

Lake Township

Master Plan



Big Platte Lake

Recommended for Approval March 2, 2023

Lake Township Planning Commission

Approved **April 6, 2023**

Lake Township Board of Trustees

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**Lake Township Master Plan
Chapter One**



Bass Lake

Introduction

This Master Plan outlines Lake Township’s vision for the future. This Plan is intended to guide the Township’s decisions on land use development and preservation and to serve as the foundation for the Township’s zoning ordinances. This Plan is also intended to guide and influence the Township’s environmental protection, economic development, and other regulatory ordinances.

State Law in Michigan requires local governments to assess their current master plan every five years. Lake Township’s Master Plan was last reviewed in detail in 2015 and was last rewritten in 2010. This updated plan was adopted by the Township Board after holding a special public input meeting of the Planning Commission; making available an online survey; analyzing the results of the survey, the response rate of which was very good; reviewing and discussing the plan at several Planning Commission meetings; and holding a public hearing by the Township Board.

The planning statute makes it the responsibility of the Lake Township Planning Commission to prepare this master plan and the Lake Township Board of Trustees has retained the authority for final review and approval of it. This master plan will serve as a guide for the development of the Township according to the following provisions as applicable:

a. Make careful and comprehensive surveys and studies of present conditions and future growth within the planning area with due regard to its relationship to neighboring jurisdictions.

b. Consult with representatives of adjacent units of government with respect to their planning so that conflicts in master plans and zoning may be avoided.

c. Cooperate with all departments of the state and federal government and other public agencies concerned with programs for economic, social, and physical development within the planning jurisdiction and seek the maximum coordination of the Township with these agencies.

About this Plan

The Lake Township Master Plan is intended to comply with the legal requirements of a community plan in Michigan as noted above, and, in addition, to provide for the proper management of the community resources, to protect as well as enhance the community's integrity.

Lake Township, an internationally renowned place of extraordinary natural beauty and excellent environmental quality, has undergone relatively intense development pressures. The Township realizes that growth management measures are essential to maintain the quality living environment for future populations, while satisfying in a controlled manner, reasonable demands for growth.

The recommendations detailed in this Plan are designed to offer guidance in managing intense development pressures that continue to be exerted on the Township's land, water, and other resources. This growth pressure is most evident in the increased influx of seasonal residents and tourists, particularly in the recreational and seasonal home developments that provide accommodations and services for these transient populations, including the short-term rental of single-family dwellings. This development activity places burdens on the land and environmental resources of the Township, as well as public services and facilities.

While incremental growth pressures do pose additional burdens on Township resources, the possibility of large-scale commercial recreation development will pose the most serious problem for the Township resources in the future. Fortunately, the Township recognizes this potential, and this Plan is created in part to help overcome this potential threat to the long-term environmental quality of the Township.

The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (“SBDNL”) is a dominant feature of the Township, and in addition to its size, places development impacts on the Township due to the ancillary and supplemental uses that are attracted here due to the Lakeshore’s existence.

Thus, while it is obvious that the economic benefits of tourism and seasonal population are known, the potential economic costs and loss of environmental quality of such growth to the area must also be fully considered. The planning challenge of the Township is to properly manage seasonal growth pressures while providing growth management programs to maintain long term environmental quality. That is the purpose and guiding principal of this Plan.

Legal Authority

This Plan is created as a “Future Land Use Plan” as defined in Act 33 of 2008, being the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, as amended. Lake Township is creating this Plan under the authority granted to townships by Act 33 of 2008, as referenced above.

Lake Township History

Lake Township was established in 1873. The Township was made up of forests, Otter Creek, Bass Lake, Otter Lake, Long Lake, Platte Lake, Little Platte Lake, Loon Lake (originally Round Lake), part of Crystal Lake, and the lower Platte River.

In the late 1800’s lumbering and commercial fishing were the major economic forces in Lake Township. In 1858 the Point Betsie Lighthouse was established to protect ships passing through the Manitou Passage—as many as 100 sailing or steam vessels could pass Point Betsie in a single day. In 1875 the life-saving station was established at Point Betsie.

In 1883 the towns of Edgewater and Aral were established in Lake Township. Edgewater was located on the northwest shore of Platte Lake, and Aral was located near Otter Creek. A narrow-gauge railroad was built to carry lumber from the Platte Lumber Company to Lake Michigan. Extensive docks were built at the Lake Michigan shore so that the lumber could be loaded onto ships. In 1891, the Otter Creek Lumber Company was established. It is reported that extensive shipments of lumber went to the rebuilding of Chicago after the great fire of 1871. Lumbering took most of the maple, ash, oak, elm, basswood, hemlock, and beech trees. By 1910 these towns were gone due to the depletion of the forests.

Resorts were the other main economic staple for fishing, hunting, and summer guests. Chimney Corners was established in 1910, and Crystal Downs (known as one of the best golf courses in the United States) was established in 1927. Other resorts were formed around the lakes.

Due to poor soil conditions agriculture was not sustainable, although orchards were developed in the 1920’s. The largest one in Lake Township was Crystal Highlands Orchards. The crop was cherries. There were also apple, blueberry, and Christmas tree farms in the area.

Lake Township has been primarily a resort community for the past seventy years. History shows that interest in the lakes and woods of northern Michigan began in the 1940's with the increased mobility and relative prosperity of workers in southern Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Illinois.

