

Van Buren County, Michigan

COMMUNITY PARK, RECREATION, OPEN SPACE, AND GREENWAY PLAN 2026 — 2030

Recommended by the Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission - November 13, 2025
Adopted by the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners _____



*The Van Buren Parks and Recreation Commission prepared this plan with assistance from the
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission*



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Section 1. Plan Overview

This is an update to Van Buren County's 2021-2025 plan for parks and recreation resources at the county level. It will guide the County's approach to parks and recreation planning through 2030.

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

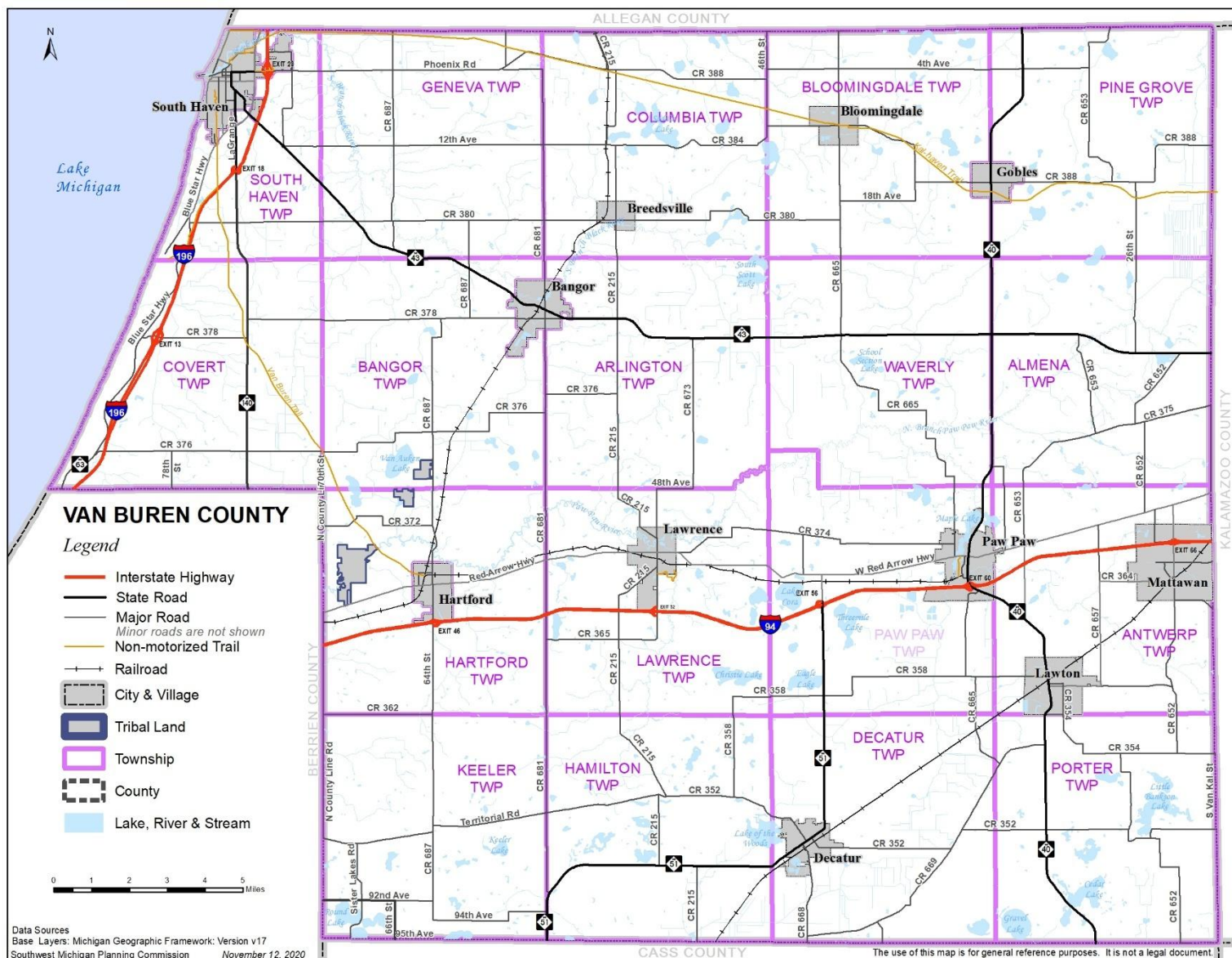
Van Buren County will enhance the quality of life for *all* current and future generations through its recreational resources.

Section 2. Community Description

Van Buren County is located in southwest Michigan and covers 611 square miles. The population has experienced a slight decline over the past two decades, decreasing from 76,258 in 2000 to 75,587 in 2020. Its residents are dispersed across four cities (Bangor, Gobles, Hartford and South Haven), seven incorporated villages (Bloomington, 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). Van Buren County has 14 miles of Lake Michigan coastline with beautiful beaches. Further, the sand dunes along Van Buren County's shoreline are part of the largest collection of freshwater dunes in the world. 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

Table 1. Population Change by Municipality Type, Van Buren County | 2000 – 2010

| Jurisdiction | 2000 Population | 2010 Population | 2020 Population | % Change 2000-2020 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Van Buren County | 76,263 | 76,258 | 75,587 | -0.89% |
| <i>Townships</i> | | | | |
| Almena Township | 4,226 | 4,992 | 5,308 | 25.60% |
| Antwerp Township | 10,813 | 12,182 | 13,425 | 24.16% |
| Arlington Township | 2,075 | 2,073 | 1,958 | -5.64% |
| Bangor Township | 2,121 | 2,147 | 1,939 | -8.58% |
| Bloomington Township | 3,364 | 3,103 | 2,930 | -12.90% |
| Columbia Township | 2,714 | 2,588 | 2,546 | -6.19% |
| Covert Township | 3,141 | 2,888 | 2,510 | -20.09% |
| Decatur Township | 3,916 | 3,726 | 3,575 | -8.71% |
| Geneva Township | 3,975 | 3,573 | 3,416 | -14.06% |
| Hamilton Township | 1,797 | 1,489 | 1,370 | -23.76% |
| Hartford Township | 3,159 | 3,274 | 3,021 | -4.37% |
| Keeler Township | 2,601 | 2,169 | 1,968 | -24.34% |
| Lawrence Township | 3,341 | 3,259 | 3,289 | -1.56% |
| Paw Paw Township | 7,091 | 7,041 | 6,881 | -2.96% |
| Pine Grove Township | 2,773 | 2,949 | 2,994 | 7.97% |
| Porter Township | 2,406 | 2,466 | 2,568 | 6.73% |
| South Haven Township | 4,046 | 3,983 | 4,041 | -0.12% |
| Waverly Township | 2,467 | 2,554 | 2,506 | 1.58% |
| Subtotal | 66,026 | 66,456 | 66,245 | 0.33% |
| <i>Cities</i> | | | | |
| City of Bangor | 1,933 | 1,885 | 2,016 | 4.29% |
| City of Gobles | 815 | 829 | 851 | 4.42% |
| City of Hartford | 2,476 | 2,688 | 2,515 | 1.58% |
| City of South Haven | 5,013 | 4,400 | 3,960 | -21.01% |
| Subtotal | 10,237 | 9,802 | 9,342 | -8.74% |
| <i>Census population figures for the following villages have been included in the figures (above) for the townships in which they are located.</i> | | | | |
| <i>Villages</i> | | | | |
| Bloomington | 528 | 454 | 513 | -2.84% |
| Breedsville | 235 | 199 | 202 | -14.04% |
| Decatur | 1,838 | 1,819 | 1,651 | -10.17% |
| Lawrence | 1,059 | 996 | 964 | -8.97% |
| Lawton | 1,859 | 1,900 | 1,850 | -0.48% |
| Mattawan | 2,536 | 1,997 | 2,550 | 0.55% |
| Paw Paw | 3,363 | 3,534 | 3,362 | -0.03% |
| Subtotal | 11,183 | 10,700 | 10,890 | -2.62% |

Population Trends in Van Buren County (2000–2020)

Between 2000 and 2020, Van Buren County experienced a slight overall population decline, though the picture becomes more complex when broken down by township, city, and village. The townships remained relatively stable, with slight overall growth. Some, like Almena and Antwerp, saw clear gains—likely due to their appeal as residential communities near job centers. Others, especially more rural areas like Keeler, Hamilton, and Covert, experienced notable declines. These shifts may reflect aging populations, limited job opportunities, or younger residents relocating for education and employment.

The county's cities tell a different story. South Haven saw a significant population drop, potentially tied to the number of second homes/short term rentals. In contrast, Bangor, Gobles, and Hartford saw modest growth, suggesting some urban areas remain resilient or are benefiting from local investments.

The villages saw a slight decline overall. While Mattawan showed signs of recovery, other villages like Decatur and Lawrence continued to lose residents. These changes reinforce a broader trend of population concentration around more accessible or economically active areas.

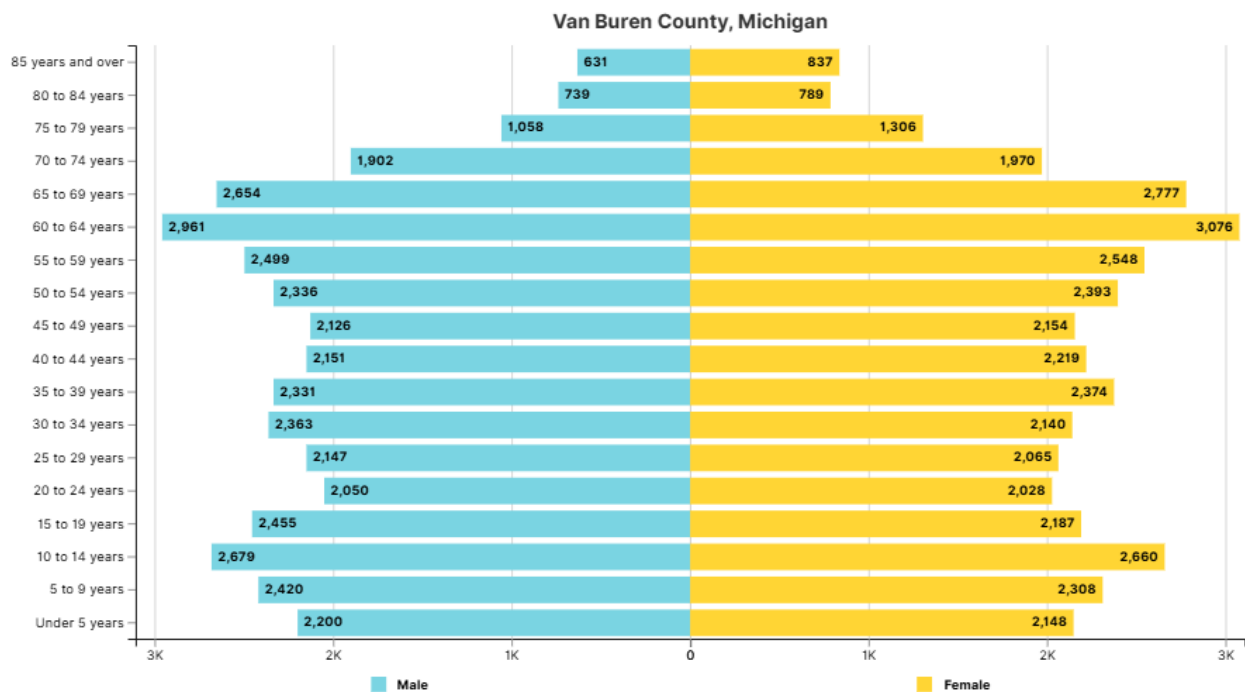
Overall, the county's population trends reveal a pattern of growth near economic hubs and corridors and decline in more remote or economically challenged communities.

Age Distribution

Van Buren County's population is both youthful and aging. Children and teens make up a significant share – about 23.3% of residents are under 19 (nearly one-quarter), slightly above the Michigan statewide figure (21.0%). At the same time, seniors (65 and older) comprise roughly 20% of the county's population, a proportion higher than Michigan's 19% average. The median age in Van Buren is 42.8 years, which exceeds the state median (40.5 years). This reflects a trend of an aging population—over the past decade, the number of older adults has grown while youth and younger working-age groups declined.

A large youth population (nearly one in four residents) means continued demand for children's play areas, youth sports, and teen programs. At the same time, the high and growing share of seniors (one in five and rising) points to increasing need for older-adult recreation opportunities – such as low-impact fitness, walking trails, and social programs for seniors. The median age being higher than the state average underscores the importance of multigenerational facilities and activities. In short, Van Buren County will need to balance amenities for young families (e.g. playgrounds, sports fields) with accessible, age-friendly infrastructure (like benches, smooth pathways, and programming for seniors). An aging populace may also mean more volunteers and retirees available for community activities, but also greater demand for passive recreation and ADA-compliant design in parks. Ensuring that both ends of the age spectrum – youth and elders – are served will be a key priority.

Population Pyramid: Population by Age and Sex in Van Buren County, Michigan



Source: 2023 ACS 5-year estimates

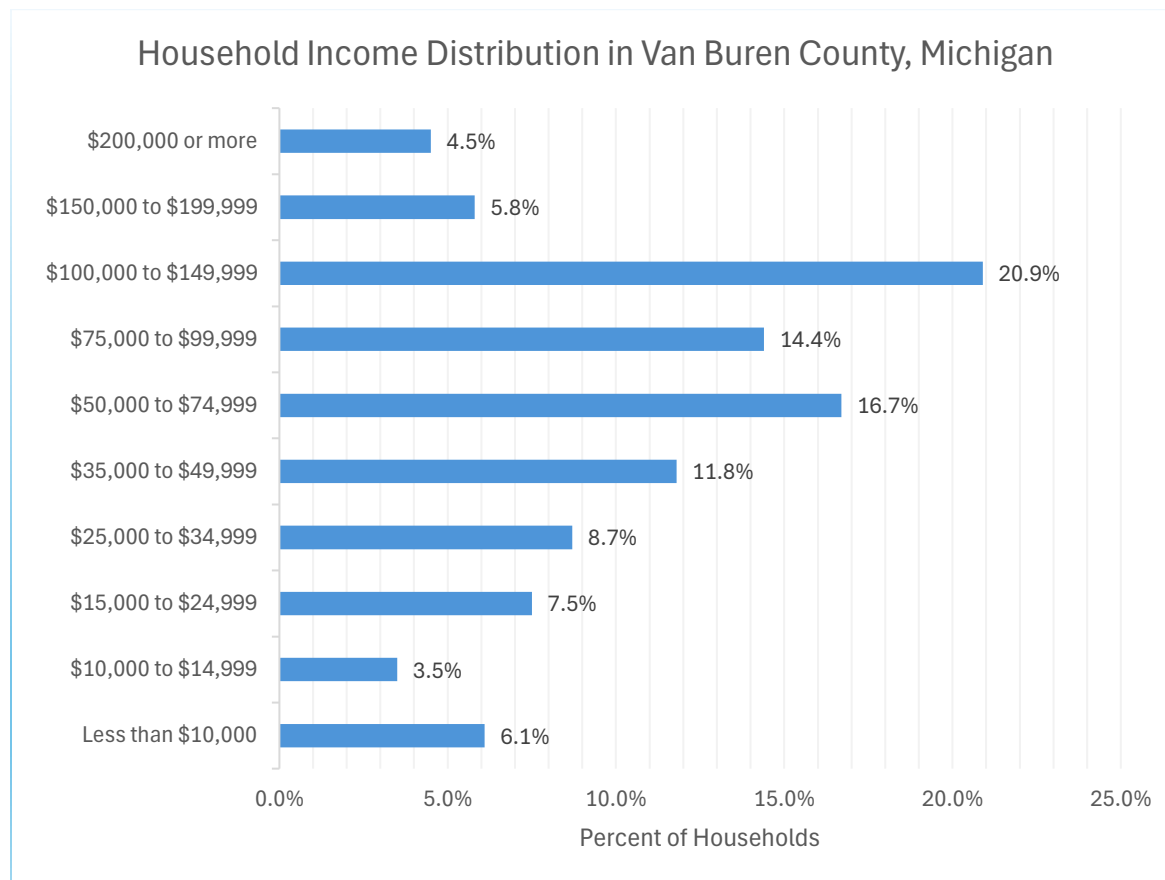
Household Income and Economic Characteristics

Van Buren County's economic profile shows moderate incomes on average, with notable income stratification that could affect recreation access. The median household income is about \$66,400 per year, which is slightly below the Michigan median (\$69,100). A significant segment of the community is of modest means: roughly 38% of households have incomes under \$50,000, and in total about two-thirds earn below \$100,000.

By contrast, upper-income households are relatively few – only around 5% of households have incomes above \$200,000. The county's poverty rate (individuals below the poverty line) is approximately 15.6%, a bit higher than Michigan's overall 13.5%. Taken together, these figures suggest a community with many working-class families and a smaller affluent tier. Notably, Van Buren's per capita income is about 80% of the state average, highlighting lower income levels and potential affordability challenges for some residents.

Household income levels influence how residents can participate in recreation. Van Buren's slightly lower-than-average incomes and higher poverty signal that affordability is crucial in planning programs and facilities. Many families may be cost-sensitive, so user fees, equipment costs, or travel expenses could be barriers to participation. The fact that over one-third of households earn under \$50,000 suggests a need for low-cost or free recreational opportunities – for example, public parks, playgrounds, trails, and scholarship-supported youth sports leagues.

Keeping entry fees minimal and offering tiered pricing or resident discounts can help ensure access for lower-income residents. Additionally, transportation can be a financial barrier; planning should consider distributed local facilities (so residents need not travel far) or partnerships to provide transit from poorer rural areas to recreation sites.



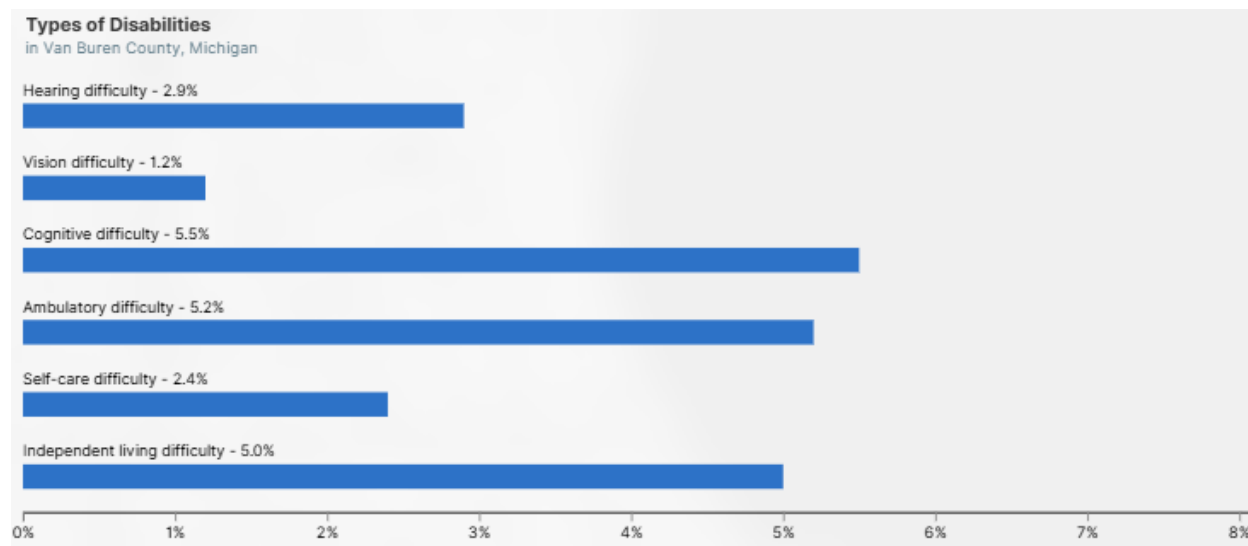
Disability Status and Accessibility

According to the American Community Survey, 11.8% of residents in Van Buren County live with a disability, compared to 14.7% statewide. While the county’s overall rate is slightly lower than Michigan’s, it still represents a significant portion of the population—more than one in ten residents.

