

CHAPTER 3

WHAT'S AT RISK: Major Issues and Analysis

Introduction

What is at risk in Benzie County is a way of life that attracted people to the County, a way of life long-time residents value and a promise of the way of life residents envision for the future. Benzie County citizens have said that their County is changing in undesirable ways—losing its scenic character, roads becoming congested. They have also said it is not changing in desirable ways—living wage jobs are not plentiful within the County. There are many other, specific issues of concern to citizens.

This chapter looks at the major land use issues identified by Benzie County citizens through visioning sessions, planning commission meetings, advisory committee meetings and subcommittee work for background papers. The following list briefly identifies the major issues discussed in this chapter:

- The single most important feature of the County is its scenic rural character
- Development is rapidly eroding scenic and rural character
- Increasing development could impair water quality unless managed properly
- Increasing development could impair effective forest management
- Increased oil and gas extraction has risks for pollution, human health and destruction of wildlife habitat
- Recreation facilities are not always located near where people live
- Extensive private in-holdings in public lands threaten long-term management
- Existing lake access sites have inadequate parking and buffers with adjoining private properties which are exacerbated because there is not enough public access to Benzie County lakes
- Large stretches of Benzie County Lake Michigan shoreline have sand dunes and are state-designated high risk erosion areas
- Historic structures are being lost due to a lack of guidance and interest.
- Agriculture is an important economic sector of the County
- Agricultural land is an important scenic resource from which farmers gain no financial reward, but tourism businesses and other residents do benefit.
- It is difficult to sustain agriculture in the County due to outside economic factors, local taxation policies and pressure from non-farm residents
- Agricultural lands are popular places for non-farmers to move because of the rural quality of life
- Non-farm residents often try to stop farmers from engaging in typical farming practices, threatening farm businesses
- Large areas of rural townships are zoned for a residential development density of about 2.5 to 10 acres per household
- As zoned, residential development will eventually demand more services (road improvements, schools, police and fire) than it will pay for in taxes.
- Expansion of the (currently small) industrial sector is seen as important to the economic health of the County in order to expand living wage jobs

- There is concern that strip commercial development along US-31, M-22 and M-115 will cause a loss of scenic character, congestion and safety problems if current trends continue
- Some important roads in the County are experiencing congestion and current funding mechanisms are not keeping up with maintenance needs
- There is a lack of quality housing that a large segment of Benzie County workers can afford
- Community facilities serving the whole county are becoming scattered and only accessible by car
- Only Frankfort and Beulah have both public sewer and water available, and the capacity is limited for future expansion
- The lives of Benzie County citizens are tied to more than one jurisdiction
- There are many issues County residents will face that will require decision-making by more than one jurisdiction (examples include highway corridors, rivers or trails, schools)
- Very little is currently being done to coordinate planning, zoning and public facility decisions between jurisdictions
- If all rural land is developed as presently zoned, there will be no viable farming, diminished wildlife habitat and very little scenery in the future of Benzie County.

Rural Character, Open Space and Scenic View Preservation

If there is one issue that permeates nearly all aspects of Benzie County life and concern for the future it is the loss of rural character, open space and scenic view preservation. The north woods character and scenic views that attract residents and vacationers to Benzie County are mentioned again and again as important resources that shouldn't be lost. Scenic character is one of the highest topics on resident's lists during visioning sessions. It is also one of the things that the people of Benzie County could lose, other than their jobs and health, and suffer the greatest change in their lives. Unfortunately, it is also the one thing Benzie County is losing the fastest due to new development authorized by existing local regulations.

Residents often use the term, "rural character." When asked to define it, residents describe the forests, wooded hills, sparkling waters, orchards, farms and wetlands. A better term for this is "scenic character," because Benzie County has more nature-based landscapes than farms, orchards and pastures. Benzie County has more of a northern Michigan wooded character than that of a southern Michigan farming region. Most agricultural activities involve fruit production which also has a physical character more like a wooded landscape than fields of grain. It is also very scenic in all seasons.

