

Chapter 3

FUTURE LAND USE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents information on future land use in the context of existing land use in Mason County. It begins by describing existing community character (for a more complete description of existing land use, see the Mason County Data Book, Chapter 4 and 5). It then discusses key issues and key policies intended to respond to those issues (Part A dealing with townships under county zoning and Part B for townships, cities and villages not under county zoning). Finally, this chapter describes how different land use categories are proposed to be managed in the future.

EXISTING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Mason County is characterized by large areas of farmland and forest. Along the Lake Michigan shoreline, there are extensive bluff and dune areas. Pristine rivers and streams flow through the county from east to west and empty into Lake Michigan. There are many small lakes, and large Hamlin Lake sits behind a dam and the dunes at Ludington State Park. Small wetlands dot the landscape. Many other wetlands in the agricultural areas were drained long ago. Most of the privately owned shoreline of Lake Michigan and the inland lakes is developed with cottages, seasonal and year-around homes. The City of Ludington is a deep water small port city, where tourists and industry both co-exist. Ludington's waterfront is largely dedicated to deep water facilities (including the pier complex for the Ludington to Manitowoc, Wisconsin ferry) and industry, but is converting to marinas, parks and water-related condominiums. Highway corridors are also important. US-31 is a freeway that comes from Muskegon to US-10 just east of Ludington. US-10 extends from the port at Ludington nearly due east to the county line and beyond to Clare and Bay City. It has become an important commercial corridor near the interchange. The US-10/US-31 corridor east of the interchange is rapidly developing, generally in a scattered and low intensity pattern. US-31 splits from US-10 at Scottville and extends north to the county line and the City of Manistee a short distance farther. Scottville is a small city in the center of the county and there are three rural villages, Custer, Fountain and Free Soil. There are 15 townships and one, Pere Marquette, is a charter township.

The diversity of landscapes in Mason County is highly prized by those that live and visit here. Orchards and farm fields, beaches and dunes, forests and wetlands, rivers and lakes provide a rich tablet for the eye to behold in the changing seasons. The small towns combined with a complete complement of retail and urban service options add to the variety of living, shopping, working and recreating opportunities. But changes to the landscape and to the job base have begun to threaten confidence that these prized characteristics will remain intact for enjoyment by future generations. This Plan proposes measures to restore confidence in a sustainable future.

KEY ISSUES FOR THE FUTURE

Mason County faces a number of issues related to current trends and its vision for the future. Two issues are much more important than the rest and guide key policies in this Plan. They are discussed below.

Economic Base in Land Resources and Industry

Mason County's economy is based on agriculture, tourism and industry. Industry is suffering and there are land use trends working against sustained agriculture and tourism. The county needs to provide a means for new industry to become established, while at the same time, protecting agriculture and tourism.

About all a county can do to provide for new industry is to work with its cities, villages and townships to ensure an adequate supply of land that is well-served by all-weather roads, railroad, shipping and air service, and has public sewer and water to industrial sites. Of course the land must be suitably zoned and located so as to not undermine the integrity of adjacent land uses. The county can also participate in job retention and marketing activities to promote the benefit of siting in the county. Once these measures are taken, it will be a high quality of life for industry owners and workers that attract them to the area: good schools, medical care, arts, culture and recreation are chief among these amenities. Mason County has all these amenities and by valuing and sustaining them, it can attract new jobs for a prosperous future.

Protecting the environment is key to the survival of agriculture and tourism and to sustaining a high quality of life. Those environmental elements that should be protected include surface and groundwater, wetlands, shorelines, forests, productive farmland and habitat for threatened and endangered species. Mason County will need to be aware of the thresholds of the effects of unplanned development on the environment. The county will need to make sure that scattered residential and commercial development does not tip the county over the thresholds that seriously weaken its agriculture and tourism economies.

People are retiring at a younger age than the previous generation and many are moving north, looking to places such as Mason County as a retirement location. Many of them demand services they formerly enjoyed that are not currently available, thus putting pressure on budgets that are already under pressure from inflationary, and rising worker benefit costs. With this influx comes many challenges, from increased traffic to increased pressure on agricultural lands, forest lands, lakes and streams. For example, in Mason County today, recreational land is often selling for more money per acre than average agricultural land.

Agriculture is important in Mason County, but is facing sustainability problems. The conversion of agricultural land to residential use threatens the future of both the agricultural economic sector and the rural character that residents and tourists enjoy. As non-farm residences are built in farming areas, it becomes more difficult for farming operations to continue as non-farm residents often complain about noise, dust, odor, fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides and many of the farm practices necessary on a modern farm.

Photo 3-1
Cottage on Big Sable



Photo by Ron Carter

Mason County is blessed with highly diverse agriculture and tourism. Agriculture includes orchards, row crops, livestock, Christmas trees, hops, blueberries and confined animal feeding operations. Tourism activities and attractions include camping, boating, historic sites, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, and going to the beach. There are many motels, restaurants, a State Park, National Forest lands, a full compliment of retail stores, festivals, the county fair, the ferry to Wisconsin and primary and secondary homes on lakes and in the woods. This diversity is healthy, necessary for the economy, and the environment needs to be protected in order to maintain that diversity.

Maximize Existing Public Investments in Infrastructure—the Ludington to Scottville Corridor

The US-10/US-31 corridor is developing rapidly and is shifting the center of retail and service business from downtown Ludington to the freeway interchange of US-10 and US-31. Commercial and industrial uses are scattered all the way to Scottville.

