

Van Buren County, Michigan

COMMUNITY PARK, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND GREENWAY PLAN



2021 — 2026

Adopted by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners January 26, 2021

Van Buren County

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The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission prepared this plan for Van Buren County with assistance from representatives from the following organizations:

- Van Buren County Planning Commission
- Van Buren County Administration and Board of Commissioners
- Van Buren County Road Commission
- Those who provided feedback via phone, email, written comments and survey responses

Special thanks to the South Haven/Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Bureau for funding the plan development.

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Section 1. Plan Overview

This is an update to Van Buren County’s 2012-2017 plan for parks and recreation resources at the county level. It will guide the County’s approach to parks and recreation planning through 2026.

Parks and recreational facilities in Van Buren County add real value to their surrounding communities and improve the quality of life for residents of all backgrounds and abilities by promoting healthy lifestyles, encouraging social interaction and providing access to natural areas.

“Public attention tends to focus on recreation, because we want exercise, or on parks, because we need a place to get it. Some citizens may visit a park monthly, or weekly -- the most active among us, even daily. However, every day, every one of us benefits from the effect of open space and greenways. They contribute dramatically to our property values, community character, and personal wellbeing.

Visiting a park for recreation may create evidence in our calendars, our memories, our selfies, or even our laundry. Benefits from open space and greenways accrue elsewhere, in the smell of the air, the clarity of the water, the stability of the community -- even whether we see wild birds from our kitchen window.” Gary Stock, Van Buren County resident

Mission

Through this plan, Van Buren County seeks to provide quality recreational resources to its residents and visitors. The County recognizes the importance of recreational amenities – including parks, natural areas, open spaces, land and water trails, lake and river access points and recreational programming – as they contribute to places where people want to live, spend their leisure time and do business. The County strives to develop its parks and recreation amenities with these benefits in mind and with particular emphasis on stewardship of historically significant assets, natural features, fragile lands, water quality and green infrastructure.

Vision

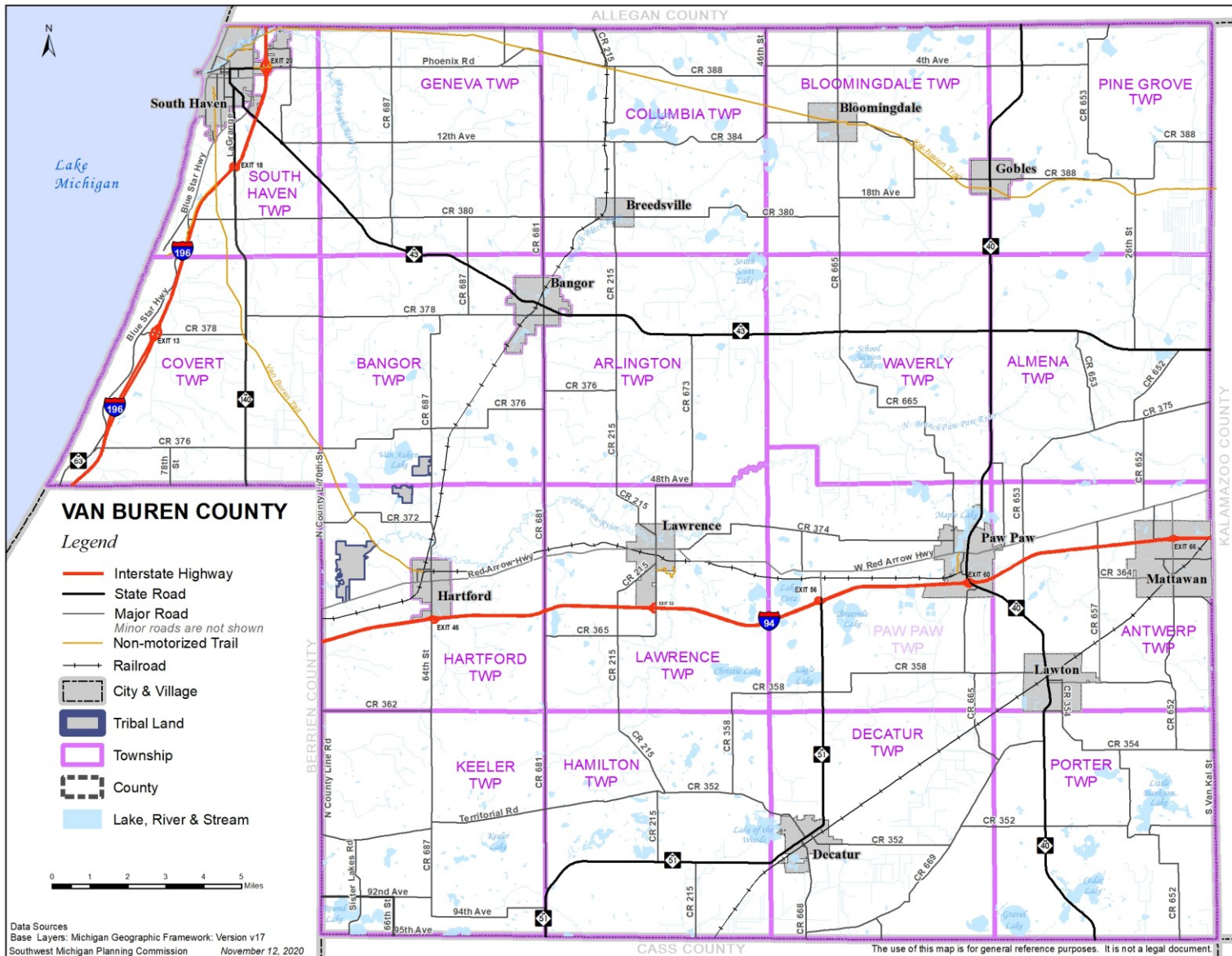
Van Buren County will enhance the quality of life for *all* current and future generations through its recreational resources.

Section 2. Community Description

Van Buren County is located in southwest Michigan and covers 611 square miles. In 2010, the total population for Van Buren County was 76,258, down slightly from the 2000 census number of 76,263. The 2019 population estimate is even lower at 75,677. Its residents are dispersed across four cities (Bangor, Gobles, Hartford and South Haven), seven incorporated villages (Bloomingdale, Breedsville, Decatur, Lawrence, Lawton, Mattawan and Paw Paw) and eighteen townships (see Table 8 in the Appendix for a full list.). The County spans small urban, suburban and rural settings and is home to one community college branch (Lake Michigan College South Haven), dozens of lakes (129 larger than ten acres) and two major rivers (the Paw Paw and Black Rivers). For more information on Van Buren County, visit the Van Buren County's website at www.vbco.org.



Figure 1 (Map) Area of Plan, Van Buren County



People - Demographics and Population Growth

Over the past two decades (1990 to 2010), the population in Van Buren County increased by over 10%. Growth has slowed somewhat in the past decade, yet the county remains the only one in its three-county region of southwest Michigan (includes Berrien and Cass) that experienced growth during this time.

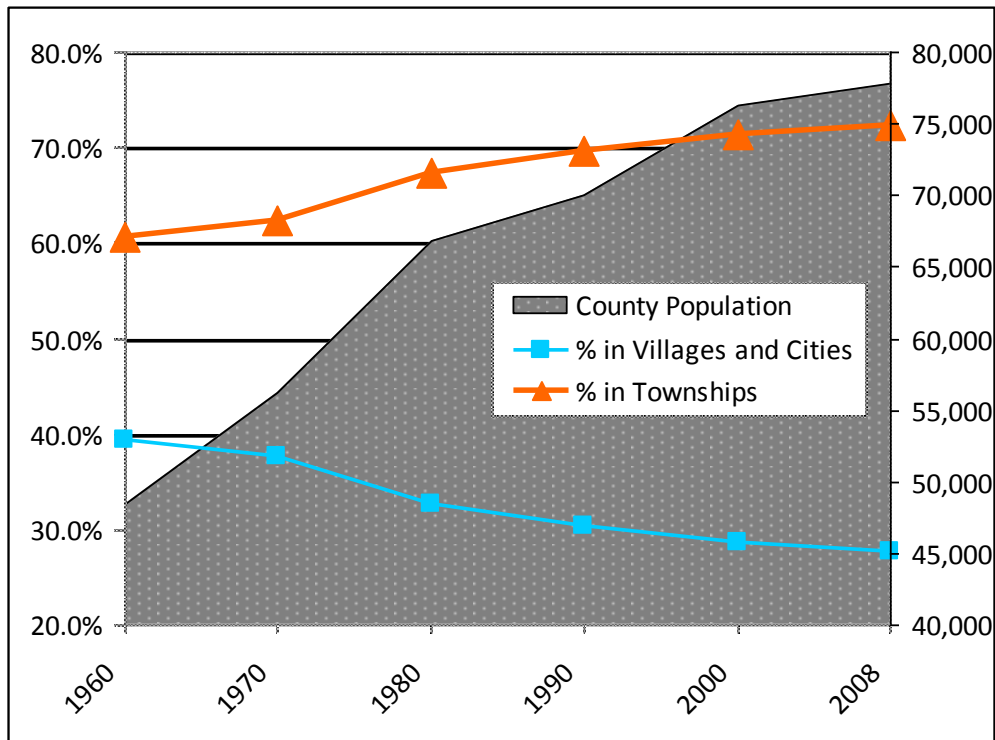
Table 1. Population Change by Municipality Type, Van Buren County | 1960 – 2010

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	1960-2000	2000-2010
Almena	1,288	1,845	2,956	3,581	4,226	4,992	228.1%	18%
Antwerp	2,456	2,312	3,910	5,039	6,298	8,285	156.4%	31%
Arlington	1,392	1,645	1,884	1,929	2,075	2,073	49.1%	-0.09%
Bangor	1,443	1,708	1,993	1,948	2,121	2,147	47.0%	1%
Bloomington	1,176	1,493	1,953	2,351	2,836	3,103	141.2%	9%
Columbia	1,374	1,657	2,004	2,339	2,479	2,588	80.4%	4%
Covert	2,323	2,659	2,706	2,855	3,141	2,888	35.2%	-8%
Decatur	1,275	1,603	1,684	1,856	2,078	1,907	63.0%	-8%
Geneva	1,850	2,392	2,984	3,162	3,975	3,573	114.9%	-10%
Hamilton	1,023	1,167	1,586	1,515	1,797	1,489	75.7%	-17%
Hartford	1,746	2,211	2,707	3,032	3,159	3,274	80.9%	3%
Keeler	2,109	2,234	2,638	2,344	2,601	2,169	23.3%	-16%
Lawrence	1,421	1,555	2,114	2,115	2,282	2,263	60.6%	-0.8%
Paw Paw	2,067	2,592	3,207	3,645	3,738	3,507	80.8%	-6%
Pine Grove	1,528	1,835	2,379	2,594	2,773	2,949	81.5%	6%
Porter	1,047	1,360	2,041	2,086	2,406	2,466	129.8%	2%
South Haven	2,766	3,416	4,174	4,185	4,046	3,983	46.3%	-1%
Waverly	1,044	1,313	2,130	2,188	2,467	2,554	136.3%	3%
Township Total	29,328	34,997	45,050	48,764	54,498	56,210	85.8%	3%
Bloomington	471	496	537	503	528	454	12.1%	-14%
Breedsville	245	209	244	213	235	199	-4.1%	-15%
Decatur	1,827	1,764	1,915	1,760	1,838	1,819	0.6%	-1.0%
Lawrence	773	790	903	915	1,059	996	37.0%	-5%
Lawton	1,402	1,358	1,558	1,685	1,859	1,900	32.6%	2%
Mattawan	~~	1,569	2,143	2,456	2,536	1,997	~~	-22%
Paw Paw	2,970	3,160	3,211	3,169	3,473	3,534	16.9%	1%
Village Total	7,688	9,346	10,511	10,701	11,528	10,899	49.9%	-5%
Bangor	2,109	2,050	2,001	1,922	1,933	1,885	-8.3%	-2%
Gobles	816	801	816	769	815	829	-0.1%	1%
Hartford	2,305	2,508	2,493	2,341	2,476	2,688	7.4%	8%
South Haven	6,149	6,471	5,943	5,563	5,013	4,403	-18.5%	-12%
City Total	11,379	11,830	11,253	10,595	10,237	9,805	-10.0%	-4%
VB Co. Total	48,395	56,173	66,814	70,060	76,263	76,258	57.6%	-0.006%

Source: U.S. Census (1960 – 2010); U.S. Census

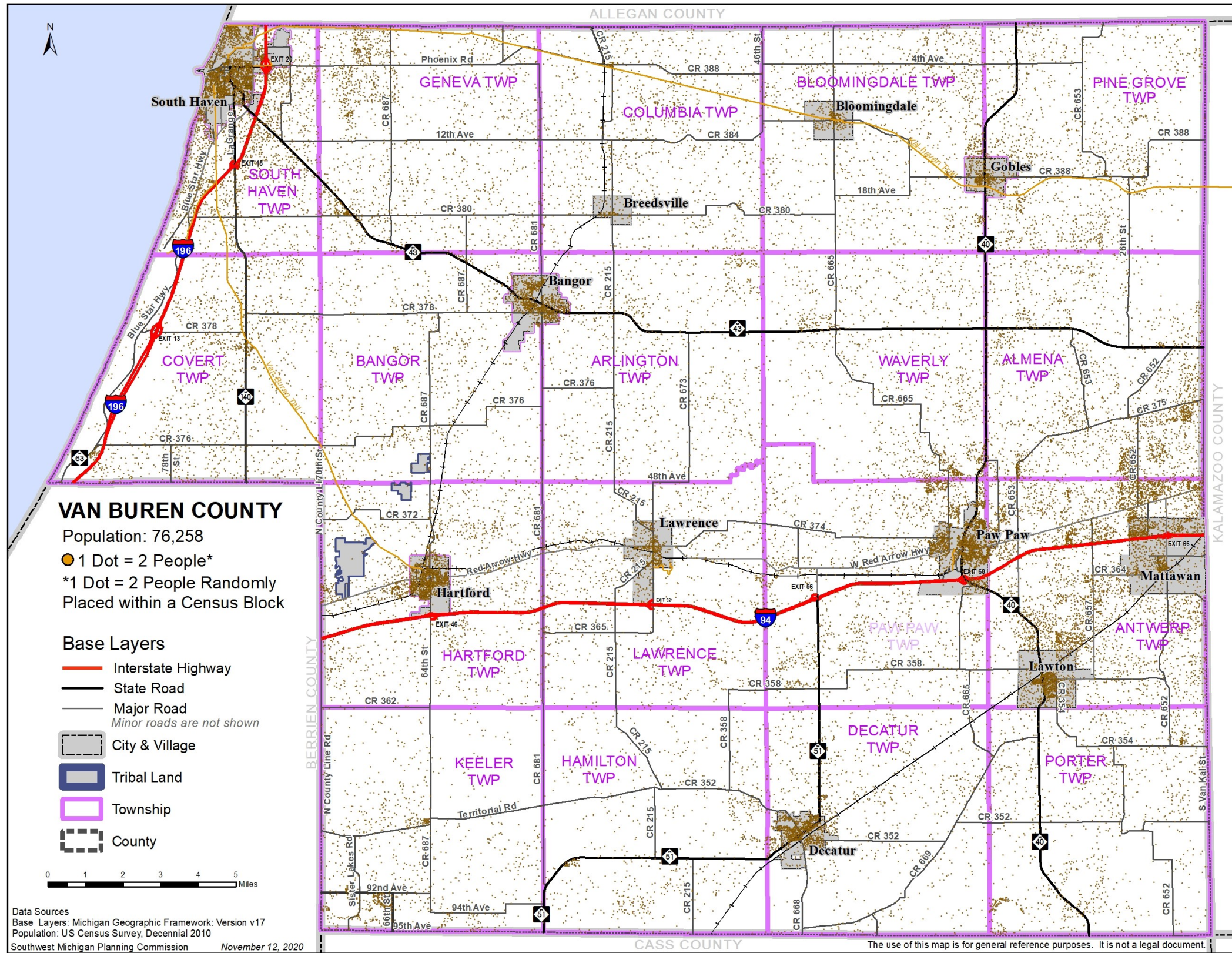
Much of this growth is concentrated on the county’s eastern edge, where the Village of Mattawan and Almena and Antwerp Townships fall into the City of Kalamazoo’s commuter-shed. The Villages of Mattawan and Lawton, and the Cities of South Haven and Hartford, experienced growth from 2000 to 2010. Nine townships (Almena, Antwerp, Bangor, Bloomingdale, Columbia, Hartford, Pine Grove, Porter, and Waverly) grew during this time, suggesting a slight land use shift from residents living near traditional downtown areas to more rural settings.