Preservation of scenic character in Benzie County is not going well. This is largely because of the lack of organized community action. The situation is akin to a person sitting on the only bailing bucket in a sinking boat. He likes sitting on the bucket so much, elevated above the rising water, he won't give it up to bail

the boat. Residents, individually make their properties into a suburban haven while hoping that everyone else will maintain scenic character. That attitude might work for a county with a population of only a few thousand persons. But Benzie County's population is getting high enough (projected to reach over 17,700 by 2020) that when each person destroys scenic character on their own property, the cumulative effect is that character is lost for vast areas of the County. Benzie County residents decry the change in appearance of Grand Traverse County but go blindly ahead making a little piece of Grand Traverse County on nearly every property they develop in Benzie County. Residents base their actions on a series of overly optimistic assumptions:

-It's OK to eliminate the scenic character of my own property because, hopefully, no one else is going to change it on their property. (Benzie County land has a highly fragmented ownership pattern so rural scenic character is dependent on the actions of thousands of property owners.)
-It's OK to clear my narrow lot in the country because the nature along the road will always be there. (When each owner of the ten to twenty narrow lots along each mile of country road clears large portions of the lot, scenic character is lost along the whole section of that road.)
-We can prevent a change in character of the County by fighting growth. There are thousands of undeveloped parcels in Benzie County and each property owner has the right to build on that property. There are only a few hundred parcels on which subdivisions could be built. (Benzie County scenic character will be determined as much or more by the owners of individual parcels as by how subdivisions are planned and built. Communities have more control over how subdivisions are built – to some degree, open space can be mandated that may preserve scenic character – than individual properties. So preservation of scenic character is largely up to *how* individual property owners develop their property.)

Benzie County residents need to decide if the public land in the state forest and national lakeshore is enough scenic character, or will they choose to make the effort to preserve scenic character on additional, private land to maintain the Benzie County they desire. Is it OK if the private land of Benzie County becomes like Chum's Corners in Grand Traverse County?

Benzie County is fortunate to still have extensive undeveloped or sparsely developed lands, lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands. Many are in a near natural state. However, the most rapidly developing lands are those with and within the most prominent views. These lands are along the major corridors and on the ridges. There are problems with the visual character along the major corridors:

- Commercial signs in Benzie County are often garish and poorly constructed. This contributes to a trashy roadside appearance. Some communities in other parts of the region and nation have smaller, attractively designed signs as the norm. Elsewhere in Michigan, but primarily along Interstate Highways, small, logo signs are being used instead of billboards to improve scenic value.

- Development on steep slopes is changing the character of the County. Tourists and residents who live in the County because of its scenic qualities would probably agree that, to be truly scenic, views of ridges should mostly be of forests, orchards, crops or meadows. In a few areas of the County, those are the views. However, the views are increasingly of scattered homes, placed on top of the ridges to achieve views of Lake Michigan or of other ridges. There is concern that turning the view into one of development rather than scenery could eventually diminish the attractiveness of Benzie County for tourism. Others might argue that the development of the ridges is itself a form of economic boost related to scenery – the views from the hills. The problem is that the ridge development provides only short-term benefit and potentially a long-term loss.
- With expanding development comes increased outdoor lighting. Improperly designed, the result can be a glow in the sky that prohibits enjoyment of the night sky. Stargazing becomes impossible from such locations. Modern outdoor lighting can direct light downwards, where it more efficiently illuminates drives and parking areas yet permits the enjoyment of that part of nature that is the night sky.

There are two important factors in scenic view preservation. These are:

- What are the signature views in the area that residents and visitors identify with Benzie County? Residents would likely list the view of Lake Michigan coming over the M-115 hill in Frankfort, the view to Crystal Lake and Beulah driving down US 31 from Benzonia and Platte River along M-22. There would be many others. Once these are identified, a preservation plan can be developed that can be used to work with civic groups and property owners to protect or enhance the important views in ways that still promote business interests and individual property rights.
- What are the most important corridors where scenery should be important? Certainly M-22, M-115 and US-31 are important corridors. Do residents want them to remain scenic corridors or for segments to become scenic corridors where the view is currently not attractive? Voluntary design guidelines can be developed to foster high visual quality along road corridors.

To preserve or enhance scenic corridors requires planning and cooperation of roadside property owners. The extent of the view needs to be mapped so particular property owners can be approached to voluntarily participate in improvement programs. The qualities that make up a scenic view for Benzie County need to be identified, and made a part of educational efforts that provide direction for property owners.

New residential development is happening so rapidly, and in a suburban style, that it is changing the character of Benzie County, especially in the northeastern part of the County. This character is being changed, to a great extent, by strip residential development. Strip residential development is now common on stretches of many interior County roads. New subdivision and site condo

development is also occurring, but to a lesser extent. Both kinds of development generally do not preserve those elements that make up a rural landscape, especially natural vegetation. The pattern starts with land divisions of 2-10 acre lots fronting on major roads. It ends with a strip of new homes, less farm or forestland and less rural character.

One of the driving forces of strip residential development is the need for farmers to incrementally sell land to supplement their income. Farmers need their land to be productive, and if farm produce is not profitable, growing houses often takes its place.

