

III. EXISTING USES AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

A. Population and Way-of-Life

Residential population within the Au Sable watershed has experienced a steady increase in the past 20 years. The counties encompassing the basin have grown approximately 60 percent in the same 20-year period. The State of Michigan population grew less than 30 percent in those years.

The average density across the basin is approximately 11 people per square mile. This compares to 22 per square mile in the northeast region and 156 per square mile for all of Michigan.

Most local units shared in this accelerated growth in this past decade. The U.S. Census tells us that 29 of the 30 townships grew faster than the state's average of 13.4 percent in 10 years.

Oscoda is the basin's largest town with a population of 3,475. This does not include Wurtsmith AFB, although a portion of this population may be due to Air Force families living outside the air base itself. Oscoda's growth can be attributed to the attractiveness of Lake Huron lakeshore properties and the northern rural environment to people from the Detroit, Saginaw, and Fling areas. Populations in other major basin towns, Grayling -- 2,143, Roscommon -- 850, and Mio -- 1,000 are increasing rapidly. This is due largely to the physical attractiveness of the area and easy access from urban areas via interstate highway 75.

The basin is rural in lifestyle. A distinctively small town atmosphere prevails in all towns of significance in the river basin. Tourist services, very light manufacturing, and forest related industries are the major employers.

A significant portion of the local population is seasonal and/or retirement. Seasonal populations are particularly heavy during June, July and August. These trends can be attributed to more leisure time and greater interest in seasonal outdoor activities.

B. Economy

The present economy of the Au Sable basin relies on light manufacturing, retail trade, forest products, and recreation. Industries such as forest products and recreation are obviously dependent on the regional resources. The manufacturing sector, which would include processing of forest products, is the leading employer in the region employing 30.6 percent of all regional employees. This, however, is considerably lower than the statewide factor of 43.0 percent of all employees in that sector. Significantly, the second leading employment sector, as 30.1 percent is retail trade. This figure is well above the state average of only 18.9

percent. Recreational services employ approximately 16.6 percent of the region.

The 60,250 person labor force in the study area suffered an unemployment rate of 13.8 percent in 1976, compared to state unemployment of only 10.1 percent for the same period. Also lower than state levels was the per capita income of the region. The mean income level for all counties in the region was only \$3,776 in 1974, compared to a state average of \$5,880.

C. Transportation

The river basin is readily accessible by all major forms of transportation. Interstate highway 75 is a major Michigan North-south artery. It provides ready access to the Grayling area from all of southern Michigan. Highway 23 is a major Lake Huron shore route serving the Oscoda area and providing access from all of southeastern Michigan. State highways 72, 33, and 65 are intermediate routes serving the entire river basin. Aside from several very small areas with difficult access, the basin has a heavily developed system of federal, state, county and Forest Service roads.

Con Rail lines serve Roscommon, Gaylord, and Grayling (freight service only). The Detroit and Mackinac rail lines serve the Oscoda and Harrisville areas.

Commercial airline service is available at Alpena and Wurtsmith Air Force Base offers commercial freight service.

Private aircraft may land at small public airports in Tawas, Harrisville, Mio, South Branch, Roscommon, Grayling and Gaylord. Commercial service is generally very limited in the central and western part of the basin and flights must be made through Traverse City.

D. Land Use and Ownership

Throughout Michigan in general, and in the Au Sable basin in particular, historic settlement patterns have led to fairly predictable land ownership patterns today. Since 1817, the choice productive agricultural lands, especially those with water and fertile soils, have been homesteaded and thereby taken out of public domain. The heavily timbered land was acquired by lumber companies and private individuals. The remaining area became public land (the Huron National forest was established in 1909) and state forests. The original heavily timbered land was cut over and either held by the owners, sold to the state and federal governments, or became tax delinquent and subsequently public land.

Attempts at agriculture have been largely unsuccessful in the river basin. Early homesteaders tried promising areas but moved on when the land

"played out". Agricultural land now accounts for eight percent of the river basin land area.

Beginning in 1909, large portions of unclaimed public domain land in the basin, especially unproductive timberland, became state and national forests. Tax delinquent "land that no one wanted" was added to this, and national forests now comprise five percent of the total basin area. State forests were also formed during this period and now comprise five percent of the total basin area. State forests were also formed during this period and now comprise 29 percent of the basin land area. An additional three-percent of the basin land area is administered by the Michigan National Guard.