Figure 2 (Chart) Population change by municipality type, Van Buren County | 2000 - 2008



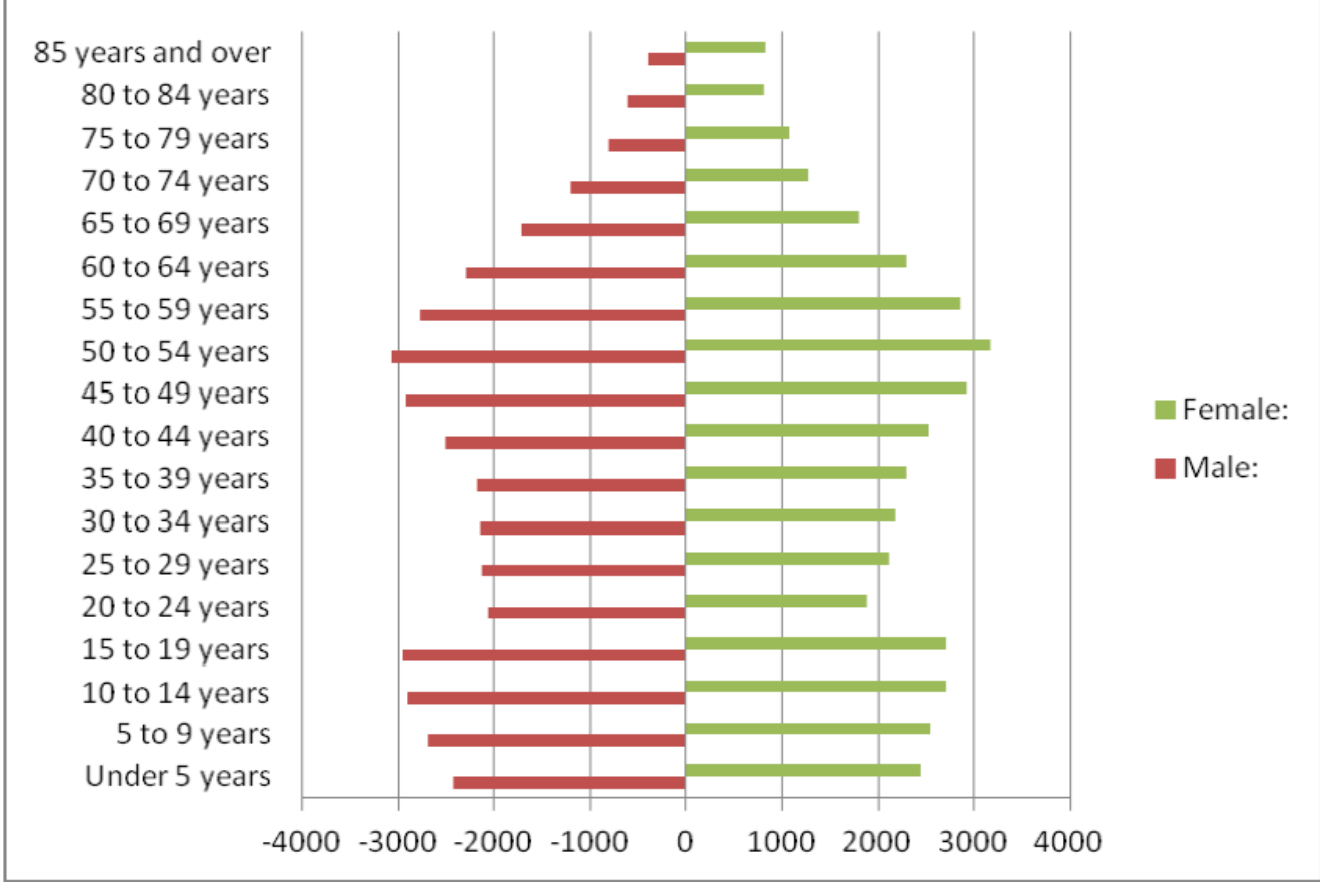
By racial composition, 2019 population estimates put Van Buren County as primarily White (91.5%), 4% African American and 4.6% other. The county has 11.7% reporting Hispanic/Latino ethnicity. Between 2000 and 2009, proportionally large increases of residents identifying themselves as Asian, Hispanic/Latino and “some other race” not defined on the U.S. Census survey forms have contributed to the county’s growth.

Figure 3 (Map) Population Density, Van Buren County



By gender, Van Buren County houses slightly more women than men. As the county’s “baby-boomer” residents’ age, its collective population also ages; this pattern reflects patterns throughout much of the region and the country. The 2019 census estimates that 6% of the county’s population is under 5 year of age, 23% are under 18 years of age and 18% are over 65 years and over.

Figure 4 (Chart) Population by Age, Van Buren County|2010



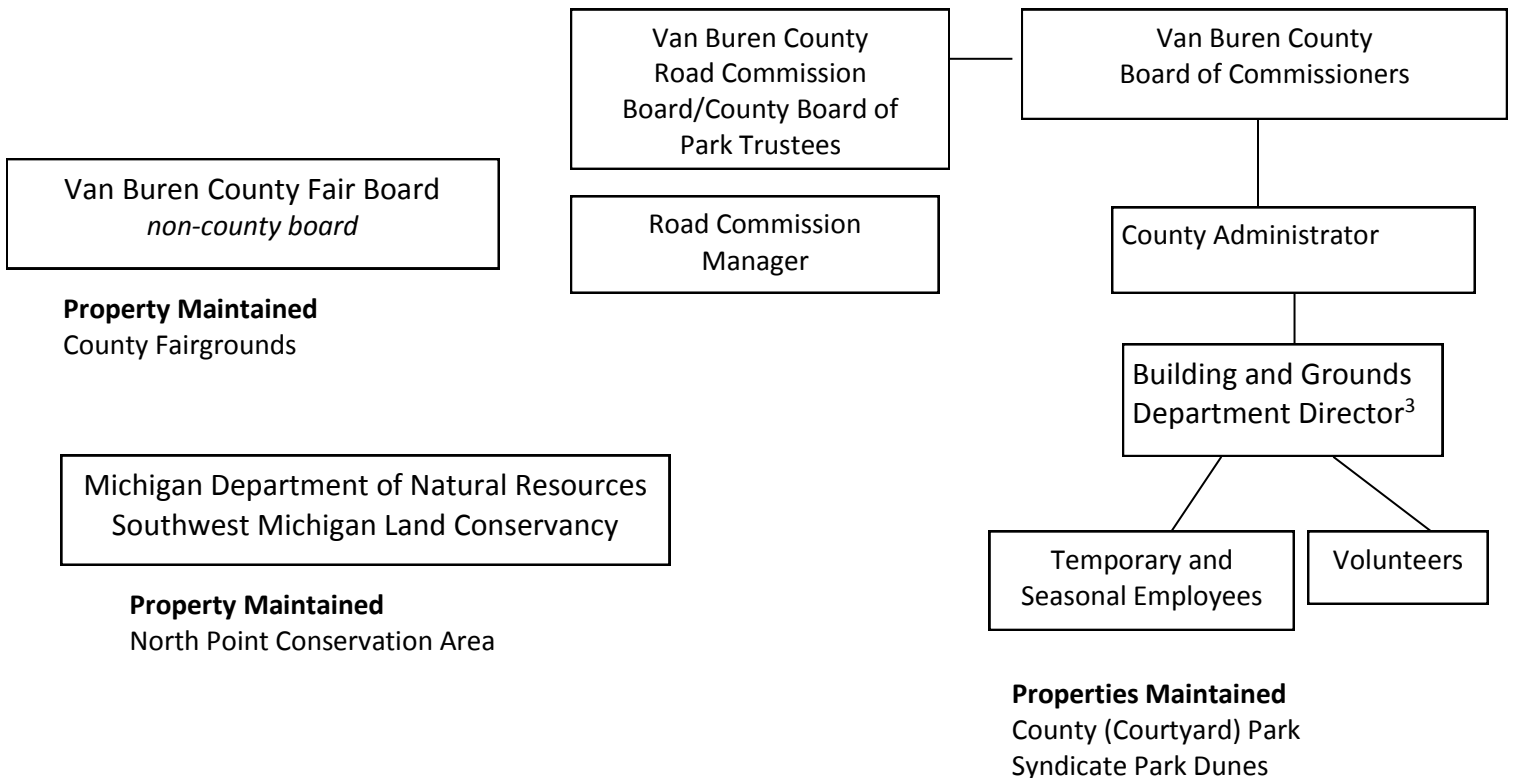
Section 3. Administrative Structure

Organizational Charts, Legal Authority and Board Membership

The four properties addressed in this plan’s recreation inventory fall under the purview of two boards/departments: the Board of Commissioners and the Board of County Park Trustees. Per Michigan Public Act 90 of 1913, “*whenever the board of supervisors of any county shall have adopted a resolution to purchase, condemn, or to accept certain lands for park purposes and make an appropriation therefore . . . there shall be created a board of 3 members to be known and designated as county park trustees.*” The Act goes on to state, “*In counties operating under the county road system, the board of county road commissioners is hereby designated and shall then act as the county park trustees.*” The members of the County Road Commission currently fill the seats on this board and currently do not manage any county park lands.

The current administrative structure for the county’s recreation system is shown in Figure 5. The basic operations and maintenance functions affecting Van Buren County’s recreation inventory are the responsibilities of one staff position within the County Buildings and Grounds Department.

Figure 5 (Chart) Administrative Structure, Van Buren County



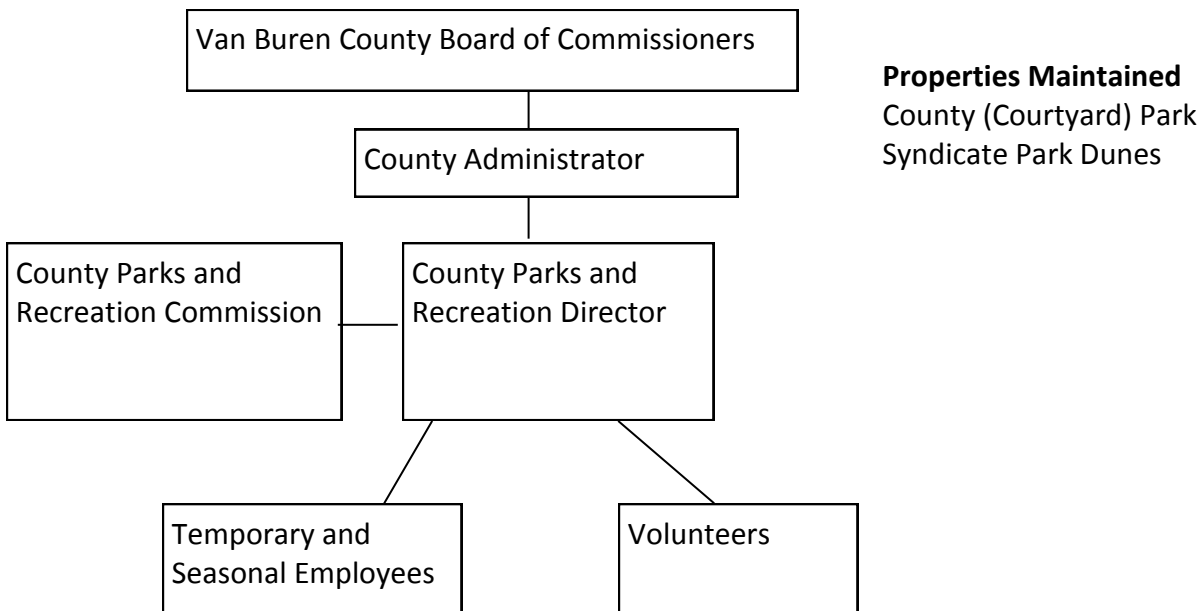
It is envisioned, over time, the County Park Trustees (or a board with an equivalent function under a different name) will manage a budget and make decisions about all of the County's parks, recreational facilities and programming.

In the event that the Board of Commissioners chooses to create a full County Parks and Recreation Commission under Michigan Public Act 261 of 1965 to operate, maintain and improve upon the County's parks and recreation resources per this plan's recommendations, the County Parks and Recreation Commission will comprise the following members:

- The Chair of the Road Commission
- The Drain Commissioner
- The Planning Commission Chairperson
- Seven board-appointed members

(See the Appendix for documentation of the relevant Michigan legislation.)

Figure 6 (Chart) Potential Future Administrative Structure, Van Buren County



Current Funding Sources & Budgets

Van Buren County's Buildings and Grounds department's "grounds care" expenditures are inclusive for the County Courthouse – where the County Park is located. The Building and Grounds department did provide funding for maintenance of the North Point Conservation Area on Lake Michigan; however, that area is now leased to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

The County Fairgrounds are leased from the County and maintained/operated by a non-governmental board. The Van Buren Youth Fair Association, a 501(c)3 corporation, leases approximately 85 acres from Van Buren County.

No county department prepares an annual budget explicitly for parks and recreation resources, though this may become a task for the Board of Park Trustees or a future Parks Commission. The following is a list of potential funding sources to provide an outline of options for the County's future approach to funding parks and recreation resources within its borders.

State-Level

- The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), established in 1976, funds capital improvements and land acquisitions for local/state parks through a granting process. The MNRTF accepts applications annually. See Table 4 for an inventory of local projects in Van Buren County funded via the MNRTF since 1976.
- The Michigan Department of Natural Resources MDNR's Recreation Passport Program replaces the Motor Vehicle Permit system that has funded state parks in Michigan since 1961. Through the program, motorists can pay a state-park access fee (\$12 annually) when renewing license plates. The program will primarily fund the maintenance and operations of MDNR properties; the MDNR will use a percentage for local park improvements as well.
- The Michigan Parks and Recreation Association's foundation provides "financial support to people and programs that work to enrich the health and well-being of all Michigan citizens through increased access to recreation and outdoor experiences," <https://www.mparksfoundation.org/>.

County-Level

Over 80% of Van Buren County respondents to the Growing Greener Survey conducted by MSU in 2009 indicated a willingness to pay some amount annually for greater conservation efforts throughout the county; nearly one third of these respondents would pay over \$25 per year and supported the following funding options – millages and user fees – by nearly 50% and 65%, respectively.

- Many Michigan counties levy a millage to fund parks, recreation and land preservation. Under 30% of respondents to the Growing Greener survey indicated opposition to a parks and recreation millage. A county-wide millage vote on a 0.25 mill for parks, recreation and land preservation could generate approximately \$750,000 a year.
- The Van Buren County Road Commission (VBCRC) previously funded operations and maintenance of the Kal-Haven and Van Buren trails and their adjacent campgrounds through

user fees. Since 2011 the Van Buren County Road Commission discontinued the user fee for the trail and contracted with the MDNR for trail maintenance. Growing Greener survey respondents were highly supportive of using user fees to fund parks and recreation resources, suggesting it may be a viable option for developing the County's parks and recreation offerings.

Other

- The Trust for Public Land has resources for federal-level funding options. More are at <http://www.tpl.org/>.
- The National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/partnerships/>
- The National Recreation and Park Association listing of grant opportunities, <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Grant-Fundraising-Resources/>
- The National Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse, <http://ruraltransportation.org/national-transportation-alternatives-clearinghouse/>

Volunteers & Other Organizations

Volunteers in Van Buren County contribute an immense amount of time and effort to improve parks and recreation resources for Van Buren County's residents and visitors. This section briefly describes and lists contact information for organizations and coalitions in Van Buren County, southwest Michigan and around the State, that contribute to maintaining, promoting and developing recreation resources throughout the county.

- The **Friends of the Kal-Haven Trail ("the Friends")** is a non-profit (501(c)3) organization that works in cooperation with Van Buren County to expand and enhance the facilities of the Kal-Haven and Van Buren Trails, promotes the use of the trails through sponsored events and other promotional activities and performs other acts consistent with and complementary to the maintenance and operations of the trails.
 - **Website:** <https://kalhaven.org/>
- **Friends of Blue Star Trail** - In 2009, a group of stakeholders from Allegan and Van Buren counties came together to discuss the possibility of creating a non-motorized connection from South Haven to Saugatuck. The group included municipal representatives from the City of South Haven, South Haven Charter Township, City of Saugatuck, Village of Douglas, Ganges Township, Casco Township, and Saugatuck Township. The group has recently formed a Friends group and has established themselves as a non-profit organization. The Friends group is now seeking contributions for their project and is working with the Allegan County Road Commission in developing their vision of a non-motorized off-road shared use path along the roadway known as Blue Star Highway.
 - **Website:** <http://www.fotbst.org/>
- The **Two Rivers Coalition** is a citizen-based group working to protect the health of the Black- and Paw Paw-River watersheds (See Figure 8 for a map of Van Buren County's watersheds.) through conservation, education and advocacy.
 - **Website:** <http://tworiverscoalition.org/>

- **Boy Scout Troops** have completed Eagle Scout Projects on the North Point property – i.e. planting hundreds of trees, maintaining trails and installing erosion control measures.
- The **Bangor/South Haven Heritage Water Trail Association** is a volunteer group working to maintain a canoe and kayak trail encompassing 21 miles of the south branch of the Black River between the cities of Bangor and South Haven in Van Buren County. The association improves and promotes the water trail through newsletters, promotional events, outreach and river clean-up days. This group dissolved in late 2020 and the responsibilities for the water trail will be coordinated by the **South Haven/Van Buren County Convention and Visitors Bureau**.
 - **Website:** www.bangorsouthhavenwatertrail.org
- The **Van Buren County Conservation District (Van Buren CD)** “is a local agency established to coordinate and implement conservation and natural resource programs, in partnership with [local, state and federal] entities to provide valuable technical assistance, financial assistance and educational opportunities to the people of Van Buren County, Michigan.” Van Buren CD also serves as staff for the Van Buren County Land Preservation Board.
 - **Website:** <http://vanburencd.org/>

Organizations Beyond County Borders

Trails, greenways and protected lands provide many opportunities for cross-jurisdictional collaborations. The following organizations represent trail, greenway and conservation planning and organizational efforts at the regional and state levels that affect parks and recreational amenities in Van Buren County.

- The **Friends of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail** partner with the Parks Foundation of Kalamazoo County and the Kalamazoo County Parks Department to provide programming to maximize the benefits of the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail, a planned 35-mile paved-asphalt trail throughout Kalamazoo County, connected to the Kal-Haven Trail.
 - **Website:** www.kalcounty.com/parks/krvt/
- The **West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition**, formed in 2000, is a non-profit group of donors, organizations and volunteers dedicated to developing non-motorized trails and greenways into a linked system that connects wilderness areas, parks, historic landmarks and cultural sites throughout west Michigan.
 - **Website:** www.wmtrails.org/
- The **Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance** is a non-profit organization that fosters and facilitates the creation of an interconnected statewide system of trails and greenways for recreation, health, transportation, economic development and environmental/cultural preservation purposes.
 - **Website:** www.michigantrails.org

- Created in 1991 by area residents, the **Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC)** seeks to permanently protect the natural, historic and scenic landscapes to ensure the health and quality of life for the people of southwest Michigan through gifts, conservation easements, education, outreach, research, recreation and volunteer opportunities. As of October 2020, SWMLC owns 12 preserves encompassing 1,058 acres (it was 584.4 acres in 2011) and holds 11 conservation easements encompassing 924 acres (It was 135.3 acres in 2011) in Van Buren County. It also plays a direct role in the preservation of Van Buren County’s natural resources, entering into an agreement with the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners to hold and enforce the conservation easement on the North Point property in December 2009. The SWMLC has a partial interest in and must approve any management or use proposal for the North Point property.
 - **Website:** www.swmlc.org

- The **Nature Conservancy** is an international organization which preserves the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting lands and waters they need to survive. The Nature Conservancy owns three preserves in Van Buren County (Ross Coastal Plain Marsh in Covert Township, East Branch Prairie Preserve and the Paw Paw Prairie Fen Preserve both in Antwerp Township) totaling 2,556 acres. The Nature Conservancy also holds three conservation easements in Van Buren County totaling 166 acres.
 - **Website:** www.nature.org/

- The **Michigan Nature Association (MNA)** is a non-profit, conservation organization dedicated to protecting Michigan's exceptional natural habitats and extraordinary endangered plants and animals. The MNA has six preserves in Van Buren County with only two being open to the public (Bavicks Sand Dunes Nature Sanctuary (40 acres in Covert Township) and the Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary (79 acres in Hamilton Township)).
 - **Website:** www.michigannature.org/

- The **Michigan Audubon Society** “connects birds and people for the benefit of both through conservation, education and research efforts in the state of Michigan.”
 - **Website:** www.michiganaudubon.org/

School Districts, Public Agencies, Cross-Jurisdictional Coalitions and Private Entities

Resource-sharing and cross-border collaboration help provide a full set of recreation resources and programming to Van Buren County residents and visitors. In some neighborhoods and communities, school facilities (mapped in Figure 7) may serve as a primary recreation resource. The following include cross-jurisdictional planning coalitions and other efforts with significance for Van Buren County’s recreation resources.