Lake and River Water Quality

Most of the surface water resources of Benzie County are very high quality. These include Crystal and Platte Lakes, the Platte and Betsie Rivers and numerous other smaller lakes, river tributaries and wetlands. Lake Michigan also is an important water resource. However, there has been some measurable decline in quality of some of these waters.

Water quality depends on what happens on land surfaces. The land surfaces that drain into a water body are its watershed. Thus, a watershed approach to managing water resources will be important. A vital part of watershed management is preventing the transport of pollutants to existing water bodies. This can be done by limiting the pollutants that are applied to the land and by filtering or treating stormwater runoff before it reaches drains, rivers and lakes.

Water quality is affected by pollutants and the velocity of stormwater runoff. Pollutants occur in four forms: sediment, chemicals, pathogens and warmed water. Sediment comes from bare soil, other erosion sites and paved surfaces. It can be highly destructive of fish habitat. Sediment also carries chemical pollutants although these can be carried by stormwater runoff alone. Chemical pollutants include nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen; toxic materials, such as oils, pesticides and salts; and changed water chemistry, such as lowered or raised pH. Nutrients can increase nuisance aquatic plant growth. Toxic materials and changed water chemistry can kill animals in the water and be a human health hazard. Pathogens include bacteria and viruses that come from animal waste and untreated or improperly treated sewage from homes and businesses and can be a serious human health hazard. Warmed water, such as the stormwater runoff that travels over paved surfaces and lawns before entering lakes and streams can change the temperature of the stream, affecting the aquatic life of the stream. It can be damaging to fish populations.

The application of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides to watershed lands affects water quality when it runs off the land. These pollutants originate on croplands, livestock pens, orchards, golf courses, shore-side lawns and gardens, commercial enterprises, impervious surfaces such as roads and parking lots and residential properties. Limited and appropriately targeted use of fertilizer,

pesticides and herbicides (Integrated Pest Management) could reduce the amount of chemicals that reach surface waters.

Soil requires special attention in Benzie County. Some of it is highly erodible and, when eroded, becomes a serious pollutant. It is important that soil in Benzie County be stabilized, both on steep slopes and on flatter areas and along floodplains.

In addition to pollutants, storm water can cause damage to streams and lakes because it enters at a high velocity. This can cause scouring of streambeds and banks and result in damage to fisheries. In a natural state, stormwater usually enters a lake or stream at a relatively low velocity and over a long period of time. A slight amount of flooding or erosion is natural, but not the level induced by directing stormwater over large paved areas before entering a stream or lake. Stormwater needs to be slowed, cooled and filtered before it enters the high quality streams and lakes of Benzie County.

Ground Water Quality

Groundwater provides drinking water to most people in Benzie County, so the quality and safety of that water is vital. The Benzie Leelanau District Health Department is involved in testing and protecting groundwater.

In portions of Benzie County, water tables are close to the surface and soils are highly permeable. This makes groundwater more vulnerable to contamination from surface spills of toxic materials, leaking underground tanks and improperly treated sewage.

Special treatment approaches, such as mounded septic systems, holding tanks, and pumped septic systems are necessary to protect ground water. These can influence the size of building lots and, to some extent, where homes and businesses can be built.

Forestry

Forest is the largest land cover category in Benzie County. According to the US Forest Service, in 1993 there were 137,000 acres of timberland (forest producing marketable wood) in Benzie County, or 67% of the County land area. There are both publicly and privately owned forestlands in Benzie County. According to the US Forest Service, 48.6% of forestland is state-owned. The remaining 51.4% is in private, corporate or miscellaneous private ownership. Thus, 32.6% of the County is state-owned forestland. Nearly 6% of the County is the federally owned, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore and a portion of those lands are timberland.

Benzie County's economy is highly dependent on forests for harvested timber, land for hunting and other forms of outdoor recreation and for scenic quality. The high quality streams, rivers and lakes of Benzie County are dependent, in part,

on forest cover of the watersheds. Thus, in Benzie County, a healthy economy depends, in part, on healthy and extensive forests.

The primary forest vegetation type in Benzie County is beech-maple, which was also the predominate vegetation type in Benzie County during pre-settlement times. Other current vegetation types include red pine (10%), elm-ash-soft maple (8.9%), aspen (6.6%) and others of lesser percentage cover.

The forest needs to have a variety of vegetation types and age classes in order to meet multiple management objectives. For example, young aspen is beneficial to deer and ruffed grouse. A diverse game and non-game wildlife population requires forest stands of different ages, from open, cleared areas to older woodlands. Such variety also improves non-hunting recreational experiences, promotes regeneration of trees, provides the opportunity to harvest over-mature forests and the option to change the mix of species to meet timber market or wildlife needs.

