

Chapter Six

ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS

ACTIONS NECESSARY TO IMPLEMENT THIS PLAN

Open space in Benzie County means undeveloped landscape. Where agriculture was once attempted or forests cut, the land is truly open and spacious. However, much of the Benzie County open space is forested, and there are a wide variety of forest types in the County. There are also many edges between forest and meadow and forest and stream or lake. These are often very important as wildlife habitat and places for recreation.

Natural resources in Benzie County include surface and ground water, soil favorable for agricultural and forest crops, sand and gravel, oil and gas, plants and wildlife. Many of these resources are used as raw materials for various industries. Some are nonrenewable, such as oil, gas and gravel. There are also renewable resource activities in which the resource, such as plants and animals are harvested on an on-going basis. The natural resources of Benzie County are also used as the setting for businesses involved in recreation and tourism.

Benzie County's landscape is a combination of north woods plus orchards and fields. The north woods are pine, cedar, birch, poplar and maple growing on a backdrop of hills and valleys and clear lakes and streams. The clean air of the north woods brings a sparkle off the water and a fragrance from the pine and balsam poplar.

Agriculture in general, and orchards in particular have been a central part of the Benzie County rural open space landscape for over a hundred years. Land use trends and the general low prices for agricultural products have put many farms in peril. Most are slowly being converted to large residential lots. This has the result of suburbanizing the landscape along road corridors in the county and undermines the rural landscape integrity.

The voluntary actions of landowners, to date, are largely responsible for the quality of the visual environment in the county. However, current trends show that unless the public acts soon, landscape integrity will suffer irreparably. This plan proposes many measures to preserve the natural and rural character of Benzie County. Listed below are measures that the County needs to take soon to preserve the natural and rural character of Benzie County.

- The creation of a Land Preservation Ordinance.
- The creation of a Benzie Land Preservation Advisory Committee with adequate staffing.
- The creation of a Land Preservation Fund, based on a new millage.

- The creation of new and expanded public sewer and water in the small towns of Benzie County to accommodate new development that otherwise will locate on large lots in the rural parts of the county, undermining the effort to protect the existing rural and natural character of the county.
- The inclusion of TDR language in the County Zoning Ordinance (or in a separate freestanding ordinance if separate enabling legislation is passed).
- Minor updates to the 2020 Comprehensive Plan to incorporate this plan by reference and to be consistent with it.
- Updates to the County Recreation Plan to incorporate this plan by reference and to clarify its scope vis-à-vis this plan.
- Major updates to the County Zoning Ordinance to be consistent with both the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, this plan, and to fix a number of long standing problems.
- Adoption of a County Subdivision Control Ordinance.
- Adoption of a County Capital Improvements Program.
- Develop and encourage the widespread use of voluntary design guidelines.
- Develop and implement a continuing public education and support program.

All of these recommendations need to be acted upon within the next 2-3 years. The first five of these recommendations are presented in detail in Chapters Four and Five of this plan. More detail follows on the remaining seven recommendations.

2020 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATES

This OS&NRPP was developed as a recommendation of the Benzie County 2020 Comprehensive Plan. Now the 2020 Comprehensive Plan needs to be updated to reflect the recommendations of this plan. These updates include:

- Adoption of this plan by reference as part of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan
- To Chapter 4 – Future Land Use and Urban Services Districts -- should be added policy language about the relationship of this plan and its map (Map 9) of priority protection lands to the future land use and urban services map. It is important that it be clear that provision of urban services is essential to protection of rural character, as well as accommodating future new development.
- Acknowledging better the important role that a land preservation millage, PDR and TDR, and the action of the Benzie Land Preservation Advisory Committee over time will have on implementing principal goals of the plan.
- Internal references to the OS&NRPP throughout the text as appropriate.