- As of 2010, the **South Haven Area Recreational Authority (SHARA)** is a collaboration between the City of South Haven, South Haven Charter Township, and South Haven School District in Van Buren County and Casco Township in Allegan County. The SHARA was initially established to provide the acquisition, construction, operation, maintenance and improvement of the land and facilities that may now or subsequently comprise the South Haven Area Recreational Park (SHARP). The SHARA is also established to acquire, construct, operate, maintain and improve

public parks and other purposes as may from time to time be authorized by Act 321 all within a specified jurisdictional limits of the cities, townships and villages that may be part of the SHARA.

- The **Van Buren Intermediate School District (Van Buren ISD) – Wildlife Habitat Project** is an educational initiative based around creating an outdoor learning environment to “enhance education, wellness and stewardship.” Educators, volunteers and students use a half-mile boardwalk in Lawrence Township on the Van Buren ISD Campus (open to the public year-round) as a learning site.

Section 4. Inventories

Van Buren County residents rely on a variety of recreational facilities throughout the county. These include parks, land and water trails, open spaces, golf courses, campgrounds, lake/river access points, etc. that are owned and maintained by cities, villages and townships, Van Buren County, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and private entities, i.e. conservation/land trust organizations, “Friends” groups and private landowners.

County Owned Properties

At the time of this plan’s adoption, Van Buren County has no department dedicated explicitly to maintaining the County’s recreation resources. With input from County staff, minutes from the County Board of Commissioners’ meetings and other planning documents (i.e. Van Buren County’s Master Plan and local recreation plans.

Table 2 lists four recreational facilities that comprise the recreation amenities currently available at the County level. This plan uses the local and regional recreation and open space classification system that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) suggests (See Table 5 in the Appendix for an overview.). This classification system is widely used throughout the state and country.

Table 2. County Owned Properties, Van Buren County

Park Name	Acres	Type	Accessibility Rating*	Fee
North Point Conservation Area	17	Natural Resource Area	1	No
County (Courtyard) Park	0.70	Mini-Park	3	No
Van Buren County Fairgrounds	85	Special Use	3	Yes
Syndicate Park Dunes	20	Natural Resource Area	1	No

**Accessibility Rating - The Michigan DNR provides the following measure of parks’ and recreational facilities’ accessibility:*

1 = none of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines

2 = some of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines

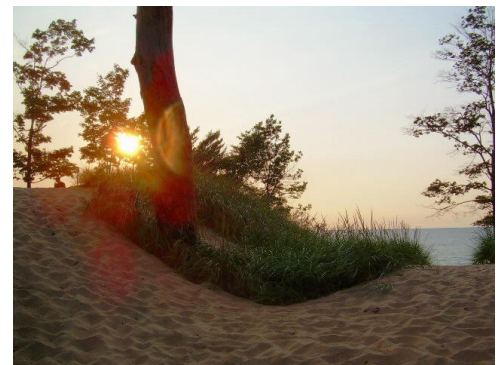
3 = most of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines

4 = the entire park meets accessibility guidelines

5 = the entire park was developed/renovated using the principles of universal design

North Point Conservation Area

North Point Conservation Area is a County-owned, 17-acre parcel on Lake Michigan that includes approximately 330 feet of Lake Michigan beach, forested critical dunes and wetlands. It abuts the lake just north of the Van Buren State Park. In 2020, this property was leased to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for 20 years and is now considered part of Van Buren State Park and is accessed through the State Park. Since December 2009, this property also has a conservation easement on it held by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.



Residents often refer to the North Point Conservation Area as the "old Boy Scout Camp," because Boy Scouts in southwest Michigan have used and maintained the property for generations. Several Boy Scouts have completed Eagle Scout Projects on the site – i.e. planting hundreds of trees, maintaining trails and installing erosion control measures.

County (Courtyard) Park

The County Park is a 0.7-acre mini-park in downtown Paw Paw adjacent to the Van Buren County courthouse. Features include an eight-foot wide sidewalk, markers denoting the four corners of the original 1840 county courthouse, a gazebo and four benches. Its most frequent users are Village of Paw Paw residents and visitors.



Van Buren County Fairgrounds

The Van Buren County Fair Board (Fair Board), a 501(c)3 corporation, leases approximately 85 acres from Van Buren County and has for the past 50 plus years. The Fair Board operates the Van Buren County Youth Fair on these grounds.

The Fair Board and volunteers have contributed to the development of a campground and buildings to supplement a “natural amphitheater” with hillside seating. In 2005, the fair board paved surfaces throughout the grounds to increase accessibility. Additional information on the Van Buren County Youth Fair can be found at: www.vanburenyouthfair.com/



Syndicate Park Dunes

Van Buren County owns over 20 acres of critical dune along Lake Michigan in South Haven Township in a subdivision called Syndicate Park. Most of this property was obtained through tax foreclosures. Due to erosion, Van Buren County worked with Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to secure a grant to restore the dune ecosystem. The grant was used to stabilize and slow down the advancing dune that was threatening neighboring residences, improve access to the beach while supporting protection of the restored dune, and to provide education on dune ecosystems. For more information visit <https://www.swmpc.org/syndicatepark.asp>.

Other Major Recreational Assets

Van Buren State Park

Van Buren State Park is comprised of 400 acres of land located along the Lake Michigan shoreline in northern Van Buren County. The focal points of the park are its high dune formations and one mile of sandy beach. Van Buren became a state park in May of 1965 when the original 167-acre plot was purchased from the Harry LaBar Drake family. Since then two other land purchases have been made to form the current park. The campground has 220 modern campsites, located approximately 400 yards from Lake Michigan.

Paw Paw River Water Trail

The 68 mile long Paw Paw River Water Trail begins in the Village of Paw Paw in Van Buren County. There are two impoundments (Briggs Pond and Maple Lake) in the village above the dam which can be paddled. The river portion of the water trail begins immediately below the Maple Lake Dam. The Paw Paw River then winds its way 66 miles through a large, wildlife rich floodplain forest corridor through Van Buren and Berrien Counties. Along the way, the river runs through or skirts the edge of the communities of Lawrence, Hartford, Watervliet, Coloma, and Riverside. Ultimately, the Paw Paw River joins the St. Joseph River in Benton Harbor, approximately one half mile from Lake Michigan. For more information visit www.pawpawriverwatertrail.org.

Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail

This water trail is one of nine designated heritage water trails in Michigan, offering 15 interpretive signs along the Black River. There are two “family-friendly” sections on the water trail. The first is the upper three miles from Lions Park in Bangor downstream to County Road 687. The other is an eight-mile section from the Basic Family Access Site (County Road 384) to South Haven. The section between County Road 687 and the Basic Family Access (CR 384) is called the "wilderness section," and paddlers can expect obstacles, major ones. For more information visit <http://www.bangorsouthhavenwatertrail.org>

Lake Michigan Water Trail

The southwest portion of the Lake Michigan Water Trail is from the Michigan/Indiana state line to Holland, Michigan. You will paddle along spectacular sand dunes, wilderness areas and quaint beach towns providing many opportunities to eat, shop, play and rest. Beach towns include New Buffalo, Bridgman, St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, South Haven, Saugatuck/Douglas and Holland. Visit <https://www.michiganwatertrails.org/trail.asp?ait=ctv&ctid=40> for more information.

Pure Michigan Trail Town – South Haven

In May of 2019, South Haven was one of the first four communities to be awarded the designation as a Pure Michigan Trail Town. The City of South Haven, the South Haven/Van Buren County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Van Buren County, the State Department of Natural Resources, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and many other community groups, various trailfriends' groups and organizations have developed and promoted a vast network of trails in and surrounding the City of South Haven. In fact, South Haven serves as the confluence for fourteen formal trails, including the Kal-Haven Trail Sesquicentennial State Park, the Van Buren Trail State Park, the Bangor/South Haven Heritage Water Trail, the Maritime District Harborwalk Trail, U.S. Bicycle Route 35, Lake Michigan Water Trail Southwest, the Great Lakes Fisheries Heritage Trail, and several others. In addition to this Trail Town designation, the Kal-Haven Trail was awarded the designation of Pure Michigan Trail in February, 2020.

Many projects including trail development, signage and wayfinding, collateral material development and trail events have been executed over the past several years. Our community has committed to a long-term plan to continue to grow these trail assets, and to develop a cohesive marketing strategy to

promote our trails. Our plan also involved coordination with our community school system to develop educational components for local area children on trail appreciation and stewardship.

Other Resources in Van Buren County

In Van Buren County, there are many state and local inland lake public accesses
https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79119_79144_80285---,00.html

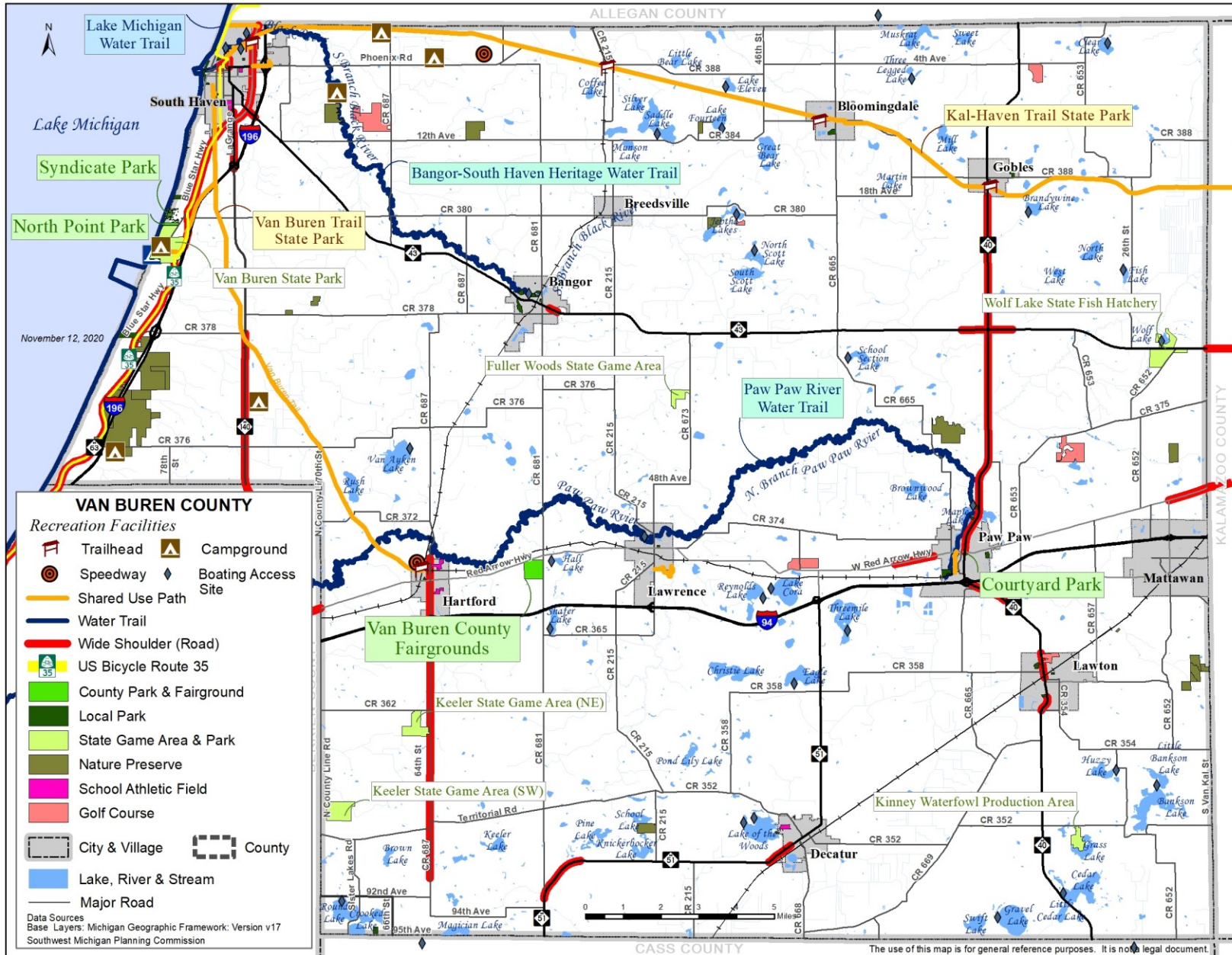
The only community pool available in the county is in South Haven located at the South Haven High School.

There are snowmobiling trails in Van Buren County (map found here
https://www.michigan.gov/som/0,4669,7-192-29907_29953_30000-31074--,00.html).

The MDNR has a Hunting Access Program for private lands in Michigan (a list of properties by county can be found here https://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/DNR_HAP_lands_list_439893_7.pdf), but currently there are no properties in Van Buren County enrolled in the program.

There are also many local recreation resources provided by cities, villages, townships and school districts available in Van Buren County.

Figure 7 (Map) Recreational Resources, Van Buren County



Non-Motorized Inventory

Recently, the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission completed a non-motorized plan for southwest Michigan which includes Van Buren and six other counties in Michigan Department of Transportation’s southwest region. For this plan, on-road facilities are defined as paved shoulders with a minimum width of four feet and bike lanes with a minimum width of five feet. There are just over 568 miles of roads with non-motorized facilities (paved shoulders and bicycle lanes) in southwest Michigan. Often on-road facilities are easier to construct than off-road facilities because the road agency usually has all or most of the required right-of-way and would not need to purchase property, which can be a major expense.

A significant on-road non-motorized facility in the region is Blue Star Highway and M-63 which follows Lake Michigan in Allegan, Berrien, and Van Buren counties. There is an on-road four foot paved shoulder along this route and it also connects to the Kal-Haven and Van Buren Trails in South Haven. As Blue Star Highway travels south into Berrien County, it becomes M-63 (a state highway) which also has paved shoulders into St. Joseph.

There is also a paved shoulder from Paw Paw to Gobles on M-40. This facility connects Paw Paw with the Kal-Haven Trail. If the Fruitbelt Trail should ever come to be, there would be a “circular” trail throughout the County. Also, it helps connect the Lawton/Mattawan Trail to Kal-Haven in the absence of the Fruitbelt Trail.

In addition, many of the roads in southwest Michigan, where traffic is low (less than 2,500 average daily traffic count) and where sight distances are not problematic, offer important connections, especially in rural areas. In the seven-county region of southwest Michigan, there are over 2,260 miles of paved roads with average daily traffic (ADT) counts of fewer than 2,500 vehicles per day (364 miles in Van Buren County). This figure does not include many roads for which traffic counts are not available, so the number of miles is quite higher than reflected, especially in rural areas. These roads provide experienced bicyclists with many miles of biking opportunities in a shared-use configuration.

Table 3. Miles of Trail and Road Facilities in Southwest Michigan

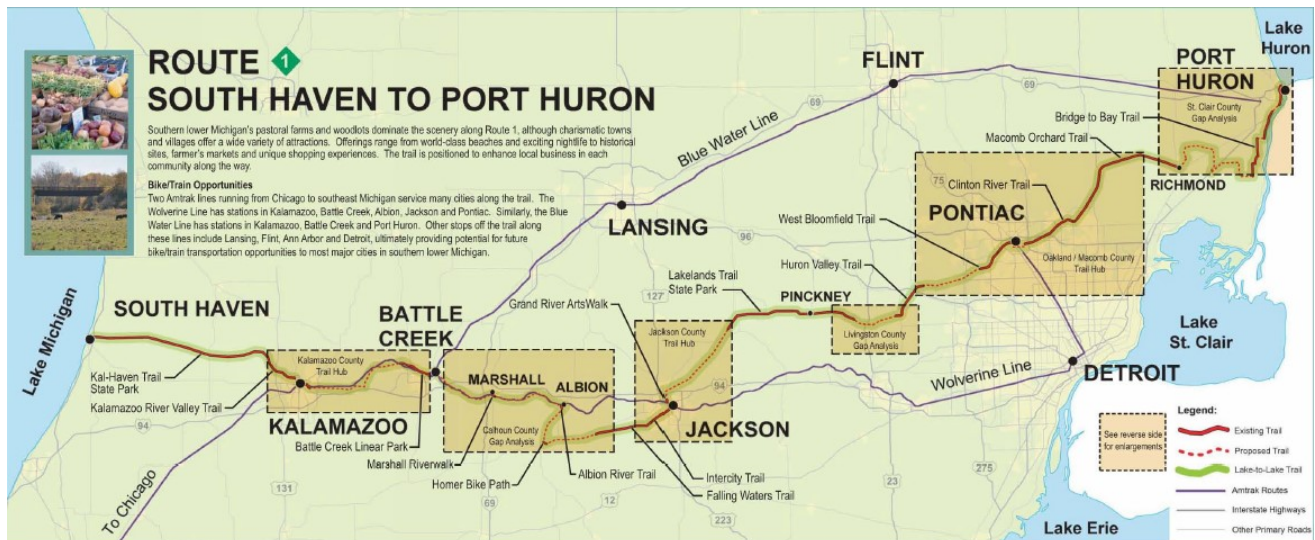
County	On Road Facilities (paved shoulders/ bike lanes) (miles)	State Roads Average Daily Traffic less than 2,500 miles)	Other Roads Average Daily Traffic Less than 2,500 (miles)	Off Road Improved Shared Use Paths (miles)
Berrien	90	10	446	17
Branch	29	13	269	5
Calhoun	107	14	277	40
Cass	54	9	324	2
Kalamazoo	201	0.3	180	75
St. Joseph	40	7	347	2
Van Buren	47	0	364	35
Total	568	53.3	2,207	176

There are 176 miles of off-road improved and 29 miles of unimproved non-motorized facilities in the region. Van Buren has 13 miles of unimproved trail (Van Buren Trail State Park) and 35 miles of improved (Kal-Haven Trail). Kalamazoo County is the leader in the region with 75 miles of off-road improved facilities.

Van Buren County has a portion of the **US Bicycle Route 35**. The U.S. Bicycle Route System is a national network of regionally and nationally significant bicycling routes spanning multiple states. The purpose of the US Bicycle Route numbering system is to facilitate travel between states on routes identified as suitable for long-distance cycling and for those comfortable riding with traffic. US Bicycle Routes can include a variety of conditions and traverse various facility types including shared use trails, paved shoulders, no paved shoulders, etc. **US Bicycle Route 35** is a 500-mile route that runs from Indiana through Michigan to Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, generally following the Lake Michigan shoreline and through the eastern Upper Peninsula. While some portions of US Bicycle Route 35 are signed, users should not rely solely on signs for navigating the route.