Most of the timberland in Benzie County is fairly well stocked (the trees are making full use of available growing space, thus will increase in diameter and height becoming more valuable with time).

Forestlands are important public resources, but the public and some commercial interests cause damage to those lands. Woodlands are being affected by fragmentation of the land through lot splits and construction of multiple access roads. Management of forestlands is increasingly difficult, as ownership patterns on private, undeveloped land become increasingly fragmented into smaller and smaller parcels.

Increased interest in the forest industry, professional forestry and knowledge of beneficial harvesting approaches will benefit Benzie County.

Minerals

Benzie County has extensive mineral resources, such as oil, gas, sand and gravel. Sand and gravel resources are located primarily in the western and northern part of the County. Oil and gas resources are primarily located in the southern and eastern part.

Oil and gas development can provide revenues to landowners and strengthen the local economy. Sand and gravel provides small revenues, less than in the recent past when now-closed extraction pits were active. Continued access to local sources of sand and gravel would help hold down the cost of future development.

There are problems associated with the extraction of those minerals. There is concern that extraction of oil, gas and sand and gravel by traditional methods could wreak havoc on the scenic quality and ecosystems that are important to

other, larger economic sectors and the quality of life of residents. Also, residents do not always fully understand the rights of property owners and laws regarding mineral resources. Not all mineral rights are owned by those who hold the rights to surface properties. The state holds mineral rights under both public and private lands in Benzie County. It is the policy of the state to make full use of those minerals, although in sales of state-owned land, the state no longer retains mineral rights. The state will also sell severed mineral rights to the owners of the matching surface rights upon application (process not yet determined) if leases are not already let and the state foresees no substantial loss of income.

Recreation

The outdoor life in an attractive setting is a primary reason for many people to settle in Benzie County. Benzie County's economy is highly dependent on recreation, which, along with quality of life, is dependent on scenic quality and good to excellent quality lakes, rivers and forests. Thus, in Benzie County, a healthy economy depends on a healthy environment.

The very attraction of Benzie County's scenery, boating, fishing, golf and other activities is compelling so many people to move to the County, that the very character of the County is in danger of being irrevocably altered.

Benzie County has a Parks and Recreation Commission and has recently updated its Recreation Plan. The Plan needs to be updated and approved by the Recreation Division of the Department of Natural Resources every five years if the community is to remain qualified to receive grants issued through the DNR. Natural Resource Trust Fund Grants have been very helpful in obtaining and developing important pieces of recreational land in recent years. These include the Betsie Valley Trail, Railroad Point Natural Area and a site on Pearl Lake. The Parks and Recreation Commission is actively implementing the Recreation Plan.

The following points summarize the recreational needs analysis of Benzie County based on national standards:

- Benzie County is well equipped in the *number* of sports facilities. Most of these are located in the western part of the County, where the majority of citizens live.
- Maintaining, upgrading and providing replacement of those sports facilities in the future will be necessary.
- Benzie County appears to be lacking in neighborhood parks in the developed and developing areas. Sites should be identified for future acquisition and development.
- While Benzie County has non-motorized trails, most are not close to where people can walk to get on them. Connections to existing and proposed trails and new trails in more populated areas are needed.
- While there are large areas of well-protected, publicly owned land in the County, there are also a few areas where special precautions have not been implemented for sensitive environments.

- Key water access sites are available, but sites are not of suitable number, size, proximity to the population or level of development to provide adequate access in future years.

Wildlife is an important feature of Benzie County that should be retained and improved for ecological benefits, quality of life experience of residents, recreation and tourism values.

While Benzie County has great recreational resources available, it has a small population and few financial or institutional resources to adequately incorporate these resources into the recreational infrastructure of the County and communities within the County.

Public Lands

Over 36% of Benzie County land is publicly owned. Jurisdictions and agencies at several levels of government own land in Benzie County. The two largest owners of public lands are the Department of Forest Management, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Marquette State Forest) and the National Park Service (Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore). Other public land owners include the Fisheries Division and Recreation Division, Department of Natural Resources, US Coast Guard, as well as Benzie County itself and each of the local jurisdictions. About 10,000 acres is in Federal ownership within Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore. There are about 59,000 acres in the Pere Marquette State Forest, the Betsie River State Game Area and Fish Hatchery, and the abandoned Ann Arbor Railway right-of-way. County and local governments own about 900 acres of land.

While there has been little reported complaint in Benzie County over the amount of State-owned land, the original purchase of land for Sleeping Bear Dunes National Seashore was controversial.

