of Act 231 of the Public Acts of 1970

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## PREFACE

The Flat River is rich in historical values, has an excellent smallmouth bass fishery, and is generally considered one of the most scenic streams in southern Michigan. In addition to being an important element in both Indian and lumbering history, the river boasts two of the remaining four original wooden covered bridges in Michigan. The oldest, White's Bridge near Smyrna, was built in 1867. Both White's Bridge and Fallasburg Bridge are on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

For these values, the Flat River was included on the list of streams for study under the Michigan Natural River Act (Part 305, P.A. 451 of 1994). Staff recruited and began organization of a local Flat River Planning Committee during the fall of 1975. While there was general support for protection of the values of the Flat River, it soon became evident many citizens were concerned with the state's involvement in this matter.

At the meeting of the Natural Resources Commission on February 12, 1976, a delegation of citizens and representatives of local government from Ionia, Kent and Montcalm counties asked the Commission to discontinue its study and possible designation of the Flat River under the Natural River Act, and allow them the opportunity to protect the river solely through local ordinances without state assistance or intervention.

The Commission discussed the matter thoroughly at their March 25, 1976 "Philosophical" meeting. The general consensus was that local units of government be given the opportunity to prove their sincerity for protection of the natural qualities of the Flat River system.

The Commission adopted a resolution at the April 9, 1976 meeting, encouraging local units of government to prepare a management plan for the protection of the Flat River and present it to the Commission for review by October 15, 1976. The plan was developed under general Department of Natural Resources guidelines and included a method of implementation.

At its December 10, 1976 meeting, the Natural Resources Commission formally adopted a resolution tentatively approving the amended management controls for protection of the Flat River through local zoning without designation under Act 231, P.A. 1970, and subject to a one year timetable for local zoning to be in effect.

The resolution also asked that local units of government submit to the Natural Resources Commission by April 1, 1977 resolutions indicating acceptance of and assuring compliance with the amended management controls. To date, the Department has received resolutions of acceptance of the suggested management controls from the nine involved townships.

Copies of the Natural Resources Commission resolutions and management guidelines are included as appendices to this report.

The Natural Resources Commission originally gave the townships one-year, until December 15, 1977, to have in place effective zoning to implement the local plan. This deadline was subsequently extended to August 1978. By that date, only six of the nine townships along the river had adopted proper zoning. Upon direction of the Natural Resources Commission, staff of the Department of Natural Resources has prepared this Flat River Natural River Plan.

This plan recommends that the Flat River and its most significant tributaries be designated a "County-Scenic" river. A "Country-Scenic" river is defined as a river in an agricultural setting with narrow bands of woods or pastoral borders. Farms and other developments may be visible from the river; it may be readily accessible by road; it may have undergone some impounding; and its waters should meet established water quality standards.

This report (1) provides a physical description of the river and the watershed as a whole; (2) reviews values of the river and factors affecting its future nature and use; and (3) provides a plan for the protection of the river's natural qualities and to guide its future use.

The plan follows the locally prepared management plan for the Flat River, previously approved by the Natural Resources Commission. It should be emphasized that those townships which have to date adopted and approved zoning ordinances for the Flat River will not be required to take further action. Those townships which at the date of adoption of this plan have adopted local zoning controls which meet the approved management guidelines are: Belvidere, Pine, Douglass, Montcalm, Eureka, Fairplain and Vergennes.

Department of Natural Resources approved local zoning, that is adequately administered and enforced, will take precedence over state administrative zoning rules should it be necessary to adopt such rules to protect the river resource.

Keene Township in Ionia County has indicated they are not interested in zoning at all. Otisco Township did adopt an ordinance for the river, but it did not include protection for Dickerson Creek and had some unacceptable wording.

This Natural River Plan recommends designation of three streams within two Kent County townships which were not involved in the local river management plan. If these streams are designated, the Department will work closely with Spencer and Oakfield townships to achieve appropriate protection.