Great Lake to Lake Trail Route #1 - Formerly known as the Airline Trail, this trail system will be 270 miles and go through 34 towns, 42 townships and nine counties from South Haven to Port Huron. The trail utilizes 16 existing trail systems. In the Southwest Region it utilizes the Kal-Haven Trail State Park, Kalamazoo River Valley Trail, Battle Creek Linear Park, Calhoun County Trailway and the Albion River Trail. For more information visit <https://greatlaketolaketraills.org/>.



Kal-Haven Trail State Park

The Kal-Haven Trail, which opened in 1991, is a 33.5-mile linear multi-use greenway that links Kalamazoo, with over 70,000 residents, to South Haven, the largest city in Van Buren County with a population of 4,403 according to 2010 U.S. Census.

The trail is built on the abandoned Kalamazoo & South Haven Railroad route. The MDNR purchased the right-of-way to the



route in 1987 and eventually converted the railroad bed to a trail with a limestone/slag surface. Non-motorized bicyclists and hikers regularly use the trail, as do snowmobilers (Snowmobiling is permitted on the trail when there is a 4" snow base.); there is also an adjacent equestrian trail. The Kal-Haven Trail is the first leg of the Great Lake to Lake Trails system in Michigan and is considered Route #1 connecting South Haven to Port Huron.

For several years, Van Buren County assisted the MDNR with trail maintenance. That is no longer the case. In the past, user fees had funded a substantial portion of maintenance and operations for the trail (along with the Van Buren Trail). As of the MDNR's 2011 fiscal year, however, there will be no fee for trail use. Van Buren Public Transit operates a shuttle service for trail users and their bicycles for a small fee. Parking is available in South Haven (94 spaces), Kalamazoo (89 spaces) and along the trail at 6th street (20 spaces), near the City of Gobles (15 spaces) and near the Village of Bloomingdale (20 spaces). More information on the Kal-Haven is available online here:

<https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/ParksandTrails/Details.aspx?id=353&type=SPTR>.

Van Buren Trail State Park

The Van Buren Trail is a 14-mile, linear, multi-use trail that links two cities in Van Buren county: South Haven (4,403 residents according to the 2010 U.S. Census) and Hartford (2,668 residents according to the 2010 U.S. Census estimates). The trail's width varies from 10 to 18 feet and its surface is undeveloped ranging from rough ballast stones to long sections of sand, to a grassy two-track. Many mountain bikers and equestrian riders use the trail. It runs through open farmland, blueberry fields, dense brush and wooded areas, and crosses the Paw Paw River north of Hartford. The MDNR is currently conducting a feasibility study to improve the surface of the Van Buren Trail State Park. Parking is available in Hartford (an unpaved grass lot contains space for an estimated 30 cars.) and in South Haven (a wide, unpaved area off of the trail at Lovejoy Avenue contains space for approximately 15 cars.) More information on the Van Buren Trail can be found at <https://www2.dnr.state.mi.us/ParksandTrails/Details.aspx?id=354&type=SPTR>.



The following non-motorized network gaps were identified for Van Buren County in the 2021 MDOT Southwest Region plan. This is a list of local/regional efforts to expand non-motorized opportunities in the county. The list of on-road (shoulders/bike lanes) and off road network priorities were identified through public input and from local planning efforts. These are not listed in any order.

Blue Star Trail - In 2009, a group of stakeholders from Allegan and Van Buren counties came together to discuss the possibility of creating a non-motorized connection from South Haven to Saugatuck. The Friends group is seeking contributions for their project and is working with the Allegan County Road Commission in developing their vision of a non-motorized off-road shared use

path along the roadway known as Blue Star Highway. Information can be found by visiting their website at <http://www.fotbst.org/>

M-40 Corridor - Three sections along M-40, in the Village of Lawton and Paw Paw, and heading north out of the Village of Lawton, need a facility.

Fruitbelt Trail - This route follows a railroad from Hartford to Paw Paw making an important east – west connection.

Antwerp Township Regional Trail – This route along I-94 between Paw Paw and Mattawan is an important east-west connection.

On-Road Network Priorities:

- 95th to CR 690 – Sister Lakes Trail Head
- CR 690 from 95th to M-152
- M-152 (92nd Ave.) from CR 690 to CR 687
- CR 687 from 92nd Ave to 90th Ave
- CR 681 – Kal-Haven Trail to Bangor
- M-43 – South Haven to Bangor
- M-40 – Lawton to Paw Paw
- M-51 – Decatur to I-94

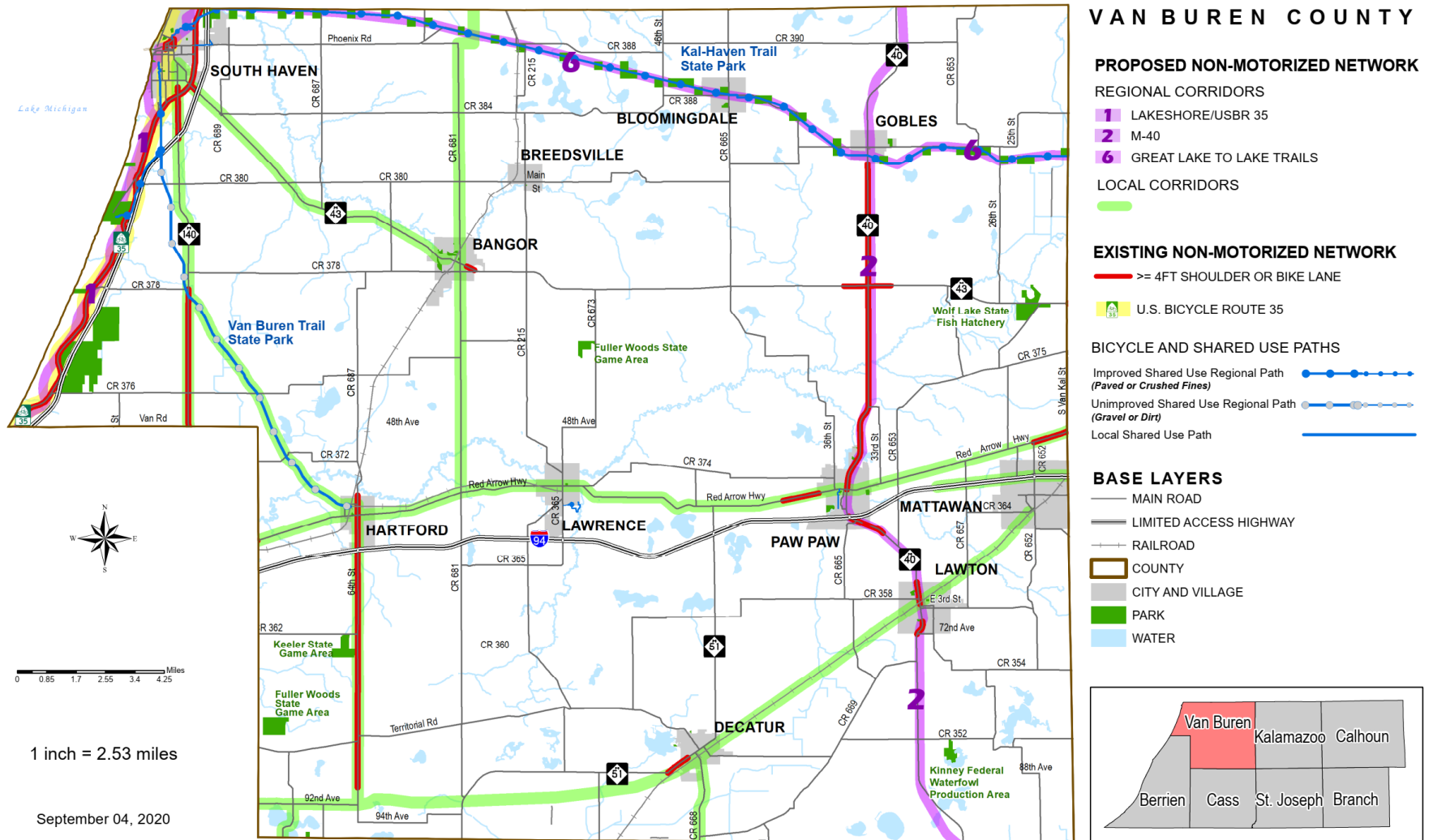
Off-Road Network Priorities:

- Fruitbelt Trail – Hartford to Paw Paw
- N. Van Kal Street
- Antwerp Regional Trail – Paw Paw to Mattawan
- Pave the Van Buren Trail – Van Buren State Park to Hartford
- Blue Star Trail

Other Priorities:

- Single track at Van Buren Street Park
- M-40 – Lawton to Gobles – the rumble strips make the paved shoulders too narrow

Figure 8 (Map) Existing and Planned Non-Motorized Facilities



Natural Resource Inventory

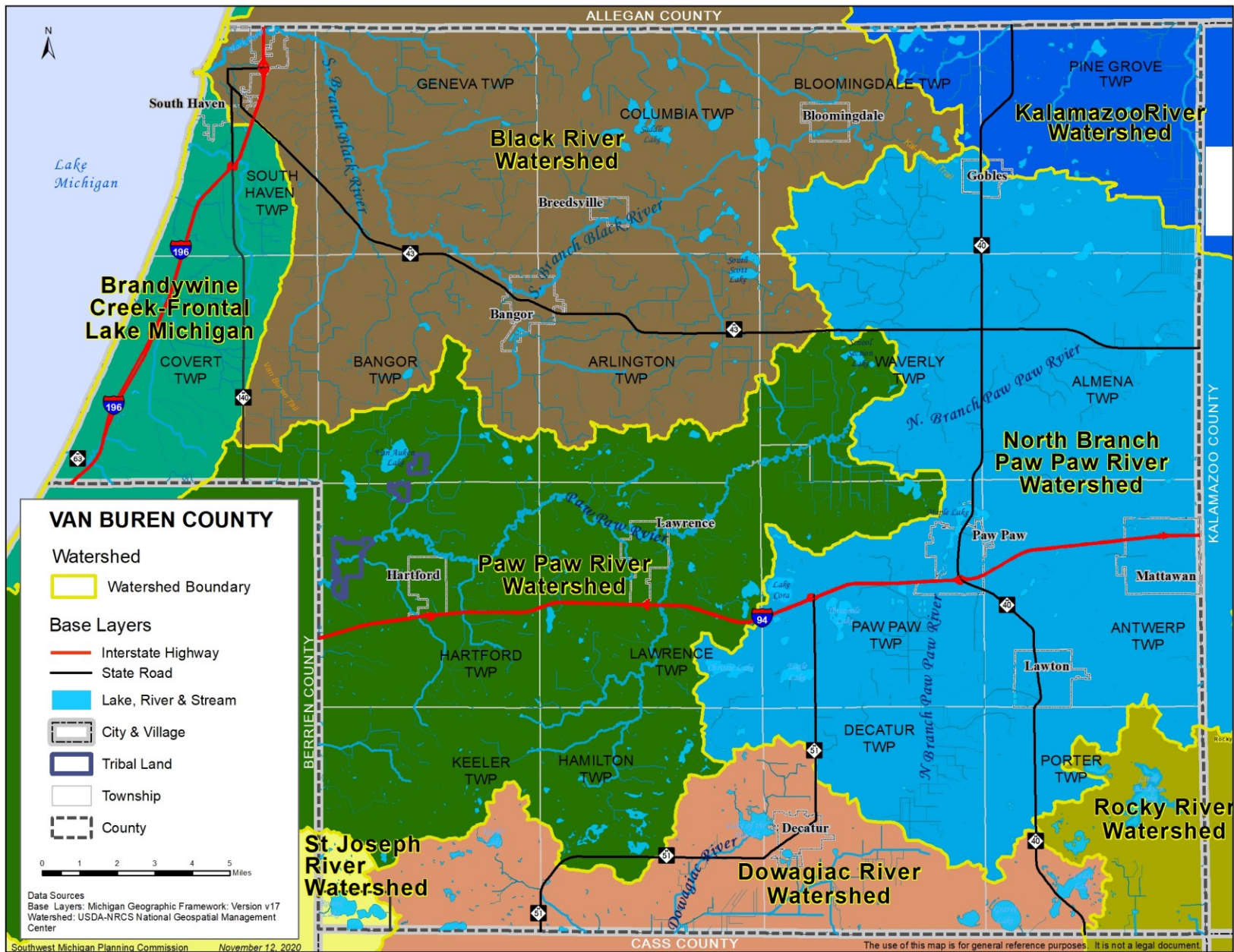
As a county within the Great Lakes basin, Van Buren County's natural environment was largely formed by glaciers thousands of years ago. Its soils, topography and especially its hydrology influence the ways in which residents and visitors recreate and use land throughout the county.

Soils. A variety of soils in the county (dry & wet, well-draining and poorly-draining) are well-suited for agricultural production. The last soil survey in Van Buren County was published in 1986; see <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/survey/> for more information.

Topography. Van Buren County's highest elevation (1,060 feet above sea level) is in Antwerp Township. Much of the County's topography ranges from knobby ridges and basin-like depressions (from three glacial moraines -- Kalamazoo, Valparaiso and Lake Border), to gentle slopes and flat bottomland near river flood plains.

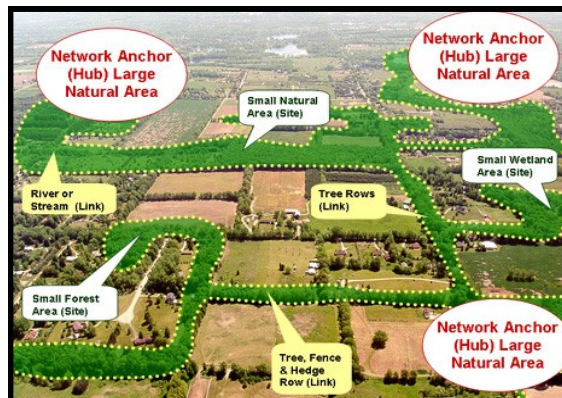
Hydrology. The entire county is within the Lake Michigan basin. The Van Buren County hydrologic system mostly falls within three major watersheds -- the Paw Paw River, which drains almost two-thirds of the county; the Dowagiac River, flowing southwesterly into Cass County; and the Black River, which drains the northwestern portion of the county. A very small area in the northeast corner of the county drains to the Kalamazoo River Watershed. Both the Paw Paw and Dowagiac Rivers are tributaries of the larger St. Joseph River Watershed which empties into Lake Michigan in St. Joseph, MI. Groundwater, surface water features (lakes, rivers, streams and ponds) and wetlands comprise these watersheds. The county's largest water feature is the 20 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, which borders its western edge.

Figure 9 (Map) Watersheds, Van Buren County



Van Buren County is blessed with many natural features including sand dunes, beaches, forests, wetlands, and endangered species habitat. The county also enjoys the benefits of an extremely diverse local agricultural economy. Figure 10 is a map of potential conservation areas in Van Buren County. This map was developed by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory and shows areas in the County which are dominated by natural vegetation that have various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. More information on the model used to develop this map can be found at www.swmpc.org/swmi.asp.

The following maps show critical dunes in Van Buren County as designated by the State of Michigan and wetlands. Sand dunes and wetlands are extremely important for animal and plant diversity. These resources are also important for protecting the shoreline and water quality.



Green infrastructure is an interconnected network of public, private, and working lands with assets such as large natural areas called hubs (vineyards, orchards, farmlands, wetlands, forests, parks, beaches) connected by rivers corridors, tree lines and trails.

Figure 10 (Map) Potential Conservation Areas in Van Buren County (2007)