In the early 1900's, Consumers Energy Company became interested in the hydroelectric potential of the Au Sable River. The river's power was harnessed with the construction of Mio Pond Dam in 1916; Alcona Dam in 1924; Loud Dam in 1913; 5-Channels Dam in 1912; Cooke Dam in 1911; and Foote Dam in 1918. The hydroelectric development involved purchase of 13,010 acres within the watershed, or one percent of the total river basin acreage.

Private interest in the land has increased during the past 25 years but is directed primarily toward the basin's recreation value and residential development.

This increased interest has led to extensive subdivision and seasonal and retirement home development, primarily along the river. Private land accounts for 62 percent of the basin land area.

E. Recreation and Scenery

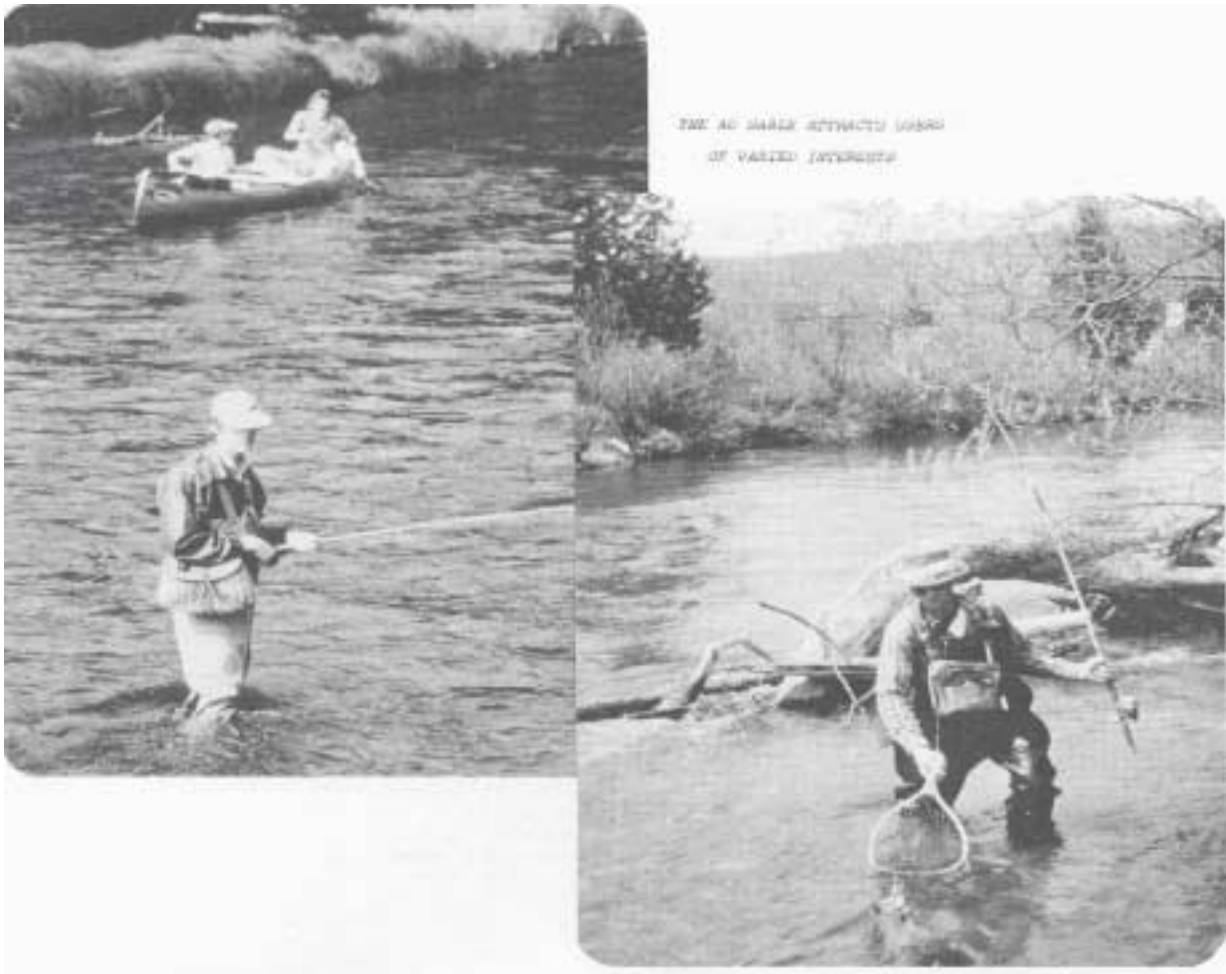
There is a high proportion of public and quasi-public land in the basin--state forests, national forests, and Consumers Energy Company. In addition, a number of state, federal, local government and private recreation facilities and areas are available and adequately developed for public use. There are 15 public campground facilities and 25 public access sites available along the Au Sable. Overnight and access facilities are well located and developed to meet public needs. Several overnight facilities have been upgraded during the past few years to better protect the sites, screen them from the river, and improve site quality. All the above facilities have been provided by state or local governments.