Both State and Federal lands provide economic benefits to the County. These include serving as tourist attractions (Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore is highly rated for quality and draws over a million visitors a year) and natural resource pools for industry. State Forest lands are used for timber harvesting and gas and oil extraction.

State Forest lands are highly fragmented, with irregular boundaries and many private in-holdings. This makes management of those lands for recreation and forestry more difficult.

Lake Access

Both waterfront property owners (riparians) and the general public have rights to the use of lakes, rivers and streams, but public access is not sufficient and there are conflicts between riparians and the general public.

Use conflicts have been reported on all inland lakes in the County regarding personal watercraft. Conflicts have also been reported regarding the use of motors on fishing boats on the Betsie and Platte Rivers, popular fishing and canoeing rivers.

The County Parks and Recreation Commission has identified existing boat launching sites and has observed that there are not a sufficient number of them. Also, many are not improved to provide off-road parking and paved launch ramps. Off-road parking is necessary to avoid conflicts with neighboring property owners and traffic accidents. Paved launch ramps help limit sediment pollution of the water body that can occur from gravel launch sites.

Sand Dunes and High Risk Erosion Areas (HREA)

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has designated certain sections of Lake Michigan Shoreline as Critical Dunes and High Risk Erosion Areas (HREA). Construction and substantial reconstruction proposed for these areas is subject to review for conformance with state regulations.

Some of the Lake Michigan shoreline dunes are unique landscapes that are unlike any elsewhere in the world. The Critical Dune Program seeks to protect endangered species and threatened wildlife habitat on such dunes through development regulations and a permit program.

The HREA provides for minimum setbacks within which no principal structures may be located between the setback line and the ordinary high water mark. According to DEQ maps, there are eighteen sections of Benzie County shoreline which are designated HREAs with different setbacks. Setbacks are measured from the bluff line. Thirty year erosion rates range from a low of about 45' to a high of about 185'. This means that the shoreline is likely to recede 45' within thirty years in some sections and up to 185' in another. This is a very rapid rate of shoreline recession and should indicate extreme caution regarding buildings in that and similar areas. While recession does not proceed at a constant rate, this averages about 6' per year in the highest rate areas. Sixty year setbacks range from 75' to 350'. This means that within a period of about 2 to 3 generations, the shoreline in that area is predicted to recede more than the length of a football field. Building activity in the HREA in Benzie County is subject to permit review by both the DEQ (HREA) and the Benzie County Planning Department (soil erosion and sedimentation permit).

There is no feasible or practical engineering solution to this situation. Maintaining a healthy vegetative cover on the dunes and bluffs is the best method to retard the rate of erosion. Public monies to protect shoreline recession will no longer be

available. This is due, in part to there being less of it available, and in part because in the long term the projects are unsuccessful and the public monies wasted. The wisest course of action is to not build within the recession zone. This includes both private property owners and communities considering investing in infrastructure.

Historic Preservation

While there are historic homes and small areas of historic homes in Benzie County, there are no designated historic districts.

The Historical Society in Lake Ann has acquired a parcel in the village and has moved some centennial buildings there. An Historic Preservation Committee has been formed in Benzonia to study formation of an historic district. Many centennial farms and old residences have been preserved in the County.

The most common historic house is the American farmhouse with a vertical two story and one story wing on the side. Some have Victorian motifs. The main building material was wood, except for some commercial buildings of stone or brick. The more grand houses were owned by lumber barons and wealthy merchants.

Occasionally one sees an old abandoned house collapsing unto itself. But these are few. New laws related to fire hazards have required their removal. In a county with few public water systems, fire is an eminent threat.

Efforts to preserve historic structures in Benzie County appear to have a lot of support from existing and former residents of the County.

Agriculture Preservation

Agriculture is an important economic sector of Benzie County. However, market conditions from outside Benzie County have had a profound, negative influence on Benzie County farmers. In the late 1990s, market conditions were so tenuous as to create doubt that farming will be viable by 2020 in Benzie County.

Most Benzie County farmers (and spouses and other adults in the farm family) are also employed off the farm in order to support the family. One of the methods of supplementing farm income is to periodically sell small portions of the farm for residential lots. Important costs to farmers include property taxes, which is often assessed on farmland at a rate that assumes it is used for residential or other developed uses, and inheritance taxes that make it difficult to pass a farm to heirs and have it remain a family farm.

A majority of Benzie County residents and visitors enjoy the open space and scenic qualities of Benzie County farmlands and want farming to continue. However, most Benzie County farmers expect to fund their future retirement on the sale of their land for development, not farming.