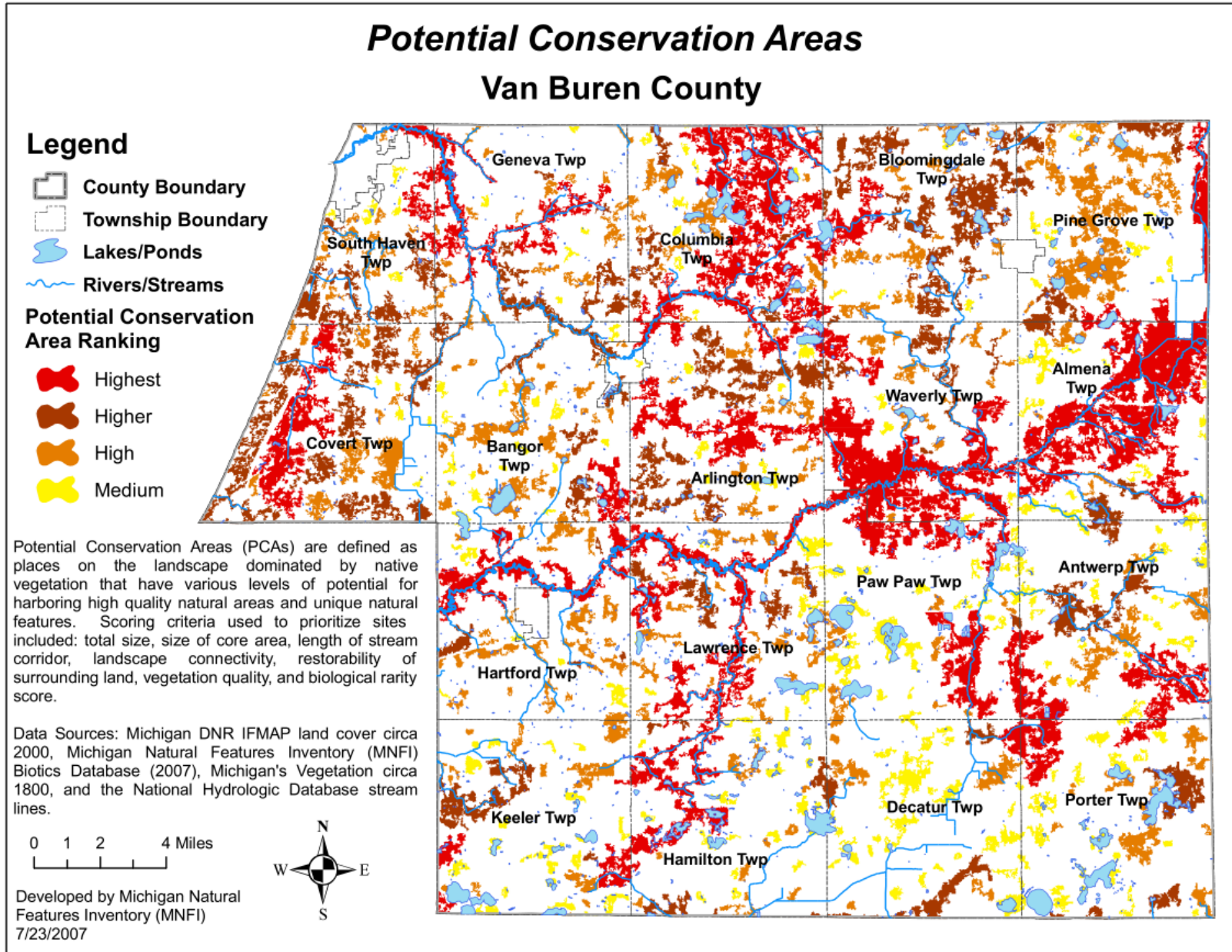


Figure 11 (Map) Critical Dunes, Van Buren County

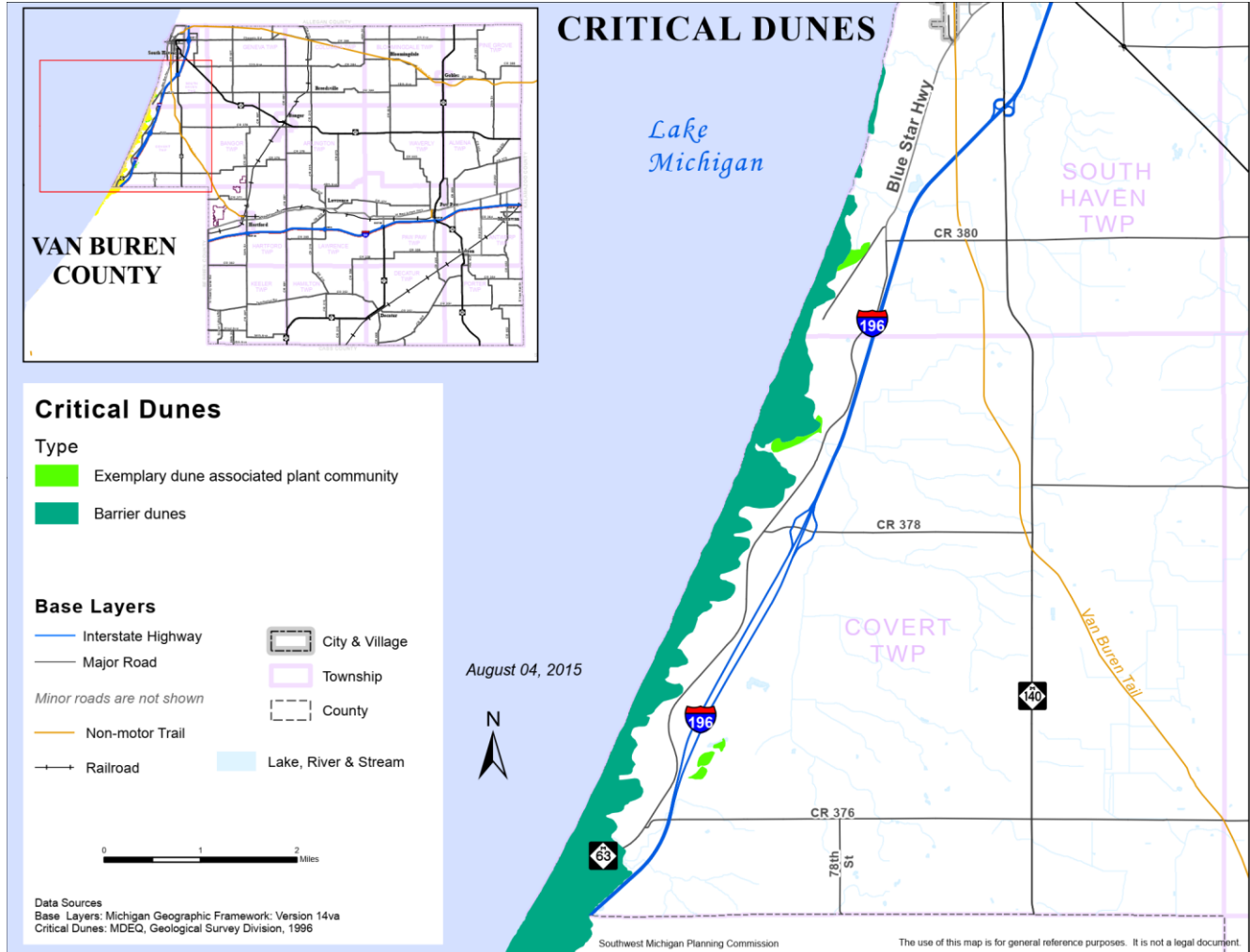
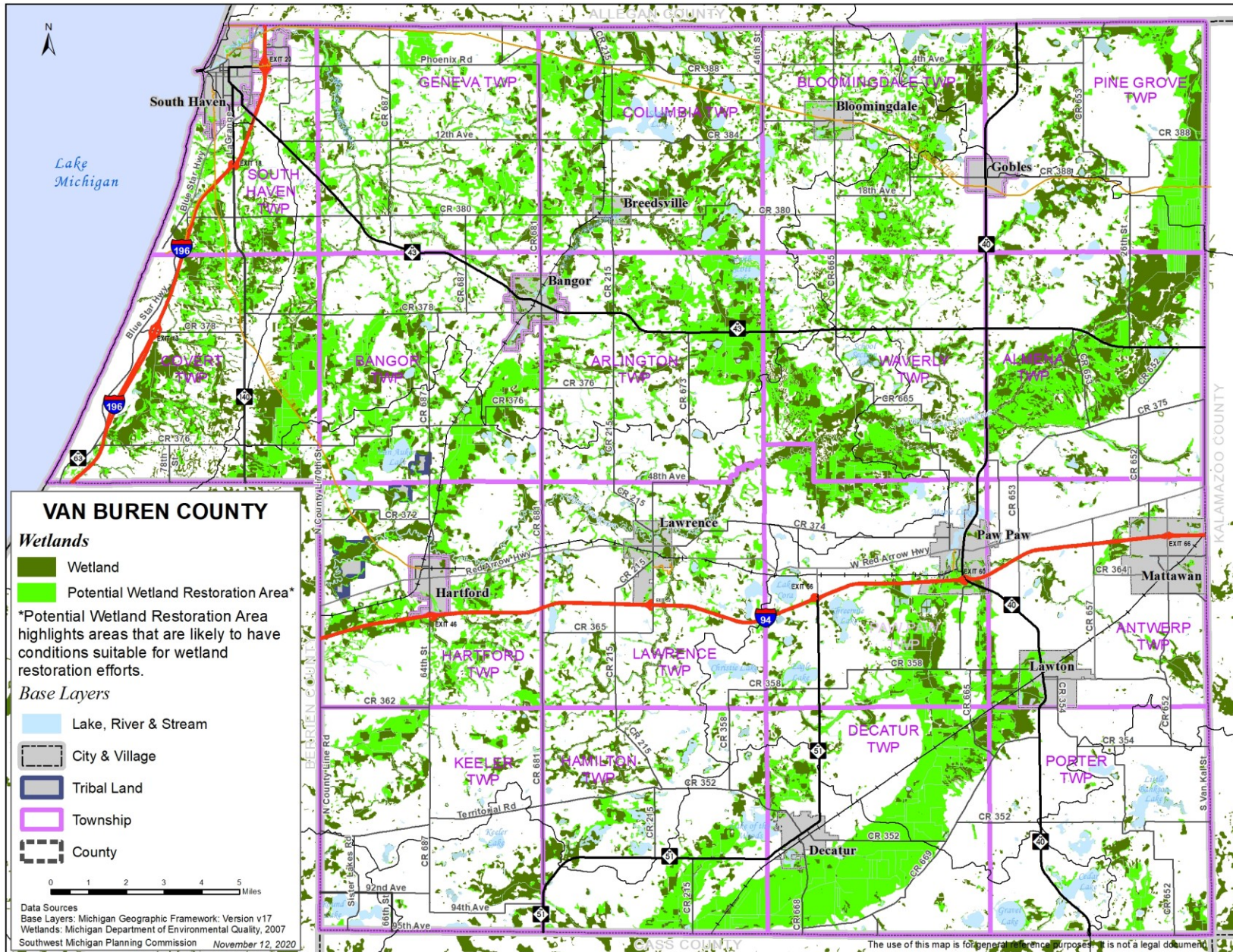


Figure 12 (Map) Wetlands, Van Buren County



MDNR Grant Inventory

None of the county facilities in this recreation inventory have been funded via the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund as of the end of 2020. Since the Trust Fund's establishment in 1976, Van Buren County has received a total of \$15,775,700 to fund acquisitions and developments projects. Table 4 provides an overview of these projects.

Table 4. Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grants Awarded in Van Buren County | 1976-2020

City of South Haven	South Shore Recreation Area	600,000	Acquisition
DNR - Parks and Recreation Division	Covert ORV Use Area	300,000	Acquisition
City of Bangor	Bangor Park	61,500	Acquisition
DNR - Wildlife Division	Lane Lake Acquisition	340,000	Acquisition
DNR - Parks and Recreation Division	Amicus Corp.-Van Buren SP	2,200,000	Acquisition
DNR - Wildlife Division	Mentha State Game Area	2,500,000	Acquisition
Village of Paw Paw	Community Park Development	169,900	Development
City of South Haven	Dyckman and Packard Beach	84,000	Development
City of Bangor	Black River Heritage Trail and Boardwalk Project	252,800	Development
South Haven Township	Deerlick Creek Park Acquisition	1,000,000	Acquisition
City of Bangor	Veterans Park and Kiwanis Park Additions	37,800	Acquisition
City of South Haven	South Beach Improvements	250,000	Development
City of Hartford	Ely Park Improvement	29,600	Development
City of South Haven	Elkenburg Park Improvements	254,800	Development
City of South Haven	South Beach Park Extension Acquisition	665,000	Acquisition
City of South Haven	Van Buren Trail Connection Development	217,400	Development
DNR - Wildlife Division	Porter Township SGA Land Initiative	1,800,000	Acquisition
DNR - Fisheries Division	Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery Development	295,000	Development
DNR - Parks and Recreation Division	Paw Paw to Hartford Multi-use Trail Partnership	750,000	Acquisition
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	Pilgrim Haven Development Project	50,000	Development
City of South Haven	North Beach Park Improvements	300,000	Development
City of South Haven	Black River Park Skid Pier Replacement	37,500	Development
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	14th Avenue Parcel Acquisition	300,000	Acquisition
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	Pilgrim Haven Development Project Phase II	100,000	Development
DNR - Michigan Historical Center	Kal-Haven Trail Interpretation Project	46,300	Development
City of South Haven	Black River Park Skid Pier Replacement	37,500	Development
City of South Haven	South Haven Splash Pad	300,000	Development
DNR - Wildlife Division	Cornish SGA Acquisition	534,600	Acquisition
South Haven Area Recreation Authority	Pilgrim Haven Natural Area - Royle Addition	2,262,000	Acquisition

Section 5. The Planning Process

The planning process for the Van Buren County Parks & Recreation Plan began in the summer of 2020. It consisted of establishing a scope of work for the plan, an analysis (data-gathering) and assessment (public input and opportunity exploration) phase.

A profile of the County's assets (its natural and physical features and the characteristics of its residents), the County's administrative structure and other elements that are unique to Van Buren County was compiled. Preceding sections illustrate these findings.

The assessment phase began in late summer 2020. The current recreational assets in Van Buren County were researched and summarized. Input was gathered from the County Planning Department, the County Administration, the Van Buren County Convention and Visitor's Bureau and the Van Buren County Road Commission.

Public Input

Van Buren County residents and other interested parties informed this plan through an online survey offered from October 13, 2020 to November 13, 2020. Below is a summary of survey results and detailed survey results can be viewed in the Appendix.

- 317 responses to the survey.
- 78% respondents were full time residents; 4% second home owner and 7% lived outside the county (most lived in neighboring counties or worked in Van Buren County).
- Responses were received from all 29 municipalities.
- Most respondents were 41-60 years of age (40%); 36% were over 61 years of age and 24% were 19-40.
- 89% of respondents think recreational opportunities attract residents and tourists for a positive economic impact and 96% think it enhances quality of life in Van Buren County.
- The recreational opportunities that are much more needed are nature preserves/conservation areas, hiking, youth activities, inland lake beaches, canoe/kayak launches, senior activities, paved multi-use trails and concerts.
- The recreational activities that are not currently offered in Van Buren County and respondents would like to see are trails (21%); water trail/access sites (7%); atv trails (7%), dog park (4%).
- If the Phoenix Road Black River Heritage Water Trail site is improved, respondents would like to see the following amenities: bathrooms (34%), safe parking, accessible launch, picnic/grill area, and signage. Other ideas included bike rack, trash and recycling bins, boat wash station, drinking water and storage lockers.
- For County Park in Paw Paw, desired improvements include more benches/covered seating, more picnic areas, lighting in warmer months and a playground.
- For the County Fairgrounds, more events/concerts was the most desired improvement. Other improvements include bathrooms, septic system, parking, showers and more paved pathways.
- For North Point, even though now managed by the MDNR, the desired improvements include trail signage (including interpretive), bathrooms and improved parking.
- For Syndicate Park Dunes, desired improvements include parking and signage.
- For accommodating respondents with disabilities, the following was identified: more wheelchair access especially for the beaches. Other ideas included accessible swings, dedicated parking and trees for shade.

- For last comments about recreation in Van Buren County, 12% of respondents want to see more trails and paved shoulders.

In person workshops/sessions were not possible because of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in June 2019 SWMPC held a county-wide workshop for the MDOT-funded seven-county non-motorized map and plan for southwest Michigan in Lawrence, Michigan to gather input on non-motorized facilities in the county and region.

The input from these efforts were utilized to update the goals and action plan.

Plan Adoption Process

After recommendation of approval from the County Planning Commission on December 16, 2020, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners set a 30 day public comment period from December 14 through January 26, 2021 and held a public hearing on January 26, 2021. During the comment period, the draft plan was available on the Van Buren County (www.vbco.org) website and available at the County Administration Building. This plan was adopted on January 26, 2021 by the County Board of Commissioners. Adoption related documentation can be found in the Appendix.

Next Steps

Parks and recreation planning in Van Buren County is a developing process. This plan performs two functions:

- Provides guidance for capital improvements affecting parks & recreation throughout Van Buren County; and
- Provides a toolkit for a new board focused on parks and recreation maintenance, operations and planning to develop baseline knowledge about:
 - the County's current recreation resources and inventory;
 - municipalities' recreation resources, inventory, planning and priorities; and
 - County residents' priorities for parks and recreational facilities in Van Buren County.

Section 6. Action Plan

The following pages present a twofold strategic plan for developing Van Buren County's recreation and open space resources. This twofold approach grew out of the planning process, during which it became clear that while the County sought to improve its recreation offerings through capital improvements, it also needed to develop an internal strategy to help shape a unified County-level approach to parks and recreation.

Goals & Objectives

This sub-section lays out prioritized objectives that fall under the following six goals. Objectives under each of the goals are prioritized based on input from both the public and county staff and elected officials. The following six goals fall loosely in order from highest to lowest priority.

1. Preserve and enhance the recreational facilities Van Buren County currently owns, leases and maintains.
2. Leverage resources and relationships between partners to develop and acquire new land for parks, recreation and open spaces where applicable.
3. Encourage universal access to both County- and municipality-owned and maintained park and recreation facilities in Van Buren County.
4. Explore the creation of a park and recreation department to manage the County's recreation facilities and future programming and manage/implement this recreation plan.
5. Maintain and promote a comprehensive inventory of the countywide park and recreation system — including parks, preserves and recreation facilities owned and operated by Van Buren County, its 29 municipalities, the State of Michigan and private entities.
6. Provide structured support for individual municipalities' recreation planning efforts, encouraging collaboration both within Van Buren County and beyond its borders.

This sub-section provides a capital improvement plan for the two facilities that currently fall under Van Buren County's management. This plan prioritizes suggested improvements for the County's recreation properties based on public input. Future amendments to this plan may choose to further prioritize and add to these suggested capital improvements. Individual improvements fall under the following prioritizations:

- Three Stars (***) → higher priority
- Two stars (**) → mid-level priority
- One star (*) → less-immediate priority
- Hash sign (#) → started or completed

Goal 1 | Preserve and enhance the recreational facilities Van Buren County currently owns, leases and maintains.

Objective	Priority
Adequately maintain and operate the County's recreational facilities	***
Maintain properties' low impact on the environment and surrounding land uses	***
Encourage connectivity between facilities and natural areas with non-motorized connections	***
Improve access (for all residents, pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles where applicable) to all facilities	**
Consistently engage local residents regarding the impact of recreational facilities on surrounding land uses and quality of life	**
Encourage year-round use of the County's recreation facilities	**

Under this goal, the two top priorities speak to some of the most basic functions of a county parks and recreation system:

(1) Adequately maintain and operate the County's recreational facilities. This is perhaps the most basic goal of the County in terms of park and recreation planning. Through adequately maintaining and operating its current recreational facilities, the County can establish its role as a recreation resource provider.

(2) Maintain properties' low impact on the environment and surrounding land uses. Public sentiment in Van Buren County leans heavily toward identifying and preserving the County's natural features. This importance placed on existing natural infrastructure and its benefit to residents' quality of life should factor into the way the County preserves and enhances its current recreational facilities. This might include engaging in low-impact maintenance and operations practices or consulting surrounding land owners when considering significant changes on County property.

Goal 2 | Leverage resources and relationships between partners to develop and acquire new land for parks, recreation and open spaces where applicable.

Objective	Priority
Inventory all County-owned property and designate appropriate properties as "priority" recreation properties based on recreational needs and desires of the community and the natural resource inventory	***
Annually inventory all tax-foreclosed properties adjacent to current County-owned/operated and locally owned/operated parkland, preservation land and recreational facilities; explore the feasibility of acquiring land for recreation purposes	***
Partner with non-profits, municipalities and others to secure land for recreation and to improve recreational opportunities.	***
Explore funding structures at the County level for land acquisition, development and maintenance of recreational areas	*

A number of private and/or non-profit organizations along with the County’s Land Preservation Board currently work to preserve open space and farmland in Van Buren County. These include the Van Buren County Conservation District, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, the Michigan Nature Association and The Nature Conservancy. Many private landowners preserve open space in Van Buren County through conservation easements, purchase of development rights (PDR) programs and Michigan’s Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act (P.A. 116).

Further, municipalities can direct new development to existing village and city centers and preserve the surrounding natural features and farmlands in the county. The maps in the natural resources inventory section can be used as a guide to understand where the most important remaining natural lands are located.