Beginning in the 1950's and continuing into the early 1970's there was a struggle back and forth concerning the national importance of the natural beauty of the Lake Michigan shoreline in Benzie and Leelanau Counties. Several bills were introduced in Congress and contested hearings held in Northern Michigan and in Washington. When the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore ("SBDNL") was finally established in 1970, bitter feelings were experienced by local citizens and vacation homeowners who had invested in homes and cottages in the area that were scheduled for purchase and demolition.

In the 1970's, much of Lake Township was purchased by the federal government to add to the park (as authorized by Congress). With some exceptions, all buildings and structures within the park boundaries have been removed and the sites returned to a natural condition. The federal government continues to purchase property in Lake Township from willing sellers to acquire parcels in a corridor for a scenic drive following the ridge between Crystal and Platte Lakes; the scenic drive was planned and authorized when the park was established.

Many Township residents recognize and appreciate that the creation of the SBDNL has preserved in its natural state much beautiful land that otherwise might not be accessible to the public and might have been developed in undesirable ways. But residual hard feelings still exist among some residents particularly the descendants of the former owners of property within the SBDNL.

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore constitutes approximately 2/3rds of the land area of Lake Township. There are a few businesses or other non-residential uses, including Crystal Downs country club, Point Betsie Lighthouse and Museum, Chimney Corners resort, canoe rentals, and party stores. The rest of the Township is owned primarily by families: many are summer residents, but many retirees have chosen to make this their permanent home. Tourism is the main economic force. There is a recent trend toward single-family homes being purchased or built by companies or partnerships with the intent of using the homes as short-term rentals.

Lake Township's numerous beautiful lakes, other water features, and forest-covered ridges make this a most special Township. The residents deeply care about their Township.

Chapter Two Existing Conditions



Big Platte Lake

An important part of a master plan is to understand existing conditions in the Township and whether trends provide any indication of future conditions and needs.

This is accomplished by examining the population and economic characteristics in the Township.

Population Characteristics

Table 1 – Population Changes

Year	Benzie County Population	% Change From Prior Census	Lake Township Population	% Change From Prior Census
1990	12,200	-	508	-
2000	15,998	+31%	635	+25%
2010	17,525	+9.5%	759	+19.5%
2020	17,979	+2.6%	694	-8.6%

Source: U.S. Census Dept; <https://data.census.gov>

Table 1 shows a history of population growth for both Benzie County and Lake Township from 1990 through 2020. The ten-year population change from 1990 to 2000 was over 31 percent for the County and 25 percent for Lake Township. Since 2000 however, the growth at both the County and Township level has noticeably declined and Lake Township even saw a drop in population between 2010 and 2020.

How much the COVID pandemic may have contributed to the population drop from 2010 to 2020 is unknown. It will be worth monitoring population trends in the next few years to keep track. Anecdotally there may be an uptick in full-time residents who have permanently relocated to the Township because of their ability to work remotely for distant employers. But that potential increase may be offset by a decline based on the advancing average age of Township residents, as shown by the data below.

Share of County Population

The 2010 Lake Township Master Plan reported that due to strong growth in Homestead, Almira and Inland Townships, Lake Township’s percentage of the County’s total population had declined slightly. But since 1990, Lake Township’s population has remained very close to 4% of the total county population.

Population Age Demographics

The age breakdown of Township residents shown in the following table is notable because of the prevalence of senior citizens.

Table 2 - Lake Township Population by Age

Year	2000		2010		2020	
Age Range	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Under 20	63	10%	60	8%	17	2
20 – 24	12	2%	15	2%	0	0
25 – 34	26	4%	14	2%	96	12
35 – 44	56	9%	37	5%	19	3
45 – 54	85	13%	100	13%	65	8
55 – 64	143	23%	165	22%	175	22
65 – 74	155	24%	213	28%	243	31
75 – 84	75	12%	122	16%	132	17
85+	20	3%	33	4%	36	5
Total	635	100%	759	100%	783	100%

Sources: 2000 data from prior Lake Township Master Plan, citing 2000 census data
 2010 and 2020: U.S. Census Dept; <https://data.census.gov>

The following table shows the median age of the population in different jurisdictions, and it clearly underscores prevalence of senior citizens in our Township compared to the averages nationally, state-wide and in neighboring parts of Benzie County. It also shows that our Township population is older than it was 10 and 20 years ago.

Table 3 – Median Age of the Population

	2000	2010	2020
United States	35	37	38
Michigan	36	39	40
Benzie County	42	46	50
Platte Township	44	51	55
Benzonia Township	45	51	56
Crystal Lake Township	48	56	60
Lake Township	61	64	65

Sources: 2000 data from prior Lake Township Master Plan, citing 2000 census data
2010 and 2020: U.S. Census Dept; <https://data.census.gov>

Housing

Table 4 shows the number of housing units in Lake Township and the increase over the last twenty years. The table also shows that a large percentage of the units are classified as vacant. Vacant units include those that are seasonal residences, which is undoubtedly why the vacancy rate is high. The table also shows that almost all housing units are single, detached units (single family dwellings). There are essentially no apartments, condos or duplexes in the Township. Lastly, the median home value is shown. The significant rise in home values is partially due to inflation, but only about one-half of the increase can be attributed to inflation. Newer homes are generally larger and more well-appointed than the typical cottages and second homes that prevailed in the past.