Disability rates tend to rise sharply with age. While only a small share of children report a disability, the proportion increases notably among older adults. Nationally, about one in three adults over age 65 lives with some form of disability, and Van Buren County’s aging population suggests its overall disability rate is likely to increase in the coming years. This trend underscores the importance of designing recreation spaces that are not only compliant with ADA standards but also intentionally inclusive.

Accessible features—such as wheelchair-friendly pathways, ramps, and restrooms—are crucial across all facilities. Inclusive playground equipment, sensory-friendly programming, and

adaptive recreation options (like accessible kayaking or guided walks for the visually impaired) help ensure everyone can participate fully. Given the higher share of older adults, amenities like benches along trails, smooth walking surfaces, and clear signage with large print will make parks more navigable for those with mobility or sensory limitations.



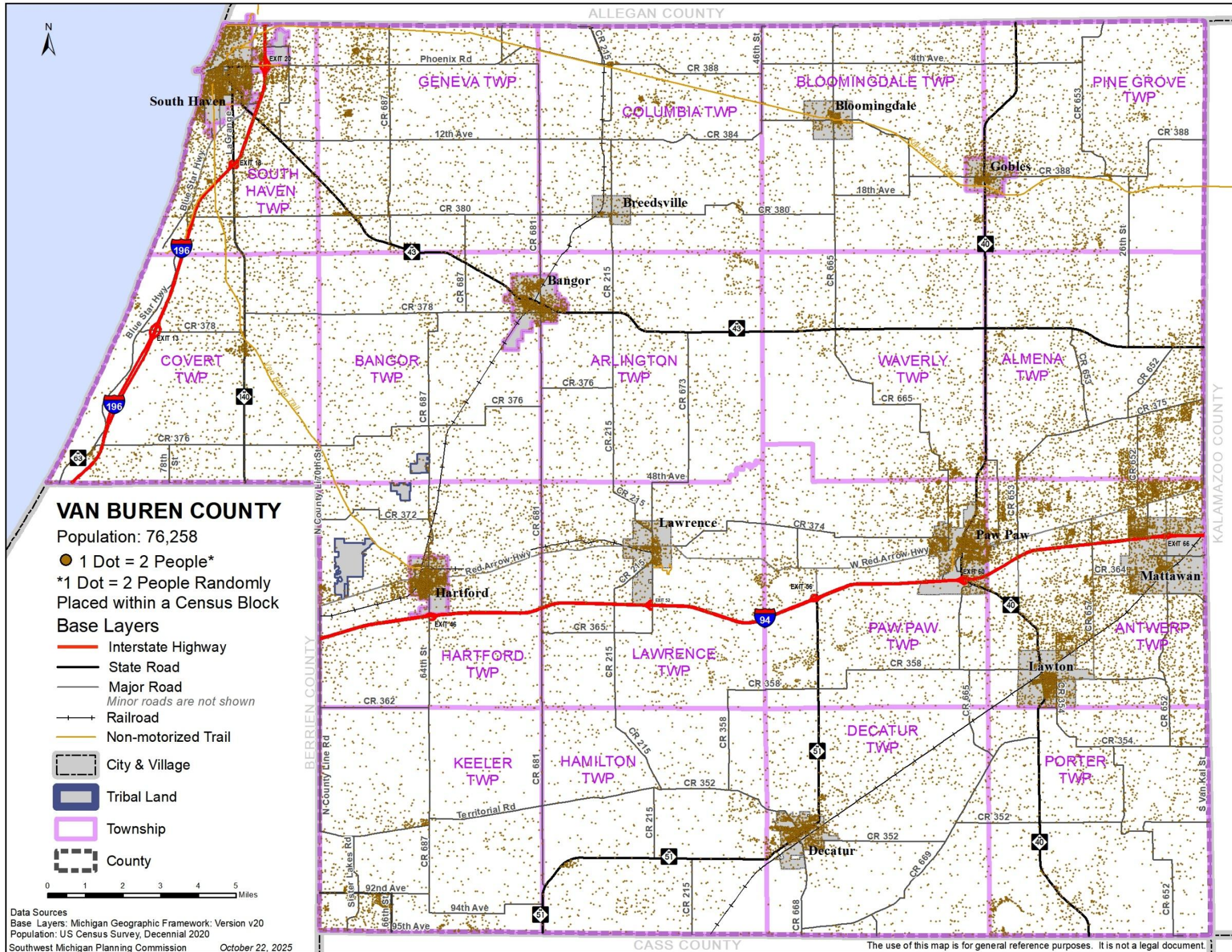
Urban vs. Rural Distribution

Van Buren County is a largely rural area, with most of its residents living outside incorporated cities or towns. According to census classifications, only about 29% of the county's population lives in "urban" areas, while fully 71% live in rural areas. (The county's total population of 75,587, spread across 607.8 square miles of land, giving a modest density of 125 people per sq. mile.) In contrast, Michigan's population overall is mostly urban (roughly 75% urban vs. 25% rural), thanks to big metropolitan centers like Detroit and Grand Rapids.

Van Buren has no large cities – the largest are South Haven and Paw Paw which have only a few thousand residents – much of the population resides in villages, unincorporated communities, or farm country. This settlement pattern means many residents live miles from major commercial centers or parks, often on country roads or in small subdivisions. The rural character is one of the county's strengths, offering abundant open space and a strong agricultural tradition, but it also poses challenges for recreation planning.

The predominantly rural makeup of Van Buren County means that siting recreational facilities and providing outreach require special consideration. With residents dispersed across townships and countryside, accessibility becomes a key issue – people may have to drive longer distances to reach a county park or recreation program. To serve rural families, it will be important to geographically distribute recreation amenities as much as feasible. This could involve maintaining smaller community parks or playgrounds in outlying villages, developing trail networks (e.g. rail-trails or greenways) that link rural neighborhoods to town centers, or using school facilities in various townships for evening/weekend recreation programs.

Figure 2 (Map) Population Density, Van Buren County



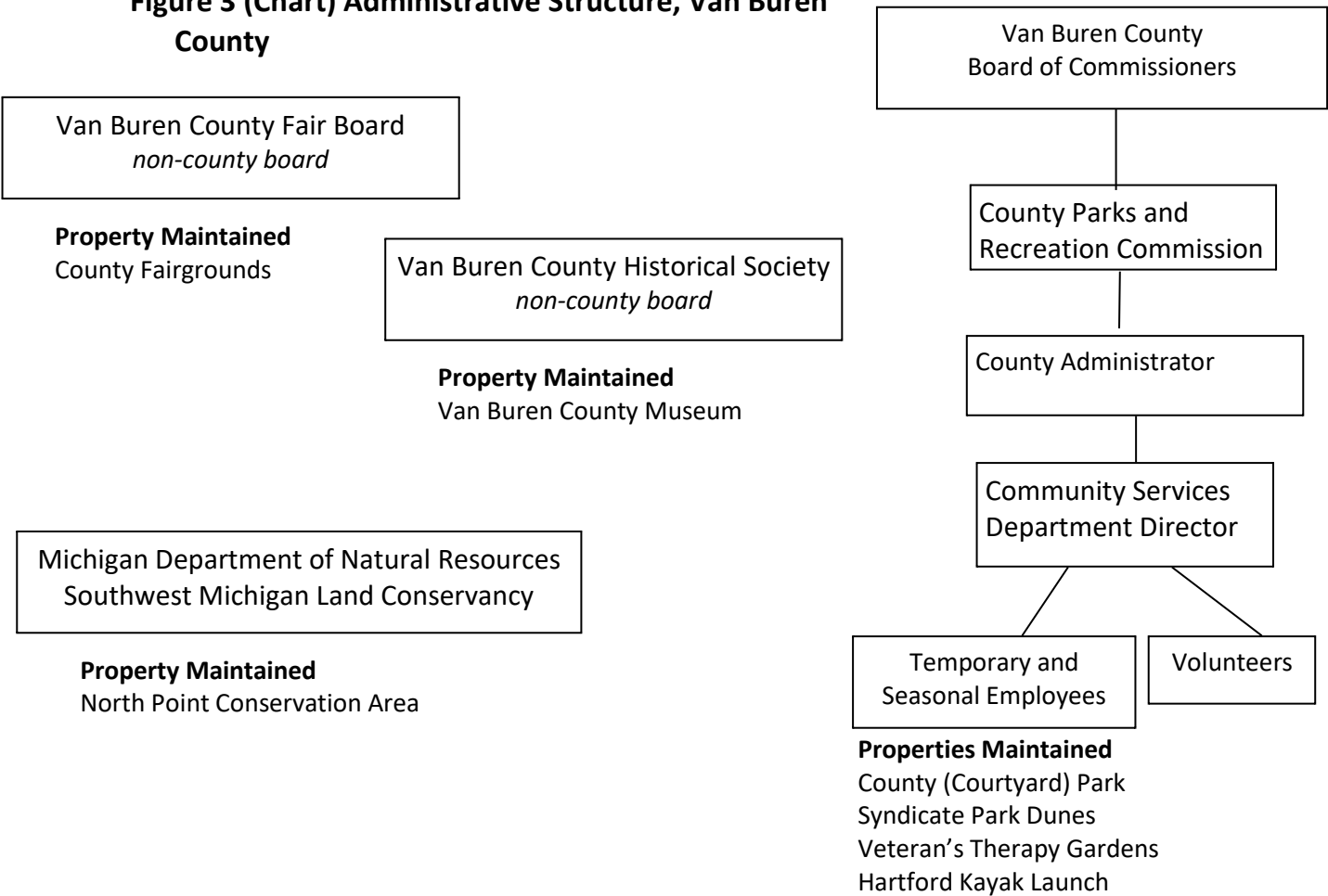
Section 3. Administrative Structure

Organizational Charts, Legal Authority and Board Membership

The Van Buren County Parks and Recreation Commission was established in 2022 by the Van Buren County Commissioners under Michigan Public Act 261 of 1965. The seven properties addressed in this plan’s recreation inventory fall under the purview of the Parks and Recreation Commission.

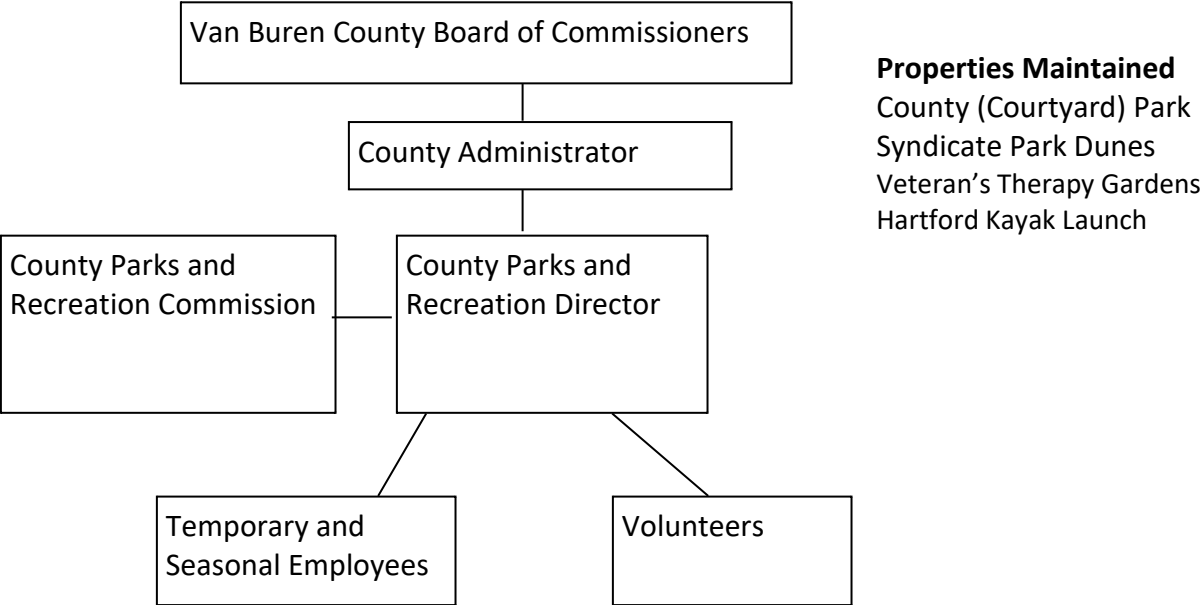
The current administrative structure for the county’s recreation system is shown in Figure 3. The basic operations and maintenance functions affecting Van Buren County’s recreation inventory are the responsibilities of one staff position within the County Buildings and Grounds Department. At the time of this plan’s adoption, Van Buren County has no department dedicated explicitly to maintaining the County’s recreation resources. The North Point Conservation Area is leased to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) who is responsible for maintenance and operations. 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. The Van Buren County Museum is leased to the Van Buren County Historical Society, but the grounds and building are maintained by the County.

Figure 3 (Chart) Administrative Structure, Van Buren County



An opportunity exists to create a Parks and Recreation Department and hire a director for the department to oversee temporary and seasonal employees. This would increase the County’s capacity for maintaining existing parks.

Figure 4 (Chart) Potential Future Administrative Structure, Van Buren County



Current Funding Sources & Budgets

Michigan counties can levy a millage to fund parks, recreation and land preservation. In 2024, voters approved a 0.25 mill County Parks and Recreation. This millage is estimated to generate approximately \$750,000 a year. Since the passing of the millage, the Parks and Recreation Commission has been tasked with preparing an annual budget. The 2025-26 budget is shown below.

| ACCOUNT | DESCRIPTION | 2025-26 AMENDED BUDGET |
|---|--|------------------------------|
| Fund 208.0 - PARKS & RECREATION FUND | | |
| Revenues | | |
| Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT | | |
| 402.000 | CURRENT PROPERTY TAXES | 430,000.00 |
| 539.000 | STATE GRANT | 283,700.00 |
| 665.000 | INTEREST | 2,500.00 |
| Total Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT | | 716,200.00 |
| TOTAL REVENUES | | 716,200.00 |
| Expenditures | | |
| Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT | | |
| 752.005 | SUPPLIES | 5,000.00 |
| 801.000 | CONTRACT SERVICES | 201,500.00 |
| 801.700 | DISBURSEMENTS | 400,000.00 |
| 999.101 | TRF TO GENERAL FUND #101 | 44,000.00 |
| Total Dept 751.00 - PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT | | 650,500.00 |
| Dept 804.00 - MUSEUM | | |
| 930.913 | LAND & BUILDING REPAIRS - HIST. MUSEUM | 25,000.00 |
| 931.913 | EQUIPMENT REPAIRS - MUSEUM | 15,000.00 |
| Total Dept 804.00 - MUSEUM | | 40,000.00 |
| TOTAL EXPENDITURES | | 690,500.00 |
| NET OF REVENUES & EXPENDITURES | | 25,700.00 |

There are several grants available for parks and recreation improvements and projects. Below is a list of some opportunities and sources for more information.

- 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 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) funds land acquisitions and the development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The grant is available to any unit of government,

as well as schools, and requires 50% match and a DNR-approved 5-year Parks and Recreation Plan.

- 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/>.
- The Trust for Public Land has resources for federal-level funding options - <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/>
- Michigan Department of Transportation, Transportation Alternatives Program, <https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/programs/grant-programs/transportation-alternatives>

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 **Southwest MI Extension Master Gardeners** are a group working to offer community education on sustainable gardening, assist with public-landscaping and conservation projects, and

contribute hands-on service to improve local green spaces and food-security. They maintain the Veteran's Therapy Gardens in Van Buren County.

- **Website:** <https://www.canr.msu.edu/kalamazoo/master-gardener/>
- 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 **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**, 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 2025, SWMLC owns 13 preserves encompassing 1,235 acres (it was 1,058 acres in 2020) and holds conservation easements totaling 1,330 acres (It was 924 acres in 2020) 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 6) 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.
- The **Van Buren District Library** is a system of libraries that provide equitable access to a world of resources, reading, and lifelong learning. Within this district, there are seven libraries, including: Antwerp Sunshine Library, Bangor Branch Library, Bloomingdale Branch Library, Covert Branch Library, Gobles Branch Library, Lawrence Branch Library, and Webster Memorial Branch Library. These libraries are available to residents living within the VBDL service area.
- Other libraries within Van Buren County include:
 - South Haven Memorial Library
 - Vanderlyn Community Center and Hartford Public Library
 - Lawton Public Library
 - Paw Paw District Library

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

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 | 16.5 | Natural Resource Area | 1 | No |
| County (Courtyard) Park | 0.70 | Mini-Park | 3 | No |
| Van Buren County Fairgrounds | 85 | Special Use | 3 | Yes |
| Van Buren County Historical Museum | 5 | Special Use | 2 | No |
| Syndicate Park Dunes | 26.9 | Natural Resource Area | 1 | No |
| Veteran’s Therapy Gardens | 1 | Special Use | 2 | No |
| Hartford Kayak Launch | 1 | Access Site - Paw Paw River Water Trail | 4 | 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

North Point Conservation Area

North Point Conservation Area is a County-owned, 16.5-acre parcel on Lake Michigan that includes approximately 330 feet of Lake Michigan beach, forested critical dunes and wetlands. It is adjacent to Van Buren State Park. Residents often refer to it as the "old Boy Scout Camp," because Boy Scouts 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.



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.



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 and downtown employees.

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/



Van Buren County Historical Museum

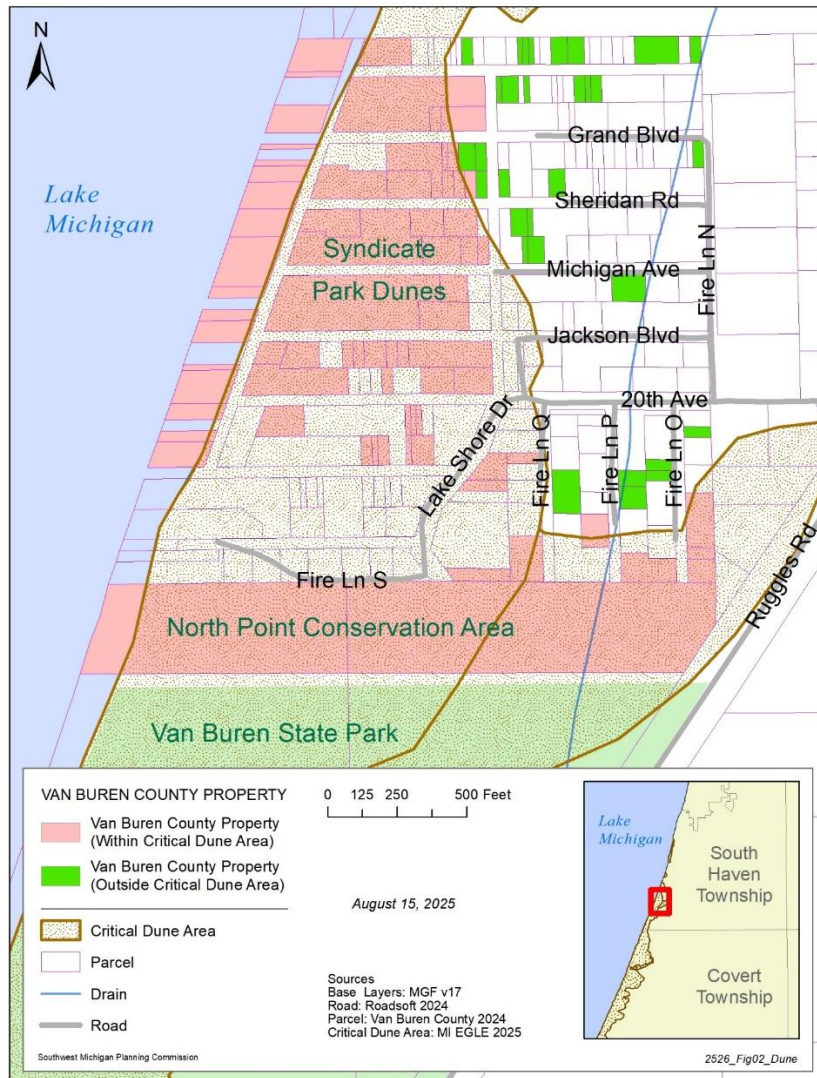
The Van Buren County Historical Society leases a 5-acre section of the County Fairgrounds, where the museum is located in a forty-four room brick and stone building that was known as the Van Buren County Poorhouse. It was built in the 1880's and is now listed on the State Historical Register. The Society manages operations and programming for the museum, and the County takes care of maintaining the grounds. The museum provides over 44 rooms of displays as well as a blacksmith shop, log cabin, and other outdoor treasures.