Goal 3 | Encourage universal design for both County- and municipality-owned and maintained parks and recreation facilities in Van Buren County.

Objective	Priority
Encourage cities, villages and townships to incorporate universal design standards in their recreation plans and provide universal access to recreational amenities	***
Provide for universal access at county owned recreation amenities	**
Explore options for adopting and enforcing countywide signage guidelines for (a) wayfinding and (b) marketing points of interest near recreation amenities	*

Ensuring that all Van Buren County residents are able to access park and recreation resources is part of a healthy parks and recreation system. Many local and state parks and recreation departments are moving toward developing and updating facilities with universal access. Additionally, “Universal Access” is one of the Michigan State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan’s (SCORP’s) priorities.

Per a 2006 Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) article, the term Universal Access refers to “more than just making a facility wheelchair-friendly . . . [it] goes beyond just mobility issues and associated features to incorporate technology, materials and design considerations that provide for all people in any case of a mobility, sight, hearing or mental disability.” Some useful resources for considering accessibility in parks and recreation planning:

- The National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/hfc/>
- Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Universal Access Program, <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/universal-access-program>
- The National Center on Accessibility, www.ncaonline.org
- The Principles of Universal Design from the Center for Universal Design, see Appendices, www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud/about_ud/udprinciplestext.htm

Universal design refers to broad-spectrum ideas meant to produce buildings, products and environments that are inherently accessible to both people without disabilities and people with disabilities.

The term "Universal design" describes the concept of designing all products and the built environment to be aesthetic and usable to the greatest extent possible by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, or status in life.

Further, public input in the recreation planning process in Van Buren County indicates county residents’ strong desire to integrate land-use planning and open-space preservation with the County’s recreation planning to ensure the protection of high quality natural features.

Goal 4 | Explore the creation of a parks and recreation department to manage the County’s parks and recreation facilities and future programming and manage/implement this recreation plan.

Objective	Priority
Assemble an advisory board comprised of community members, staff, etc. to work with a Parks and Recreation Commission (currently the Board of Park Trustees, which has limited jurisdiction) in its implementation of the plan	***
Convene planning commission/road commission staff to discuss the best approach to effectively build park & recreation commission capacity and implement this plan.	*
Begin holding regular meetings of a Parks and Recreation Commission (currently the Board of Park Trustees, which has limited jurisdiction) using the parks & recreation plan to guide meeting agendas	*

Goal 4 of this plan supports the potential formation of a parks and recreation department to consolidate County-level parks and recreation efforts, including the implementation of this plan. Under this goal, the highest priority objective suggests that the County assemble an advisory board comprised of community members, staff and others to work with the park & recreation commission in its implementation of the plan. This advisory board could assist with the implementation of this plan and any amendments over the next five years.

Goal 5 | Maintain and promote a comprehensive inventory of the countywide parks and recreation system — including parks, preserves and recreation facilities owned and operated by Van Buren County, its 29 municipalities, the State of Michigan and private entities.

Objective	Priority
Present an annual report detailing changes with recreation amenities in Van Buren County to Board of Commissioners	**
Comprehensively promote all recreation facilities throughout the County	**
Create a database of the current recreation facilities/resources inventory and perform a survey of changes, plans and updates at the local level. Include spatial data with these updates for GIS analysis	*

The process should be a proactive one where the county often reminds municipalities and others to send updates. Email reminders once or twice a year would be appropriate. A base inventory of local recreational assets was included in the 2011 plan, but not in this update. This base inventory can serve as starting point for a county-wide inventory along with the information on county and other significant recreational resources detailed in this plan.

Goal 6 | Provide structured support for individual municipalities’ recreation planning efforts, encouraging collaboration both within Van Buren County and beyond its borders.

Objective	Priority
Provide municipalities with baseline asset information to inform their recreation planning processes	***
Encourage local municipalities to engage the County planning commission at both the beginning and end of the recreation planning process	***
Establish a process to reach out to elected officials on a regular basis	**
Encourage individual actors to collaborate on non-motorized recreation and transportation planning processes	*

The objectives under this goal speak to the need for outreach at the County level. The two high-priority objectives under this goal are:

(1) Provide municipalities with baseline asset information to inform their recreation planning processes. The Planning Commission can suggest that cities, villages and townships review (a) the county-wide park inventory from the County’s 2011 Recreation Plan, (b) a county-wide inventory of “plentiful prime natural areas” (see natural resource inventory for maps of Van Buren County’s key potential conservation areas) (c) a measure of how recreation resource standards measure against current provisions (i.e. “acres per capita” measures) and other information as part of the information-gathering stage of their own recreation planning processes.

(2) Encourage local municipalities to engage the County planning commission at both the beginning and end of the recreation planning process. Van Buren County’s 29 municipalities are currently required to submit draft (or completed) recreation plans to the County Planning Commission. In keeping with this objective, the body in charge of parks and recreation might consider adding an additional step to this process, such as requesting notification at beginning of the plan development process (this notification is currently required by state law for the master planning process). Further, the County Planning Commission when sending correspondence regarding Master Plan updates could also include a reminder to let the County know if any recreation plans are being updated soon or currently.

Recreation Capital Improvements

The following capital improvements serve as guidelines for the facilities that are currently operated and managed by Van Buren County as parks & recreation properties.

County (Courtyard) Park

Project	Estimated Cost	Priority
Add more benches and covered seating	\$5,000	**
Add picnic areas with phone charging stations	\$10,000	**
Provide lighting in the warmer months	\$15,000	*
Add a playground with accessible swings.	\$30,000	*

Syndicate Park Dunes

Project	Estimated Cost	Priority
Provide parking for hiking and beach access opportunities	\$3,500 (using existing county property)	**
Install more signage about the unique natural resources.	\$3,000	**

Even though the County Fairgrounds and North Point are managed by other entities, the survey respondents desired the following improvements to these facilities.

County Fairgrounds: More events/concerts, improved bathrooms, septic system, parking and shower facilities.

North Point: trail markers, historical signage, bathrooms and parking.

General Capital Improvements (Not Necessarily Tied to a Specific Property)

There is an increased awareness that coordination and cooperation is needed to provide exceptional recreational opportunities in Van Buren County. Also, many recreational resources such as land and water trails traverse through several local municipalities requiring a coordinated effort to provide and develop these resources. With this county-wide recreation plan, the County will be in a position to partner with local municipalities and other entities to

purchase property and develop additional recreational opportunities for county residents and visitors.

There is a strong desire for more non-motorized opportunities. Currently, groups are working on these major connections:

Blue Star Trail connecting South Haven (Van Buren and Kal Haven Trails) to Saugatuck and beyond.

Antwerp Township Trail connecting Mattawan to Paw Paw.

Fruitbelt Trail connecting Hartford to Paw Paw.

There are also several roads that could be improved with 4 foot shoulders or bike lanes to make important connections for walking and biking throughout the county. See a list of priority roads in the non-motorized inventory section.

A current project is to improve the Phoenix Road Black River Heritage Water Trail access site. The access site could include the following amenities: parking with dedicated accessible parking spaces, bathrooms, an accessible launch, picnic/grill area, and signage. Other amenities could include a bike rack, trash and recycling bins, a boat wash station, drinking water and storage lockers for kayaks/canoes.

There are also current efforts along the Paw Paw River Water Trail to improve signage by placing signs at every road crossing. Other efforts include improving and adding more access sites along the River.

There is also a strong desire for more nature preserves/conservation areas in the county, especially with hiking trails. A potential future opportunity for expanding recreation lands in the county would be to acquire the soon to be retired Pallsades Nuclear Plant property located in Covert Township along Lake Michigan.

Another opportunity for development of passive recreation and canoe/kayak access is the MDNR owned Riverwood Property along the Black River in South Haven.

There is also growing interest in creating a dune trail that would connect SWMLC properties, Pilgrim Haven and Porter Legacy Dunes, south through Syndicate Park (on County owned parcels or easements) and to Northpoint/Van Buren State Park then eventually to the Palisades property if it becomes public.

There is also a desire for more youth and senior activities in the county. Programs through senior services, schools and other organizations should be expanded and promoted. There is currently only one community pool in the county in South Haven so another community pool would be beneficial.

The following table lists several potential projects by priority. Estimated costs do not include the cost of property acquisition and will also depend on all of the amenities provided.

Project	Estimated Cost	Priority
Acquire and improve water trail access and facilities along the Paw Paw River Water Trail and Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail.	TBD	***
Create more Lake Michigan access points and provide more wheelchair accessible accesses to beach/lake.	TBD	***
Expand non-motorized network of shared use paths and paved shoulders (see non-motorized section for priority routes such as the Fruitbelt Trail, Blue Star Trail and the Antwerp Township Trail connecting Mattawan to Paw Paw).	Paved shoulders - \$40,000/mile. Shared use Path - \$1 million/mile.	***
Allocate more County-owned land or purchase new land for recreation use/conservation areas.	TBD	***
Develop a single track/mountain biking trail.	TBD	***
Create more inland lake boating access points and beaches.	TBD	**
Implement public art projects on recreation properties throughout Van Buren County.	TBD	**
Develop a dog park.	\$20,000	*
Develop pickle ball courts	\$40,000	*
Develop recreation resources for equestrian users.	TBD	*
Develop an ice rink.	\$30,000	*
Develop a disc golf course.	\$25,000	*
Develop a facility for off-road vehicles.	TBD	*

Appendices

Table 5. Michigan Department of Natural Resources Park Classification

Classification	General Description	Location Criteria	Size Criteria
Mini-Park	Used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs.	Less than ¼ mile distance in residential setting.	Between 2,500 sq. ft. and one acre in size.
Neighborhood Park	Neighborhood park remains the basic unit of the park system and serves as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. Focus is on informal active and passive recreation.	¼- to ½-mile distance and uninterrupted by non-residential roads and other physical barriers.	5 acres is considered minimum size. 5 to 10 acres is optimal.
School Park	Depending on circumstances, combining parks with school sites can fulfill the space requirements for other classes of parks, such as neighborhood, community, sports complex and special use.	Determined by location of school district property.	Variable-depends on function.
Community Park	Serves broader purpose than neighborhood park. Focus is on meeting community-based recreation needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces.	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves two or more neighborhoods and ½ to 3 mile distance.	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually between 30 and 50 acres.
Large Urban Park	Large urban parks serve a broader purpose than community parks and are used when community and neighborhood parks are not adequate to serve the needs of the community. Focus is on meeting community-based recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces.	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves the entire community.	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually a minimum of 50 acres, with 75 or more acres being optimal.
Natural Resource Area	Lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space and visual aesthetics/buffering.	Resource availability and opportunity.	Variable.
Greenway	Effectively tie park system components together to form a continuous park environment.	Resource availability and opportunity.	Variable.

Classification	General Description	Location Criteria	Size Criteria
Sports Complex	Consolidates heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities to larger and fewer sites strategically located throughout the community.	Strategically located community-wide facilities.	Determined by projected demand. Usually a minimum of 25 acres, with 40 to 80 acres being optimal.
Special Use	Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single- purpose use.	Variable-dependent on specific use.	Variable.
Private Park / Recreational Facility	Parks and recreation facilities that are privately owned yet contribute to the public park and recreation system.	Variable-dependent on specific use.	Variable.
Park Trail	Multipurpose trails located within greenways, parks and natural resource areas. Focus is on recreational value and harmony with natural environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists / in-line skaters. • Type II: Multipurpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians and bicyclists/in-line skaters. • Type III: Unimproved multipurpose trails for pedestrians, mountain bikes and horses. 	
Connector Trail	Multipurpose trails that emphasize safe travel for pedestrians to and from parks and around the community. Focus is as much on transportation as it is on recreation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists / in-line skaters located in independent r.o.w. (e.g., old railroad r.o.w.). • Type II: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skaters. Typically located within road r.o.w. 	
On-Street Bikeway	Paved segments of roadways that serve as a means to safely separate bicyclists from vehicular traffic.	Bike Route: Designated portions of the roadway for the preferential or exclusive use of bicyclists. Bike Lane: Shared portions of the roadway that provide separation between motor vehicles and bicyclists, such as paved shoulders.	
All-Terrain Bike Trail	Off-road trail for all-terrain (mountain) bikes.	Single-purpose loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.	
Cross-County Ski Trail	Trails developed for traditional and skate-style cross-country skiing.	Loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.	
Equestrian Trail	Trails developed for horseback riding.	Loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas. Sometimes developed as multipurpose with hiking and all-terrain biking where conflicts can be controlled.	

Figure 13 (Chart) Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Universal Access Brochure
www.mass.gov/dcr/universal_access/docs/accessbroch.pdf

Selected Parks – Places to Go on Your Own

CHART CODES

- **Accessible:** Meets all codes and guidelines for accessibility.
 - ◐ **Fair Accessibility:** Meets many of the ADA standards with few barriers. Some visitors with disabilities may require assistance.
 - ◑ **Minimal Accessibility:** Does not meet ADA standards and has significant barriers. Many visitors with disabilities will need assistance.
- NA Not available or not applicable.

This chart highlights a selection of most recommended parks for accessible visitation. Each offers accessible attractions though not all park features may be accessible. If you have any questions or hesitation prior to visiting, call the park in advance to verify conditions.



Beach wheelchairs are now available at more DCR facilities than shown in the chart at right. Please visit

www.mass.gov/universal_access for more locations. Call in advance to reserve beach wheelchairs (to ensure one will be available for your visit.)



Many of the Boston area parks can be reached by public transportation.

For information on public transportation to the sites listed, check with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority website at www.mbta.gov

	Restrooms	Visitors Center /Contact Station	Interpretive Program	Trail Opportunity	Picnicking	Swimming	Beach Chair #
WESTERN							
Ashwiltcook Rail Trail, Adams to Lanesborough, 413-442-8928	●	●	NA	●	●	NA	NA
D.A.R. State Forest, Rte. 112, Goshen, 413-268-7098	●	●	●	●	◐	◑	1
Mt. Greylock State Reservation, 30 Rockwell Rd., Lanesborough, 413-499-4262	●	●	●	●	◐	NA	NA
Pittsfield State Forest, 1041 Cascade Street, Pittsfield, 413-442-8992	◐	NA	●	●	●	NA	NA
Savoy Mountain State Forest, 260 Central Shaft Road, Florida, 413-663-8469	◐	NA	◐	●	●	◐	NA
CENTRAL							
Blackstone River State Park, 287 Oak Street, Uxbridge, 508-278-7604	●	●	●	◐	◐	NA	NA
Dunn State Park, 289 Pearl St., Rte. 101, Gardner, 978-632-7897	●	●	●	●	●	◐	1
Erving State Forest, 200 East Main Street, Erving, 978-544-3939	●	NA	●	◐	●	●	1
Lake Wyola State Park, 94 Lakeview Road, Shutesbury, 413-367-0317	●	◐	NA	NA	●	●	1
Mt. Tom State Reservation, 125 Reservation Road, Holyoke, 413-534-1186	●	●	●	●	●	NA	NA
Norwottuck Rail Trail, Amherst – Northampton, 413-586-8706	●	NA	●	●	NA	NA	NA
Robinson State Park, North Street, Agawam, 413-786-2877	●	NA	NA	●	◐	◐	NA
NORTHEAST							
Great Brook Farm State Park, 84 Lowell Road, Carlisle, 978-369-6312	●	●	●	◐	●	NA	NA
Halibut Point State Park, Gott Avenue, Rockport, 978-546-2997	●	●	●	◐	◐	NA	1
Harold Parker State Forest, 1951 Turnpike Road, N. Andover, 978-686-3391	◐	NA	●	●	◐	◐	2
Hopkinton State Park, 71 Cedar St., Hopkinton, 508-435-4303	◐	NA	NA	◐	◐	◐	2
Nahant Beach & Lynn Shore Reservation, Lynn, Nahant, 781-485-2303	●	NA	●	●	◐	◐	2
Sallsbury Beach State Reservation, Reservation Road, Sallsbury, 978-462-4481	●	◐	◐	NA	●	◐	12

Appendix Text A – Michigan Public Act 90 of 1913, Section 123.66

Source: legislature.mi.gov/%28S%28fqaiui451cebqt45qrd3q1v1%29%29/mileq.aspx?page=getobject&objectname=mcl-123-66&query=on&highlight=county%20AND%20park%20AND%20trustees

123.66 County park trustees; board of county road commissioners; rules and regulations, resolution, publication; report to board of supervisors.

Sec. 6.

Whenever the board of supervisors of any county shall have adopted a resolution to purchase, condemn or to accept certain lands for park purposes and make an appropriation therefore under the provisions of sections 1 and 2 of this act, there shall be created a board of 3 members to be known and designated as “county park trustees.” In counties operating under the county road system, the board of county road commissioners is hereby designated and shall then act as the county park trustees. In all other counties the board of supervisors, at the time of making the appropriation above provided for, shall name and appoint from their number 3 members to be known and designated as county park trustees. Said board of trustees shall have the management, control and expenditure of such funds when collected and shall hold in trust for the county the title to any real estate so purchased, acquired by condemnation or accepted by way of gift or devise for park purposes and shall supervise the improvement of any such property so purchased, acquired or accepted as authorized by the board of supervisors. Said board of park trustees shall have the power to impound water on any property so purchased, acquired by condemnation or accepted for park purposes and to form a lake thereon whenever they deem it necessary in the course of improving such property for park purposes. Such trustees shall also have the care and control of such park property and may make reasonable rules and regulations and enforce the same when made respecting the use by the public of such park property: Provided, That no such rule or regulation shall become effective until (1) it has been approved by resolution of the board of supervisors, (2) such resolution containing such rule or regulation has been published at least once in a newspaper of general circulation within the county and (3) such rule or regulation has been posted in at least 3 conspicuous places in such park property, the posters to be not less than 10 inches by 12 inches in size and printed in legible type. Such posting shall be continuously maintained. They shall elect a chairman and secretary from among their number. All expenditures of funds so appropriated shall be paid only by the county treasurer on the warrant or voucher of the chairman and 1 other member of such board. The trustee so appointed shall make a full report to the board of supervisors at each October session as to the condition of the property and the expenditure of funds. The members of such board of county park trustees shall continue to act until their successors have been duly elected or appointed. In all counties of this state operating under the county road system when this act takes effect, the board of “county park trustees” heretofore appointed shall be immediately dissolved and cease to exist and the board of county road commissioners shall take the place thereof and thereafter exercise the powers and perform the duties of the board of county park trustees, taking possession of all books, records and office equipment of such former board.