Table 4 – Housing Units – Lake Township

	2000 Number	2000 Percentage	2010 Number	2010 Percentage	2020 Number	2020 Percentage
Total Housing Units	1,106	100%	1,271	100%	1,311	100%
Occupied Units	318	29%	387	30%	367	28%
Vacant Units	788	71%	884	70%	944	72%
Occupied Units	318	100%	387	100%	367	100%
Owner Occupied	294	93%	348	90%	365	99%
Renter Occupied	24	7%	39	10%	2	1%
Single, Detached Units	1,048	97%	1,246	98%	1,305	99%
Median Value of All Housing Units	\$230,500		\$407,100		\$448,400	

Sources: 2000 data from prior Lake Township Master Plan, citing 2000 census data
2010 and 2020: U.S. Census Dept; <https://data.census.gov>.

Employment

Table 5 below shows the percentage of Township residents who are employed as part of the labor force. Not surprisingly, given the average age of residents, a large portion of the population is retired and not part of the work force.

Table 5 – Employment

Year	2000	2010	2020
% Of Residents in the Labor Force	34.5%	32%	40%
% Of Residents Not in Labor Force	65.5%	68%	60%

Household Income

Table 6 displays data on household income and reflects the relatively high level of income in the Township. For comparison, the median household income in the U.S is \$67,500, in the State of Michigan is \$59,000, and in Benzie County is \$64,000.

Table 6 - Household Income

Year Annual Household Income	2000 % of Households	2010 % of Households	2020 % of Households
Less than \$10,000	4%	1%	2%
\$10,000 – \$14,999	9%	2%	1%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	17%	7%	8%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	8%	7%	8%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	18%	20%	16%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	23%	20%	16%
\$75,000 – \$99,999	6%	7%	8%
\$100,000 – \$149,999	7%	18%	17%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	4%	7%	6%
\$200,000 or more	4%	11%	18%
Median Household Income	\$47,000	\$61,600	\$72,400
Mean Household Income	-	\$104,500	\$126,600

Community Facilities

Government Services:

Lake Township is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees, elected for four-year terms, and consisting of a Supervisor, Clerk and Treasurer and two trustees.

The Lake Township Hall and office is at 5153 Scenic Highway (M-22). Township officials maintain regular, posted office hours and the Township Board holds monthly meetings for the transaction of the official business of the Township.

Emergency Services:

The Township is served by enhanced 911 service that dispatches fire, ambulance and law enforcement services from the Benzie County Sheriff’s Office located on US 31 in Beulah.

Fire Department: Lake Township contracts with the City of Frankfort Fire Department and maintains a substation located at the Township offices at 5153 Scenic Highway.

Ambulance Service: Benzie County operates an ambulance/first responder service. There are three stations in the County: Station 1 in Beulah, Station 2 at US 31 and County Road 669 (Maple City Road), and Station 3 in Frankfort.

Culture and Recreation:

Library Services: All Township residents have full borrowing privileges at the Benzonia and Beulah libraries free of charge. At the Benzie Shores Library in Frankfort, residents with property in the Frankfort school district have full borrowing privileges, and other residents have limited use privileges.

Other cultural attractions that serve the Township residents are the Benzonia Historical Society in Benzonia, the Oliver Art Center in Frankfort, and the Interlochen Arts Academy in Interlochen.

Recreation: The Township owns and operates a park on Lake Michigan at Platte River Point. While this property is surrounded by the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (“SBDNL”), the Township has worked out a cooperative agreement with the SBDNL to share some facilities to allow for access to both Township residents and SBDNL visitors. The Township Park offers picnic and water access facilities and access to the SBDNL’s restroom facilities.

The SBDNL also operates a picnic area near M-22 and the Platte River, which also offers access to the river for canoes and kayaks.

Benzie County owns the Point Betsie Lighthouse facility located on Lake Michigan, which is operated by The Friends of Point Betsie Lighthouse. This is an historical site consisting of the Lighthouse and accessory buildings and offers access to Lake Michigan. Much of the lands around this site are owned by The Nature Conservancy and are being returned to a natural condition. Trails and informal picnic facilities are also provided.

There are public access sites for boat access to the following lakes:

Long Lake – public access off Bancroft Road.

Little Platte Lake – an access site on the North side of the Lake off Saffron Road.

Platte Lake – an access site off Arborvitae Drive on the West end of the Lake in.

Loon Lake – There is an access provided to Loon Lake off of M22 provided by the SBDNL.

Lake Michigan – There is access to Lake Michigan at the end of Lake Michigan Road at the Township Park.

Campgrounds:

The SBDNL operates a campground near the Platte River and the White Pine backcountry campground (walk-in only) east of Peterson Road.

The American Resort, a travel trailer facility is located on Deadstream Road with a nearby convenience commercial business and canoe livery.

Utilities:

Electrical service is provided by Consumers Energy.

Natural gas service is provided to most residential areas by DTE Energy with the balance served primarily with liquid propane gas.

Phone service is provided by Century Tel and AT & T.

Internet service is provided by Charter (Spectrum) Communications in most areas of the Township.

Cell phone services are available from most major providers and one cell tower is in the Township on Cooper Road near M22.

Solid Waste: Individuals and businesses contract privately for regular solid waste services. The Township pays for and sponsors a successful “Clean-up Day” program on two Saturdays during the summer when most types of waste can be dropped off at the Township Hall for disposal or recycling.

Schools: Lake Township is located within both the Benzie County Central School District and the Frankfort Elberta School District. Elementary Schools are in Frankfort, Lake Ann, Thompsonville, and Benzonia. The high schools are Benzie Central High School located on Homestead Road in Homestead Township and Frankfort High School located in Frankfort.

Transportation:

M-22 is the main transportation artery that traverses the Township generally in a north/south direction. Most residents and visitors use this main access to get to Frankfort and Empire and Glen Arbor.