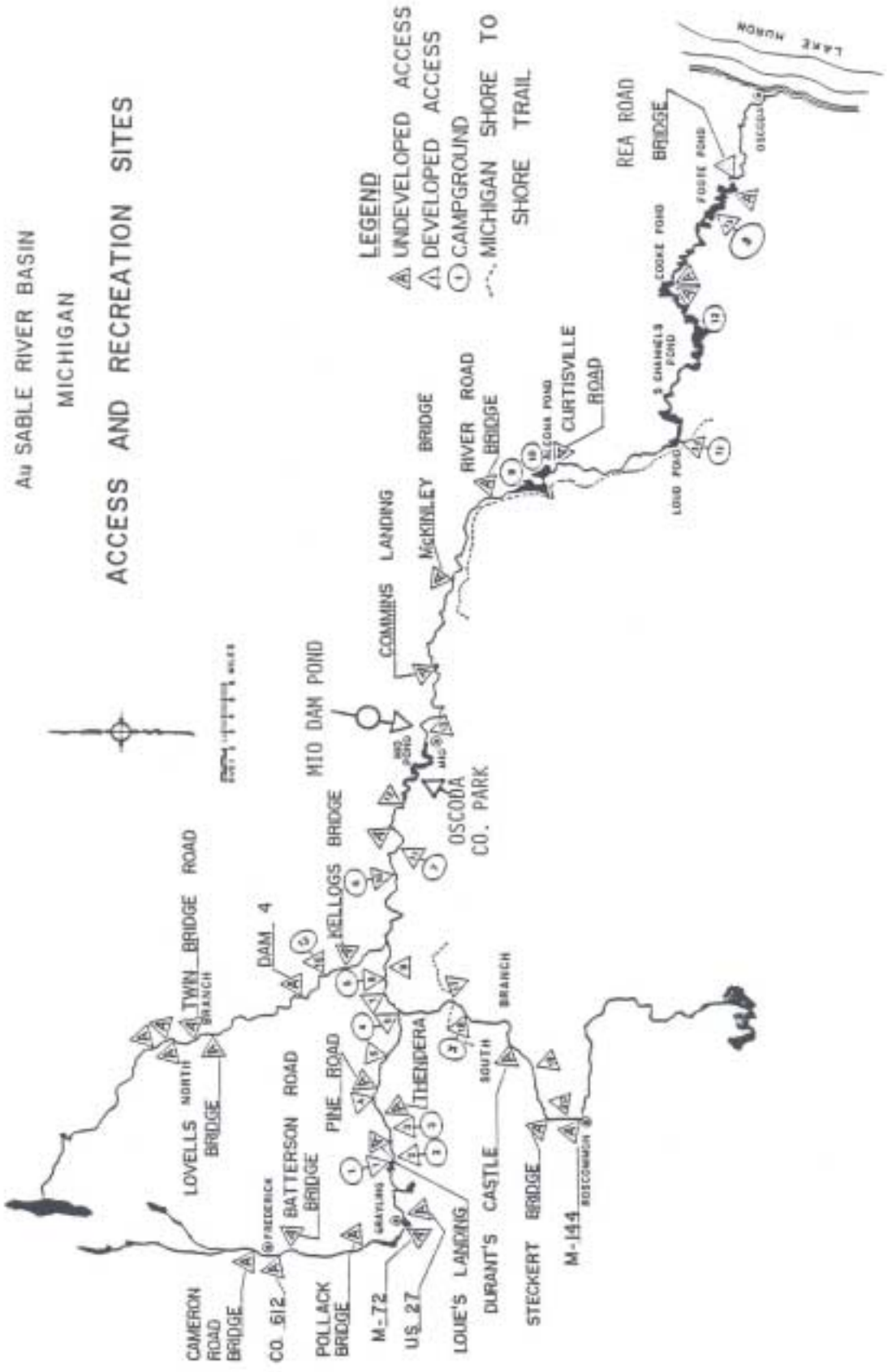
Recreation opportunities are diverse and year-around activity in the river basin is increasing. More leisure time and increased interest in snowmobiling and cross-country skiing have opened the winter seasons to more recreationists. More and better winter sport facilities and equipment have also encouraged people to enjoy the winter out-of-doors.