History: 1913, Act 90, Eff. Aug. 14, 1913 ;-- CL 1915, 2323 ;-- Am. 1921, Act 36, Eff. Aug. 18, 1921 ;-- Am. 1923, Act 215, Eff. Aug. 30, 1923 ;-- CL 1929, 2398 ;-- Am. 1931, Act 268, Eff. Sept. 18, 1931 ;-- Am. 1939, Act 275, Eff. Sept. 29, 1939 ;-- CL 1948, 123.66 ;-- Am. 1953, Act 165, Imd. Eff. June 3, 1953

Appendix Text B - Michigan Public Act 261 of 1965, Section 46.351

Source: <https://legislature.mi.gov/%28S%28z1q5rrrcnkvgomijmqab5eqt%29%29/mileq.aspx?page=getObject&objectName=mcl-46-351>

46.351 County parks and recreation commission; creation; membership; terms; vacancy; commission as county agency; rules and regulations; compensation.

Sec. 1.

(1) The county board of commissioners of a county, by resolution adopted by a 2/3 vote of all its members, may create a county parks and recreation commission, which shall be under the general control of the board of commissioners.

(2) The county parks and recreation commission shall consist of the following members:

(a) The chairperson of the county road commission or another road commissioner designated by the board of county road commissioners.

(b) The county drain commissioner or an employee of the drain commissioner's office designated in writing by the drain commissioner.

(c) One of the following:

(i) In a county that elects a county executive under section 9 of 1973 PA 139, MCL 45.559, the county executive or a designee of the county executive.

(ii) In a county with a population of 1,000,000 or less, the chairperson of the county planning commission or another member of the county planning commission designated by the county planning commission. In a county that does not have a county planning commission, the chairperson of the regional planning commission shall serve on the county parks and recreation commission if that person is a resident of that county. If the chairperson of the regional planning commission is not a resident of that county, then the board shall, by a 2/3 vote, appoint a member of the regional planning commission who is a resident of that county to serve on the county parks and recreation commission.

(d) Seven members appointed by the county board of commissioners, not less than 1 and not more than 3 of whom shall be members of the board of commissioners.

(e) For counties with a population greater than 750,000 but less than 1,000,000, the county board of commissioners shall appoint a neighborhood representative. The appointee under this subdivision shall be an officer of the homeowners or property owners association that represents the largest area geographically that is located totally or partially within 1,000 feet of the property boundary of the most frequently used county park who is willing to serve on the county parks and recreation commission. If a homeowners or property owners association is not located within 1,000 feet of that park or no officer is willing to serve, then the appointee shall be a resident who lives within 1/2 mile of that park and who is willing to serve on the county parks and recreation commission. If no resident lives within 1/2 mile of that park or no resident is willing to serve, then the appointee shall be a resident of the city, village, or township in which that park is located who is willing to serve on the county parks and recreation commission. The first appointment under this subdivision shall be made not more than 60 days from October 17, 2003 or not more than 60 days from the date a county qualifies for an appointment under this subdivision.

(3) Of the members first appointed by the county board of commissioners, 2 shall be appointed for a term ending 1 year from the following January 1, 2 for a term ending 2 years from the following

January 1 and 3 for a term ending 3 years from the following January 1. The first member appointed by a qualifying county under subsection (2)(e) shall be appointed for a term ending 2 years from the following January 1. From then on, each appointed member shall be appointed for a term of 3 years and until his or her successor is appointed and qualified. Each term shall expire at noon on January 1. A vacancy shall be filled by the county board of commissioners for the unexpired term.

(4) The county parks and recreation commission is an agency of the county. The county board of commissioners may make rules and regulations with respect to the county parks and recreation commission as the board of commissioners considers advisable. The members of the county parks and recreation commission are not full-time officers. The county board of commissioners shall fix the compensation of the members.

History: 1965, Act 261, Imd. Eff. July 21, 1965 ;-- Am. 1981, Act 223, Eff. Mar. 31, 1982 ;-- Am. 1986, Act 99, Imd. Eff. May 14, 1986 ;-- Am. 1990, Act 84, Imd. Eff. May 25, 1990 ;-- Am. 2000, Act 496, Imd. Eff. Jan. 11, 2001 ;-- Am. 2003, Act 187, Imd. Eff. Oct. 17, 2003 ;-- Am. 2006, Act 588, Imd. Eff. Jan. 3, 2007

Appendix Text C- Press release for online survey

October 13, 2020

PRESS RELEASE

Contact Information:

Marcy Hamilton, Senior Planner

Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

269-925-1137 x1525

hamiltonm@swmpc.org

VAN BUREN COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION

Van Buren County is working to update its parks and recreation plan. Having an approved parks and recreation plan is especially important as it establishes eligibility for certain state and federal grants. As part of the planning process, public input about parks and recreation opportunities in Van Buren County is being sought. You can take an on line survey by visiting <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VanBurenCounty>. The survey takes less than 10 minutes to complete and will be open through November 13, 2020.

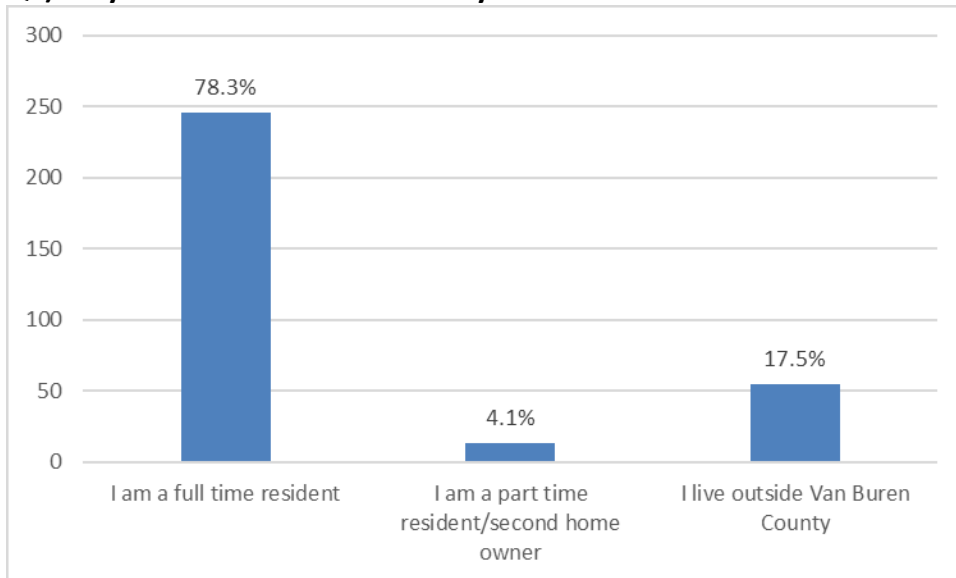
Parks and recreation improve the quality of life for residents, help maintain and attract residents and businesses, promote healthy physical and mental lifestyles, provide opportunities for social connections, protect natural features and the environment and improve property values.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, you can contact Marcy Hamilton with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission at 269-925-1137 x 1525 or at hamiltonm@swmpc.org. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is assisting Van Buren County with the development of a state approved plan.

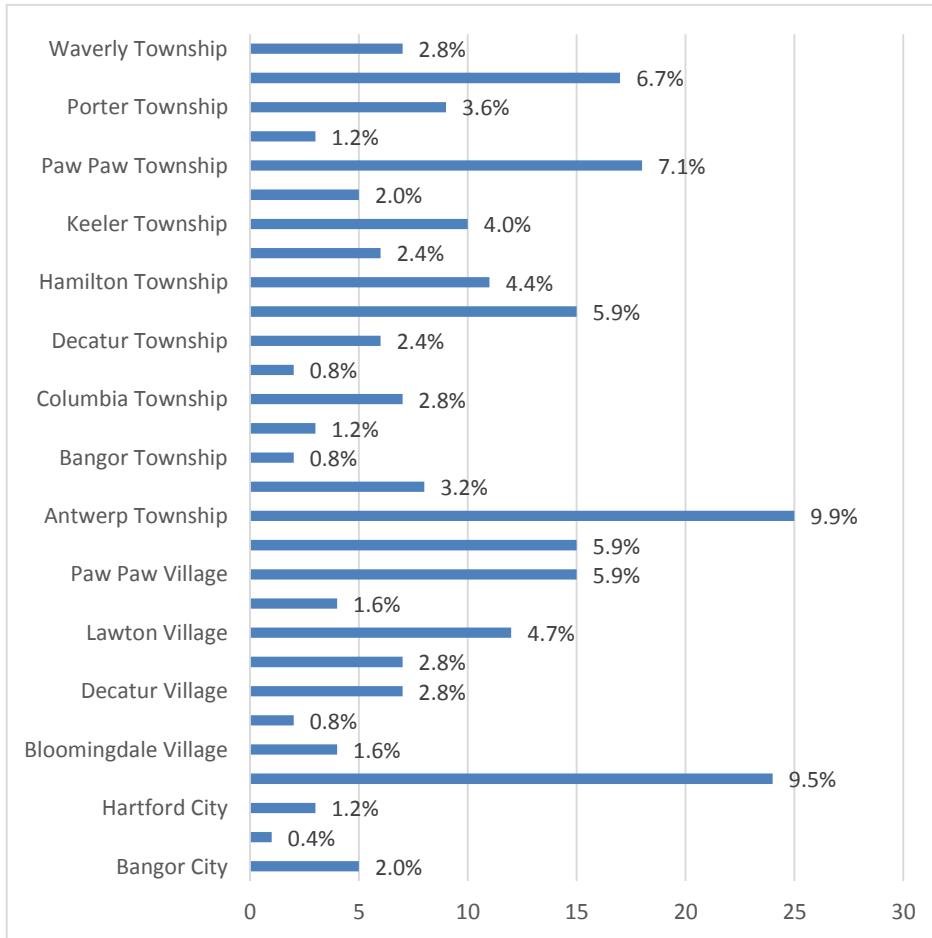
Appendix Text D – Detailed Survey Results

There were 317 responses to the 2020 survey.

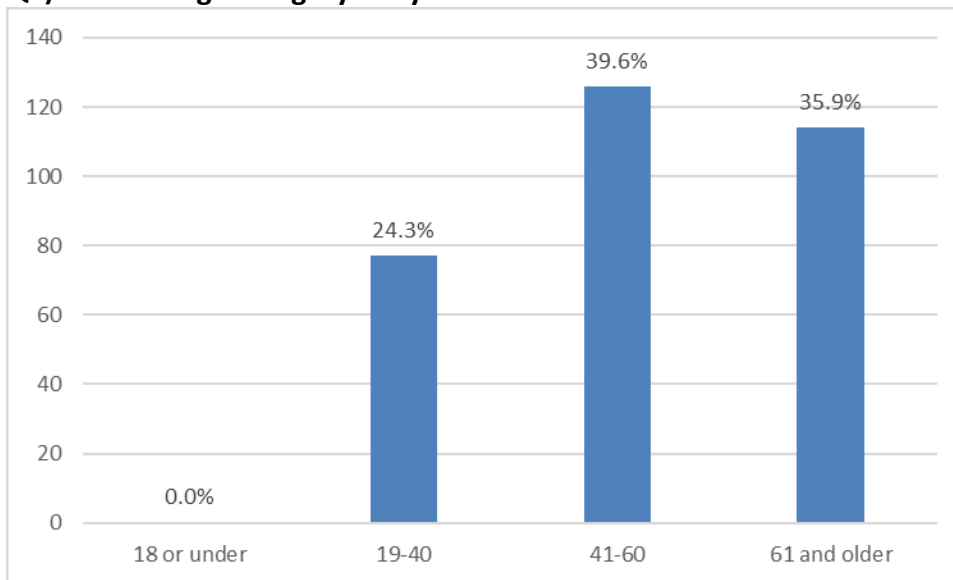
Q1) Do you live in Van Buren County?



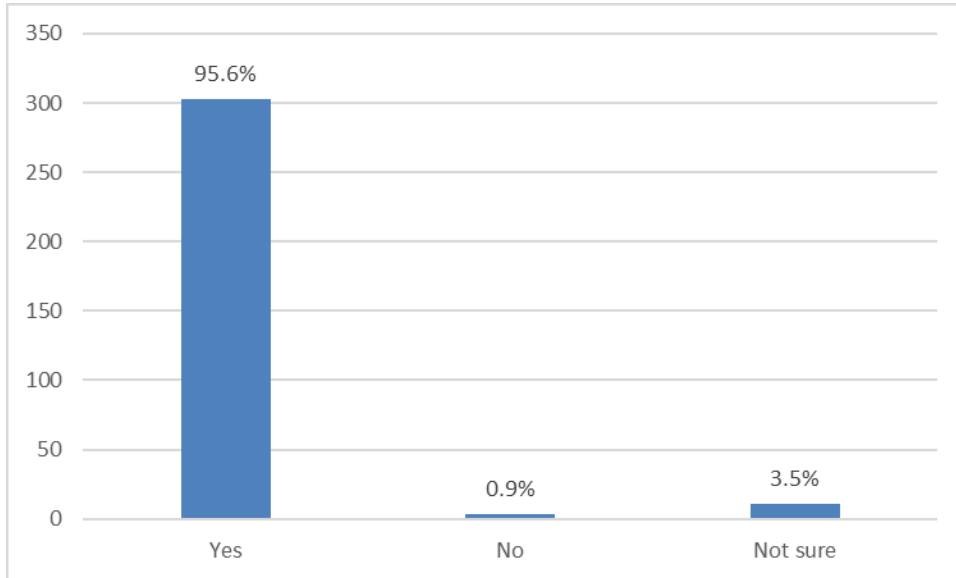
Q2) If you reside (full or part-time) in Van Buren County, which City, Village or Township is your residence located in?



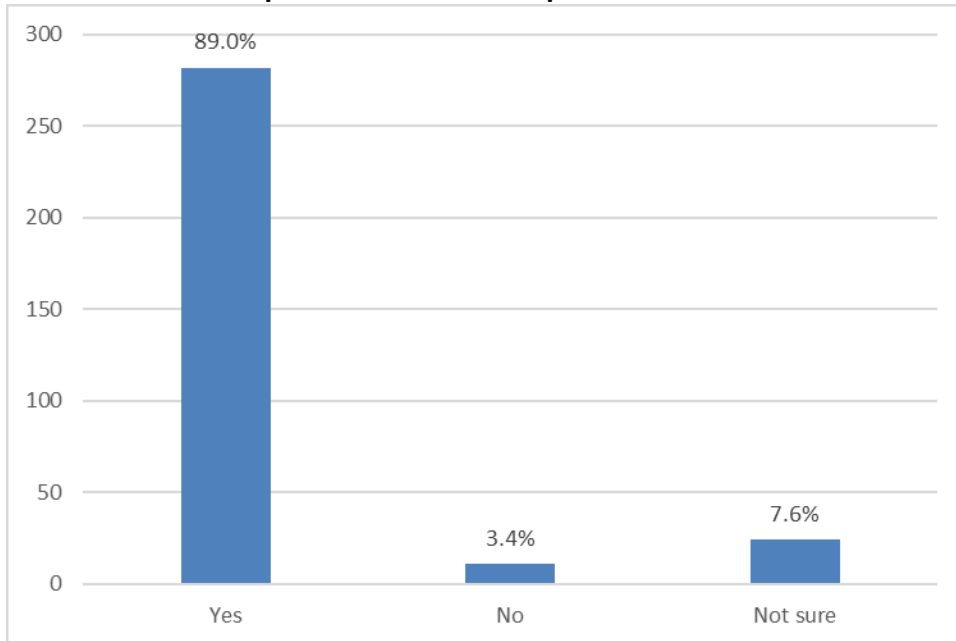
Q3) In which age category are you?



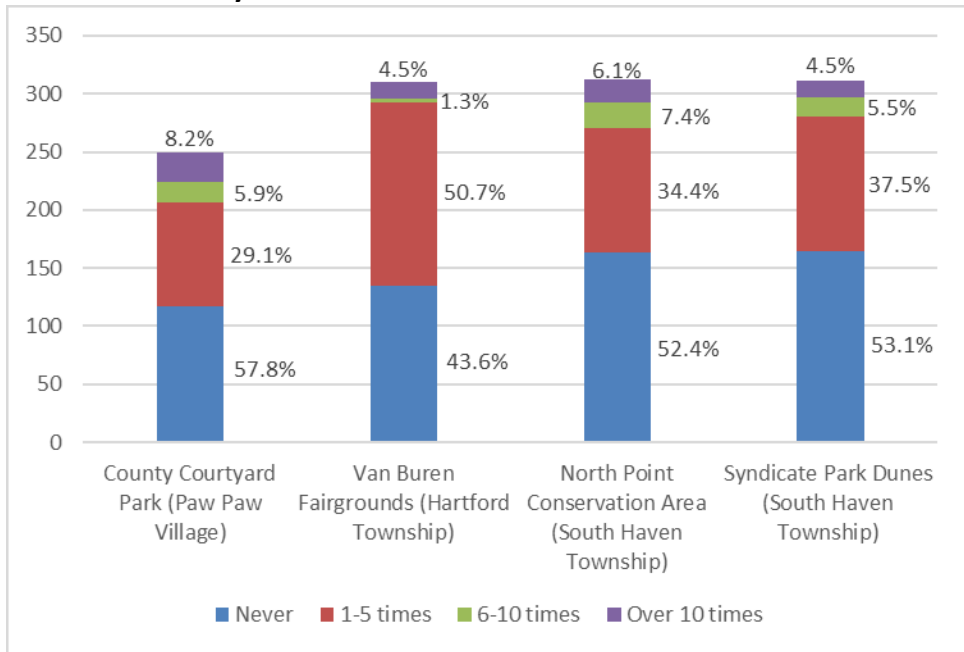
Q4) Do parks, trails and open spaces throughout Van Buren County enhance residents' quality of life?



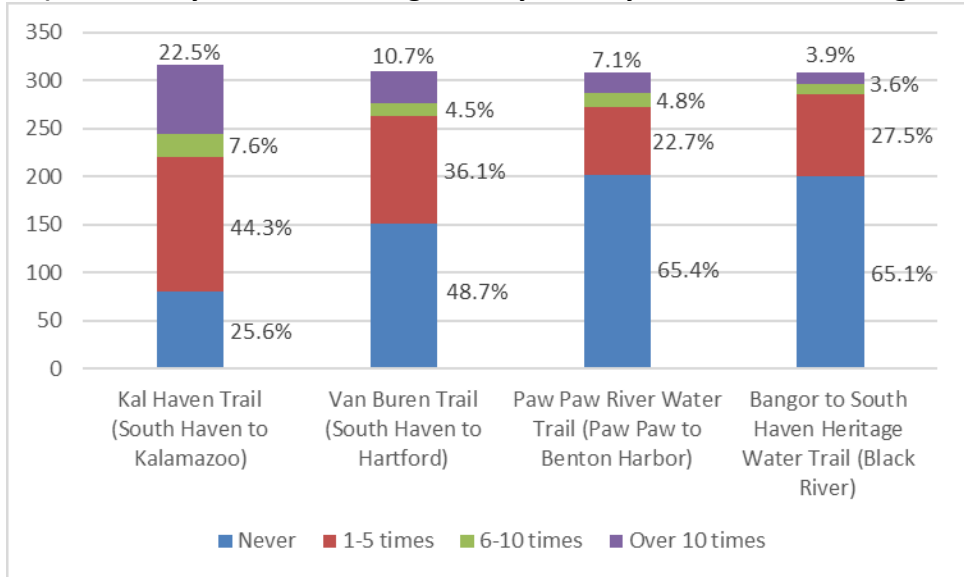
Q5) Do parks, trails and open spaces throughout Van Buren County attract visitors and tourists to create a positive economic impact?