Platte Road and Deadstream Road are used to gain access to the Village of Honor. Residents of Crystal Downs and the north shore of Crystal Lake utilize Crystal Drive to gain access to Beulah and Benzonia. Frankfort is approximately three miles south of the

Township boundary, Empire is approximately five miles north of the northern Township boundary, and Honor approximately five miles to the East.

To minimize truck traffic on most of the residential roads in the Township, there is a truck route ordinance which bars through traffic by large trucks, except on M22 and Platte Road.

The Benzie County Road Commission, with headquarters located in Honor, maintains the county roads in the Township. While much of the land area of the Township has been incorporated into the SBDNL, the Road Commission has retained ownership and thus maintenance responsibility of the roads now located within the SBDNL. Many of these roads are now classified as “seasonal roads” and are not plowed in the winter months but do receive maintenance during the summer. The SBDNL also owns and maintains some roads within the Township.

Benzie County operates a public Transportation system called Benzie Bus. This system offers public transportation services to the residents and visitors of the Township. Service is primarily provided on an “on call” basis.

The Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore:

The Bill to create the SBDNL was signed into law on October 21, 1970. On October 22, 1977, the SBDNL was officially dedicated.

SBDNL facilities and programs in Lake Township include:

The Platte River Campground – Located on Lake Michigan Road. This is a year-round camping facility consisting of approximately 179 sites with some electric service, restrooms, showers, trash receptacles and potable water available throughout the campground. In addition, there are four group camping sites that can accommodate up to 25 campers each and some 20 walk-in campsites where campers can backpack into a remote camp site.

Other facilities offered are a canoe launch on the Platte River, a fish cleaning station, a sanitary dump station, a picnic area across Lake Michigan Road from the campground on the Platte River, and a Ranger Station with public phones.

Within the SBDNL, bicycles are allowed only on the campground roads, designated bicycle paths, and on public roads retained by the Benzie County Road Commission (including several seasonal “two-tracks”).

There are several locations in the SBDNL with access to Lake Michigan and its beaches, including Indian Trail and the ends of Lake Michigan Road, Peterson Road, and Esch Road

The Platte Plains Trail – A hiking and cross-country ski trail system of about 15 total miles between the Platte River Campground and Otter Creek at Esch Road. The trails are through maple, beech and pine forests and low dunes. There are many branches and loops to this system with several scenic look-out points to Lake Michigan, and the remote backpack-only White Pine backcountry campground.

The Old Indian Trail – This is a trail of about 2.5 miles that is very popular for winter skiing and snowshoeing. The trail travels through a maple beech forest and low dunes to a view of Lake Michigan.

Natural Resources and Features

Basic Geology – The bedrock underlying the Township was created during the Devonian Age of the Paleozoic Era. The surface area we see today was formed some 10,000 years ago because of glacial activity and the activity of the winds off Lake Michigan. Glaciers advanced and retreated, resulting in a mix of soils due to the erosion and the depositions of various soils. Sandy soils at the shore of Lake Michigan resulted in the creation of extensive dunes.

The result of this geologic activity over many hundreds of years is a wide variety of topography from plains to steep hillsides, valleys, dunes and swamps.

Soils – According to the Natural Resource Conservation Service, in general, the soils of the Township are predominantly sands, with a wide variety of slopes, some very steep up to 25% and steeper. Some clay deposits also exist. Soils in stream valleys and around lakes often contain high organic material such as mucks and may contain high water tables.

These sandy soils often do not contain any impermeable barrier such as clay in the lower levels, which makes the use of on-site septic systems problematic. In addition, these soils often have very poor filtering capacity so that on site investigation is needed for septic system use to prevent ground water contamination.

The very nature of the basic soils, along with the glacial and wind actions, have created a beautiful natural environment, but one that results in steep slopes and ridges, as well as poor soils for on-site septic systems. These factors support the need for regulations to protect the Township's natural features.

Forests – The predominant land cover in the Township is forests. These forests consist of typical northern Michigan forest types of maple, beech, pine and oak in the higher areas and cedar, swamp maple, tamarack, spruce, and balsam in the lower high water table areas. The forests not only provide good habitat for wildlife but have provided timber resources in the past and have provided protection of the fragile sands from

water and wind erosion. In addition, many residents find a pleasant residential setting in the Michigan north woods.

Surface Water – The Platte River Watershed is some 193 square miles in area and extends into Leelanau, Grand Traverse, and most of the Northern half of Benzie County. The Platte River Valley is about 14 miles in length. The predominant land cover in the total watershed is forest, open space, and wetlands at approximately 82 percent of the land area. Second is agriculture with 12 percent, and urban uses at about 6 percent. Approximately 76 percent of the total watershed is publicly owned by either the National Park Service as the SBDNL or the State of Michigan as the Pere Marquette State Forest.

The predominant surface water features in the Township in addition to Lake Michigan, are Crystal Lake, Platte and Little Platte Lakes, the Platte River, Long Lake, and Rush Lake. Several other smaller lakes, including Round Lake, Loon Lake, Mud Lake, Bass Lake, and Otter Lake all lie within the boundary of the SBDNL.

Agriculture: There are modest agricultural uses north of Crystal Lake.

Chapter Three Trends and Projections



Loon Lake

The taxable land value in Lake Township is quite high despite two-thirds of the land area being exempt from taxes because it is within the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (“SBDNL”). This is due to the high value of the homes which are located along Crystal, Platte, and other smaller lakes and within Crystal Downs.

