

EXISTING USES  
AND  
RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

A. Land Use

The White River watershed is on the border of a farming region to the south and a forest-resort recreation region to the north. Roughly half the watershed can be classed as forest land and the rest farm land.

Land use is largely dependent on local soil conditions. Where soils are more productive, as in the DeLong Creek area, farming is intensive and permanent. There are productive dairy farms in this area with good crops of hay, corn and wheat being major crops. Most of the drainage has poor sandy soils and the farms are small subsistence and part-time farms with many tenant farmers and absentee owners.

Abandonment of farms is a major trend and the abandoned land is in a very depleted condition. Old farmland usually lies idle for a long time and is subject to moderate or severe erosion depending on the degree of slope and exposure to wind.

Hunting, fishing and other resort activities account for a large part of the land use in the area. Resort cabins are abundant and are concentrated along or near lakes and streams. A greater demand for resort property in recent years is one of the reasons for a high proportion of privately owned land being retained in the watershed.

Numerous developments are visible along the river in White Cloud and Hesperia. In addition to these municipalities, there are three other areas where cottages are concentrated along the White.

On the upper White, just below Van Buren Road, there is a plat of about 50 lots, where roughly six cottages have been built. However, considering the whole stretch of river from 8 Mile Road to White Cloud only 25 cabins exist.

Between White Cloud and Hesperia, the area between M-20 and Pinchtown Bridge contains a cottage development. Roughly 15 cottages presently exist along the river in this area. Along the entire stretch, however, there are only 25 cottages.

Another development, St. Huberts, about a mile and half downstream from Taylor Bridge contains 41 cottages. The entire stretch of river between Taylor Bridge and County Line Bridge has only 50 cottages, however, only two are visible from the river below St. Huberts. Below County Line Bridge downstream to the lowland (muck farm) areas above Whitehall, only six structures exist along the river.

## B. Private Recreation Areas

Private camping facilities in the vicinity of the White River are numerous. Thirty-five campgrounds provide 1,705 campsites to the recreationist in the three county area of the watershed. Other areas providing recreation from private sources are: five feet fishing ponds, 29 Great Lakes charter boats, three canoe liveries on the White River, five riding stables and two enterprises offering dune buggy rides at Silver Lake.

## C. Public Recreation Areas

Camping facilities in the three county area surrounding the White River watershed are adequate. Six state parks are within easy driving distance of the White and provide 1,240 campsites for public use. In addition, there are three Forest Service campgrounds, five picnic areas and 45 county, township or city parks within or near the watershed, which provide additional camping and day use facilities for recreationists.

Other public areas of interest are the sand dunes at Silver Lake State Park, the Muskegon State Game Area and Pentwater River State Game Area.

## D. Fishing

Between "the Pool" and White Cloud the upper White is fine trout water, famous for its brook trout fishing. It is still a good producer of brook trout, particularly in the upper reaches near "the Pool", but from "the Pool" downstream, brook trout generally give way to browns until at White Cloud only the occasional brookie is now taken.

Good tributary streams enter in this stretch--Mullen, Five Mile and Flinton, with Five Mile being the best. It is a fine cold brook-brown stream that flows through a cedar swamp for most of its length. Flinton and Five Mile creeks contribute considerable numbers of trout to the river immediately above the impoundment at White Cloud (White Cloud Lake) where the river becomes sandy and has few spawning areas. White Cloud Lake harbors large numbers of suckers and other roughfish.

The trout population between White Cloud and Hesperia is only fair, but the river contains some outsized browns. Thus, the Middle White warrants the attention of the "big fish" fishermen, particularly in view of the fine "caddis" hatches that occur from mid to late June.

The inadequate natural reproduction and abundance of food in the Middle White presents an opportunity for improvement through brown trout plantings. Stocking of brown trout fingerlings dramatically improved fishing in 1974. Some attention could also be given to the chestnut lamprey and roughfish problem. The stream is very well suited for fly fishing, particularly in the area around Aetna.

Several tributaries enter the Middle White, but by far the best is Martin Creek. The Martin is a fine brook-brown stream in its own right and is a favorite among some fly fishermen even though it is quite brushy. It has a good Drake and "caddis" hatch during June. The Martin produces not only good numbers of browns and brooks, but fish of excellent average size. Mena Creek is the only other tributary that supports significant trout fishing in this stretch. It is a good brook-brown trout stream, but is smaller and not of the quality of the Martin. They both join the White between Aetna and Hesperia.

The lower White is a good-sized river, most famous now for its fine fall and spring steelhead fishing. However, until about 1950 the river near Whitehall was known more for its fine spring fishing for white bass which ran the river in droves at spawning time. These were sizeable fish, too; often running 2-3 pounds and up to 17-18 inches long. Some smallmouth bass and northern pike are also taken. For about 15 miles below Hesperia, the White flows rapidly over good gravel bottom. The stream here contains a few lunker brown trout and could produce improved trout fishing through trout stocking and possibly chemical reclamation.