Au Sable River fishing has attracted anglers since the very late 1800's. Today the river is rated as one of the most productive trout streams in the United States. The Michigan grayling captured the attention of early anglers, but brown trout were introduced long before the grayling disappeared. Brown, brook and rainbow trout are responsible for the river's reputation today.

Trout fishing develops in early spring and extends throughout the summer. It offers outstanding fishing opportunities and attracts anglers from throughout the midwestern United States. The Michigan recreation plan indicates fishing participation in the eight county region at 103,000 days annually with use projected to increase approximately 10 percent by 1990. A significant portion of the increased fishing use may be for anadromous fish in the rivers and Lake Huron.

The anadromous fishery has developed in the lower Au Sable during the past 10 years. Fish migration upstream is restricted by Foote Dam. However, the program has been highly successful and attracts vast numbers of anglers during the spring and fall seasons.





Developed Public Access Points			Developed Campground Facilities		
		Capacity 1/			Capacity 2/
1.	AuSable Canoe Camp	15	1.	AuSable River Canoe Camp	190
2.	Burton's Landing	24	2.	Burton's	60
3.	Keystone Landing	4	3.	Keystone	90
4.	Stephan's Bridge	25	4.	White Pine Canoe Camp	300
5.	Wakely Bridge	15	5.	Rainbow Canoe Camp	35
6.	White Pine Canoe Camp	20	6.	Parmallee Bridge	75
7.	Cannors Flats	10	7.	Luzerne Township Park	150
8.	Rainbow Canoe Camp	10	8.	Old Orchard County Park	2000
9.	McMaster's Bridge	20	9.	Curtis Township Park	816
10.	Parmelee Bridge	6	10.	Curtis Township Park	660
11.	Luzerne Township Park	8	11.	Rollways	105
12.	Camp 10 Bridge	7	12.	Monument	100
13.	Mio Access	25	13.	Sheep Pasture	60
14.	Rollways	50	14.	Canoe Harbor	520
15.	Old Orchard County Park	55			
16.	Sheep Pasture Camp	23		Total	5161
17.	Smith Bridge	25			
18.	Canoe Harbor Camp				
19.	Chase Bridge	12			
20.	Beaver Creek	12			
	Total	366			

1/ Numbers of cars for which space is available.

2/ Capacity expressed in numbers of "people at one time" (PAOT)

Canoeing could account for the highest single use on the Au Sable River. The canoeing season extends from late spring through Labor Day. A University of Michigan study indicates approximately 50,000 canoes traveled on the Upper Au Sable in 1971. This would include 25,000 canoes on the Grayling mainstream; 10,000 on the Mio mainstream and 15,000 on the South Branch. The Michigan Recreation Plan (1974) projected a 10.1 percent increase in canoeing by 1980 for the eight county region.

In recent years, various factors have contributed to a significant decrease in the canoe traffic originating in Grayling. The factors which have reduced rental canoe traffic include the changing travel patterns by vacationers triggered by the late 70's oil/gas shortages and the large increase in the number of rental canoes that have become available on other Michigan waterways.



A TYPICAL SUMMER SCHEDULE

Area liveries estimate a significant decrease in canoe rental traffic, as compared to the 1971 level. The only increasing segments of canoe traffic are private canoes, those that have been purchased by scout, religious, or fraternal organizations and "you-haul" canoes rented in other areas and brought into the area by the users.

Canoe use is concentrated in the Grayling to Stephan's Bridge and South Branch sections. The Foote Dam to Oscoda section receives very light canoe use and the Alcona to Loud Pond section and North Branch have no measurable canoe use.

Mio, Alcona, Loud, 5-Channels, Cooke, and Foote Ponds are Consumers Energy Company reservoirs and are available for public recreation use. The six reservoirs provide 6,625 acres of water for warm water fishing, boating, canoeing, and swimming. In addition, there are six camp-picnic sites available along the shorelines and public access sites to each reservoir.

In the fall, deer, ruffed grouse, and rabbit hunting are the primary recreational pursuits in the basin. Waterfowl are also hunted but to a lesser degree.