Much of the land available for growth and development is already in use, especially the more desirable lake-front parcels. There is some remaining acreage that could be developed in the future, as either site condominiums or other types of residential development, but there is very little land available for future growth. There are also vacant lots within established subdivisions in the Township on which construction of new homes is possible.

There are few commercial development areas, and no urban centers. A canoe rental/convenience store business is located on M-22 at the Platte River, a small convenience store and private campground with frontage on Little Platte Lake is located on Deadstream Road, the Chimney Corners resort and associated Rock’s Landing restaurant are on M22 on Crystal Lake, and the Manitou Restaurant is located on M-22 near Sutter Road. The private golf course and club house for Crystal Downs

development is another commercial component of the Township. The 2010 Lake Township Master Plan suggested that there could be requests to add commercial businesses, especially resort or tourism related businesses due to increased visitation to the national lakeshore, but to date such requests have not materialized.

Other than a limited Resort Commercial zoning district along a portion of Deadstream Road, there is no land in Lake Township zoned for commercial use. Given the desire of most residents to preserve the natural and residential quality of the Township, consideration should be given by the Planning Commission to removing the Resort Commercial zoning district. The existing commercial cottages and resorts would be 'grandfathered' and could continue as they have. But removing the commercial district would require any new, and potentially larger, commercial development to obtain special approvals.

The Township will continue to face growth pressures from new or current residents wanting to build a second home or retirement home in the Township. While the pressure for more recreational enterprises and tourist accommodations has not yet reached a high level, if visitation to the SBDNL continues to increase in future years, such pressure for new businesses is quite possible.

A trend that was not imagined in the 2010 Master Plan is the proliferation of residences being used often or even exclusively as short-term rentals. The responses in the Public Survey and at the public input session held on this Plan, made clear that short-term rentals are a 'hot-button' issue here, as they have been in other parts of Northern Michigan and elsewhere in the country. Short-term rentals have been common in Lake Township for many years and are recognized as supporting the local tourism and hospitality economy. But the increase in their number, the use of large homes that can accommodate more guests at once, and the increasing prevalence of corporate or absentee owners have led many residents to become adamantly opposed to short-term rentals. Opponents of short-term rentals cite noise, rowdy behavior, litter, and a general loss of a friendly neighborhood character.

If the trend to more year-round residential use continues, there will be pressure within the Township for the type of upgraded community services expected by year-round residents, such as mail delivery, trash pickup, improved roads, health services, community rooms, library services, convenience stores, and additional recreation services.

Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore –

The following charts show the historical trends in visitation to the SBDNL. The first chart shows visits to the entire park, and the second focuses on Lake Township and shows traffic counts at the Platte River outlet at the end of Lake Michigan Road. Statistics are available for all months of the year, but the charts focus on the summer since that is the

period with highest use. The data shows a general trend of increased visitation, though there has been variability from year to year. The data for 2020 may be a COVID pandemic related anomaly, as visitation since then has dropped back more in line with historical trends.