The first tributary of note to enter below Hesperia is Braton Creek, a fair brook trout stream of small size that usually has a slightly milky discoloration. Further down the sizeable (though short), Cushman Creek enters. The Cushman contains a good trout population consisting of brooks, browns and rainbows (from steelhead natural reproduction which is significant in this stream). Sizeable brook trout (to 17 inches) and brown trout (to 5-8 pounds) are present in this stream. Skeels Creek is another fair brook trout stream similar to Braton Creek.

Due to the influence of its headwater lakes (warming temperatures and warmwater fish), the North Branch is not good trout water for its first four or five miles. Just north of Hightower Lake, enough groundwater enters to cool the North Branch to trouts liking. Browns and a few brooks are found in this area. From this point until it joins the lower White, the North Branch is a good brown trout stream that also produces a fair number of brooks. Sizeable browns (16-22 inches) are not uncommon. It is a popular steelhead stream, spring and fall, in the area below Arthur Road. It also offers good fly fishing during the June Drake hatches.

Several small, but excellent cold tributaries enter the North Branch--Robinson Creek, Cobmosa Creek, Newman Creek and Knudsen Creek--all of which contain brooks and browns of respectable size.

Downstream from the mouth of the North Branch the tributaries of the White are notable in that they are sizeable streams that contain almost 100 percent brook trout. These are Carlton, Sand, Silver and Cleveland creeks. Carlton is the largest and best, with Silver and Sand ranking above Cleveland. Small impoundments on Sand, Silver and Cleveland inundate some good water, but produce good trout fishing themselves when roughfish are kept in check.

#### E. Wildlife Observation and Hunting

The White River drains a comparatively small watershed adjacent to the Lake Michigan shore and extending generally eastward across Oceana and Newaygo counties. The southern tip of the watershed extends a short distance in Muskegon County.

The eastern portion of the watershed is largely timbered with excellent habitat and good populations of forest game species, such as deer, ruffed grouse, snowshoe hare, wild turkeys, squirrels and a large variety of nongame species.

The western portion of the watershed is primarily rolling orchard country with numerous small areas or pockets of wild habitat. Wildlife habitat in this area is more restricted and populations are not as large as in the eastern part of the watershed. Game species consist of the same ones found in the eastern part of the watershed, except for wild turkeys which do not occur in the western part of the watershed. In addition to the species mentioned above, there are limited populations of pheasants and cottontail rabbits.

The White River watershed is not an important waterfowl area, except for White Lake, which is heavily used by migrating waterfowl, especially ducks. There is some production of dabbling ducks on most of the natural waters of the watershed and some artificial ponds.

Fur species common to the watershed include muskrats, mink, raccoon, foxes, beaver and a limited number of otter.

#### F. Canoeing and Boating

Although the river above White Cloud can be canoed, it generally is not considered canoeing water. Below White Cloud, downstream to Lutes Bridge, the river channel is crossed by fallen elm and numerous logjams, which make canoeing difficult. The best stretch of river for canoeing is from Hesperia downstream to White Lake, especially the area below Pine Point Campground which is practically undeveloped. A moderate current with relatively few logjams makes this an enjoyable stretch to canoe. This lower portion of the river is large enough to handle small outboards and these craft are used to some extent by fishermen or people exploring the river. Canoes are available for rent at liveries located in White Cloud, Hesperia and on Fruitvale Road at the Oceana, Muskegon county line.

#### G. Historic and Archaeological Sites

Although Muskegon, Newaygo and Oceana counties are rich in history, sites of historic or archaeological interest along the White River have not been authenticated. Records in the State Archaeological Site File indicates an Indian village existed west of the White River in Denver Township, Newaygo County. If

systematic archaeological surveys were undertaken, Indian campsites may be uncovered along the river.

## PRELIMINARY NATURAL RIVER PLAN

### A. Proposed Designation

The White River system represents the southernmost major trout stream in the Lake Michigan drainage. Except for areas around Hesperia and White Cloud, much of the river, especially the middle and lower reaches, are scenic, crossed by few bridges, wild in nature and intrusions by man are few. Development of recreation homes and homesites on the White River have increased in recent years, however, there are still many miles of stream in a natural state with scenic and other recreational values worth preserving. Because of this concern, the White River Planning Group was formed in February 1974, to draft a plan to regulate future development and use for the protection of the natural character of the White River.

It is recommended that the following portions of the White River system be classified and managed as a country scenic river under Part 305, Natural Rivers, of P.A. 451 of 1994: (Approximate mileage mainstream - 70 - tributaries - 93)

<u>Stream</u>	<u>Approximate Mileage</u>	<u>Section for Inclusion</u>
Mainstream of the White River	70	From 8-Mile Road, NW corner of Section 28, T15N, R12W in Newaygo County downstream to US-31, Muskegon County excluding the following: from the north city limit of White Cloud down to old M-20 west of city, from the east city limit of Hesperia down to west city limit and those portions within the city limits of Whitehall and Montague.
Mullen Creek	3	From 6-Mile Road downstream to White River.
Five Mile Creek	5	From Pine Ave. downstream to White River.
Flinton Creek	4	From Pine Ave. downstream to Catalpa Ave.
Wrights Creek	2	From Comstock Road downstream to White River.