Syndicate Park Dunes

Van Buren County owns more than 26.9 acres of land along Lake Michigan in South Haven Township, within a subdivision known as Syndicate Park. Of this property, approximately 23 acres lie within a designated critical dune area. Most of this property was obtained through tax foreclosures. In 2017, 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 provide education on dune ecosystems. For more information visit <https://www.swmpc.org/syndicatepark.asp>. The map below shows the county-owned properties that comprise Syndicate Dunes, both inside and outside the critical dunes area.



Figure 5 (Map) Syndicate Park County-Owned Parcels



Veterans Therapy Gardens

The Veterans Therapy Gardens is a one-acre park in the heart of downtown Paw Paw. It provides self-guided learning opportunities and access to community gardens. The MSU Extension Master Gardeners of Southwest Michigan provides program support and helps maintain the gardens.



Hartford Kayak Launch

The Hartford Kayak Launch is the county's newest park in Hartford Township along County Road 681. It will be a one-acre park that provides access to the Paw Paw River Water Trail. The park will be completed in 2026 and includes a parking area, an accessible pathway, canoe/kayak launch and a dock for fishing. The improvements were funded by the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund and local matching funds from Hartford Township and Van Buren County.

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 trail friends' 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. The community has committed to a long-term plan to continue to grow these trail assets, and to develop a cohesive marketing strategy to promote trails. The plan also involved coordination with the community school system to develop educational components for local area children with on trail appreciation and stewardship experiences.

Porter Dunes Legacy Trail

The Porter Dunes Legacy Trail is in a 48-acre lakeshore property managed by SWMLC that offers a recently completed half-mile loop trail that winds through the woods with a boardwalk and leads to a dune-top overlook with views of Lake Michigan. The park trail was completed in Fall of 2025 and connects to the existing trail network in the adjacent SWMLC property, Pilgrim Haven. Future plans for the **Legacy Dune Trail** include a 3-mile hiking trail that will connect Pilgrim Haven, Porter Legacy Dunes, Syndicate Park Dunes, North Point Conservation Area and Van Buren State Park. Public input and conceptual designs have already been completed for this trail.

Other Resources in Van Buren County

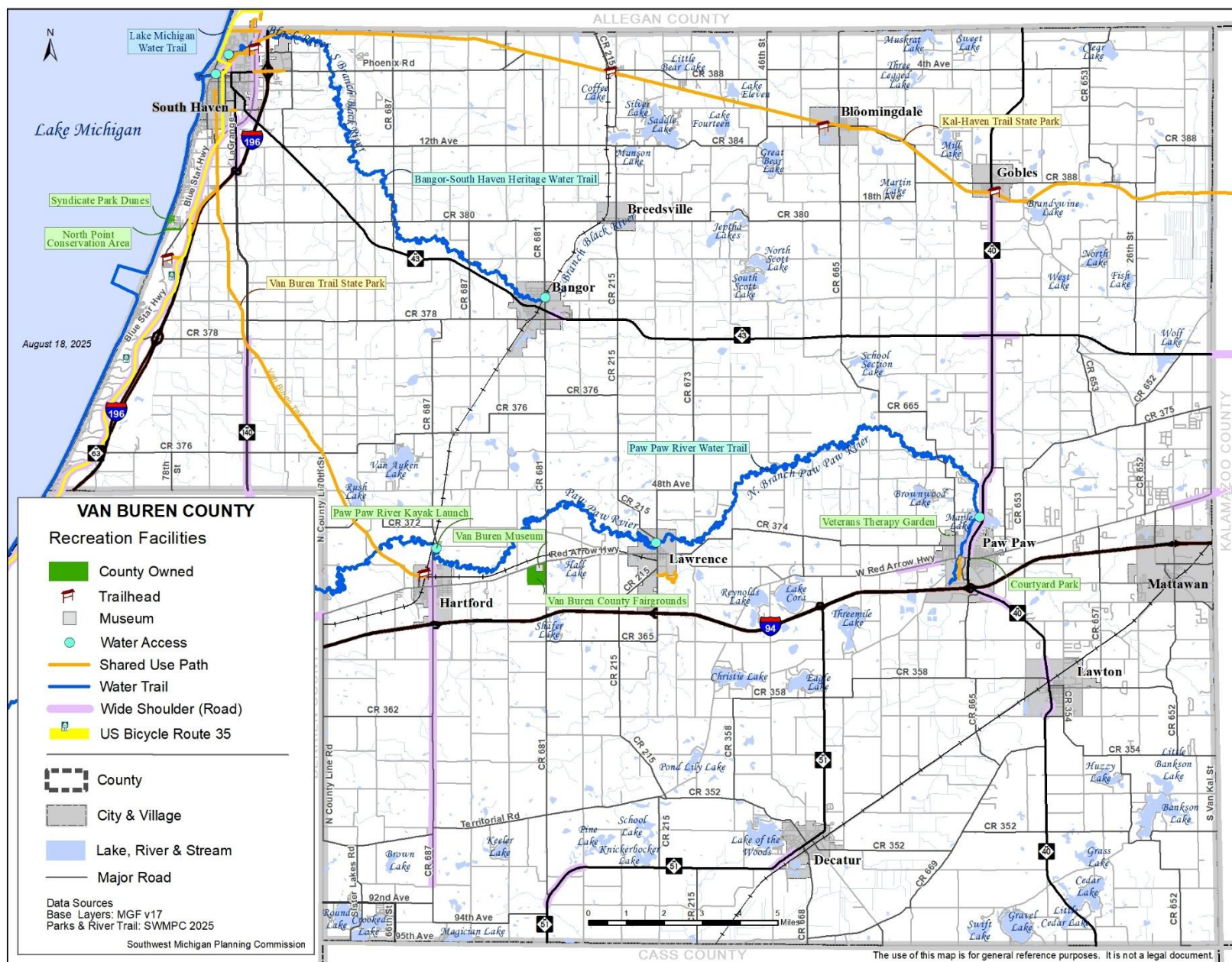
In Van Buren County, there are many state and local inland lake public accesses
https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79119_79144_80285---,00.html

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 6 (Map) Recreational Resources, Van Buren County



Non-Motorized Inventory

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 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 connects to the Lakeshore Trail at Whirlpool's Headquarters at Monte Road.

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.

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.

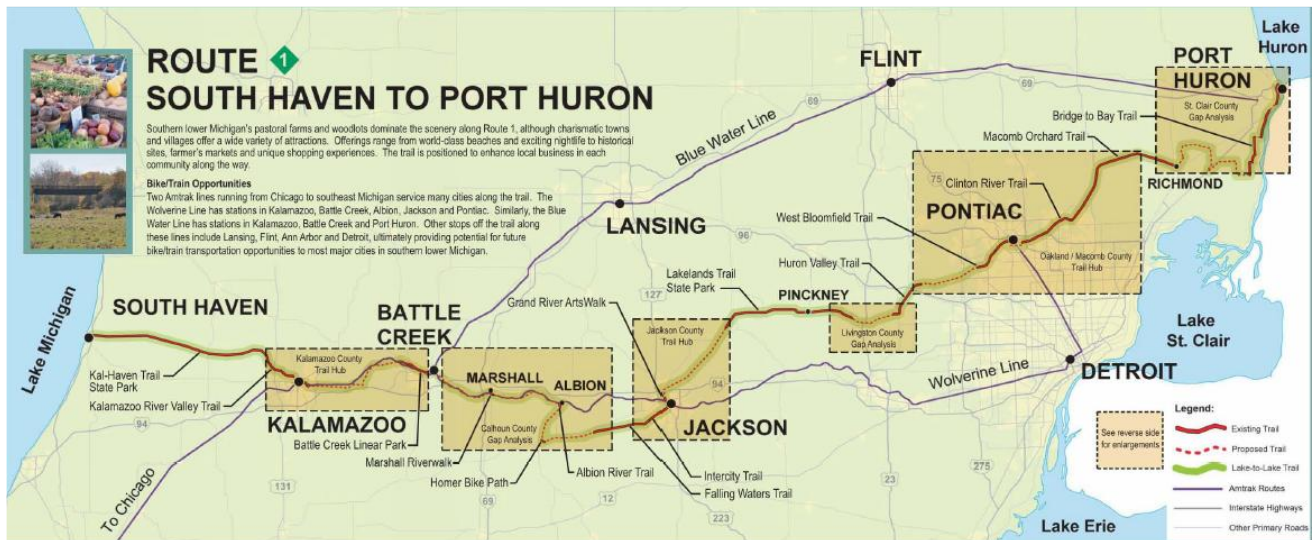
Table 3. Miles of Trail and Road Facilities in Southwest Michigan (2020)

| 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 improved off-road 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.

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). 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. 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 (3,964 residents according to the 2020 U.S. Census) and Hartford (2,515 residents according to the 2020 U.S. Census). 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>.

Van Buren County has a portion of **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.

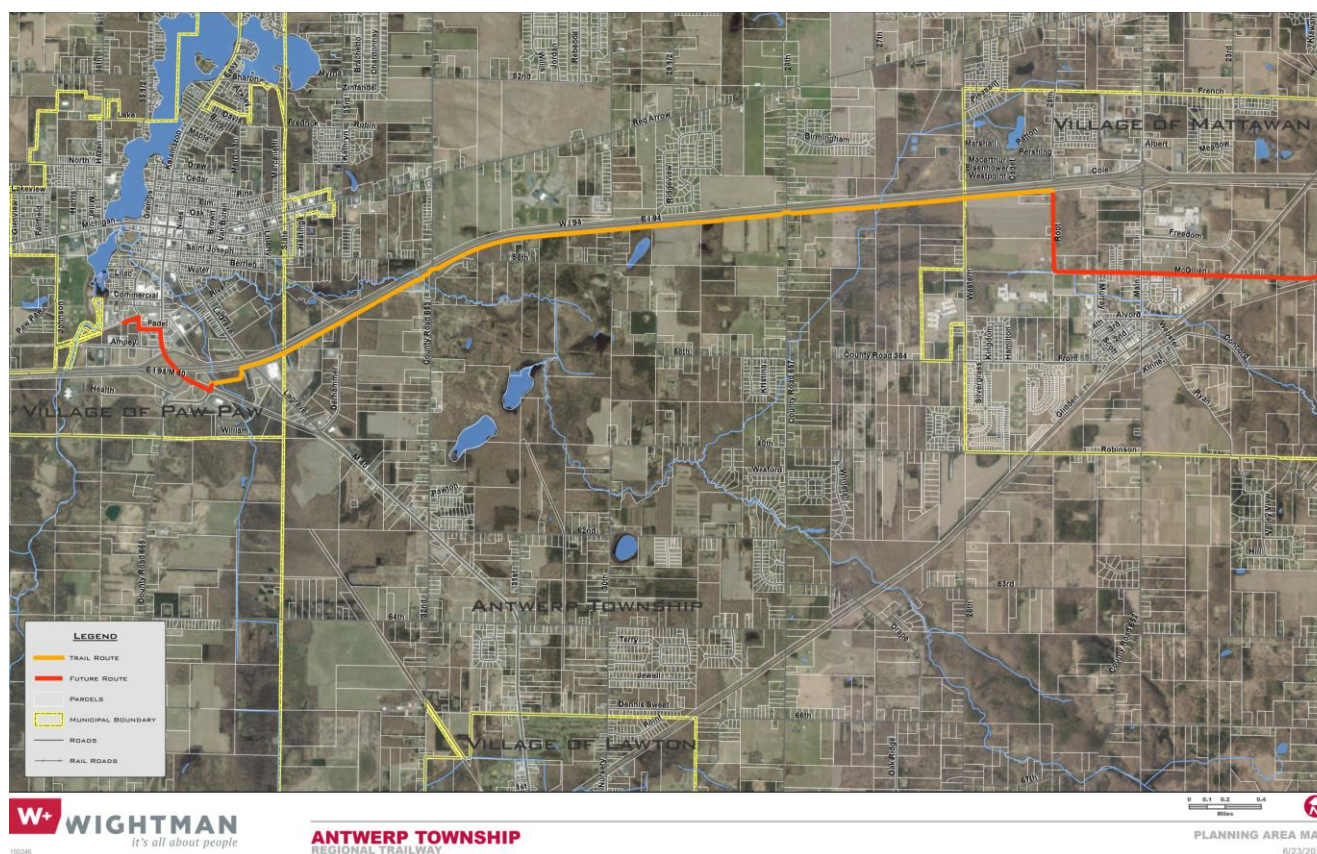


<https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/travel/safety/road-users/bicycling/us-bicycle-routes>

The following non-motorized network gaps were identified for Van Buren County in the 2020 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 Van Buren and Allegan County Road Commissions in developing their vision of a non-motorized off-road shared use path along Blue Star Highway. Information can be found by visiting their website at <http://www.fotbst.org/>

Antwerp Township Regional Trail – This route along I-94 between Paw Paw and Mattawan is an important east-west connection. The 10-foot paved trail will be roughly 5 miles long and will utilize the I-94 right of way and power line easements. The trail begins at the MDOT Park n Ride on the north side of M-40 and traverses east, primarily along the south side of I-94 right of way, to its eastern terminus at Root Road. The trail will cross beneath CR 653 and CR 657. In addition, where the trail crosses the Paw Paw River and wetland areas, culverts and boardwalks will be utilized. The trail will include a 10-foot paved width with 2-foot clear space on either side of the trail. At proposed boardwalk locations, a 14-foot clear width will be maintained. Fencing is proposed on both sides of the trail for safety of users and security for adjacent property owners. The proposed trail will have zero road crossings and is planned to be constructed in a single phase, with trailheads located at the MDOT Park n Ride and Root Road. Construction is currently planned for 2027.



Lakeshore Trail - The Lakeshore Trail will be a shared-use path that will ultimately connect the Red Arrow Linear Park in Berrien County to the Van Buren State Park Trail. The trail will follow the Lake Michigan shoreline. The first phase was completed in 2025 and includes a 2.5-mile shared-use trail from Higman Park Road in Benton Harbor, along M-63 to the Lakeview Mountain Bike Trail trailhead located on Monte Road (Whirlpool Headquarters). This project connects several parks and beaches along Lake Michigan to downtown Benton Harbor and St. Joseph and also connects to 12 miles of [Harbor Shores](#) public walking trails and the 7-mile Lakeview Mountain Bike Trail, inclusive of a shared trailhead and bathroom facilities. Stakeholders have been meeting to connect the Lakeshore Trail in Berrien County to the Van Buren State Park Trail (spur trail) along M-63 and Blue Star Highway. Stakeholders include Van Buren County Road Commission and Parks and Recreation Commission, Berrien County Road Department, MDOT, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, Covert

Township, South Haven Area Recreation Authority, Van Buren State Park, Hagar Township, Harbor Shores, Cornerstone Alliance and Friends of Berrien County Trails. More information can be found <https://www.berrientrails.org/lakeshoretrail.asp>.

M-40 Corridor – There are three sections along M-40, in the Village of Lawton and Paw Paw, and heading north out of the Village of Lawton, needing a facility.

Fruitbelt Trail - This proposed route follows a railroad corridor from Hartford to Paw Paw making 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

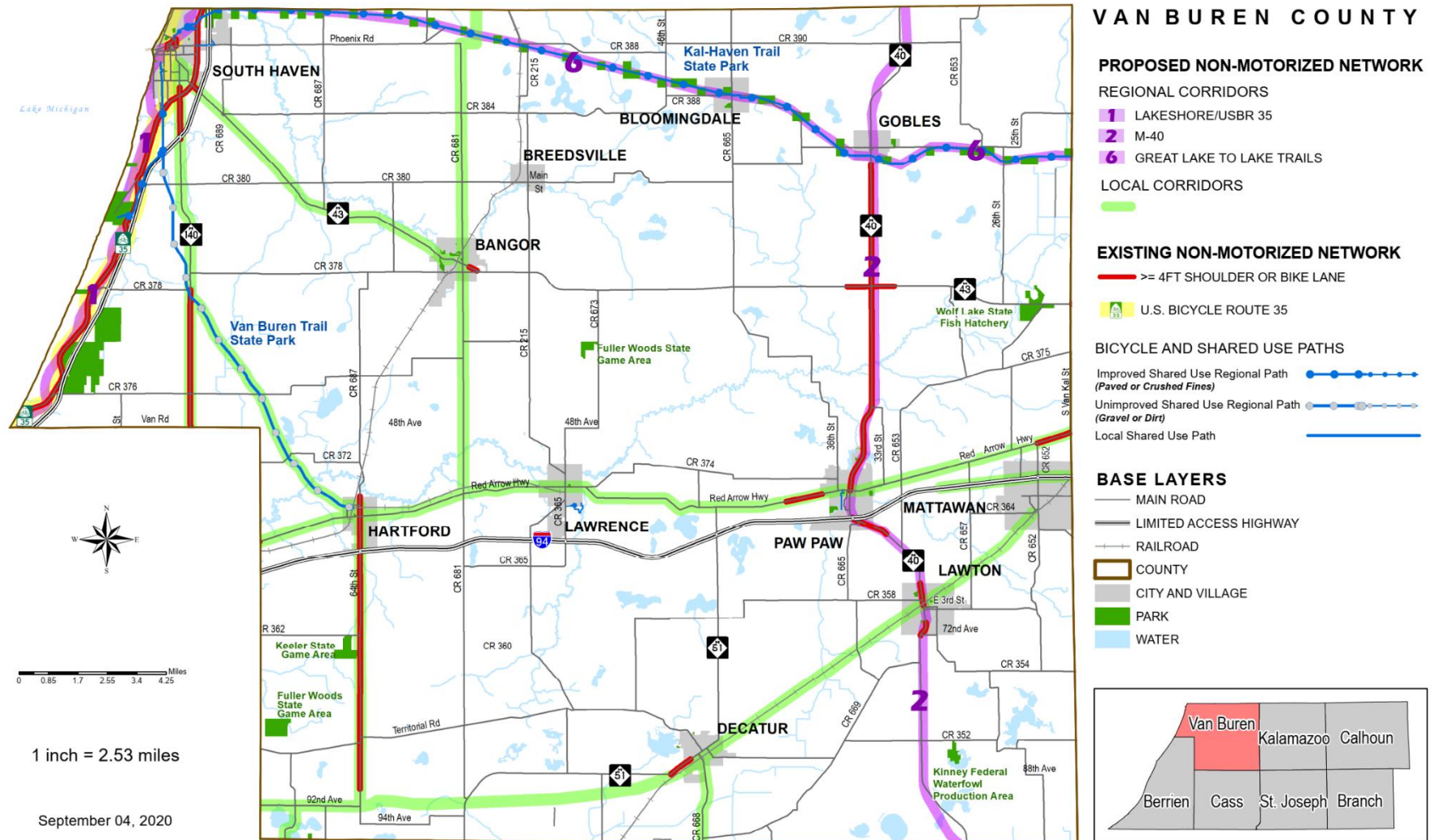
Off-Road Network Priorities:

- Fruitbelt Trail – Hartford to Paw Paw
- Lakeshore Trail connecting to Berrien County along Blue Star
- N. Van Kal Street
- Pave the Van Buren Trail – Van Buren State Park to Hartford
- Blue Star Trail (north of South Haven to Saugatuck along Blue Star Highway)

Other Priorities:

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

Figure 7 (Map) Existing and Planned Non-Motorized



Natural Resource Inventory

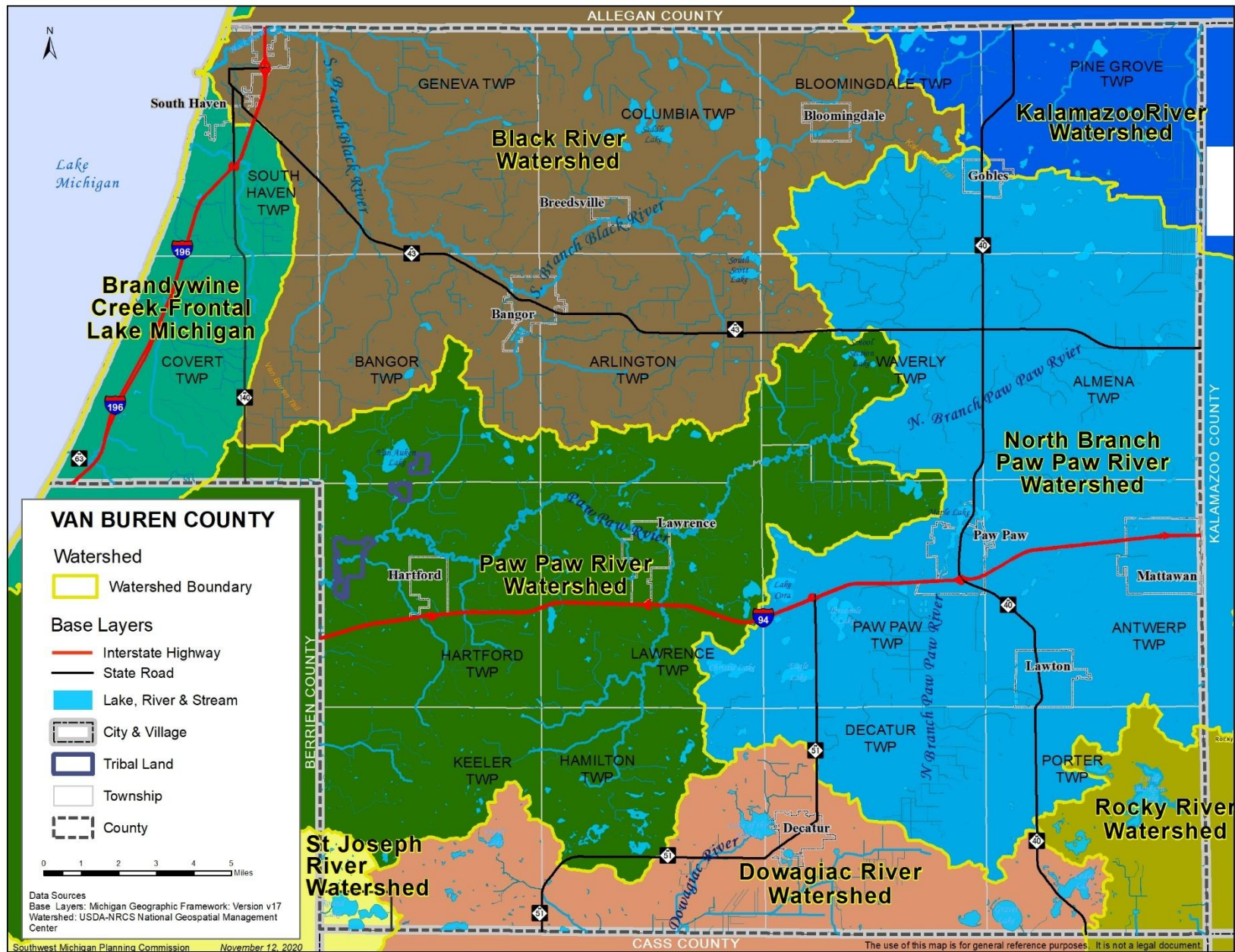
As a county within the Great Lakes basin, Van Buren County's natural environment was largely formed by glaciers thousands of years ago. Its soils, topography and especially its hydrology influence the ways in which residents and visitors recreate and use land throughout the county.

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.

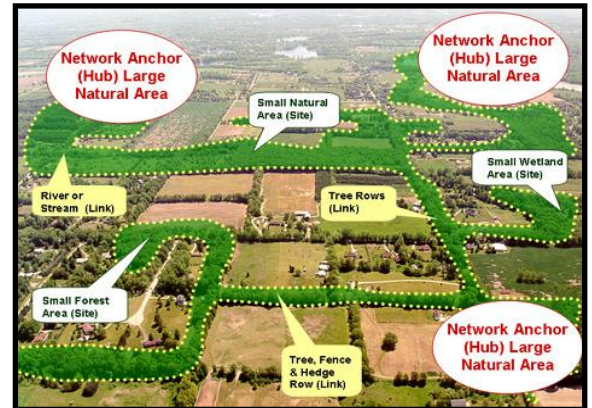
Hydrology. The entire county is within the Lake Michigan basin. The Van Buren County hydrologic system mostly falls within three major watersheds -- the Paw Paw River, which drains almost two-thirds of the county; the Dowagiac River, flowing southwesterly into Cass County; and the Black River, which 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 14 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, which borders its western edge.

Figure 8 (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 9 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 9 (Map) Potential Conservation Areas in Van Buren County (2007)

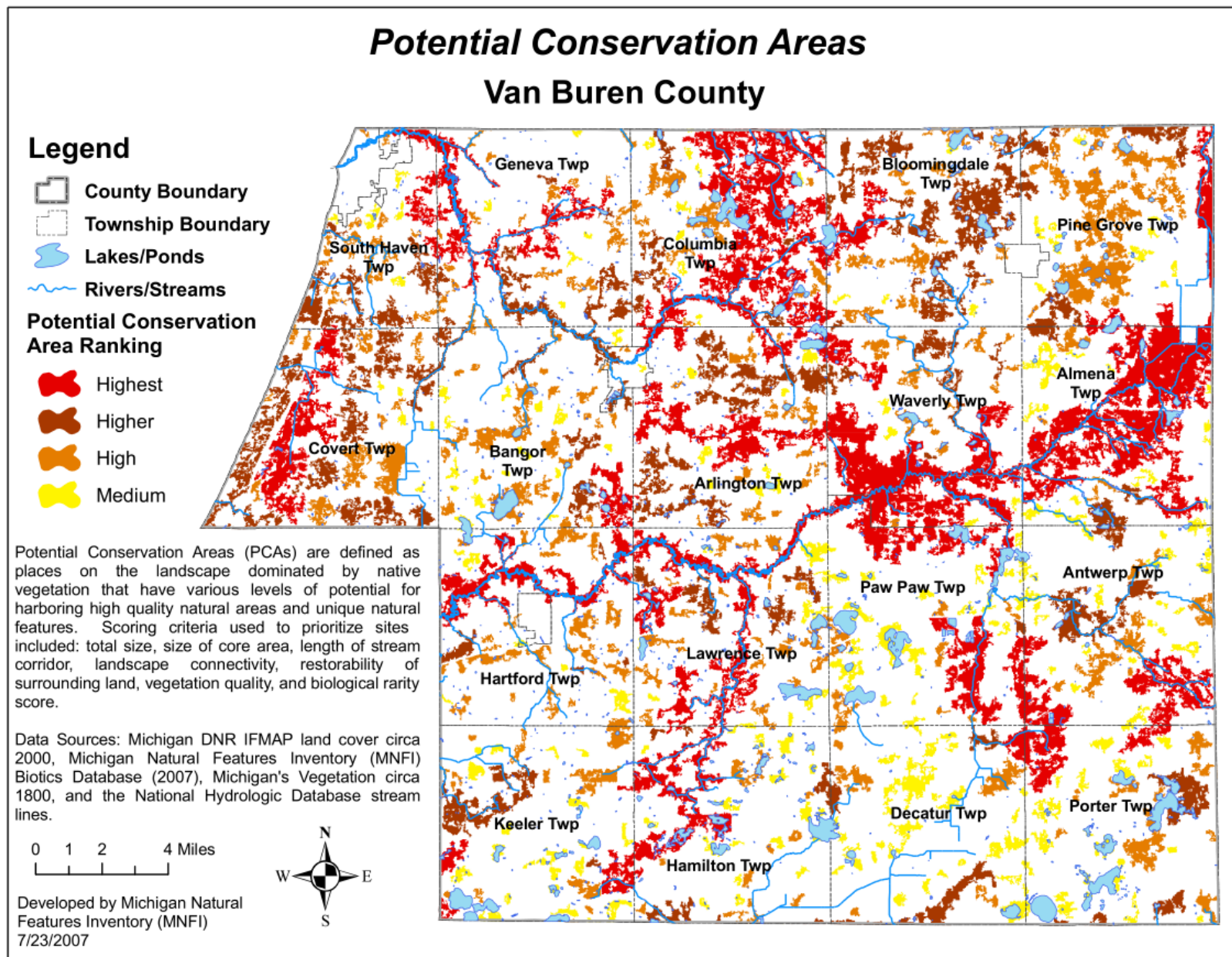


Figure 10 (Map) Critical Dunes, Van Buren County

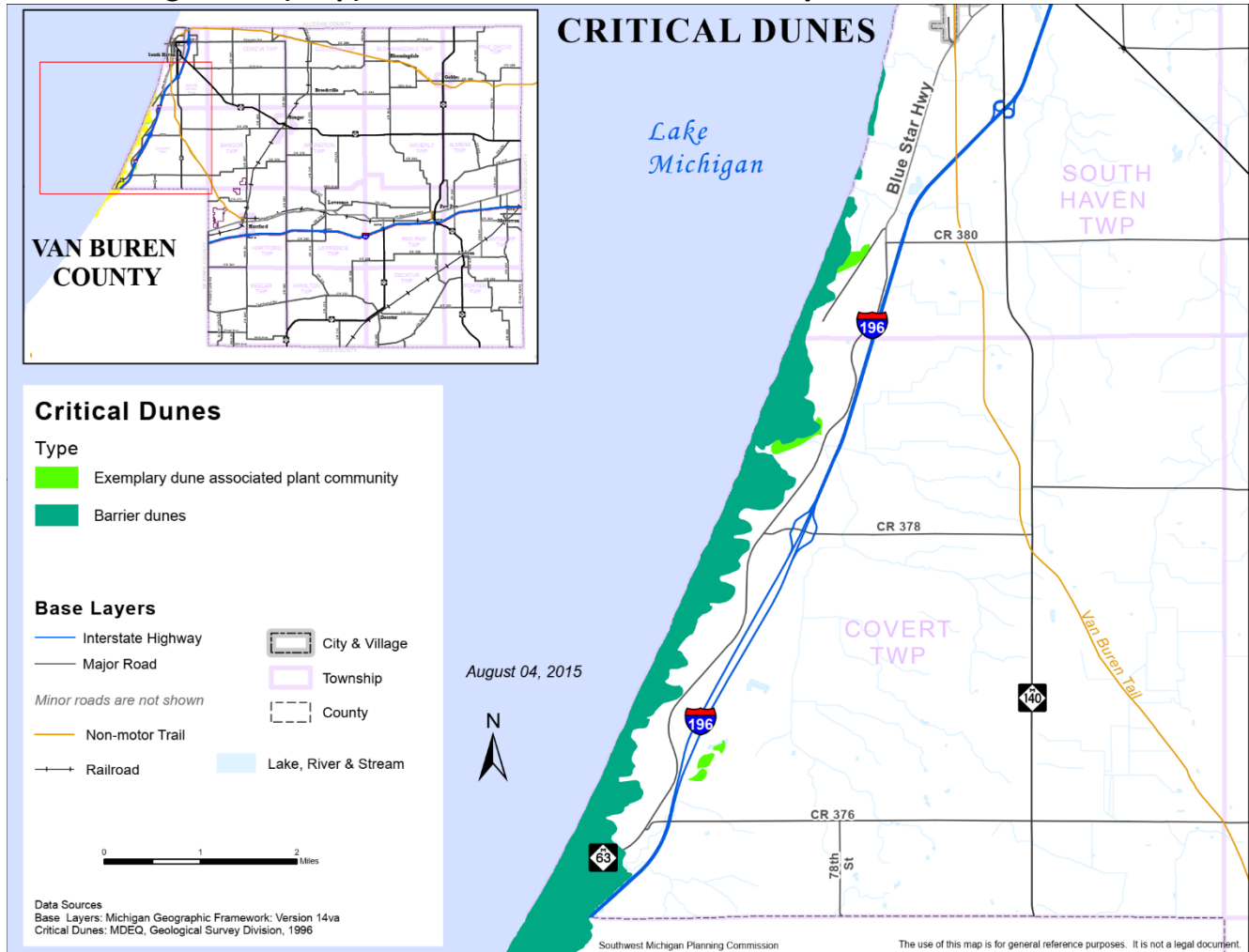
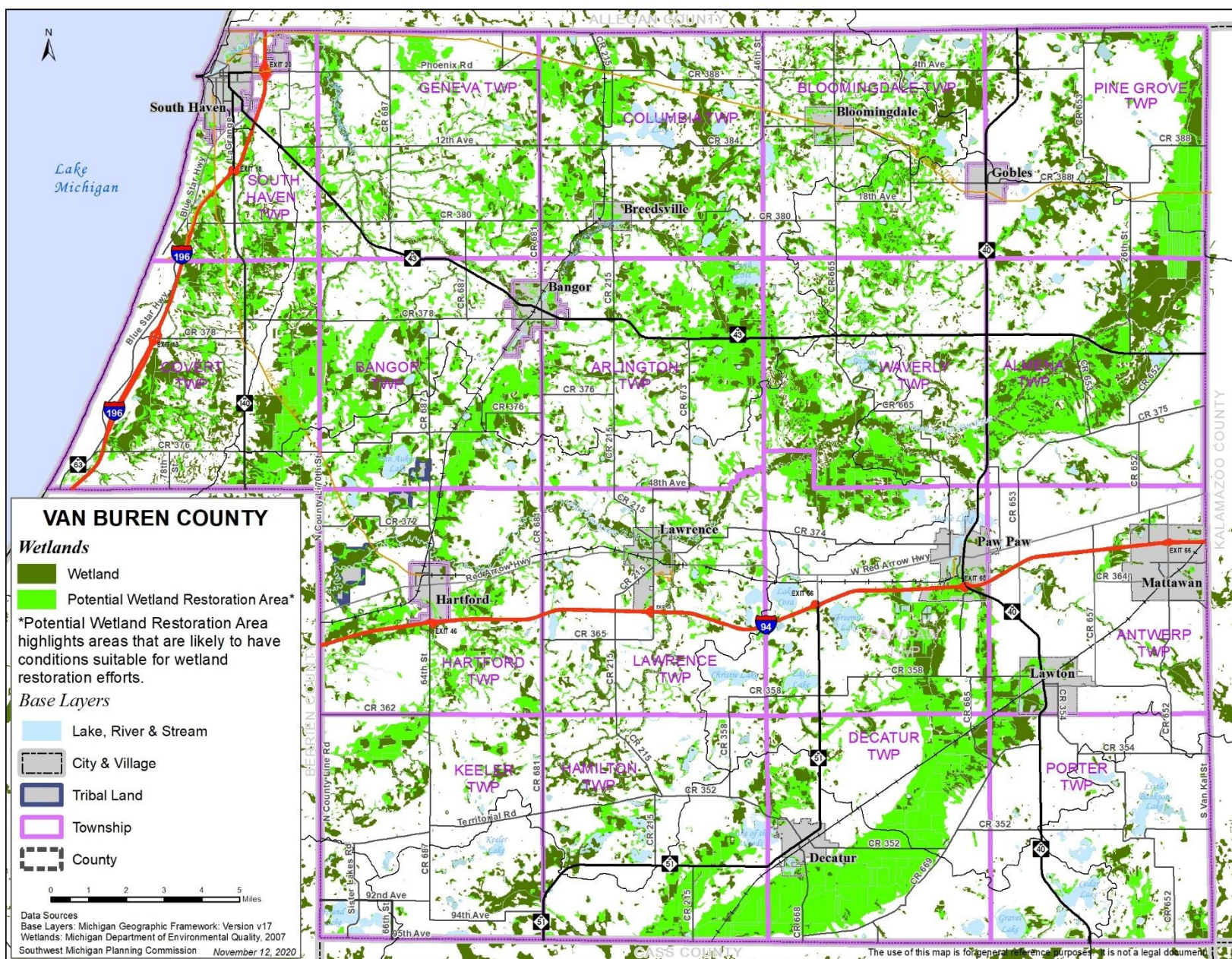


Figure 11 (Map) Wetlands, Van Buren County



MDNR Grant Inventory

IN 2023, Van Buren County received its first Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant for the kayak launch in Hartford on the Paw Paw River. Since the Trust Fund's establishment in 1976, Van Buren County and its communities have received a total of \$17,220,500 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 | 1976-2023

| Grantee | Project # | Project | Grant Amount | Project Type | Public Act |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|--|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| City of South Haven | 887 | South Shore Recreation Area | 600,000 | Acquisition | PA 105 of 1985 |
| DNR - Parks and Recreation Division | 972 | Covert ORV Use Area | 300,000 | Acquisition | PA 197 of 1986 |
| City of Bangor | 86-146 | Bangor Park | 61,500 | Acquisition | PA 108 of 1987 |
| DNR - Wildlife Division | 86-097 | Lane Lake Acquisition | 340,000 | Acquisition | PA 108 of 1987 |
| DNR - Parks and Recreation Division | 90-175 | Amicus Corp.-Van Buren SP | 2,200,000 | Acquisition | PA 32 of 1991 |
| DNR - Wildlife Division | 91-845 | Mentha State Game Area | 2,500,000 | Acquisition | PA 85 of 1992 |
| Village of Paw Paw | 94-157 | Community Park Development | 169,900 | Development | PA 152 of 1995 |
| City of South Haven | 95-093 | Dyckman and Packard Beach | 84,000 | Development | PA 353 of 1996 |
| City of Bangor | 04-170 | Black River Heritage Trail and Boardwalk Project | 252,800 | Development | PA 11 of 2005 |
| South Haven Township | 06-210 | Deerlick Creek Park Acquisition | 1,000,000 | Acquisition | PA 59 of 2007 |
| City of Bangor | 08-102 | Veterans Park and Kiwanis Park Additions | 37,800 | Acquisition | PA 23 of 2009 |
| City of South Haven | 10-097 | South Beach Improvements | 250,000 | Development | PA 16 of 2011 |
| City of Hartford | 10-024 | Ely Park Improvement | 29,600 | Development | PA 16 of 2011 |
| City of South Haven | 11-144 | Elkenburg Park Improvements | 254,800 | Development | PA 283 of 2012 |
| City of South Haven | 12-096 | South Beach Park Extension Acquisition | 665,000 | Acquisition | PA 9 of 2013 |
| City of South Haven | 12-114 | Van Buren Trail Connection Development | 217,400 | Development | PA 9 of 2013 |

| Grantee | Project # | Project | Grant Amount | Project Type | Public Act |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|---|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| DNR - Wildlife Division | 13-128 | Porter Township SGA Land Initiative | 1,800,000 | Acquisition | PA 114 of 2014 |
| DNR - Fisheries Division | 13-127 | Wolf Lake Fish Hatchery Development | 295,000 | Development | PA 114 of 2014 |
| DNR - Parks and Recreation Division | 14-0189 | Paw Paw to Hartford Multi-use Trail Partnership | 750,000 | Acquisition | PA 7 of 2015 |
| South Haven Area Recreation Authority | 14-0211 | Pilgrim Haven Development Project | 50,000 | Development | PA 7 of 2015 |
| City of South Haven | 15-0072 | North Beach Park Improvements | 300,000 | Development | PA 61 of 2016 |
| City of South Haven | 15-0058 | Black River Park Skid Pier Replacement | 37,500 | Development | PA 61 of 2016 |
| South Haven Area Recreation Authority | 16-0140 | 14th Avenue Parcel Acquisition | 300,000 | Acquisition | PA 93 of 2017 |
| South Haven Area Recreation Authority | 16-0204 | Pilgrim Haven Development Project Phase II | 100,000 | Development | PA 93 of 2017 |
| DNR - Michigan Historical Center | 16-0069 | Kal-Haven Trail Interpretation Project | 46,300 | Development | PA 93 of 2017 |
| City of South Haven | 17-0032 | Black River Park Skid Pier Replacement | 37,500 | Development | PA 165 of 2018 |
| City of South Haven | 17-0034 | South Haven Splash Pad | 300,000 | Development | PA 165 of 2018 |
| DNR - Wildlife Division | 18-0156 | Cornish SGA Acquisition | 534,600 | Acquisition | PA 12 of 2019 |
| South Haven Area Recreation Authority | 19-0201 | Pilgrim Haven Natural Area - Royle Addition | 2,262,000 | Acquisition | PA 145 of 2020 |
| South Haven Area Recreation Authority | 20-0111 | Deerlick Creek Park Development | 15,000 | Development | PA 9 of 2021 |
| Village of Paw Paw | 21-0130 | Maple Island Boardwalk and Fishing Platform | 300,000 | Development | PA 151 of 2022 |
| South Haven Area Recreation Authority | 21-0109 | Phoenix Avenue Kayak Launch Development | 229,800 | Development | PA 151 of 2022 |
| DNR - Wildlife Division | 22-0194 | Paw Paw River Land Acquisition | 900,000 | Acquisition | PA 119 of 2023 |

| Grantee | Project # | Project | Grant Amount | Project Type | Public Act |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|---|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Covert Township | 23-0034 | Development of Covert Park Beach | 300,000 | Development | PA 135 of 2024 |
| South Haven Area Recreation Authority | 23-0090 | Porter Legacy Dunes Park Development | 300,000 | Development | PA 135 of 2024 |
| Van Buren County | 23-0178 | Development of Paw Paw River Water Trail Access | 283,700 | Development | PA 135 of 2024 |

Section 5. The Planning Process

The planning process for the Van Buren County Parks & Recreation Plan began in the summer of 2025. 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 were compiled. Preceding sections illustrate these findings.