Chart 1 – Sleeping Bear Dunes Overall Visitation

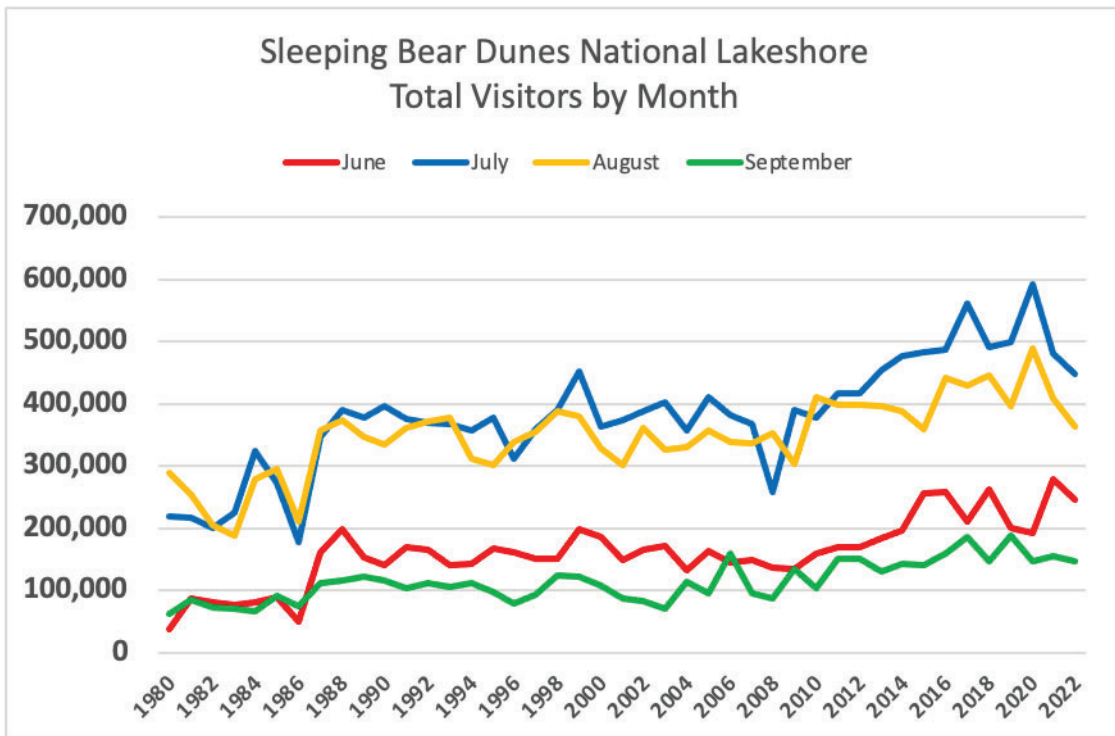
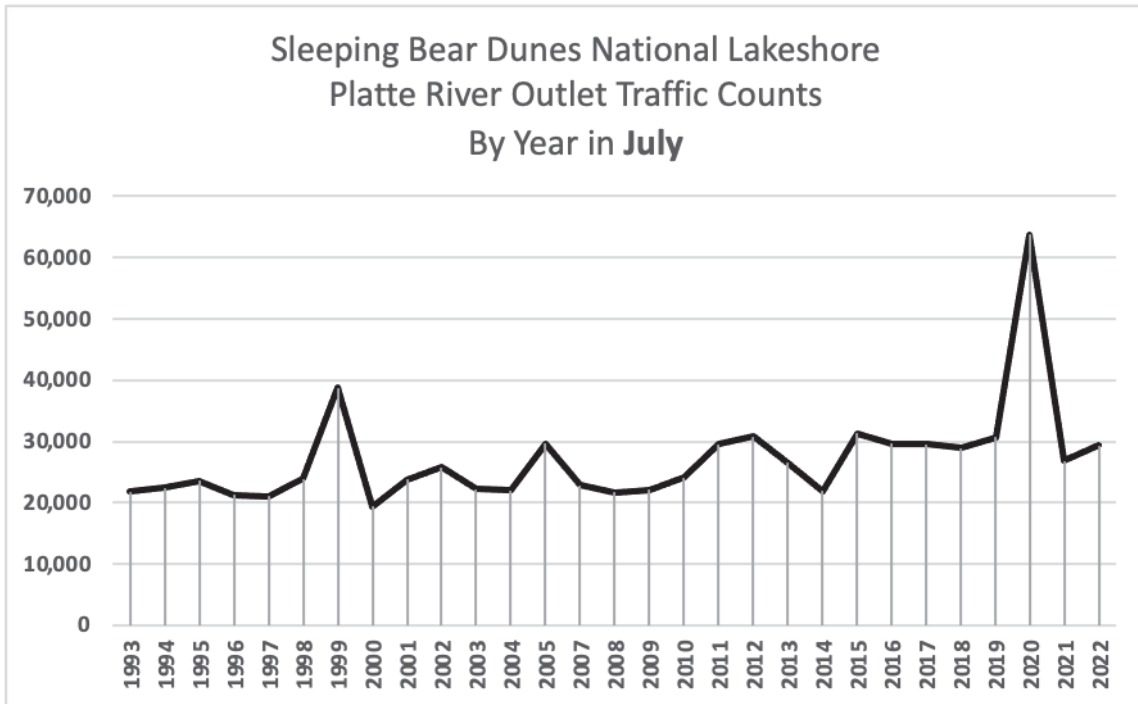


Chart 2 – Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore – Lake Township Traffic Counts



The SBDNL offers a wide variety of outdoor activities and tourist-oriented events. Many businesses as far away as Traverse City advertise and offer services to SBDNL visitors. While the economic impact of the SBDNL can be felt in the multi-county area, the direct economic effect experienced in the Township is relatively small.

Several potential future trends or developments are worth monitoring:

- If visitor use continues to increase in future years, and more activities are included within the SBDNL facilities and programs, there will be a spin-off effect in the surrounding area for increased tourist accommodations and related recreational enterprises.
- Since its inception, potential plans for the SBDNL have included a scenic drive connecting US31 with M22, generally along the ridgeline between Crystal and Platte Lakes. In Lake Township, the authorized acquisition area is generally along Cooper Road. The National Park Service continues to acquire land in the corridor, but only when a willing seller exists. Property records indicate that still more than half of the corridor is in private hands and park service officials do not anticipate acquiring all, or even most of the corridor for many years to come. Based on the public input obtained for this Master Plan, there is strong opposition against completing the scenic drive for motor vehicles.

- The Sleeping Bear Gateways Council is an organization, not directly affiliated with SBDNL, which has as its stated purpose: *“to discuss the benefits and challenges presented by our growing National Lakeshore visitor population, [and] to encourage and execute planning for the benefit of residents and visitors, the regional economy and the environment. Of great importance in this process is the participation of Gateway Communities which serve as the access points to the National Lakeshore.”* One of the group’s stated projects is to explore *“a Benzie visitors center hybrid facility, offering National Park Service presence and information on how to access other public and private attractions, could help disperse visitors among the region’s natural and cultural amenities,”* which they assert could benefit *“local residents, as well as businesses and visitors.”* Whether this project will gain traction is an open question, as is the question whether it would be a benefit to the residents of Lake Township. Monitoring developments and participating in the planning process is advisable.

Chapter Four Goals and Objectives



Little Platte Lake

These goals and objectives are created in response to the requirements of Act 33 of 2008, as amended, to provide guidance for growth management and maintenance of the Township's natural qualities while planning for an acceptable level of growth.

Goal 1: Zoning

Throughout Lake Township, maintain a rural atmosphere, ecological balance, open space, high levels of sanitation and low levels of pollution by providing for the rational control of Township development growth through proper zoning, subdivision and land division regulations, development standards, code enforcement and administration.