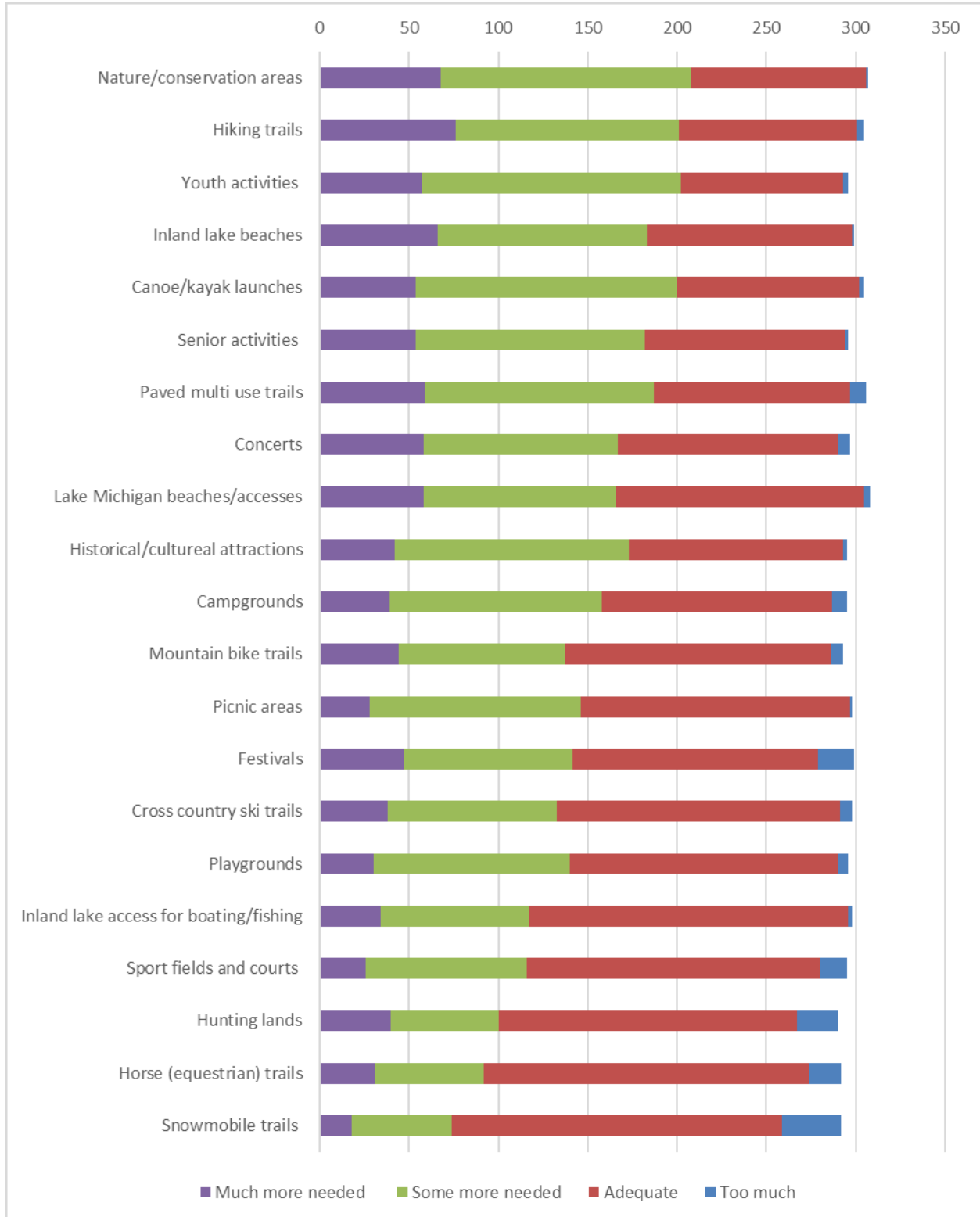
Q6) How many times on average each year do you visit the following properties owned by Van Buren County?



Q7) How many times on average each year do you use the following trails?



Q8) How do you feel about the amount of the following recreation resources/activities offered in Van Buren County?



Q9) Are there any recreational opportunities or activities currently not offered in Van Buren County that you would like to see?

Trails (23), atv trails (8), water trails/access (8), dog park (5), pickelball (4), pool (4), campgrounds (4), dark sky park (3), disc golf (3), equestrian (3), hunting (3), ice rink (2), splash pad (2), nature areas (2), accessible fishing (2), concert in parks (2), county park system (1), inland lake beaches (1), model airplane area (1), picnic area (1), shooting range (1), sporting events (1), sports fields (1), tours/interpretive (1), and yoga (1).

Q10) A grant to develop a canoe/kayak access site on the Black River at Phoenix Street will be submitted next year, do you have any suggestions for amenities at this site?

Bathrooms (42), parking (19), launch accessible (16), picnic/grill area (13), signage (11), drinking water (8), boat wash (7), trash cans (5), storage lockers (3), accessible fishing (1), bike rack (1), and lighting (1).

Q11) Are there specific improvements you would like to see at the County Courtyard Park (Paw Paw Village)?

Benches (6), expanded picnic area (5), playground (3), lighting in warmer months (2), art/sculpture (2), drinking water fountain (1), farmers' market venue (1), historical signage (1), ice rink (1), landscaping (1), and native plants/garden (1).

Q12) Are there specific improvements you would like to see at Van Buren County Fairgrounds (Hartford Township)?

More events/concerts (13), improve parking (4), improve bathrooms (3), improve septic (3), improve drainage (2), no mow areas/native (2), parking lot lighting (2), paved paths (2), shower facility (2), allow pets (1), better internet (1), better reservations (1), education venue (1), hiking trails (1), improve barns (1), improved parking (1), landscaping (1), restrooms on south end (1), and signage for recycling (1).

Q13) Are there specific improvements you would like to see at North Point Conservation Area (South Haven Township)?

Trail signage (9), parking (8), bathrooms (5), trash/recycling (3), and dog area (1).

Q14) Are there specific improvements you would like to see at Syndicate Park Dunes (South Haven Township)?

Parking (7), signage (7), control invasive species, dog area (1), picnic tables (1), and trash/recycling cans (1).

Q15) If you or someone in your family has any disabilities or limitations, are there any specific improvements at any of the county properties that you would like to better accommodate you and your family?

Wheelchair access (5), beach handicap access (3), accessible swings (2), dedicated parking (2), more benched on trails (2), trees for shade (2), sensory activities (1), public restrooms (1), paved trails (1), flat trails (1), horses as transportation (1), and accessible kayak launches (1).

Q16) Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding Parks and Recreation Facilities or Opportunities in Van Buren County?

Trail/paved shoulders (12), promote (5), more conservation areas (5), horse trails (4), more accessibility (3), water trail accesses (2), Van Buren Trail surface (2), parking along Van Buren Trail (2), native plants (2), inland beach/launch (2), dog beaches/parks (2), atv trails (1), education (1), lease County Park to village (1), more beaches (1), nature center (1), park in Grand Junction (1), pave KalHaven (1), trail etiquette signs (1), and trash/recycling (1).

Appendix Text E - ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Recreation Facilities – Summary

www.access-board.gov/recreation/final.htm#SUMMARY

AGENCY: Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board) is issuing final accessibility guidelines to serve as the basis for standards to be adopted by the Department of Justice for new construction and alterations of recreation facilities covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The guidelines include scoping and technical provisions for amusement rides, boating facilities, fishing piers and platforms, golf courses, miniature golf, sports facilities and swimming pools and spas. The guidelines will ensure that newly constructed and altered recreation facilities meet the requirements of the ADA and are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.

DATES: The guidelines are effective October 3, 2002. The incorporation by reference of certain publications listed in the guidelines is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of October 3, 2002.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Peggy Greenwell, Office of Technical and Information Services, Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, 1331 F Street, NW, suite 1000, Washington, DC 20004-1111. Telephone number (202) 272-0017 (Voice); (202) 272-0082 (TTY). E-mail address: greenwell@access-board.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Availability of Copies and Electronic Access

Single copies of this publication may be obtained at no cost by calling the Access Board's automated publications order line (202) 272-0080, by pressing 2 on the telephone keypad, then 1 and requesting publication S-43 (Recreation Facilities Final Rule). Persons using a TTY should call (202) 272-0082. Please record a name, address, telephone number and request publication S-43. This document is available in alternate formats upon request. Persons who want a copy in an alternate format should specify the type of format (cassette tape, Braille, large print, or ASCII disk).

Appendix Text F - The Principles of Universal Design

www.ncsu.edu/www/ncsu/design/sod5/cud/about_ud/udprinciplestext.htm

Version 2.0 - 4/1/97 Compiled by advocates of universal design, listed in alphabetical order: Bettye Rose Connell, Mike Jones, Ron Mace, Jim Mueller, Abir Mullick, Elaine Ostroff, Jon Sanford, Ed Steinfeld, Molly Story and Gregg Vanderheiden. Major funding provided by: The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education

UNIVERSAL DESIGN: The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. The authors, a working group of architects, product designers, engineers and environmental design researchers, collaborated to establish the following Principles of Universal Design to guide a wide range of design disciplines including environments, products and communications. These seven principles may be applied to evaluate existing designs, guide the design process and educate both designers and consumers about the characteristics of more usable products and environments.

The Principles of Universal Design are presented here, in the following format: name of the principle, intended to be a concise and easily remembered statement of the key concept embodied in the principle; definition of the principle, a brief description of the principle's primary directive for design; and guidelines, a list of the key elements that should be present in a design which adheres to the principle. (Note: all guidelines may not be relevant to all designs.)

PRINCIPLE ONE: Equitable Use | The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

Guidelines:

- 1a. Provide the same means of use for all users: identical whenever possible; equivalent when not.
- 1b. Avoid segregating or stigmatizing any users.
- 1c. Provisions for privacy, security and safety should be equally available to all users.
- 1d. Make the design appealing to all users.

PRINCIPLE TWO: Flexibility in Use | The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

Guidelines:

- 2a. Provide choice in methods of use.
- 2b. Accommodate right- or left-handed access and use.
- 2c. Facilitate the user's accuracy and precision.
- 2d. Provide adaptability to the user's pace.

PRINCIPLE THREE: Simple and Intuitive Use | Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

Guidelines:

- 3a. Eliminate unnecessary complexity.
- 3b. Be consistent with user expectations and intuition.
- 3c. Accommodate a wide range of literacy and language skills.
- 3d. Arrange information consistent with its importance.
- 3e. Provide effective prompting and feedback during and after task completion.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: Perceptible Information | The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.

Guidelines:

- 4a. Use different modes (pictorial, verbal, tactile) for redundant presentation of essential information.
- 4b. Provide adequate contrast between essential information and its surroundings.
- 4c. Maximize "legibility" of essential information.
- 4d. Differentiate elements in ways that can be described (i.e., make it easy to give instructions or directions).
- 4e. Provide compatibility with a variety of techniques or devices used by people with sensory limitations.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: Tolerance for Error | The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

Guidelines:

- 5a. Arrange elements to minimize hazards and errors: most used elements, most accessible; hazardous elements eliminated, isolated, or shielded.
- 5b. Provide warnings of hazards and errors.
- 5c. Provide fail safe features.
- 5d. Discourage unconscious action in tasks that require vigilance.

PRINCIPLE SIX: Low Physical Effort | The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.

Guidelines:

- 6a. Allow user to maintain a neutral body position.
- 6b. Use reasonable operating forces.
- 6c. Minimize repetitive actions.
- 6d. Minimize sustained physical effort.

PRINCIPLE SEVEN: Size and Space for Approach and Use | Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

Guidelines:

- 7a. Provide a clear line of sight to important elements for any seated or standing user.
- 7b. Make reach to all components comfortable for any seated or standing user.
- 7c. Accommodate variations in hand and grip size.
- 7d. Provide adequate space for the use of assistive devices or personal assistance.

Please note that the Principles of Universal Design address only universally usable design, while the practice of design involves more than consideration for usability. Designers must also incorporate other considerations such as economic, engineering, cultural, gender and environmental concerns in their design processes. These Principles offer designers guidance to better integrate features that meet the needs of as many users as possible.

Copyright 1997 [NC State University, The Center for Universal Design](#)

Appendix G – Approval Documents

Van Buren County Planning Commission Minutes Recommending Approval

Copy of Public Notice for public comment period and public hearing

Van Buren County Board of Commissioners– Minutes of Public Hearing

Van Buren County Board of Commissioners Resolution to Adopt Plan

Copy of Transmittal Letter to County Planning Department

Copy of Transmittal to Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

Copy of Transmittal to Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Plan Certification Checklist



Van Buren County Planning Commission

219 Paw Paw Street, Suite-302, Paw Paw, MI 49079-1492

Telephone (269) 657-8243 Fax (269) 657-0579

December 16, 2020

Van Buren County Planning Commission Virtual

Minutes

Call to Order & Attendance 6:30: Celinda Gilmore, Jan Petersen, Kurt Doroh, Pam Stermer, Tony Hemenway, Ray Martin, (abs. Scott, Cedarquist, Jeff Radtke, Barb Rose

Approve Agenda: On a Martin/Doroh motion unanimous

Approval Minutes of October 28, 2020 meeting On a Doroh/Martin motion unanimous

Public Comment: No comment

Reports:

County Commissioner- Doroh reported

Southwestern Michigan Commission Representative (Only if meeting scheduled) Doroh reported

Local Visits - Doroh- Columbia, City of Bangor

Unfinished Business:

VBC Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan: Petersen/ Martin motion to make recommendation to Board of Commissioners in adoption of VBC Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan. Comments included plan was very comprehensive, well written, supports local efforts.

New Business:

Paw Paw Twp.- Ordinance 271, Zoning Ordinance Text Amendments- on a Martin/Doroh motion to concur with PC recommendations to Township Board to adopt these amendments. Unanimous

Nominating committee session

Petersen, Martin, and Hemenway made up the subcommittee. Their recommendation for Pam Stermer to be Chair, and Scott Cedarquist to be Vice-Chair. Vote unanimous.

Adjourn: 7:15

AFFP
Public Comment/Hearing

Affidavit of Publication

STATE OF MICHIGAN }
COUNTY OF VAN BUREN } SS

LEGAL NOTICE
NOTICE OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD
AND PUBLIC
HEARING NOTICE

Courtney Kruger, being duly sworn, says:

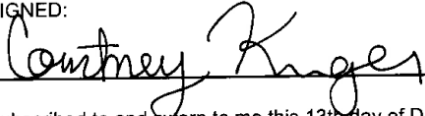
That she is Legal Clerk of the South Haven Tribune, a Weekly newspaper of general circulation, printed and published in South Haven, Van Buren County, Michigan; that the publication, a copy of which is attached hereto, was published in the said newspaper on the following

December 13, 2020


Publisher's Fee: \$ 165.80

That said newspaper was regularly issued and circulated on those dates.

SIGNED:

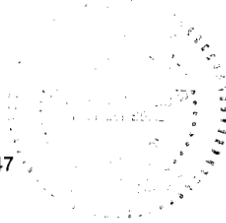


Subscribed to and sworn to me this 13th day of December 2020.



Julie Gaines, Notary Public 05/24/2024

60000654 61164669 269-657-2547



HPalladium 180
VAN BUREN COUNTY
219 E PAW PAW ST STE 303
PAW PAW, MI 49079

Van Buren County, Michigan will hold a Public Comment Period for the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan from December, 14 2020 to January 26, 2021.

The plan will be available for review during business hours (possibly by appointment due to COVID-19) at the Van Buren County Administration Building (219 E Paw Paw Street, Paw Paw, MI) which are Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. The plan is also available for review on the internet at www.vbco.org.

Written comments can be submitted by email to hamiltonm@swmpc.org or by mail to SWMPC, 376 W. Main Street, Ste 130, Benton Harbor, MI 49022 and must be received by January 26, 2021.

The Van Buren County Board of Commissioners will also hold a Public Hearing on the draft plan on January 26, 2021, via Zoom:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83884669172>
Webinar ID:
838 8466 9172

At this meeting, the public will have the opportunity to give oral and/or written comments and also ask questions regarding the plan. All interested parties are urged to attend.

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD AND PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

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Webinar ID: 838 8466 9172

At this meeting, the public will have the opportunity to give oral and/or written comments and also ask questions regarding the plan. All interested parties are urged to attend.



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

January 27, 2021

Van Buren County Planning Commission
Mr. Ted Thar
219 Paw Paw Street
Paw Paw, MI 49079

Dear Mr. Thar,

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2021-2026 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the County's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,

Marcy Hamilton

Marcy Hamilton
Senior Planner

376 West Main Street, Suite 130 • Benton Harbor, MI 49022-3651

• 269.925.1137 • 269.925.0288 • www.swmpc.org • swmpc@swmpc.org



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

January 27, 2021

Mr. K. John Egelhaaf, Director
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
376 W. Main Street, Ste 130
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Dear Mr. Egelhaaf:

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2021-2026 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the County's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,

Marcy Hamilton

Marcy Hamilton
Senior Planner

376 West Main Street, Suite 130 • Benton Harbor, MI 49022-3651

[P 269.925.1137](tel:269.925.1137) • [F 269.925.0288](tel:269.925.0288) • [W www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org) • [E swmpc@swmpc.org](mailto:swmpc@swmpc.org)



Southwest Michigan Planning Commission

January 27, 2021

Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Grant Management
Lansing, MI

To Whom It May Concern:

Enclosed please find a copy of the adopted Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan: 2021-2026 for your records. This five-year plan reflects the County's commitment to comprehensive recreational planning that includes measures to protect natural resources through responsible use and provides opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities to participate in healthful living.

Sincerely,

Marcy Hamilton

Marcy Hamilton
Senior Planner

376 West Main Street, Suite 130 • Benton Harbor, MI 49022-3651

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