Agriculture and Residential Conflicts

In many parts of Benzie County, an increasing number of non-farm residences are being located in farming areas. While the new residents are attracted to the rural scenery, they show little acceptance of typical farming practices, such as spraying, manure application, the transport of farm equipment on the roads and other operations. In addition, people who live in the vicinity of farms often do not want those farms developed as subdivisions.

There is little understanding among non-farmers of the economic constraints of farming in Benzie County. These include market factors, property taxes and fluctuating fuel, chemical and labor costs. One farmer stated, "We are not in the business of providing scenery." Yet this is what is often most valued by non-agricultural residents in rural areas.

Over-Zoning for Residential Development

Almira Township and the Lake Ann area have been experiencing rapid residential growth. Some of this growth is in the form of individual residential lots but there have also been a number of subdivisions developed as well. The Almira Township Planning Commission recently prepared a new zoning map that changed the density of large areas of the community. As a result, the eventual population could be substantially less than permitted under the previous zoning ordinance. Their revisions included provisions for open space and natural resource preservation through their subdivision ordinance. However, the buildout potential in Almira Township under current zoning is still over 20,000 persons (compared to an estimated population of 1,763). In the rest of the County it is about 124,000 compared to an estimated 1998 population of 14,678. This is called over-zoning.

The pressure to continue rapid development in the northeast quarter of the County, and in the other townships in the County will continue as people who work in Traverse City try to move farther into the "country". They will try to find an area that hasn't lost scenic character to the extent that Grand Traverse County has.

However, as long as the individual township zoning ordinances and the County zoning Ordinance provide for too great a density in rural townships, scattered residential development will continue with all the attendant negative impacts previously identified. Over-zoning is insidious in its ability to scatter residential development without regard to scenic and rural character considerations, while also creating a false impression in the minds of rural landowners. The false impression is that at some future time the land could be divided and sold for the maximum density allowed under the zoning ordinance. The reality is that without public sewer and water, that density is often unlikely to be approved. In addition, the market over the next 20 years would not be anywhere near large enough to absorb that many units – and the citizens would never permit it. Zoning density

should reflect existing use levels and current public service levels. Planned future density can be higher where the community is willing to commit to a higher level of public service in a particular area. Over-zoning also destroys the potential to achieve planned, incremental growth by permitting scattered growth over a large area of the community.

Industrial Development

Although Benzie County has strong tourist and agricultural economic sectors, the industrial sector is also important. One of the reasons an industrial sector exists is the high quality of life that attracts business owners and workers. Other factors include the availability of timber for forest product industries, agricultural crops for agricultural products industries and a port for shipping or receiving raw materials and goods by boat to or from other parts of the Great Lakes.

Benzie County industries are located throughout the County. There are two industrial parks. These are located in Frankfort and Thompsonville. There are available spaces in both parks. The Thompsonville Industrial Park is nearly empty. In addition, there are scattered industrial facilities, primarily along the major highways. The relatively limited availability of public water and sewer is a factor that will limit industrial growth in the County when existing parks and industrially zoned sites within existing sewer and water service areas become filled.

There is general recognition in Benzie County that a growing economy is good. While there is no goal to make the industrial sector the largest source of income in the County, improving it is a goal. To improve the industrial sector, the following needs to happen:

- Some business diversification will be important to better weather economic shifts, to provide a wider range of employment opportunity, and to broaden the tax base.
- Retention of existing employers will be more important than attracting new employers because most new job growth comes from expansion of existing businesses that are already familiar with doing business in Benzie County.
- Business start-ups require available land, a willing entrepreneur, available capital, available workers and adequate levels of public services. Benzie County has available land. The other factors are met in the varying degrees of success in different parts of the County.
- A Comprehensive Plan can help sustain an economy by directing the location and pace of growth so that land and services (school, emergency response, roads, sewer and water) can be available for new businesses and homes for workers when needed (See Chapters 4 & 5).
- Zoning, as backed by the Comprehensive Plan, can ensure that land remains available for industrial and commercial growth in appropriate locations. It can also protect farm and forestlands and the rural character that provides the base for the tourist economy. Zoning can also protect a wide range of land uses from the negative effects of incompatible adjacent uses.

Commercial Development

There is a wide range of commercial establishments in Benzie County, including grocery stores, restaurants, banks, galleries, resorts, storage facilities, marinas, gas stations and convenience shops. There has been a decline in car dealers and agricultural supply stores. Many residents travel to Traverse City to shop in the regional malls and discount stores. There are only two, small strip malls in Benzie County. There is one fast-food restaurant with drive-through service in Benzonia.

Most of the commercial establishments are located in Beulah, Benzonia, Honor Elberta and Frankfort. There are a growing number of establishments located along US 31, outside those communities, primarily between Honor and the Grand Traverse County line.