Objectives:

Objective 1 (A): **Zoning Review** –

With input and involvement of the Zoning Administrator, the Planning Commission should conduct a review of the current zoning ordinance and recommend any changes that should be considered by the Township Board. The review should include an assessment whether the current zoning allows higher

development density or more commercial development than most residents want and would allow undesirable natural and environmental deterioration. This includes a critical look at the existing Resort Commercial Zoning District to determine if it is still necessary and appropriate. This review shall also include an assessment of current agricultural land use in the Township and whether any zoning changes with respect to such use are appropriate.

To be completed by mid-2024.

Objective 1 (B): Watershed Overlay Review and Recommendation-

The Planning Commission should conduct further assessment of the proposed Crystal Lake Overlay Ordinance amendments, and how the proposal compares to the existing overlay ordinances for Platte and Crystal Lakes and the existing general zoning ordinance. The assessment should include:

1. An evaluation of the most serious threats and identification of the provisions of the proposal most likely to positively affect such threats.
2. Consultation with the Crystal Lake and Watershed Association, and other lake protection associations.
3. Consultation with other neighboring townships.
4. Strong consideration of making the overlay ordinance applicable to all watersheds so it is consistent throughout the Township.

Based on the assessment, the Planning Commission should prepare proposed ordinance changes for recommendation of approval by the township Board.

To be completed by the end of 2023.

Objective 1 (C): Annual Enforcement Review

Annually at one of its regular meetings, the Zoning Administrator should present to the Planning Commission a review of the following:

1. A list of enforcement actions with the basis for the violation, their status, and outcome.
2. A list of all matters taken before the Zoning Board of Appeals.
3. A listing of complaints received regarding alleged non-compliance, whether enforcement action was taken, and if not, the basis for not pursuing the complaint.
4. An assessment by the Zoning Administrator whether any provisions of the zoning ordinance are creating uncertainty, negative feedback or other concerns which warrant ordinance amendments.

To be conducted annually, beginning in 2023.

Goal 2: Short-Term Rentals

Lake Township should have fair and straightforward regulations applicable to short-term rental property which should continue to allow short-term rentals, but which protect and preserve the existing quality and character of the Township.

Objective 2(A): Short Term Rental Assessment and Recommendations

The Planning Commission should:

- Conduct a review of the current provisions of the zoning ordinance relating to short term rentals.
- Estimate the number of rental units in the Township, and their level of compliance with existing requirements.
- Review regulations in neighboring and similar jurisdictions.
- Make recommendations to the Township Board for any needed changes to the regulations.

To be completed by mid-year 2023.

Goal 3: Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore

Lake Township should have a frank, open and constructive relationship with the SBDNL and its supporting organizations.

Objective 3 (A): Ongoing Dialog

Maintain an open channel of communication with Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore management personnel. At a minimum meet annually to discuss the Park Service's plans for the portion of the park within Lake Township and discuss areas of mutual interest, activity, or support, as well as express concerns or opposition where appropriate.

Objective 3 (B): Scenic Drive Land Acquisition

The Planning Commission should periodically review the status of property acquisition by SBDNL for the proposed scenic drive.

Ongoing

Objective 3 (C): Sleeping Bear Gateways Council

The Planning Commission should monitor activities and plans of the non-governmental organization, the Sleeping Bear Gateways Council, and provide input and involvement as appropriate to assure their plans are consistent with this Master Plan and will not be detrimental to the Township or its residents.

Ongoing

Goal 4: Environmental Quality and Preservation

To maintain its natural beauty and excellent environmental quality, the Township should seek input from governmental and non-governmental organizations, and when appropriate provide support where action of the Township can assist efforts to preserve and protect our resources.

Objective 4 (A): Lake Association Dialog

Once a year, invite all the lake associations (Crystal, Platte, Long, and Little Platte) to a regular Planning Commission meeting to get reports on the status of the lakes and gather input on any desired Township actions that might help the condition of the lakes.

Chapter Five Future Land Use



Crystal Lake

Before outlining the Township’s future land use plan, it is worthwhile to examine the 2010 Lake Township Master Plan and review whether it adequately anticipated future developments and was the foundation for successful land use management in the Township. The 2010 Master Plan stated: *“Lake Township will consider this planning effort a success if there is very little change in the Township land use over the next twenty years.”*

Land use patterns have not changed significantly since 2010. So, the 2010 Master Plan met one of its primary goals. Now the question going forward is whether there needs to be a change in direction or emphasis. Based on public input received during this Master Plan update process, from a broad, overall perspective, most Township residents are satisfied with current land use patterns and major shifts are not warranted. That is not to say there are no concerns about how well the Township is implementing and enforcing its zoning ordinances, and some of the goals and objectives in Chapter 4 are directed at those concerns. But the purpose of this Chapter is to examine land use more broadly.

At least since 2010 when the Master Plan was first prepared, the Lake Township growth management concept has been to guide and control population densities and

distribution, and limit business growth to maintain the rural, open space and woodland atmosphere. The Township has strived to maintain an ecological balance, open space, high levels of sanitation and low levels of pollution. A principal foundation of this Plan should continue to be the maintenance of the unique and high value environment of Township.

The 2010 Plan identified two major types of development pressure that could alter the Township's land use characteristics. Both are still relevant. One was pressure for more commercial development to service the tourism and recreation visitors to the Township, and the other was pressure for increased residential development, especially on hillsides, ridgelines, and other non-lakefront property.

Future Commercial Development - The Township's zoning does not provide for new commercial development, except for limited opportunities in a small Commercial Resort district along Deadstream Road. There have been no new commercial developments in that district and no requests for variances or modified zoning to allow businesses in other parts of the Township. So, in the last twelve years, there has not been significant pressure for new businesses. But visitation to Sleeping Bear Dunes is still trending upward, so the concern remains highly relevant. The public input received on the Master Plan update included some comments expressing the desire for increased services, though most residents seem very satisfied with the status quo and would be opposed to new commercial development.