The assessment phase began in late summer 2025. The current recreational assets in Van Buren County were researched and summarized.

Public Input

Van Buren County residents and other interested parties informed this plan through an online survey offered from August 18, 2025 to September 21, 2025. Below is a summary of survey results and detailed survey results can be viewed in the Appendix.

Key Stats

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|
| Total Responses | 322 |
| Full-time Residents | 87% |
| Main Age Group | 41–60 years |
| Positive Impact on Quality of Life | 79% |
| Believe Parks Boost Economy | 72% |

Usage & Needs

- Most visited: Fairgrounds & Courtyard Park
- Most used trail: Kal-Haven Trail
- Needs: More multi-use trails, hiking, water trails, nature preserves
- Amenities: Playgrounds, picnic areas, campgrounds, pickleball, dog parks

Site-Specific Priorities

- Courtyard Park: Farmers’ market, playground, benches, picnic area
- Fairgrounds: Events/concerts, bathrooms, parking, lighting
- Museum: Promotion, accessibility, hours, maintenance
- Dunes: 57% favor nature area w/ public access; some prefer conservation only

Funding Priorities

1. Maintain and improve existing parks
2. Support improvements of locally owned parks
3. Expand non-motorized trail system

Community Comments

Strong interest in expanding recreation while protecting sensitive natural areas. Emphasis on cost-effective spending, environmental protection, and keeping taxes low.

- 327 responses to the survey.
- 86% respondents were full time residents; 8% second homeowners and 6% lived outside the county (most lived in neighboring counties or worked in Van Buren County).
- Responses were received from 27 of the county's 29 municipalities.
- Most respondents were 41-60 years of age (49%); 26% were 19-40 years of age and 21% were over 61.
- 79% of respondents think recreational opportunities attract residents and tourists for a positive economic impact and 72% think it enhances quality of life in Van Buren County.
- The recreational opportunities that are most needed are multi-use non-motorized trails, hiking trails, nature preserve/conservation areas, playgrounds, Lake Michigan beaches/access, dark sky parks, and water trails.
- The recreational activities that are not currently offered in Van Buren County and respondents would like to see are trails; sports facilities; gardens/green spaces/nature preserves; community events and festivals; skateparks.
- Over 55% of respondents support using County park millage funds to help improve the Van Buren Trail from South Haven to Hartford to leverage grants.
- For County Park in Paw Paw, desired improvements include a playground, more benches/covered seating, more picnic areas, lighting, an ice rink, and using the space for a farmers market. To make the park more accessible, the desired improvements include paved walkways, and ADA play equipment.
- For the County Fairgrounds, more events/concerts was the most desired improvement. Other improvements include bathrooms, parking, hiking trails, and more paved pathways. To make the fairgrounds more accessible, over 70% of respondents would like to see more paved walkways.
- For the Van Buren Museum, desired improvements include increased advertising and promotion of the existence of the museum, expanded hours of operation, improved ADA accessibility, and paved walkways.
- For Syndicate Park Dunes, most respondents want the County to manage it as a natural area but maintain public access.
- Over 65% of respondents support the development of a trail to connect the Van Buren Trail from Hartford, Lawrence, Paw Paw, and Mattawan. 62% of respondents support connecting the Kal-Haven Trail to Paw Paw.
- Most respondents believe the County should use park millage funds for maintaining and improving existing parks (64%); improving locally owned parks (47%); expanding multi-use, non-motorized trails in the County (35%); and promoting the County and local parks (21%).
- The majority of respondents support maintaining and enhancing parks in the County. Many respondents desire to preserve natural areas and expand trails.

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

Plan Adoption Process

After recommendation for approval from the County Planning Commission on December __, 2025, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners set a 30-day public comment period from December __ through January __, 2026 and held a public hearing on January __, 2026. 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 __, 2026 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 for county-owned parks & recreation facilities in Van Buren County; and
- Provides background information on parks and recreation maintenance, operations and planning to develop baseline knowledge about:
 - the County's current recreation resources and assets;
 - municipalities' recreation resources, assets, 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, maintain and enhance the recreational facilities Van Buren County currently owns, leases and maintains.
2. Leverage resources and relationships between partners to develop existing parks, recreation areas and open spaces and acquire new land for parks and recreation areas where there are deficiencies or strategic opportunities.
3. Encourage and invest in providing universal access at both County- and municipal-owned park and recreation facilities.
4. Consider the creation of a county parks and recreation management position or department to manage the County's recreation facilities and future programming and manage/implement this 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 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

Goal 1 | Preserve, maintain 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 recreation assets and communities with non-motorized facilities | *** |
| Encourage year-round use of the County's recreation facilities | ** |

Under this goal, the three top priorities represent 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 parks and recreation planning. Through adequately maintaining and operating its current recreational facilities, the County can establish its role as a recreation resource provider. **The county should develop, budget for and implement maintenance plans for each park property.**

(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.

(3) Encourage connectivity between recreation assets and communities with non-motorized facilities. There is support for improving and expanding the non-motorized system in Van Buren County.

Goal 2 | Leverage resources and relationships between partners to develop existing parks, recreation areas and open spaces and acquire new land for parks and recreation areas where there are deficiencies or strategic opportunities.

| 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, libraries, municipalities and others to develop programming, improve recreational assets and secure land for recreational opportunities. | *** |
| Explore grant and private funding for land acquisition, development and maintenance of recreational areas | *** |

Several 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, 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. 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 and invest in providing universal access at both County- and municipal-owned park and recreation facilities.

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

Ensuring that all Van Buren County residents can 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. West Michigan Trails has developed trail wayfinding signage guidance for trail facilities that could be used to have uniform signage in the county and beyond. The guidance can be found here https://wmtrails.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/WayfindingSignagePlan_FINAL.pdf.

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.

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

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

| Objective | Priority |
|---|----------|
| Determine the needs for a designated staff person or department to manage county parks and recreation facilities, operations, marketing and programming | *** |

Goal 4 of this plan supports the potential creation of a staff person or the formation of a parks and recreation department to consolidate County-level parks and recreation efforts, including the implementation of this plan.

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 | *** |
| Work with the Van Buren County Visitors and Convention Bureau to 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 county could facilitate a collaborative approach to planning, managing and marketing recreation facilities and programming by maintaining a comprehensive inventory of all public and private recreation assets in the county. This could be in collaboration with the Van Buren County Visitors and Convention Bureau and cities, villages and townships. A base inventory of local recreational assets was included in the 2011 plan, but not in this update.

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 with the County during the County's recreation plan update process | *** |
| Participate in efforts to collaborate on non-motorized projects to connect communities and recreation facilities in the county and beyond | *** |

The objectives under this goal speak to the need for outreach/coordination at the county level.

(1) Provide municipalities with baseline asset information to inform their recreation planning processes. The Parks and Recreation 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 with the County during the County's recreation plan update process. Van Buren County's 29 municipalities are currently required to submit completed recreation plans to the County. The county could take a more proactive approach and notify the 29 municipalities about updates to the County Plan and ask for municipalities to notify the county about their plan development or updates.

3) Participate in efforts to collaborate on non-motorized projects to connect communities and recreation facilities in the county and beyond. Many of the non-motorized efforts are regional and require the County to be involved in efforts within and with adjacent counties/municipalities to advance connectivity of the non-motorized system. Currently the County Parks and Recreation Department and the Van Buren County Road Department is involved in advancing the Lakeshore Route along Lake Michigan connecting to Berrien and Allegan Counties.

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 | \$8,000 | ** |
| Add picnic areas with phone charging stations | \$10,000 | ** |
| Add paved pathways | \$20,000 | ** |
| Provide lighting | \$15,000 | * |
| Add ADA play equipment (playground, swings) | \$80,000 | * |

- Other ideas included an ice rink and using the space for a farmers market.

Syndicate Park Dunes

| Project | Estimated Cost | Priority |
|---|----------------|----------|
| Determine if providing parking areas is feasible | TBD | ** |
| Ensure signage about the unique natural resources are maintained. | \$5,000 | ** |

Syndicate Park Dunes are currently just a collection of county owned properties. There are some unique challenges with access to the properties. The County needs to seek legal counsel for park designation, boundaries, and title cleanup.

Even though the **County Fairgrounds**, **Van Buren Historic Museum** and **North Point Conservation Area** are managed by other entities, the survey respondents desired the following improvements to these facilities.

- **County Fairgrounds** – paved pathways and more events/concerts were the most desired improvements. Other improvements include bathrooms, parking and hiking/skiing trails.

- **Van Buren Historic Museum** - increased advertising and promotion of the existence of the museum, expanded hours of operation, improved ADA accessibility, and paved walkways.
- **North Point Conservation Area** - trail markers, historical signage and bathrooms.

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:

Lakeshore Trail connecting to Benton Harbor/St Joseph in Berrien County and beyond to Chicago, IL.

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

Antwerp Township Regional 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.

There are several efforts to develop/improve access and promote the Paw Paw River Water Trail, the Bangor to South Haven Heritage Water Trail (Black River) and the Lake Michigan Water Trail.

There is also a strong desire for more nature preserves/conservation areas in the county, especially with hiking trails.

There is also an effort to create a dune nature 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.

There is also a desire for more youth and senior activities in the county. Programs through senior services, schools, libraries 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 Lakeshore Trail, Blue Star Trail, Fruitbelt Trail and the Antwerp Township Regional 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. | 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 12 (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.mbtta.gov

WESTERN

| | Restrooms | Visitors Center /Contact Station | Interpretive Program | Trail Opportunity | Picnicking | Swimming | Beach Chair # |
|---|-----------|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------|----------|---------------|
| Ashwilticook 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

| | Restrooms | Visitors Center /Contact Station | Interpretive Program | Trail Opportunity | Picnicking | Swimming | Beach Chair # |
|--|-----------|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------|----------|---------------|
| 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

| | Restrooms | Visitors Center /Contact Station | Interpretive Program | Trail Opportunity | Picnicking | Swimming | Beach Chair # |
|--|-----------|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------|----------|---------------|
| 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 |
| Salisbury Beach State Reservation, Reservation Road, Salisbury, 978-462-4481 | ● | ◐ | ◐ | NA | ● | ◐ | 12 |

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

Source: <https://legislature.mi.gov/%28S%28z1q5rrcnkvqomijmqab5eqt%29%29/mileg.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

For Immediate Release - August 21, 2025

Van Buren County is updating its parks and recreation plan. A county parks and recreation plan provides a five-year framework for decisions regarding the establishment, development, and maintenance of recreational programs and facilities. Having the plan is also necessary to be eligible for certain state and federal grants.

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

As part of the planning process, the County is gathering public input. There is a survey available for residents and business owners to take. The survey asks what types of improvements you would like to see, what recreational opportunities are most important, what parks you visit most, and more.

You can take the survey online by visiting www.surveymonkey.com/r/VanBurenParks. The survey will close on September 21, 2025.

If you have any questions, you can contact Marcy Hamilton with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission at 269-925-1137 x1525 or at hamiltonm@swmpc.org. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is assisting the County with the development of the plan.

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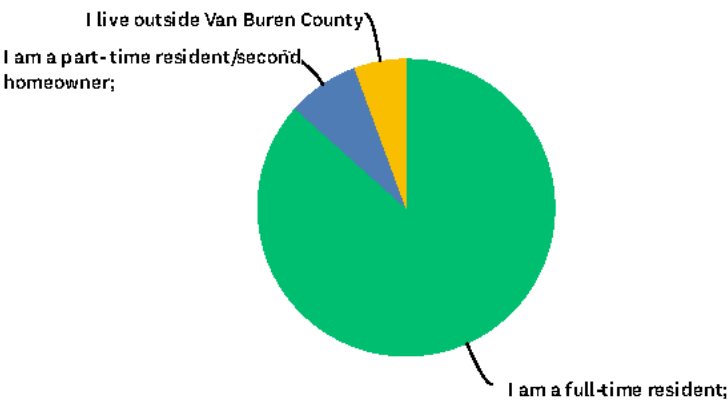
Contact:
Marcy Hamilton
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
269-925-1137 x1525
hamiltonm@swmpc.org

Appendix Text D – Detailed Survey Results

Van Buren County Parks Public Survey

Q1 Do you live in Van Buren County?

Answered: 322 Skipped: 3



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|--|-----------|-----|
| I am a full-time resident; | 86.6% | 279 |
| I am a part- time resident/second homeowner; | 7.8% | 25 |
| I live outside Van Buren County | 5.6% | 18 |
| TOTAL | | 322 |

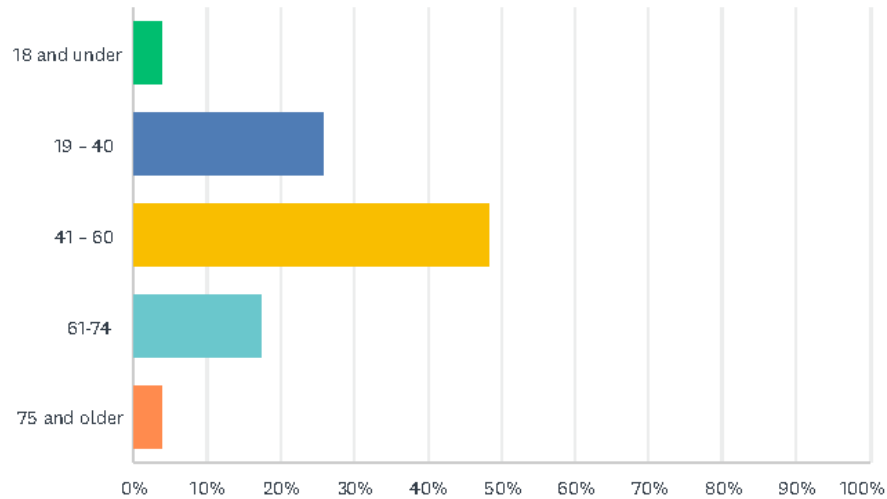
Q2 If you reside (full or part-time) in Van Buren County, which City, Village or Township is your residence located in?



| Location | Number of Mentions |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Almena Township | 18 |
| Antwerp Township | 24 |
| Arlington Township | 3 |
| Bangor | 7 |
| Benton township | 1 |
| Berrien County | 1 |
| Bloomingdale | 5 |
| Cass County | 1 |
| Columbia Township | 5 |
| Covert Township | 2 |
| Decatur | 5 |
| Geneva Township | 5 |
| Gobles | 13 |
| Hamilton Township | 7 |
| Hartford | 8 |
| Lawrence | 9 |
| Lawton | 9 |
| Mattawan | 14 |
| Paw Paw | 48 |
| Pine Grove Township | 6 |
| Porter Township | 2 |
| South Haven | 25 |
| Waverly Township | 14 |

Q3 In which age category are you?

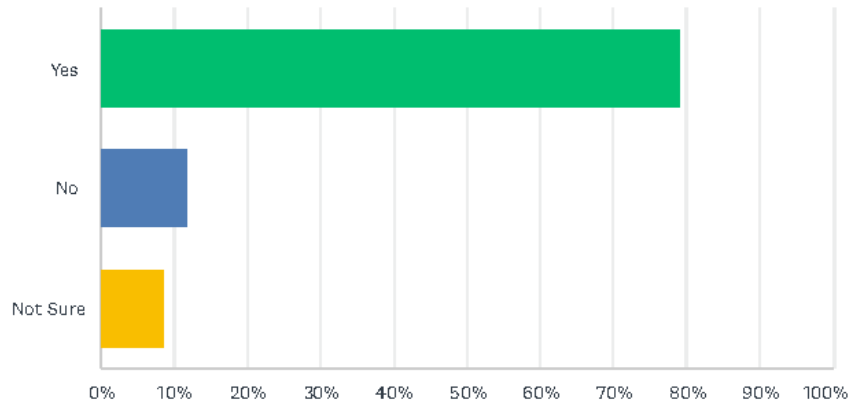
Answered: 320 Skipped: 5



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| 18 and under | 4.1% | 13 |
| 19 - 40 | 25.9% | 83 |
| 41 - 60 | 48.4% | 155 |
| 61-74 | 17.5% | 56 |
| 75 and older | 4.1% | 13 |
| TOTAL | | 320 |

Q4 Do Van Buren County parks, trails and open spaces positively impact your quality of life?