Commercial development, and the resultant congestion, is generally accepted within cities and villages, but can cause safety problems and commuting delays when it develops in strip form along country roads and highways. This is the emerging pattern along US 31.

Alternative patterns of commercial development are available, in which access is controlled and scenic character is maintained. These have not been promoted or adopted in regulatory form by local governments in Benzie County.

Development along US-31 and M-115

The highway corridors with emerging development are along US 31 from Beulah to the Grand Traverse County line and M-115 from Benzonia to Frankfort. Generally, this development is characterized as commercial, institutional and residential strip development. This means that developments occur on individual properties strung out along the road. While businesses and institutions have high visibility, it is at the cost of increased traffic accidents and loss of scenic character. Strip residential development also contributes to these problems.

Alternatives that include nodes of development with shared access points and vegetation buffers to retain scenic character have not been used by those developing these properties.

Transportation

Road traffic is increasing in Benzie County, causing congested conditions on certain roads during peak summer tourist months. The traffic increases on some road segments were as high as 70% between 1987 and 1994. Nearly all segments of State and Federal roads show increases of 20% to over 30%. It has been reported that residents use County roads to avoid congestion on US 31 from Benzonia through Honor when traveling east toward Traverse City. According to the **Michigan Sub-State Area Long Range Plan for the Northern**

Sub-State Area, without roadway improvements, between 10% and 20% of Benzie County roads will be congested roads in the year 2015.

Many road segments are in only fair or poor condition. Fair conditions mean that there is occasional deterioration requiring routine maintenance and poor means a frequent to heavy occurrence of surface deterioration requiring more extensive to heavy maintenance. While surface conditions improved for some State and Federal road segments between 1987 and 1994, according to the Sufficiency Reports for those years, there are still large segments of these roads rated as poor.

Local roads need maintenance and repair but the money available is far less than the amount necessary to complete repairs and improvements. The Road Commission estimates about \$9 million is needed for repairs of County roads and bridges.

County road reconstruction occurs as the Townships and private businesses request and the Townships contribute, along with some local businesses, to the costs. Meanwhile, it has been reported by the Residential Development Subcommittee that a few townships pave gravel roads in order to foster development, increasing the future maintenance burden.

The use of public roads by trucks hauling heavy loads has both positive and negative effects. There are positive effects in that industries that rely on truck hauling contribute to the Benzie County economy and shipping materials from the City of Elberta helps justify retention of the deep water port status. The negative effect is that trucks can be destructive to County roads. The Road Commission works with the local trucking companies to route trucks over the most appropriate roads but cannot keep truckers from using an all-weather road.

Maintenance of County forest roads (unpaved two-tracks under County jurisdiction) is also important in Benzie County because of the logging industry and recreational interests in public forest lands. In the fiscal year, 1996, Benzie County engaged in five forest road improvement projects.

The issue of a by-pass or expressway through Benzie County (or of by-passes around specific congested areas such as Honor or Benzonia) keeps arising. There is little likelihood a by-pass or expressway will come to pass within the next twenty years or so.

Two scenic highway corridors have been explored. The first is along an approximately diagonal line from Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore along the ridge between Crystal and Platte Lakes, toward North Beulah and identified in the National Lakeshore's enabling legislation. It would be a ridge top location and a new road, but has never had funds allocated and is opposed locally. The other, which is only in the inventory phase, is M-22 from Frankfort through the

National Lakeshore into Leelanau County. Pursuit of a scenic or heritage designation for this second corridor will only come following the inventory and if there is local support.

The National Park Service would like Benzie County to abandon some County roads within the National Lakeshore that have been little used, and turn them into trails. The MDNR wants to close some redundant two-tracks in State Forests. This would please those seeking more peaceful areas and disappoint those seeking greater vehicular access to natural areas.

Affordable Housing

There is need for a wide range of housing types to be available in Benzie County so that singles, young couples, families, retirees, vacationers and seasonal workers can have affordable and desirable housing choices.

Housing is considered affordable when it costs no more than 30% of a person's gross income. Because there is a wide range of incomes, a certain house may be affordable to a person of one income but not affordable to a person who earns less.

Benzie County is becoming a residential community for people who work in Traverse City. The eastern portion of Benzie County is where most of those people settle, but there are many commuting to Traverse City from all parts of Benzie County. Affordable housing is usually most feasible when located on property served by public sewer, water and good roads. The higher density possible in these areas makes the lots affordable and contributes to the vitality of small towns.