To ensure that the principal goals of this Master Plan are met, the Planning Commission should consider eliminating of the existing Commercial Resort District. Commercial businesses which are currently operating would be 'grandfathered' and can continue as they have. New businesses in that district seem out of character with the general residential quality of the district.

Variances for new or expanded commercial establishments can and should be given fair and thoughtful consideration. The key consideration should be whether the proposed establishment is consistent with preserving and protecting the natural environment and maintaining the generally quiet and rural character of the Township.

Future Residential Development – The 2010 Master Plan predicted that “the Township will be faced with typical incremental development that, if not wisely managed, has the potential to degrade not only the natural environment, but may result in general urban type sprawl, placing public service burdens on the citizens and taxpayers, along with a reduction of the basic attractiveness of the Township for residents and visitors alike.” The 2010 Plan emphasized that visible ridge top development was a major threat. Most residential development in the last twelve years has taken place along the lakeshores and within existing subdivisions. But the concern raised is still relevant today, and the question going forward is whether the current zoning is adequate to provide the protections most of our residents want.

Lakeshore Development - Very little undeveloped property exists along the lakeshores. So, housing density will not change significantly unless the zoning is altered to allow developments like apartments, condos, or resorts; but such a change would be completely inconsistent with the overall land use goals of this Plan. So, there is no reason to change the lakeshore zoning to allow anything other than single-family residences. Property in the lakeshore district continues to be very desirable and property values continue to escalate. The pressure to replace or expand older, smaller dwellings with newer, larger homes will surely continue. So, as spelled out in Chapter 4, the Township needs to evaluate the current ordinances (basic zoning as well as watershed overlays) and determine if specific changes are needed to prevent degradation of the lakes and shorelines.

Outside of the Lakeshore District, all land in the Township that is not part of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is zoned for moderate density residential development. There are two zoning districts:

- Residential Single-Family District (R-1) which allows single-family dwellings or duplexes on lots that are at least 12,000 square feet (slightly more than a quarter acre).
- Residential Rural District (R-2) which allows single-family dwellings, duplexes, or mobile homes on lots that are at least one acre.

Both districts allow condominium developments, subject to site plan approval. Most of the land in the R1 District is in platted subdivisions or along lakeshore areas with larger existing lots, though there are several tracts totaling several hundred acres that could be subdivided into the allowed fraction of an acre lots. There is much more undeveloped land in the Township in the R2 District, which can be divided into one-acre lots. Between the two districts, the potential exists for hundreds of new home sites. But as a practical matter, the potential for high levels of development is probably not as significant as those numbers suggest. Much of the vacant land may not be that desirable due to the lack of water frontage or attractive views. Several large parcels are owned by or under non-development conservation easements with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

The question for future land use planning and zoning is whether the current allowed density is low enough to assure that the principal goal of assuring the rural, open-space and woodland character of the Township is maintained in the future.

Other Considerations

Site Plan Approval Criteria – One of the purposes of this Master Plan is to guide, not only future zoning, but to provide guidance for other land use decisions. Consistent with the

overall goals of this Master Plan, when assessing site plans for approval, especially those involving condominium or planned residential developments, the following criteria are of particular importance in helping determine if approval should be granted; a site plan should be viewed more favorably if it:

- Minimizes housing density and keeps the number of dwellings below the generally allowed number per acre.
- Minimizes the removal of natural vegetation and stays well within allowed removal standards.
- Maximizes the natural screening of buildings to preserve the natural, woodland appearance of the subject property.
- Includes natural, undeveloped common areas.

Short-term Rentals - It would be possible to amend the zoning ordinance to exclude or limit any new short-term rental units (STR's). But zoning restrictions can not eliminate pre-existing uses, so any already existing STR would be allowed to continue to operate as they have. A fairer and more complete way to control STR's would be to adopt a police-power ordinance along with zoning, which would regulate not only the location of STR's but would regulate the operation of STR's and tenant behavior.

Neighboring Jurisdictions - The future land use Portion of the 2010 Master Plan borrowed heavily from a Benzie County comprehensive plan. Since then, planning and zoning efforts at the County level have been abandoned. So, no coordination of this Plan with any County-wide plans is possible.

A review of zoning maps of neighboring townships shows they have similar general land use plans, especially for land bordering on or near Lake Township. Lakeshore residential and other residential districts predominate in the areas of Crystal Lake, Benzonia and Platte Townships near Lake Township. One difference worth noting is the existence of Rural Preservation districts in the neighboring townships. Those districts allow agriculture and forestry, but limit housing to minimum lot sizes of 2.5, 5, 10 or even 20 acres depending on the exact location. So, as discussed above, if Lake Township were to amend its zoning to further limit future housing density, it would not be incompatible or out of place in comparison to neighboring jurisdictions.

The Lake Township Future Zoning Plan:

To assure that the overall goals of this Master Plan are met, as discussed above, there are two possible changes to the Township's zoning plan that warrant consideration. Otherwise, the current zoning map and plan generally appropriate and in keeping with the overall goals of this Plan. The first possible change is the elimination of the Commercial Resort zoning district along Deadstream Road, and the second is whether the current residential zoning districts allow higher density housing than is desirable.

Both changes should be considered by the Planning Commission after further detailed assessment and an opportunity for public input.

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