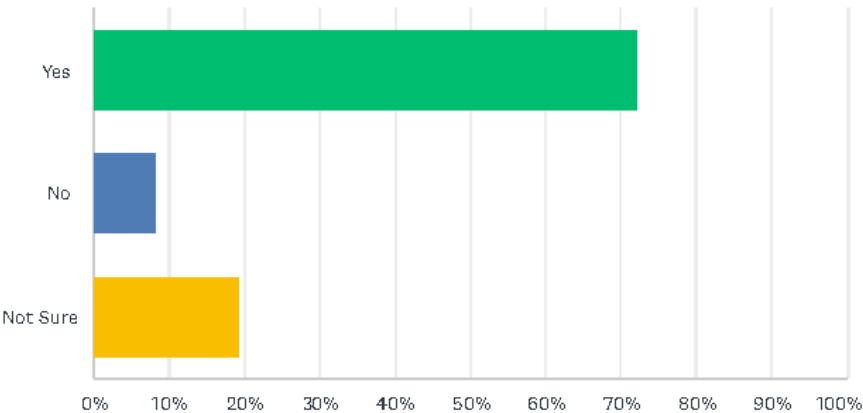
Answered: 319 Skipped: 6



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| Yes | 79.3% | 253 |
| No | 11.9% | 38 |
| Not Sure | 8.8% | 28 |
| TOTAL | | 319 |

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

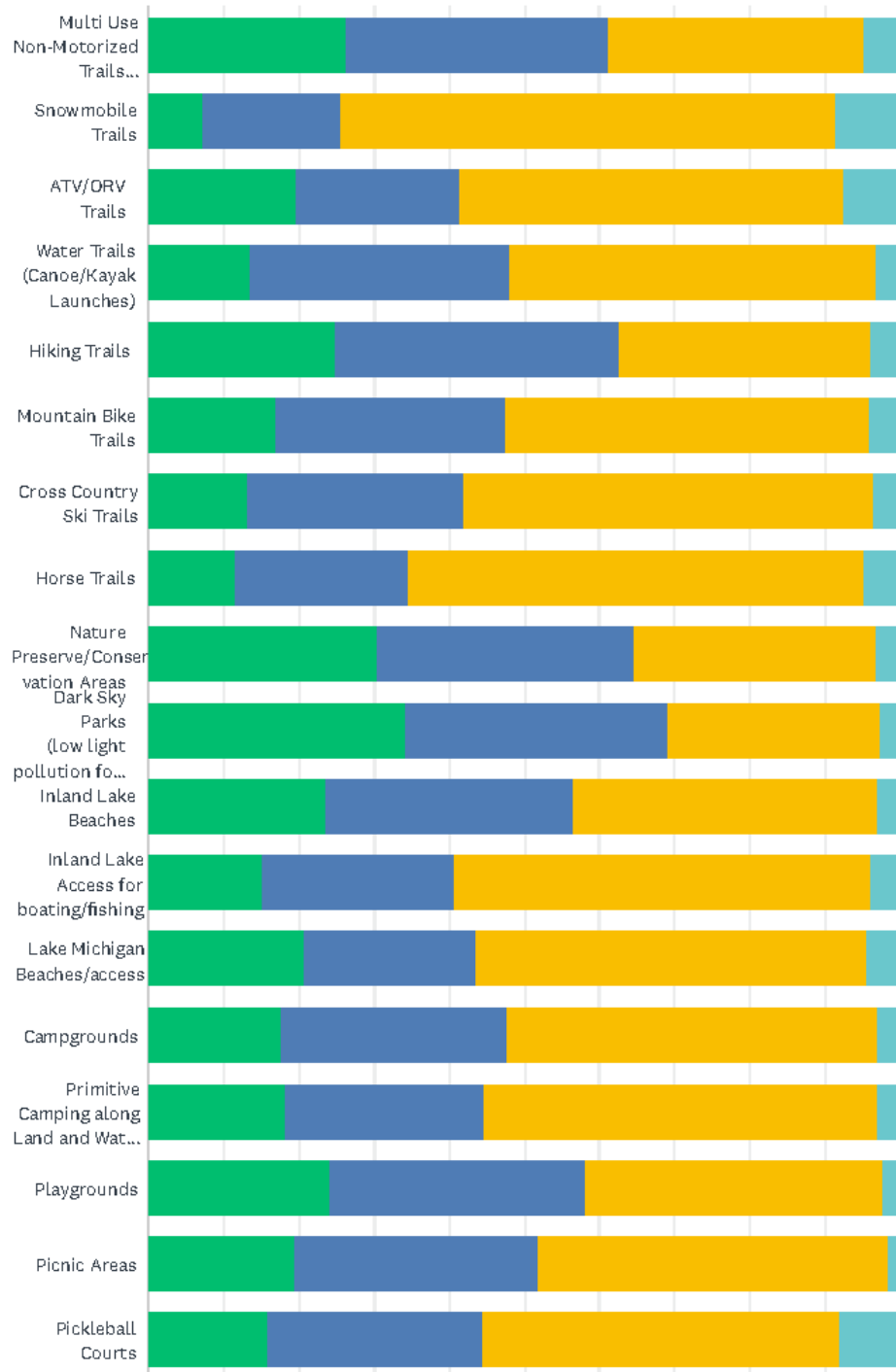
Answered: 321 Skipped: 4



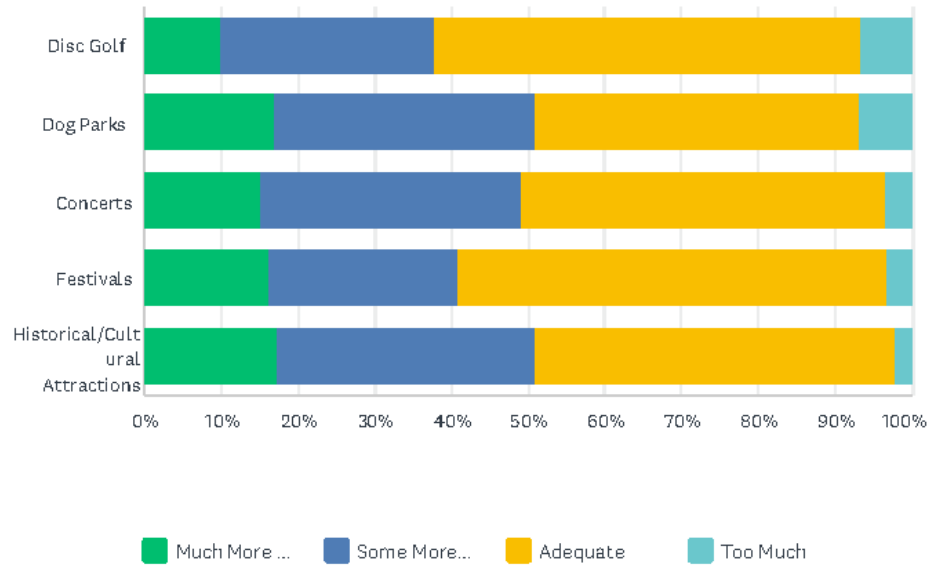
| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| Yes | 72.3% | 232 |
| No | 8.4% | 27 |
| Not Sure | 19.3% | 62 |
| TOTAL | | 321 |

Q8 How would you rate the amount of the following recreation resources/activities offered in Van Buren County?

Answered: 317 Skipped: 8



Van Buren County Parks Public Survey



Van Buren County Parks Public Survey

| | MUCH MORE NEEDED | SOME MORE NEEDED | ADEQUATE | TOO MUCH | TOTAL |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|-------|
| Multi Use Non-Motorized Trails (paved/crushed limestone for biking, walking, jogging, etc) | 26.2% 81 | 35.0% 108 | 34.0% 105 | 4.9% 15 | 309 |
| Snowmobile Trails | 7.1% 21 | 18.4% 54 | 66.0% 194 | 8.5% 25 | 294 |
| ATV/ORV Trails | 19.7% 59 | 21.7% 65 | 51.0% 153 | 7.7% 23 | 300 |
| Water Trails (Canoe/Kayak Launches) | 13.6% 41 | 34.4% 104 | 48.7% 147 | 3.3% 10 | 302 |
| Hiking Trails | 24.8% 76 | 37.8% 116 | 33.6% 103 | 3.9% 12 | 307 |
| Mountain Bike Trails | 17.1% 51 | 30.4% 91 | 48.5% 145 | 4.0% 12 | 299 |
| Cross Country Ski Trails | 13.2% 39 | 28.7% 85 | 54.4% 161 | 3.7% 11 | 296 |
| Horse Trails | 11.4% 33 | 23.1% 67 | 60.7% 176 | 4.8% 14 | 290 |
| Nature Preserve/Conservation Areas | 30.4% 93 | 34.3% 105 | 32.0% 98 | 3.3% 10 | 306 |
| Dark Sky Parks (low light pollution for sky viewing) | 34.2% 104 | 34.9% 106 | 28.3% 86 | 2.6% 8 | 304 |
| Inland Lake Beaches | 23.5% 70 | 32.9% 98 | 40.6% 121 | 3.0% 9 | 298 |
| Inland Lake Access for boating/fishing | 15.2% 45 | 25.6% 76 | 55.2% 164 | 4.0% 12 | 297 |
| Lake Michigan Beaches/access | 20.7% 63 | 23.0% 70 | 51.8% 158 | 4.6% 14 | 305 |
| Campgrounds | 17.6% 52 | 30.1% 89 | 49.3% 146 | 3.0% 9 | 296 |
| Primitive Camping along Land and Water Trails | 18.1% 54 | 26.5% 79 | 52.3% 156 | 3.0% 9 | 298 |
| Playgrounds | 24.2% 74 | 34.0% 104 | 39.5% 121 | 2.3% 7 | 306 |
| Picnic Areas | 19.3% 58 | 32.3% 97 | 46.7% 140 | 1.7% 5 | 300 |
| Pickleball Courts | 15.8% 47 | 28.5% 85 | 47.7% 142 | 8.1% 24 | 298 |
| Disc Golf | 9.8% 29 | 28.0% 83 | 55.4% 164 | 6.8% 20 | 296 |
| Dog Parks | 17.1% 51 | 33.8% 101 | 42.1% 126 | 7.0% 21 | 299 |
| Concerts | 15.2% 45 | 33.8% 100 | 47.6% 141 | 3.4% 10 | 296 |
| Festivals | 16.1% 48 | 24.7% 74 | 55.9% 167 | 3.3% 10 | 299 |
| Historical/Cultural Attractions | 17.2% 52 | 33.8% 102 | 46.7% 141 | 2.3% 7 | 302 |

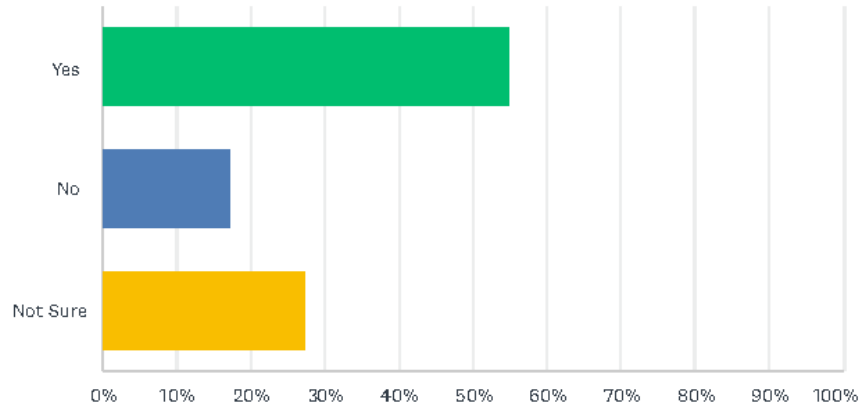
Q9 Are there any recreational opportunities or activities not listed above that you would like to see in Van Buren County?

etc path None Skate park areas splash pads think love county sports NA kids trails
walking parks small n see activities around Paw Paw People gardens community bike

| Category | Mentions |
|---|----------|
| Walking/Biking/Trails | 13 |
| Sports Facilities (courts, fields, rinks, training) | 8 |
| Gardens / Green Spaces / Nature Preserves | 7 |
| Festivals & Community Events | 6 |
| Skate Parks / Skateboarding | 6 |
| Splash Pads | 6 |
| Creative / Novel Ideas (yoga, axe throwing, drone racing, etc.) | 5 |
| Education / Conservation Programs | 5 |
| Community Pools (indoor/outdoor) | 4 |
| Affordable / Free Activities | 3 |
| Dog Parks | 3 |
| Music / Amphitheater / Concerts | 3 |
| Playgrounds / Kids Spaces | 3 |
| Water Recreation (canoe/kayak/rafting) | 3 |
| Fairgrounds / County-wide Use | 2 |
| Other / Not sure | 2 |
| Winter Activities (sledding, skating, etc.) | 2 |

Q10 Would you support using County park millage funds to help improve the Van Buren Trail (State-owned) from South Haven to Hartford if doing so increased the County's likelihood of obtaining grants?

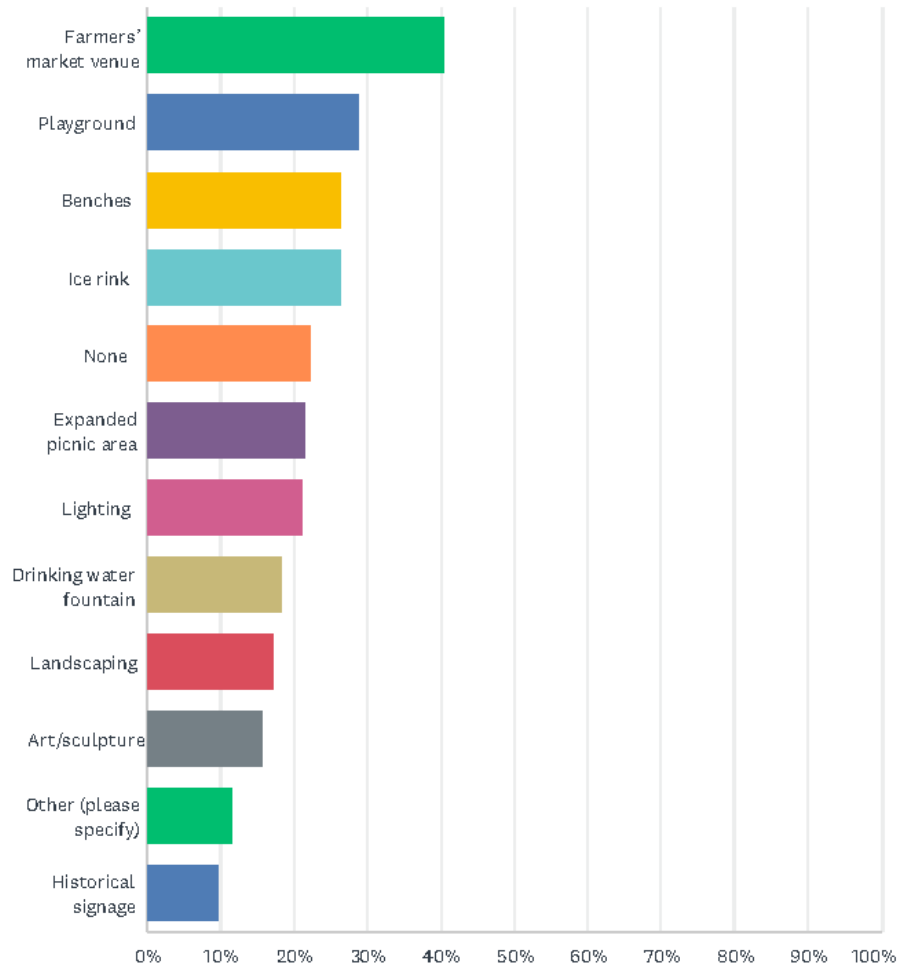
Answered: 323 Skipped: 2



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|----------------|-----------|-----|
| Yes | 55.1% | 178 |
| No | 17.3% | 56 |
| Not Sure | 27.6% | 89 |
| TOTAL | | 323 |

Q11 What would be the priority improvements you would like to see at the County Courtyard Park (Paw Paw Village)? Please select up to five answers.

Answered: 325 Skipped: 0



Van Buren County Parks Public Survey

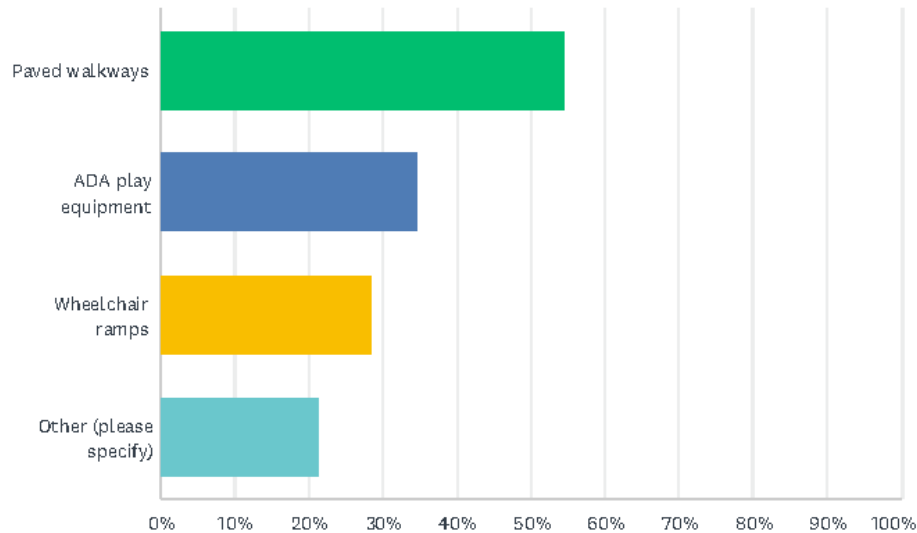
| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Farmers' market venue | 40.6% | 132 |
| Playground | 28.9% | 94 |
| Benches | 26.5% | 86 |
| Ice rink | 26.5% | 86 |
| None | 22.5% | 73 |
| Expanded picnic area | 21.8% | 71 |
| Lighting | 21.2% | 69 |
| Drinking water fountain | 18.5% | 60 |
| Landscaping | 17.2% | 56 |
| Art/sculpture | 15.7% | 51 |
| Other (please specify) | 11.7% | 38 |
| Historical signage | 9.8% | 32 |
| Total Respondents: 325 | | |

"Other (please specify)" responses:

| Priority / Theme | Mentions |
|---|----------|
| "Don't know / don't use / unsure" | 9 |
| Parking | 4 |
| Restrooms (accessible, clean, open) | 3 |
| Dog park | 2 |
| Walking / Nature trails | 2 |
| Sheltered pavilion / shaded seating (trees, picnic tables) | 2 |
| Play spaces for kids/teens (pickleball, skate park, playground) | 2 |
| Naturalized / native green spaces / gardens | 2 |
| General refresh / modernization | 1 |
| Amphitheater upgrades (Maple Lake) | 1 |
| Splash pad | 1 |
| Better maintenance (garbage cans, upkeep) | 1 |
| Modeled after South Haven's park | 1 |

Q12 Are there any improvements you would like to see at County Courtyard Park to make it more accessible to all? Select all that apply.

Answered: 242 Skipped: 83



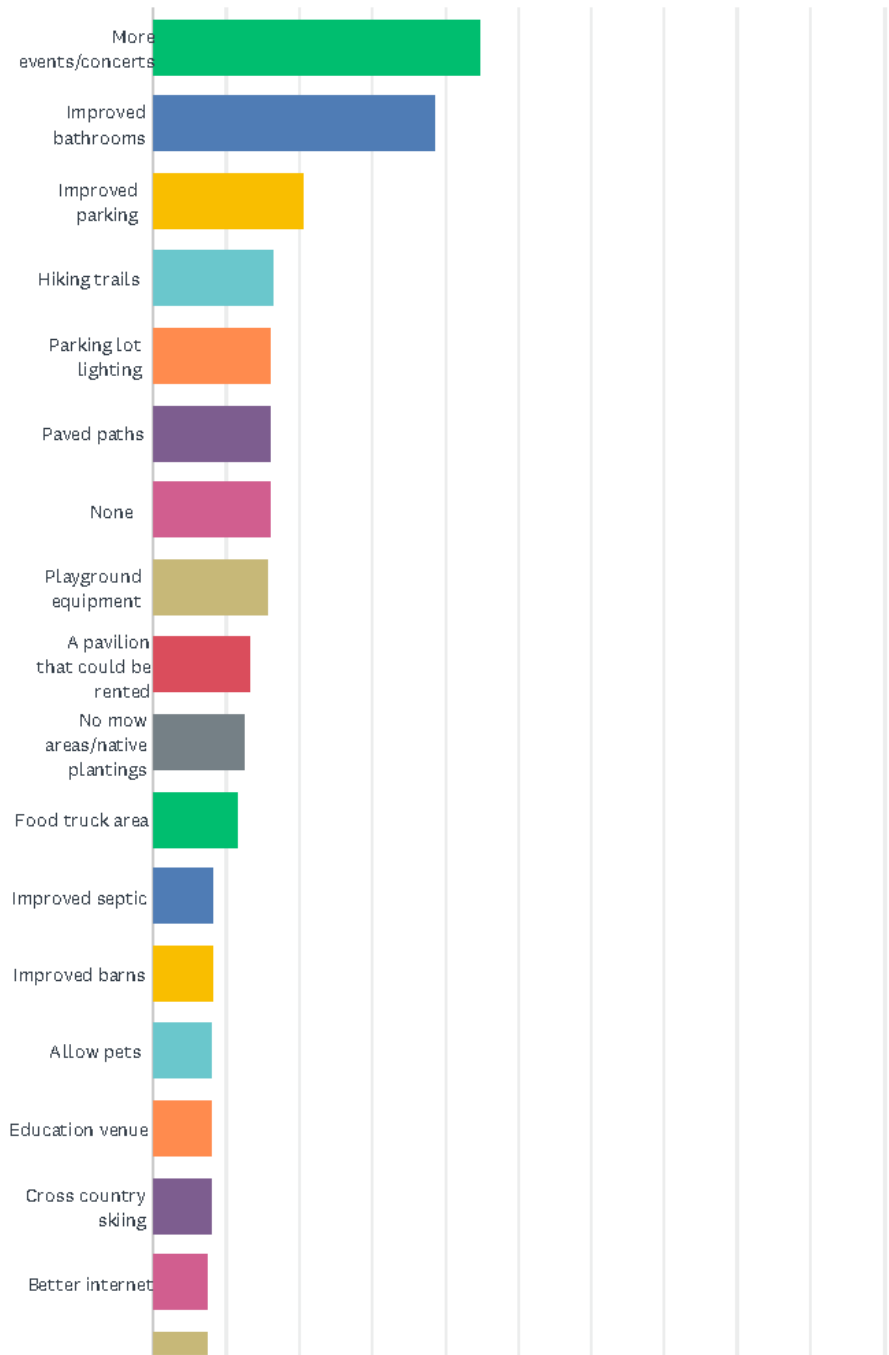
| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Paved walkways | 54.5% | 132 |
| ADA play equipment | 34.7% | 84 |
| Wheelchair ramps | 28.5% | 69 |
| Other (please specify) | 21.5% | 52 |
| Total Respondents: 242 | | |

Other Responses:

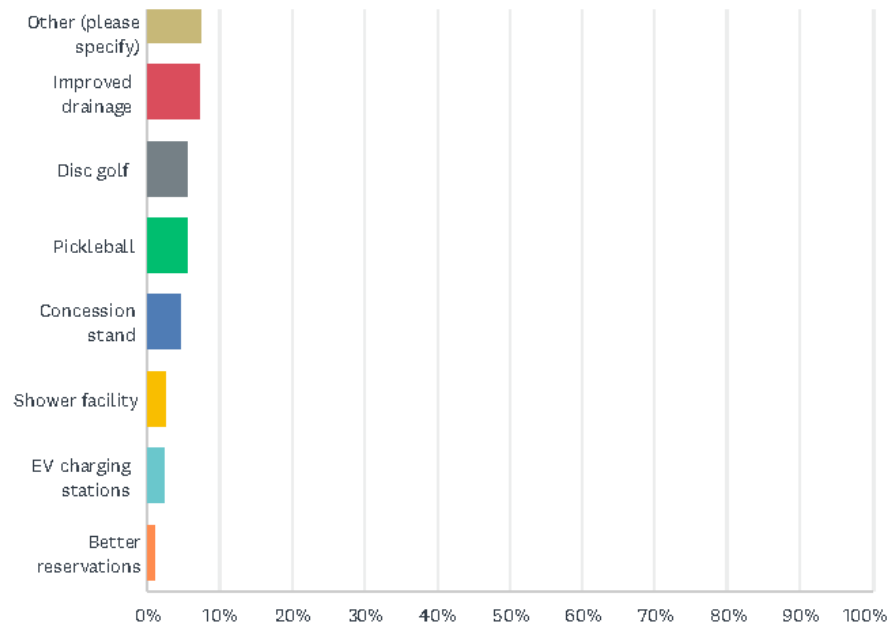
| Category | Count |
|---|-------|
| No improvements / satisfied / N/A / none | 26 |
| Unfamiliar / unsure / never been / don't know | 10 |
| Accessibility / ADA / wheelchair | 3 |
| Play equipment / seating / recreational areas | 3 |
| Parking | 2 |
| Maintenance / cleanliness | 2 |

Q13 What would be the priority improvements you would like to see at the Van Buren County Fairgrounds (Hartford Township)? Please select up to five answers.