Skiing and snowmobiling have increased significantly during recent years. The eight county area has 11 ski areas, or 17 percent of the state's downhill ski runs. The Michigan Tourist Council reports skiing increased from 65,000 to 350,000 skiers during the 1954-1970 period. A large percentage of the increase is attributed to cross-country skiing. Although a large percentage of the snowmobiles are registered in the downstate urban areas, the heavy use occurs in the north country. The availability of heavy snow cover, public lands, and developed trails are the main attractions.

The Au Sable River corridor is a well known, outstanding, scenic resource in the river basin and Midwest. It rates very high when compared with other rivers in the region. Its major scenic attractions are relatively undeveloped shorelines, high quality water, diverse vegetation, and sinuous course. Scenic qualities of the river basin may be typical of the north one half of Lower Michigan. The rural landscape is heavily forested and broken by occasional small farms, towns, swamps, lakes, and streams. This is also an area of extensive jack pine sand plains without physiographic or vegetative variety. It lacks vistas and variety afforded by broken topography. Scenery rated typical within the basin would be considered outstanding in other areas of the Midwest.

F. Archaeological, Historic, and Cultural Resources

The Au Sable River basin is almost archaeologically unknown. Virtually no systematic survey of the area has ever taken place. The few reported sites are primarily accidental discoveries with the exception of one major site near Oscoda. There is also little doubt that human action in the form of damming, logging, and other development has destroyed sites. Nevertheless, it is likely that a comprehensive survey of the Au Sable would yield numerous (albeit small) sites. It is speculated that the Au Sable and Manistee rivers provided prehistoric inhabitants with an almost uninterrupted passage from Lake Michigan to Lake Huron, but its use has not been substantiated.

Frenchmen may have explored portions of the river as early as 1688, but the area remained a mystery to white men for almost 150 more years. Some early atlases did not include the river on charted maps, and several names were applied to it. A 1795 United States gazetteer, for example, referred to it as the Beauvais River. The area was labeled as inaccessible and essentially worthless in an inaccurate yet widely circulated survey. Alexis DeTocqueville, who visited Saginaw in 1831, warned that the territory northward was "covered by an almost impenetrable forest which extends uninterruptedly . . . full of nothing but wild beasts and Indians." Not everyone was discouraged by these observations, however. In 1835, several traders explored the Au Sable and small-scale logging operations commenced soon thereafter.

The end of the Civil War, along with a huge influx of eastern capital, accelerated the growth of the logging industry. An 1899 timber survey found that, in contrast to earlier reports, the region contained extensive timber stands. Furthermore, the Au Sable River itself was wide, deep, and had few meanders; it was, therefore, an almost perfect river for logging drifts. Beginning in the late 1860's, the industry grew at an astounding rate. The occasional warnings of the rapid depletion of the forests were ignored by the lumber industry, which felt the timber supply virtually unlimited and, in any case, was committed to a "cut and get out" policy.

Oscoda was the center of lumbering in the Au Sable river basin. Its mills sawed as much as 75 million board feet per year. Meanwhile, the extension of the railroad to Grayling in 1878, followed by narrow gauge inland spurs, accelerated the industry's growth. The atmosphere of the boom was contagious and colorfully reported in such newspapers as Grayling's Crawford Weekly Avalanche. Some people, such as H. M. Loud of Oscoda, made fortunes. Most loggers, however, made subsistence wages, and labor disputes were frequent. A strike in 1884 at Oscoda almost led to the entry of militia.

The logging industry faded rapidly after 1890, and the rise of recreation in subsequent years barely compensated for the transformation of forested land into cutover, sandy acreage. There was one last brilliant chapter to the industry. A large tract of cork pine in northwestern Crawford County, near the headwaters of the Mainstay and the Au Sable's Middle Branch remained untouched. It was owned by David Ward, a famous lumber speculator who had explored the area in the 1850's. Upon Ward's death in 1900, his heirs discovered that the estate required execution by 1912. The town of Deward was constructed in 1901 to harvest the timber. It included housing, a school, and one of the world's largest mills. By 1912, the forest was denuded and Deward was abandoned. A few rotting buildings now mark the site of this ghost town. Ironically enough, Hartwick Pines, the state's last virgin White Pine Forest, lies only a few miles to the southwest.

The Au Sable's cultural value is most evident in the way it has influenced visitors and residents of the surrounding countryside. People can attain a greater appreciation of natural beauty and outdoor activity by visiting an outstanding natural area. The river has fostered legends, which, through the years, impart a sense of feeling and appreciation for early river people and their lives.

AU SABLE RIVER
DESIGNATED SEGMENTS
ACT 231, P.A. 1970