Community Services and Facilities, Including Sewer and Water

While it is natural beauty that draws many people to Benzie County, living and playing in the County requires schools, police and fire departments, government offices, water and sewer in densely settled areas and other services. The degree of satisfaction of residents and tourists with community services can be a factor in whether residents are happy with local government, whether new residents or business owners settle in the County or whether tourists return.

Some community leaders have suggested a new way of looking at the provision of community services. They agree with the general citizen sentiment that government should be cost-effective with the services it provides and that it should provide those services through flexible approaches and at a variety of locations, not necessarily centralized. However, they also suggest planning for services based on an evaluation of need, not on the basis of national standards. This is a new approach, sometimes referred to as "out of box thinking." For example: The traditional approach may be to begin by comparing the County to national standards, such as the number of hospital beds needed for a county of about 14,000 year-round population. "Out of box thinking," starts with the

question, “How can we best ensure a healthy population?” While providing the number of hospital beds recommended according to national standards may be a part of ensuring a healthy population, it is only one part. Other factors must be considered, such as where the population is centered, or whether it is even centered anywhere within the jurisdiction and how mobile is the population?

Services should become proactive to community needs. For example: planning for expanded jail space for juveniles should occur in conjunction with planning for programs that target at-risk youth to keep them out of trouble.

Future public service expansion needs to be limited to discrete areas so that provision of those services remains cost effective, and growth associated with public services does not negatively change large areas of the County with resultant decline in the tourist economy and quality of life for residents. These areas should be in and adjacent to existing cities and villages in the County.

Due to the types of soils and high water tables in parts of the County, there are serious human health issues related to how sewage is treated and the safety of ground water from which residents draw their drinking water. Public water and sewer systems have been upgraded recently in Frankfort and Beulah, but still provide service to relatively limited geographic areas. Some of the areas experiencing the fastest growth in the County do not have public sewer and water. This means that lot sizes must be large enough to permit both wells and septic systems. Larger lot sizes quickly consume large areas of land. Small lots should be provided in existing cities and villages to maximize use of limited public utilities, to keep costs per dwelling unit low and to permit affordable housing to be established.

Intergovernmental Cooperation and Coordination

Each resident's daily life involves activities in more than one jurisdiction within the County. Benzie County is a prime example of a place where a resident may live in one township (or city or village), work in another (perhaps another county), shop in a different township and send children to school in yet another. But land use and infrastructure decisions are routinely made by jurisdictions independently and without consideration of impacts on adjoining jurisdictions. The exceptions traditionally come:

- When they want to provide services that require the cooperation of several communities to provide adequate funding, such as fire or ambulance.
- When Federal or State programs require cooperation.

Other, cross-jurisdictional issues that communities could address on a cooperative, intergovernmental basis, but rarely do in Benzie County include:

- Viewsheds and scenic character
- Watersheds and water quality
- Recreational capacity
- Public facilities and infrastructure.

These are really issues of greater than local concern and there should be mechanisms in place to deal with these issues on a systematic and ad hoc basis.

For Benzie County residents and businesses to continue to enjoy the quality of life they have come to expect and the scenic quality that the tourist industry relies on, intergovernmental cooperation and coordination will be required. It will also be necessary to avoid border conflicts over land use issues and to achieve most of the key goals and objectives of this Plan.

Coordinated Planning and Zoning

The most important arena for improved intergovernmental cooperation is with regard to local planning and zoning. In order for the scenic character and public service cost objectives of this Plan to be realized, it is important that local plans be consistent with this County Comprehensive Plan and that local zoning ordinances be revised over time in a manner consistent with the goals, objectives and policies of this Plan. This will require leadership and technical assistance from the County as well as a new spirit of cooperation throughout the County.

Sustainability

Sustainability is defined as providing for the needs of today's generation without compromising the needs of future generations. In Benzie County, this means taking actions that the present generation's great-great-great grandchildren will be able to enjoy, such as food grown in Benzie County, scenic views of the ridges, lakes and rivers, historic districts, trees with brilliant fall color along rural roads and clean water for drinking, fishing and swimming. Some residents question whether their children, let alone their descendents several generations hence, will have these resources to enjoy.

To achieve sustainability, natural resource lands will have to be preserved, farmland will have to be protected and private properties developed according to design principles that retain scenic character. This includes architectural character in developed landscapes and north woods character in the countryside.

If all rural land is developed at presently zoned densities and according to the current system of minimum lot size, there will be no viable farming, wildlife habitat will be diminished and scenic character would be gone. If these features are to be returned for the benefit of present and future generations, local zoning will need to be changed to protect farmland and open space and yet provide rural opportunities. This will require a degree of intergovernmental cooperation not previously common in Benzie County.