RECREATION PLAN UPDATES

Benzie County updated its Recreation Plan in 2001 and 2002, with County approval of the Plan in 2002. Because this OS&NR Protection Plan was completed after the Recreation Plan update, the following issues need to be addressed through amendments to the 2002 Recreation Plan:

- The Recreation Plan needs to incorporate this OS&NRPP Plan by reference because:
 - This OS&NRPP promotes open space preservation to foster the northern Michigan quality of life experience that the Recreation Plan also intends to enhance.
 - This OS&NRPP promotes the preservation of renewable resource lands that may also be useful for recreational and tourism experiences such as hunting, fishing and enjoyment of scenery.
 - The preservation of trail links and ecological corridors is important to both the OS&NRPP and the Recreation Plan. Trails contribute to linear recreation experiences and to local economies. Ecological corridors are connected habitat and can be necessary for many bird, game and fish species to exist. This OS&NRPP promotes trail links and ecological corridors on both private land and on land for which development rights or conservation easements are acquired.
 - Applications for funding assistance under the state Natural Resources Land Trust Fund and the federal Land & Water Conservation Fund both require an adopted Recreation Plan that meets state requirements. That means this OS&NRPP must be an acknowledged part of the Recreation Plan in order to have open space lands considered for grant funding under these two programs. This is most easily accomplished by incorporating this plan by reference in the Recreation Plan.
- Since the scope of the Recreation Plan is public and quasi-public park and recreation facilities, whereas this OS&NRPP addresses open space preservation principally and other public recreation uses of such lands incidentally, the Recreation Plan needs to specifically acknowledge this distinction in its text. Both plans are complementary and essential to a comprehensive program.

The above points can be added to the 2002 Plan through amendments.

Smoothing of Public Land Boundaries

The Parks and Recreation Commission should become involved in helping to eliminate the irregularities in the boundaries of public land. Both state and federal lands (the latter to a lesser degree) in Benzie County have irregular boundaries. This makes management of those lands for recreation more difficult. It especially affects hunting and trail development. Private in-holdings should be purchased by the state or traded for lands elsewhere. Local funds should not be used for this purpose unless County ownership can be temporary, with eventual state or

federal purchase. However, the Parks and Recreation Commission could help the Benzie Land Preservation Advisory Committee to facilitate such acquisitions through education of landowners and coordination.

Coordination with State, Federal and Other Land Managers

Recreational lands in Benzie County are managed by units of government and other organizations: the Michigan DNR, the National Park Service, the Betsie Valley Trailway Management Council, the County Parks and Recreation Commission, conservancies and local units of government. All of these organizations need to be aware of the purpose and intent of both the Recreation Plan and the OS&NRPP and seek ways to coordinate their activities.

In addition, as recommended in Chapter Four, a Benzie County Land Preservation Advisory Committee should be established by the County. This Committee, in conjunction with the different land conservancies will have responsibilities in acquiring and managing natural resource and open space lands. The Board may or may not be responsible for land management but will have a role in assigning that responsibility.

There should be regular meetings in which all of these groups get together. This should be acknowledged in the Recreation Plan. The agenda for these meetings should include, among other topics:

- Needed links between protected lands
- Opportunities for development rights, conservation easement or other purchases of natural resource, scenic or recreation lands.
- Opportunities for one group or agency to educate the public on the stewardship efforts of the other groups and agencies.
- Threats to the land preservation efforts of one group or agency that might affect others.
- Ways to pool resources to manage protected lands.

ZONING ORDINANCE UPDATES

Major updates to the County Zoning Ordinance will be necessary to make it consistent with both the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, this plan, and to fix a number of long-standing problems. A partial list of needed changes is listed below:

- Adding a stronger link to the 2020 County Comprehensive Plan.
- Cross-referencing provisions with the new Land Preservation Ordinance to implement PDR.
- Add TDR language and modify the zoning map to include sending and receiving zones.
- Add exclusive agricultural and exclusive forest-recreation districts.
- Add natural resource protection provisions concerning floodplains, wetlands, sand dunes, shorelines, ground and surface water protection. Note that the County has already drafted a wetlands ordinance and is working on a stormwater ordinance similar to that in place in Grand Traverse County.