Answered: 325 Skipped: 0



Van Buren County Parks Public Survey



Van Buren County Parks Public Survey

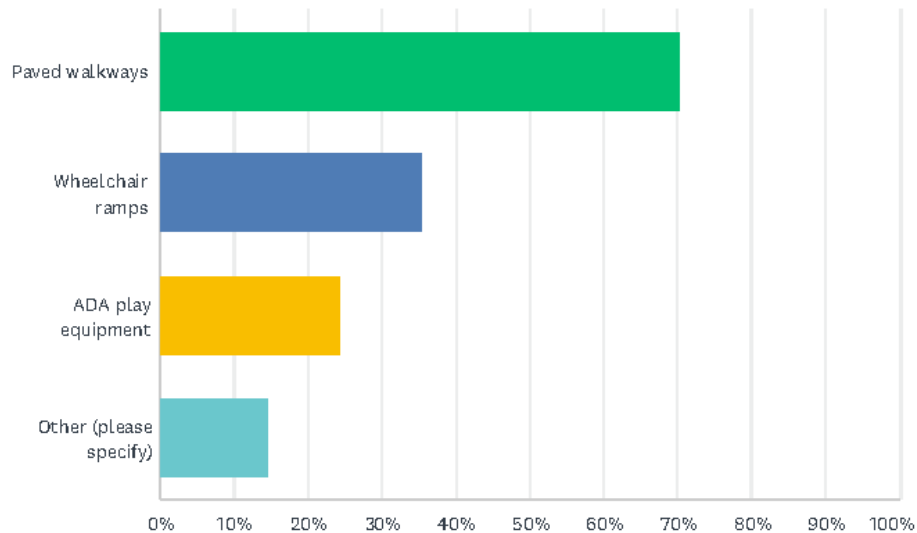
| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| More events/concerts | 44.9% | 146 |
| Improved bathrooms | 38.8% | 126 |
| Improved parking | 20.6% | 67 |
| Hiking trails | 16.6% | 54 |
| Parking lot lighting | 16.3% | 53 |
| Paved paths | 16.3% | 53 |
| None | 16.3% | 53 |
| Playground equipment | 15.7% | 51 |
| A pavilion that could be rented | 13.5% | 44 |
| No mow areas/native plantings | 12.6% | 41 |
| Food truck area | 11.7% | 38 |
| Improved septic | 8.3% | 27 |
| Improved bams | 8.3% | 27 |
| Allow pets | 8.0% | 26 |
| Education venue | 8.0% | 26 |
| Cross country skiing | 8.0% | 26 |
| Better internet | 7.7% | 25 |
| Other (please specify) | 7.7% | 25 |
| Improved drainage | 7.4% | 24 |
| Disc golf | 5.8% | 19 |
| Pickleball | 5.8% | 19 |
| Concession stand | 4.6% | 15 |
| Shower facility | 2.8% | 9 |
| EV charging stations | 2.5% | 8 |
| Better reservations | 1.2% | 4 |
| Total Respondents: 325 | | |

Other
Responses:

| Category | Count |
|---|-------|
| No improvements / satisfied / N/A / none / unsure | 6 |
| Unfamiliar / never been / don't know | 6 |
| Increased usage / more events / multi-season use | 5 |
| Seating / grandstand improvements | 4 |
| Shade / trees / visual improvements | 3 |
| Recreational amenities / fishing / rentals / biking | 3 |
| Camping / fairground facilities | 2 |
| Pricing / accessibility | 1 |

Q14 Are there any improvements you would like to see at County Fairgrounds to make it more accessible to all? Select all that apply.

Answered: 253 Skipped: 72



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Paved walkways | 70.4% | 178 |
| Wheelchair ramps | 35.6% | 90 |
| ADA play equipment | 24.5% | 62 |
| Other (please specify) | 14.6% | 37 |
| Total Respondents: 253 | | |

| Category | Number of Mentions |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| No improvements/Unsure/Never been | 33 |
| Improved campground/Multi-use access | 2 |
| Overall updates to the fairgrounds | 1 |

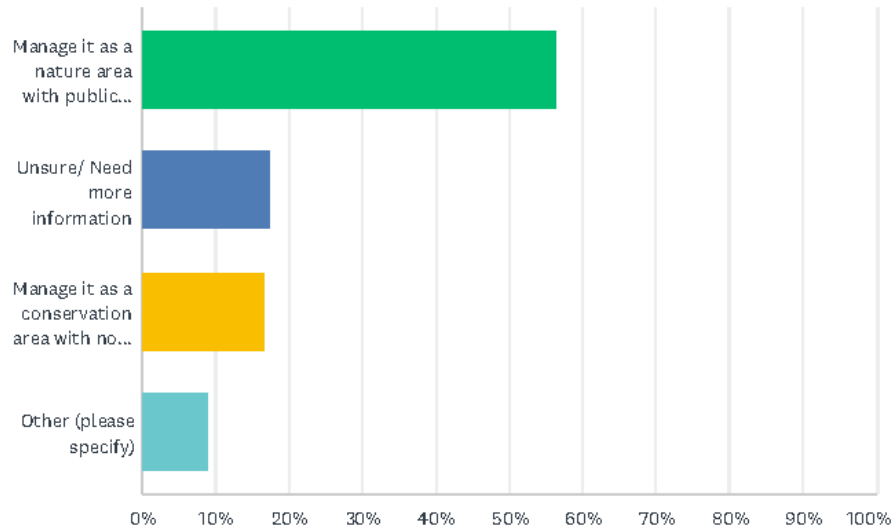
Q15 What would be the priority improvements you would like the Van Buren Museum Committee to consider for the Van Buren Museum located at 58471 Red Arrow Highway, Hartford?

Answered: 167 Skipped: 158

Most respondents either have never visited the museum or are unsure of what improvements are needed, with many indicating “none,” “N/A,” or similar. Among the suggestions provided, the most common themes include increasing advertising and promotion so more people know the museum exists, expanding hours of operation, improving accessibility for people with disabilities, and enhancing the building and grounds, including paved walkways, benches, landscaping, and building maintenance. A few respondents suggested hosting more events, linking the museum with the fairgrounds or other historical sites, and updating exhibits or adding more historical items.

Q16 Van Buren County owns 40 acres of critical dunes in South Haven Township along Lake Michigan. What would you like the county to do with this property?

Answered: 320 Skipped: 5

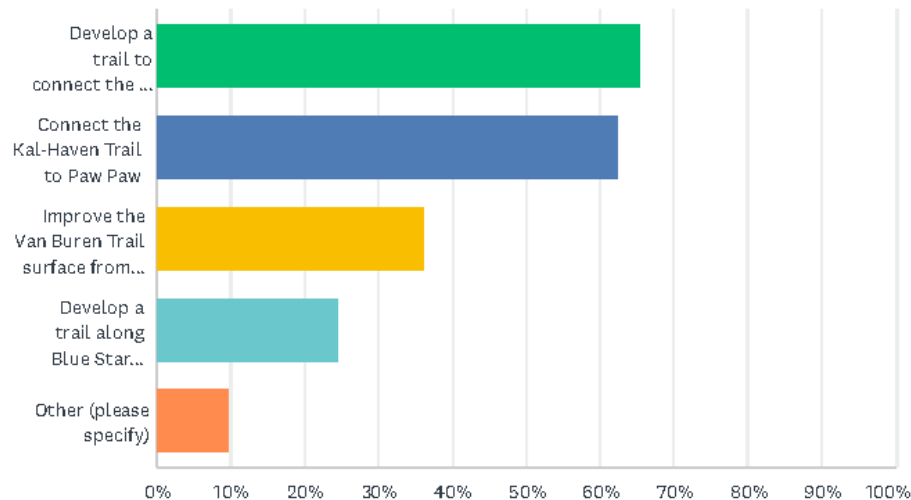


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Manage it as a nature area with public access | 56.6% | 181 |
| Unsure/ Need more information | 17.5% | 56 |
| Manage it as a conservation area with no public access | 16.9% | 54 |
| Other (please specify) | 9.1% | 29 |
| TOTAL | | 320 |

| Response / Category | Number of Mentions |
|--|--------------------|
| Keep as is / no public access | 20 |
| Manage as nature/conservation area with limited public access | 6 |
| Public access with amenities (bathrooms, paved walkways, trails) | 2 |
| Allow recreational use (trails, sand dunes, festivals, off-road/ATV) | 2 |

Q17 Which of the following multi-use, non-motorized trails (for activities such as biking, walking, jogging, etc.) do you support developing? Select all that apply.

Answered: 298 Skipped: 27

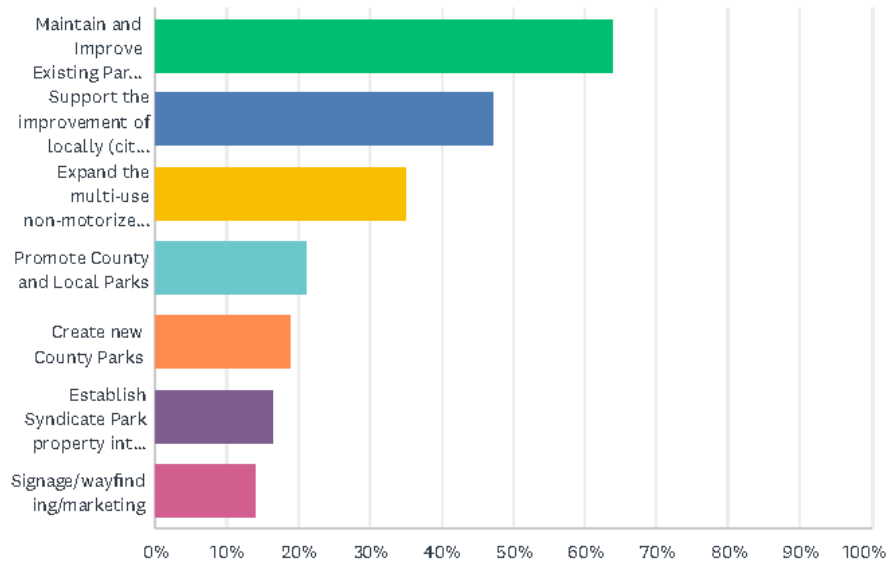


| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|--|-----------|-----|
| Develop a trail to connect the Van Buren Trail from Hartford, Lawrence, Paw Paw and Mattawan | 65.4% | 195 |
| Connect the Kal-Haven Trail to Paw Paw | 62.4% | 186 |
| Improve the Van Buren Trail surface from South Haven to Hartford | 36.2% | 108 |
| Develop a trail along Blue Star Highway linking to trails in Berrien and Allegan Counties | 24.8% | 74 |
| Other (please specify) | 9.7% | 29 |
| Total Respondents: 298 | | |

The "Other (please specify)" responses indicate that a portion of respondents prefer to keep the current trail system as it is, with many expressing satisfaction with existing trails or stating that they do not have enough information to make a judgment. Eleven responses explicitly indicated "none," "keep as is," or similar sentiments. A few individual suggestions for specific trail expansions or improvements were mentioned, such as connecting local towns or adding paved shoulders.

Q18 Overall what do you think should be the priority order for the county to use park millage funds for? Select your top three priorities.

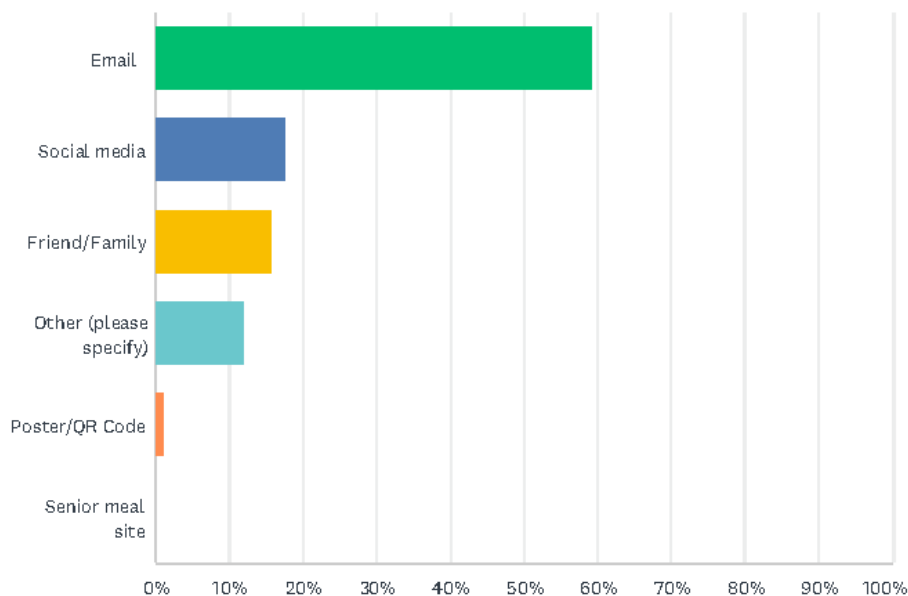
Answered: 325 Skipped: 0



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|--|-----------|-----|
| Maintain and Improve Existing Parks (County Courtyard, Fairgrounds) | 64.0% | 208 |
| Support the improvement of locally (city, village and township) owned parks | 47.4% | 154 |
| Expand the multi-use non-motorized trail system in the county | 35.1% | 114 |
| Promote County and Local Parks | 21.2% | 69 |
| Create new County Parks | 19.1% | 62 |
| Establish Syndicate Park property into the Syndicate Park Dunes Preserve/County Park | 16.6% | 54 |
| Signage/wayfinding/marketing | 14.2% | 46 |
| Total Respondents: 325 | | |

Q19 How did you hear about this survey? Select all that apply.

Answered: 322 Skipped: 3



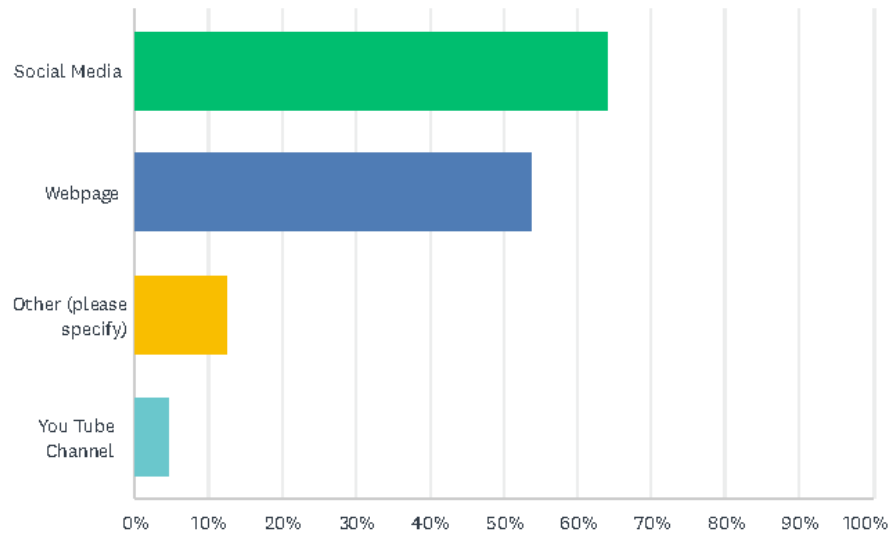
| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Email | 59.3% | 191 |
| Social media | 17.7% | 57 |
| Friend/Family | 15.8% | 51 |
| Other (please specify) | 12.1% | 39 |
| Poster/QR Code | 1.2% | 4 |
| Senior meal site | 0.0% | 0 |
| Total Respondents: 322 | | |

Other (please specify) responses:

| Method | Number of Mentions |
|--|--------------------|
| Work / Employer / From my employer | 3 |
| School / School district / Paw Paw Public Schools / School email | 16 |
| News article / WSJM / Newspaper Flashes | 6 |

Q20 How would you like to get information about parks? Select all that apply.

Answered: 304 Skipped: 21



| ANSWER CHOICES | RESPONSES | |
|------------------------|-----------|-----|
| Social Media | 64.1% | 195 |
| Webpage | 53.9% | 164 |
| Other (please specify) | 12.5% | 38 |
| You Tube Channel | 4.6% | 14 |
| Total Respondents: 304 | | |

| Method | Number of Mentions |
|---|--------------------|
| Email / Email alerts / E mail / Direct email | 16 |
| Mail / Mass mail / Mail flyer | 4 |
| Newsletter / Email newsletter | 3 |
| Newspaper / News release | 3 |
| School flyers | 1 |
| Van Buren Website | 1 |
| App | 1 |
| None / Don't / NA / "I would not like to get information" | 4 |

Q21 Do you have any other comments or suggestions regarding Parks and Recreation Facilities or Opportunities in Van Buren County?

Answered: 157 Skipped: 168

The community responses show a mix of strong support for maintaining and enhancing parks and recreation in Van Buren County, coupled with caution about new development and public access in sensitive areas. Many respondents emphasized preserving natural areas, including dunes, forests, wetlands, and lakes, while maintaining existing facilities such as trails, playgrounds, and boat launches. Popular suggestions included expanding walking, biking, ATV, UTV, and horse trails, improving trail connections and amenities, adding shade, seating, and ADA access, and supporting multi-use facilities and family-friendly spaces. Several comments highlighted the value of partnerships with local organizations to enhance recreational opportunities and maintain natural areas. Conversely, a significant number of respondents expressed opposition to opening private or sensitive areas, such as Syndicate Park dunes, to public access due to concerns about safety, privacy, environmental damage, and irresponsible public use. Others prioritized practical improvements, including playground upkeep, parking, public boat launch access, and cost-effective use of funding without raising taxes. Overall, the responses reflect a community that values both accessibility and conservation, with strong interest in expanding recreational opportunities while protecting sensitive natural resources.

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/udprincipletext.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 Parks and Recreation Commission Minutes Recommending Approval
- Copy of Public Notice for public comment period and public hearing
- Van Buren County Board of Commissioners– Committee of the Whole - Minutes of Public Hearing
- Van Buren County Board of Commissioners Resolution to Adopt Plan
- Van Buren County Board of Commissioners – Minutes Regular Board Meeting
- 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

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.

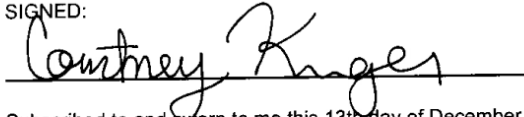
Written comments can be submitted by email to hamiltonm@swmpc.org or by mail to SWMPC, 376 W. Main Street, Ste 130, Benton Harbor, MI 49022 and must be received by January 26, 2021.

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

Publisher's Fee: \$ 165.80

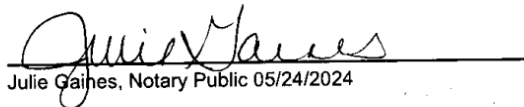
That said newspaper was regularly issued and circulated on those dates.

SIGNED:



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

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.


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

Affidavit of Publication

STATE OF MICHIGAN }
COUNTY OF VAN BUREN } SS

Courtney Kruger, being duly sworn, says:

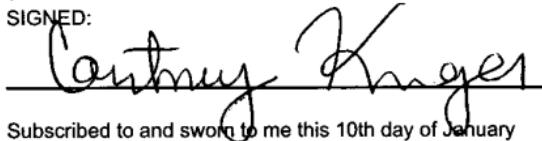
That she is Legal Clerk of the South Haven Tribune, a Weekly newspaper of general circulation, printed and published in South Haven, Van Buren County, Michigan; that the publication, a copy of which is attached hereto, was published in the said newspaper on the following

January 10, 2021

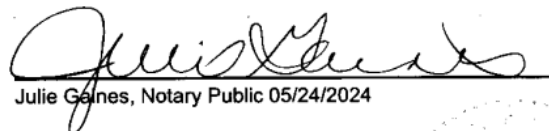
Publisher's Fee: \$ 179.84

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

SIGNED:



Subscribed to and sworn to me this 10th day of January 2021.


Julie Gaines, Notary Public 05/24/2024

60000654 61169157 269-657-2547

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

LEGAL NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD AND PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

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 at 2:50 pm, 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.





MINUTES

Committee of the Whole Meeting of the County Board of Commissioners
Van Buren County

January 26, 2021

2:50 PM

Board of Commissioners Chambers - 219 East Paw Paw Street

PUBLIC HEARING

A. Recreation Plan Update

The Public Hearing for the proposed update to the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan was called to order at 2:50 p.m. by Richard Godfrey, Chairman of the Board. Marcy Hamilton, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, reviewed the updates. The Chair called for comment three times and with no public comment the meeting was adjourned at 2:56 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER

B. Zoom Meeting Information

The Committee of the Whole meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Richard Godfrey, Chairman of the Board. Present in person: Doroh, Godfrey, Chappell, Hanson and Schincariol. Present remotely: Patterson-Gladney from City of South Haven, Van Buren County, MI, and Peat from Paw Paw Township, Van Buren County, MI.

2. ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

None.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the agenda as presented.

Motion by Don Hanson, Second by Mike Chappell, Carried

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Minutes - January 12, 2021

Motion to approve the January 12, 2021 Committee of the Whole minutes as presented.
Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Carried

5. PRESENTATION

6. Administrative Affairs Committee

A. Economic Development Corporation Reappointment

Motion to approve by resolution at the next regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the reappointment of Tom Stanek to the Economic Development Corporation for a six year term expiring February 13, 2027.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Don Hanson, Second by Randy Peat, Carried

B. Non-Attorney Magistrate Appointment

Pursuant to MCL 600.8501, the Court is seeking approval for the formality of appointing Robyn Papaioannou as a new Non-Attorney Magistrate for the 7th District Court.

Motion to approve by resolution at the next regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the appointment of Robyn Papaioannou as a new Non-Attorney Magistrate for the 7th District Court pursuant to MCL 600.8501.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Kurt Doroh, Second by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Carried

C. Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) Bylaws Update

Lt. Bob Kirk highlighted the updates to the Local Emergency Planning Committee bylaws.

Motion to approve by resolution at the next regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the Local Emergency Planning Committee bylaws update.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

D. 911 - VHF Radio Project - Site lease agreements

911 Director Tim McGee presented the request for Tower Site Lease Agreements for the VHF Radio Project.

Motion to approve by resolution at the next regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the Tower Site Lease Agreements with Columbia Township, Covert Township, Gobles City, Oxley Farms, Paw Paw Village and South Haven Area Water/Sewer Authority for the VHF Radio Project.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Paul Schincariol, Second by Don Hanson, Carried

7. Buildings and Grounds Committee

8. Finance Committee

A. Village of Paw Paw Commercial Rehabilitation District

The Village of Paw Paw has established a Commercial Rehabilitation District and is requesting the County to ratify and approve.

Motion to approve by resolution at today's regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the establishment of the Gateway Commercial Rehabilitation District No. 1806 in the Village of Paw Paw.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Randy Peat, Second by Mike Chappell, Carried

B. South Haven Charter Township Commercial Rehabilitation District

South Haven Charter Township has established a Commercial Rehabilitation District and is requesting the County to ratify and approve.

Motion to approve by resolution at today's regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the establishment of the Commercial Rehabilitation District No. 1 in the South Haven Charter Township.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Second by Kurt Doroh, Carried

9. Labor Negotiations and Contracts Committee

10. Transit Committee

A. MDOT Contract 2017-0136/P10

Tony Dacoba is requesting approval of MDOT Agreement #2017-0136/P10, CARES Act funding.

Motion to approve by resolution at the next regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners, the MDOT Agreement #2017-0136/P10 in the amount of \$369,104.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Paul Schincariol, Carried

11. Veteran's Services Committee

12. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

Suzie Roehm, County Clerk

Van Buren County will provide necessary and reasonable auxiliary aids and services, such as signers for the hearing impaired and audio tapes of printed materials being considered at the meeting, to individuals with disabilities at any meeting/hearing upon ten (10) days notice to the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners' Office. Individuals with disabilities requiring auxiliary aids or services should contact Van Buren County by writing, Anna Cerven, 219 Paw Paw Street, Ste. 201, Paw Paw, MI 49079, or by calling the Board of Commissioners' Office at (269) 657-8200, option 8 ext. 1271.

B1/01-26-2021

VAN BUREN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

☒ RESOLUTION ☐ MOTION ☐ REPORT OF BUILDINGS & GROUNDS COMMITTEE

HONORABLE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS:

WHEREAS, a plan which addresses the future use and development of parks, recreation areas, open spaces and greenways has been developed Van Buren County with the assistance of the County Planning Commission and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, and;

WHEREAS, the planning process included public input opportunities such as Planning Commission meetings, a survey and a public comment period, and;

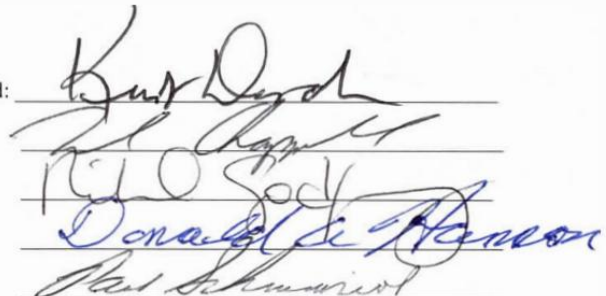
WHEREAS, the plan has been developed to meet the recreational needs (based on data and public input) of the County; and

WHEREAS, the County held a public 30-day public comment period and a public hearing to take comment of the plan; and

WHEREAS, the County Planning Commission has recommended the plan to the County Board for adoption; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, The Van Buren County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan 2021-2026.

Signed:


Gail Patterson-Gladney
Randy Peat

Date: January 26, 2021

FOR CLERK'S USE ONLY

MOTION BY: Chappel

CARRIED ☒

SECONDED BY: Patterson-Gladney

NOT CARRIED ☐



MINUTES
County Board of Commissioners
Van Buren County

January 26, 2021

4:00 PM

Board of Commissioners Chambers - 219 East Paw Paw Street

1. CALL TO ORDER

1.

On the above date the regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners was called to order at 4:03 p.m. by Richard Godfrey, Chairman of the Board.

The roll was called by County Clerk Suzie Roehm with the following commissioners answering to their name and district: Gail Patterson-Gladney, District 1 (remotely from City of South Haven, Van Buren County, MI); Kurt Doroh, District 2; Richard Godfrey, District 3; Mike Chappell, District 4; Randy Peat, District 5 (remotely from Paw Paw Township, Van Buren County, MI); Donald Hanson, District 6; and Paul Schincariol, District 7.

2. ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

None.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

All items on the agenda marked with *** are part of the consent agenda. Commissioners or the public can request that items be removed from the consent agenda.

Motion to approve the agenda as presented.

Roll Call Vote: All Yes

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Carried

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. ** Minutes - January 12, 2021

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Carried

5. PUBLIC COMMENT

The following Mattawan residents spoke in opposition to the proposed Mattawan Village Wastewater Treatment Facility that would discharge into Hayden Creek:

- Jake Jedynak
- Priscilla Woodhams
- Derek Rouse

Tyler Augst, MSUE, provided his contact information to the Board.

6. PRESENTATION

7. ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

A. Road Commission - Appointment

ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION AA1/1-26-2021

WHEREAS, the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners is responsible for making appointments to the Van Buren County Road Commission, and;
WHEREAS, the request is to accept the resignation of Mr. Geoffrey Moffat and to appoint Mr. Todd Hackenberg to fill the vacancy, and;
WHEREAS, Mr. Moffat's term expires December 31, 2024. The appointment of Mr. Hackenberg would be to fill this term.
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners approves the appointment of Mr. Todd Hackenberg to the Van Buren County Road Commission for a term to expire December 31, 2024.

Roll Call Vote:

Yes: Doroh, Chappell, Peat, Hanson, Schincariol, Godfrey

No: Patterson-Gladney

Motion by Kurt Doroh, Second by Mike Chappell, Carried

B. Declaration of a State of Emergency - Extension

ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION AA2/1-26-2021

WHEREAS, on March 10, 2020, the County of Van Buren, Michigan was informed that in response to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, a state of emergency was declared by the Governor of the State of Michigan; and
WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, the County of Van Buren, Michigan was informed that in response to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, a national state of emergency was declared by the President of the United States; and
WHEREAS, the Van Buren/Cass District Health Department was partially activated on March 2, 2020, and fully activated on March 17, 2020; and
WHEREAS, the Van Buren County Emergency Operations Center was partially activated on March 25, 2020, in support of Public Health in acquiring resources to deal with the pandemic, and has since been demobilized; however, the Van Buren County Emergency Operations Center remains ready to assist and may be partially or fully activated consistent with the Emergency Operations Plan which has been functioning since March 25, 2020 as necessary; and
WHEREAS, any widespread outbreak within the County of Van Buren could hinder and/or cease most daily operations within the entire County and overwhelm Emergency Medical Services, hospitals and urgent care facilities; and
WHEREAS, as a result of the requirements placed on the local health department personnel (including, but not limited to, education, enforcement, contact tracing, planning, testing and vaccination deployment), additional staff, volunteers, services, supplies/equipment and afforded liability protection may be needed to continue to protect public health; and
WHEREAS, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) rules and orders exist requiring, or advising of, preventive measures to be in place to protect public health, including limitations on gatherings and use of remote technologies; and
WHEREAS, public bodies within Van Buren County have complied with orders or have voluntarily elected to meet virtually and may elect to continue such practice under this Declaration to protect public health consistent with the Open Meetings Act as amended; and
WHEREAS, in the absence of a current State of Michigan declared State of Emergency, it is necessary to declare a local State of Emergency.
THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners, in accordance with Section 10 of 1976 PA390, as amended, and the Open Meetings Act, as amended, hereby declares that a "local state of emergency" exists within our jurisdiction as of November, 24 2020 and that local resources and funding are being utilized to the fullest possible extent, and the Emergency Operations Plan will be partially or fully implemented as this pandemic necessitates.
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Declaration which was scheduled to expire on January 31, 2021, will be extended until and expire on December 31st, 2021, unless otherwise extended or repealed by the Board of Commissioners.

Roll Call Vote:

Yes: Patterson-Gladney, Doroh, Chappell, Peat, Schincariol, Godfrey

No: Hanson

Motion by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Second by Mike Chappell, Carried

C. **CivicClerk - Agenda/Minutes Software

ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS RESOLUTION AA3/01-26-2021

WHEREAS, the request is to utilize another platform from CivicPlus, their agenda setting platform, CivicClerk to replace our current platform, Novus, and;
WHEREAS, Clerk Roehm and the Administration Department are pleased with the upgrades CivicClerk has to offer, and;
WHEREAS, the first year of CivicClerk with their implementation costs is \$8,239 and starting year two, \$7,144.20 annually.
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Van Buren County Board of Commissioners approves the request to purchase CivicClerk and authorizes the Board Chair to sign on its behalf.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Carried

8. **BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS COMMITTEE**

A. **Recreation Plan Update

BUILDINGS & GROUNDS RESOLUTION BG1/01-26-2021

WHEREAS, a plan which addresses the future use and development of parks, recreation areas, open spaces and greenways has been developed Van Buren County with the assistance of the County Planning Commission and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, and;
WHEREAS, the planning process included public input opportunities such as Planning Commission meetings, a survey and a public comment period, and;
WHEREAS, the plan has been developed to meet the recreational needs (based on data and public input) of the County; and
WHEREAS, the County held a public 30-day public comment period and a public hearing to take comment of the plan; and
WHEREAS, the County Planning Commission has recommended the plan to the County Board for adoption; and
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, The Van Buren County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts the Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan 2021-2026.

Motion by Mike Chappell, Second by Gail Patterson-Gladney, Carried

9. **FINANCE/AUDITING COMMITTEE**

A. Village of Paw Paw Commercial Rehabilitation District

FINANCE RESOLUTION F2/01-26-2021

WHEREAS, pursuant to PA210 of 2005, on January 11th, 2021 Village of Paw Paw established a Commercial Rehabilitation District ("District") within the village upon written request of a commercial business enterprise being SLATE STONE LLC; and
WHEREAS, in so doing the Village Council of the Village of Paw Paw after notice and a public hearing was held determined that the District meets the requirements as set forth in sections 2(b) and 3 of PA210 of 2005; and
WHEREAS, written notice of the Resolution was forwarded to Van Buren County by certified mail pursuant to MCL 207.843(4) and Van Buren County has 28 days to reject the establishment of the District; and
WHEREAS, Van Buren County desires to support the establishment of the District and waive its right to reject the Village of Paw Paw's establishment of the District as provided under MCL 207.843(5).
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, by Van Buren County that the following described parcel(s) of land situated in the Village of Paw Paw, Van Buren County, and State of Michigan, to wit: 547-224,223 535-315 923-910 1385 13-3-14 COM AT PT ON FORMER CEN L OF S KALAMAZOO ST 1194' NLY OF E & W 1/4 L, TH N 88 DEG 23' 33" W 33' TO BEG OF DES, TH N 88 DEG 23' 33" W

- Hayden Creek
- SW Michigan Behavioral Health
- Emergency Planning Committee

17. ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

18. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:48 p.m.

Richard Godfrey, Chairperson

Suzie Roehm, County Clerk



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

269.925.1137 • 269.925.0288 • www.swmpc.org • 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

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



COMMUNITY PARK AND RECREATION PLAN

CERTIFICATION CHECKLIST

By Authority of Parts 19, 703 and 716 of Act 451, P.A. 1994, as amended, submission of this information is required for eligibility to apply for grants

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete, obtain certification signatures and submit this checklist with a locally adopted recreation plan.

All recreation plans are required to meet the content and local approval standards listed in this checklist and as outlined in the *Guidelines for the Development of Community Park and Recreation Plans* provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Plans must be submitted to the DNR through MiRecGrants **with** a completed checklist that has been signed by an authorized official(s) of the local unit of government(s) submitting the plan. Plans may be submitted at any time of the year, but no later than February 1 of the year the local unit of government is applying for grants.

| PLAN INFORMATION | | |
|---|------------------|---|
| Name of Plan: Van Buren County Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan | | |
| List the community names (including school districts) that are covered under the plan and have passed a resolution adopting the plan. | County | Month and year plan adopted by the community's governing body |
| Van Buren County | Van Buren County | January 2021 |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

| PLAN CONTENT |
|--|
| INSTRUCTIONS: Please check <u>each</u> box to certify that the listed information is included in the <u>final</u> plan. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Roles of Commission(s) or Advisory Board(s) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Department, Authority and/or Staff Description and Organizational Chart |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Annual and Projected Budgets for Operations, Maintenance, Capital Improvements and Recreation Programming |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current Funding Sources |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Role of Volunteers |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Relationship(s) with School Districts, Other Public Agencies or Private Organizations |
| Recreation Authorities or Trailway Commissions Only: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Description of the Relationship between the Authority or Commission and the Recreation Departments of Participating Communities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Articles of Incorporation |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 3. RECREATION INVENTORY |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Description of Methods Used to Conduct the Inventory |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Inventory of all Community Owned Parks and Recreation Facilities |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Location Maps (site development plans recommended but not required) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accessibility Assessment |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Status Report for all Grant-Assisted Parks and Recreation Facilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waterways Inventory (if applicable) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 4. RESOURCE INVENTORY (OPTIONAL) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS |

☒ **6. DESCRIPTION OF THE PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS**

☒ Description of the Method(s) Used to Solicit Public Input Before or During Preparation of the Plan, including a Copy of the Survey or Meeting Agenda and a Summary of the Responses Received

☒ Copy of the Notice of the Availability of the Draft Plan for Public Review and Comment

Date of the Notice Dec 13, 2020

Type of Notice Newspaper

Plan Location County Office, online

Duration of Draft Plan Public Review Period (Must be at Least 30 Days) Dec 14, 2020 - Jan 26, 2021

☒ Copy of the Notice for the Public Meeting Held after the One Month Public Review Period and Before the Plan's Adoption by the Governing Body(ies)

Date of Notice January 10, 2021

Name of Newspaper South Haven Tribune

Date of Meeting January 26, 2021

☒ Copy of the Minutes from the Public Meeting

☒ **7. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

☒ **8. ACTION PROGRAM**

☒ **9. POST-COMPLETION SELF-CERTIFICATION REPORT(S)**

PLAN ADOPTION DOCUMENTATION

APPROVAL DOCUMENTATION: For multi-jurisdictional plans, **each** local unit of government must pass a resolution adopting the plan. Prepare and attach a separate page for each unit of government included in the plan.

☒ 1. Official resolution of adoption by the governing body dated: Jan 26, 2021

☒ 2. Official resolution of the County Planning Commission or Board, recommending adoption of the plan by the governing body, dated: January 16 2021

☒ 3. Copy of letter transmitting adopted plan to County Planning Agency dated: January 27, 2021

☒ 4. Copy of letter transmitting adopted plan to Regional Planning Agency dated: January 27, 2021

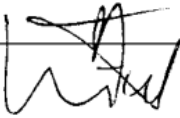
OVERALL CERTIFICATION

NOTE: For multi-jurisdictional plans, Overall Certification must include the signature of each local unit of government. Prepare and attach a separate signature page for each unit of government included in the plan.

I hereby certify that the recreation plan for

Van Buren County (Local Unit of Government)

above and as set forth by the DNR.

 includes the required content, as indicated

Authorized Official for the Local Unit of Government

Date 01/26/2021

This completed checklist must be uploaded in MiRecGrants.