- Changes to the PUD provisions to fix density issues and to provide other cluster development and conservation development options consistent with new state enabling requirements.
- Addition of urban and general services districts language.
- Review and updating of all district language to ensure compatibility with the future land use provisions of the 2020 Comprehensive Plan.
- Review of provisions in shoreline areas to identify ways to reduce variance requests.
- Eliminate inconsistencies between ordinance provisions.
- Clarify review and approval procedures and responsibilities of decision entities and ensure consistency with statutory requirements.
- Add special land use standards to conform with statutory requirements.
- Add access management standards.
- Add graphics for key definitions and regulations.
- Refine standards to better guide decisions on site plans, special land uses, rezonings, nonconforming uses, and variances.
- Improve the organization of the ordinance to make it more "user friendly".
- Review permitted uses lists by district to ensure they are consistent with the purposes of the district.
- Better link the ordinance to other codes and ordinances.
- Revise "site condo" provisions.
- Improve landscaping provisions.
- Encourage conformance with (yet to be developed) design guidelines.
- Review zoning of opens space and natural resource lands on Map 9 in this Plan to ensure consistency with the intent and purpose and to ensure compatibility between open space uses and permitted development. This may require some downzoning (or "right zoning") especially in strip commercial areas; the creation of a few commercial nodes along US 31; and the integration of access management and buffering standards along major corridors.
- Overlay zoning may need to be added along roadways and river/stream corridors.
- Other changes yet to be identified.

ADOPT A COUNTY SUBDIVISION CONTROL ORDINANCE

One of the most basic tools to guide land development is a subdivision control ordinance. This ordinance regulates the division of land into plats, which involve more divisions than are permitted under the land division portion of the state Land Division Act (PA 288 of 1967, as amended). Residential subdivisions are the most common plats, but commercial and industrial plats are also common. Cities, villages, townships and counties can adopt subdivision regulations. While the townships in Benzie County have all adopted land division regulations, few if any have adopted subdivision regulations, leaving this task to the county since it administers zoning over most of the county. Once land has been divided, land use options are usually limited. Particularly in areas where land is still in large

blocks and the creation of large subdivisions is possible, it is important to regulate the subdivision process. For example, the rural natural character of the county can be quickly undermined by long strip residential plats. This can only be accomplished with a subdivision control ordinance. The county should adopt a subdivision control ordinance which is coordinated with the zoning ordinance and local township land division review and approval procedures.

ADOPTION OF A COUNTY CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

A capital improvements program lists proposed public facilities to be constructed over the next 5-6 years, where they are to be located, their cost, and means of financing. It is a critical tool to prioritizing the expenditure of public funds for public facilities and public lands. It is an old tool long used in urban areas, but not widely used in rural Michigan. However, since the 2020 Comprehensive Plan identified a number of needed capital improvements that are necessary to implement the plan (notably sewer and water in small towns across the county) and the Recreation Plan identifies parcels that should be acquired for public recreation and this plan establishes a process for identifying other open space lands that may need to be acquired outright, as well as many other lands for which the development rights should be purchased, it is increasingly imperative that the county develop, adopt and annually update a capital improvement program. As a sidenote, Leelanau County recently adopted its first capital improvement program.

VOLUNTARY DESIGN GUIDELINES

As detailed in Chapter 3, it is very important that landowners continue to take voluntary measures that maintain and where necessary restore the natural landscape character of the county. While the **Grand Traverse Bay Development Guidebook** provides some guidance in this regard, additional guidelines that are specific to the landscape and opportunities in Benzie County should be prepared. By necessity, these need to be clear, easily reproduced graphics that are widely and easily available. A number of conservation organizations should be involved in their preparation. The sooner these are prepared, the more quickly landowners can do their part to preserve the natural landscape of Benzie County. At a minimum, design guidelines should address:

- Vegetation management, especially along roadways, shorelines and ridgetops.
- Location of open space on properties.
- View protection.
- Water quality protection.
- Sign design.
- Architectural design.
- Linking ecological corridors.

BROAD-BASED EDUCATION PROGRAM

Perhaps the most fundamental activity that is necessary to implement this plan is the development and implementation of a continuing public education and support program. The public will be asked to support a number of new measures that they heretofore have not been asked to support. Some will involve new taxes, others will involve the donation of development rights, others the implementation of voluntary guidelines to preserve the natural rural character of the county, and still others to support new development regulations.

These are substantial new public initiatives that will not implement themselves and are unlikely to happen if there is not strong public support. As a result, a well conceived program of public education will be necessary to implement not only this plan, but the 2020 Comprehensive Plan and the Recreation Plan. That effort should start very soon. It will need to involve a number of public and nonprofit groups to be successful. At a minimum it will need to include the following elements:

- Development of brochures, pamphlets, flyers and other educational material
- Offering public educational forums on various issues and bringing in qualified speakers with broad expertise to educate citizens on key issues and opportunities
- Training local leaders on these issues and implementation tools
- Incorporating key elements into local school curricula
- Constructively engaging the media.