Local communities and MDOT have already invested heavily in the corridor. There are several thousand acres of undeveloped land that should be built upon over time, in order to make efficient use of the existing investment in public sewer, water and the five lanes of US-10/US-31 itself. Building on the undeveloped land in the corridor will take development pressure off of rural land. This protects the agriculture and agri-tourism economies of the County, and protects the quality of life of those already living in rural areas. In addition to making good use of existing infrastructure, it delays the need for infrastructure investment elsewhere. It also improves opportunities for affordable housing as higher density is feasible.

Yet, there are reasons to be concerned about new development on the corridor. First, if it robs jobs and sales from existing businesses in Ludington or Scottville, then there is no net gain to citizens, only more empty storefronts in the two cities in the county. Second, if it happens too fast, or at too low a density it will underutilize the infrastructure

investment if stores close from lack of a market or others can not be built because too much land is used to serve too few. Third, the corridor serves as one of the main entryways into the county and the City of Ludington, and some citizens are already concerned that its visual character presently reflects poorly on the community's sense of place. New development should be more carefully designed with an eye to an improved aesthetic. Fourth, if the design and layout is not carefully done, and if new parallel roads are not constructed as recommended in Chapter Five, then traffic safety and congestion will become problems as the corridor develops.

Encouraging a compact growth pattern for the corridor that includes residential, commercial, and industrial development in appropriate locations will be essential to the efficient provision of public services and sustainability of corridor businesses. While this Plan recommends a general arrangement of industrial and commercial development on the south side of US-10/US-31, commercial on the north side, and residential development north of the commercial, the over-arching purpose is job development with nearby affordable housing in neighborhood oriented clusters. This must occur in staged increments only as the market permits and only after all measures to properly build out Ludington and Scottville are taken.

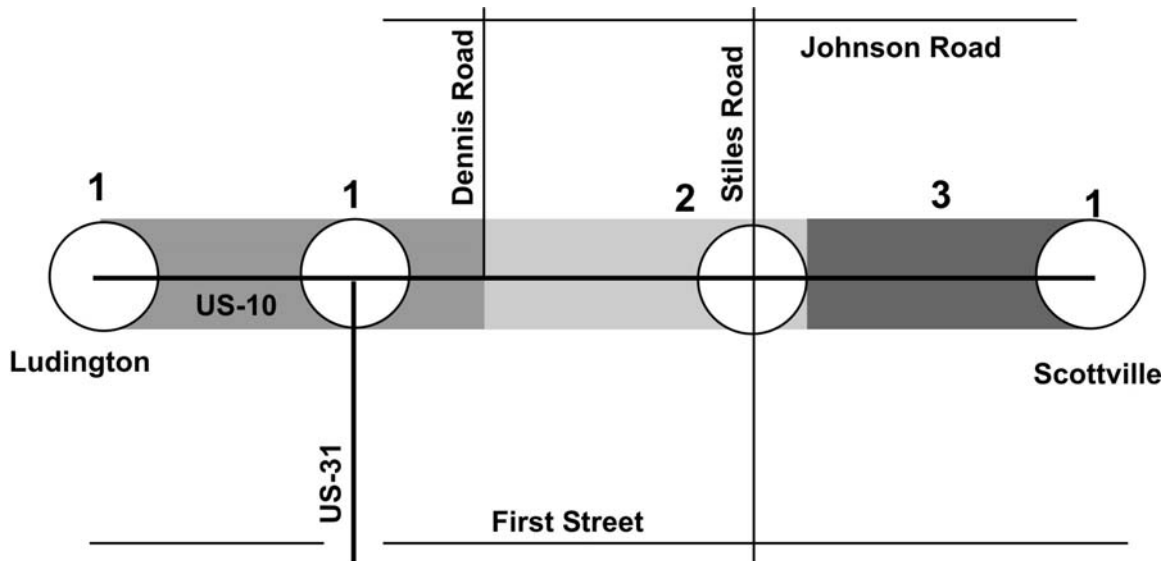
KEY LAND USE POLICIES—PART A

This section describes key land use policies in Mason County in townships subject to county zoning. It is intended to provide an overview of the direction the county intends for land use change in the future. Map 3-1 illustrates those key policies.

In general, the intent is to concentrate future development along the US-10/US-31 corridor from the interchange to Scottville, while preserving rural lands and natural features elsewhere. Development of the US-10/US-31 corridor would take place in stages (see Figure 3-1), with the first stage (from present up to about 20 years into the future) focusing first on Ludington and Scottville, and then development in the center part of the corridor. A node at the freeway interchange of US-10 and US-31 would continue to be devoted to "Big Box Retail" development. In the second stage (after about 20 years), new development would center around the intersection of Stiles Road and US-10/US-31. In a final stage (30 or more years from the present), development of the corridor from Stiles Road east to Scottville would take place. Job centers in the villages of Custer, Free Soil and Fountain are also encouraged, within defined community service areas once both public sewer and water are available.

These time frames are based on rates of change in 2012. If change accelerates, then less time will pass before a stage is complete and vice versa. The biggest impediment to successful implementation of this policy is developers who do not use the developable part of property (i.e. avoid all wetlands) intensively enough. That will result in prematurely using up the scarcest resource in the county—undeveloped land served (or servable) by both public sewer and water. It will also push development into the rural areas of the county which should be preserved for their renewable natural resource value.

**Figure 3-1
Staged Development**



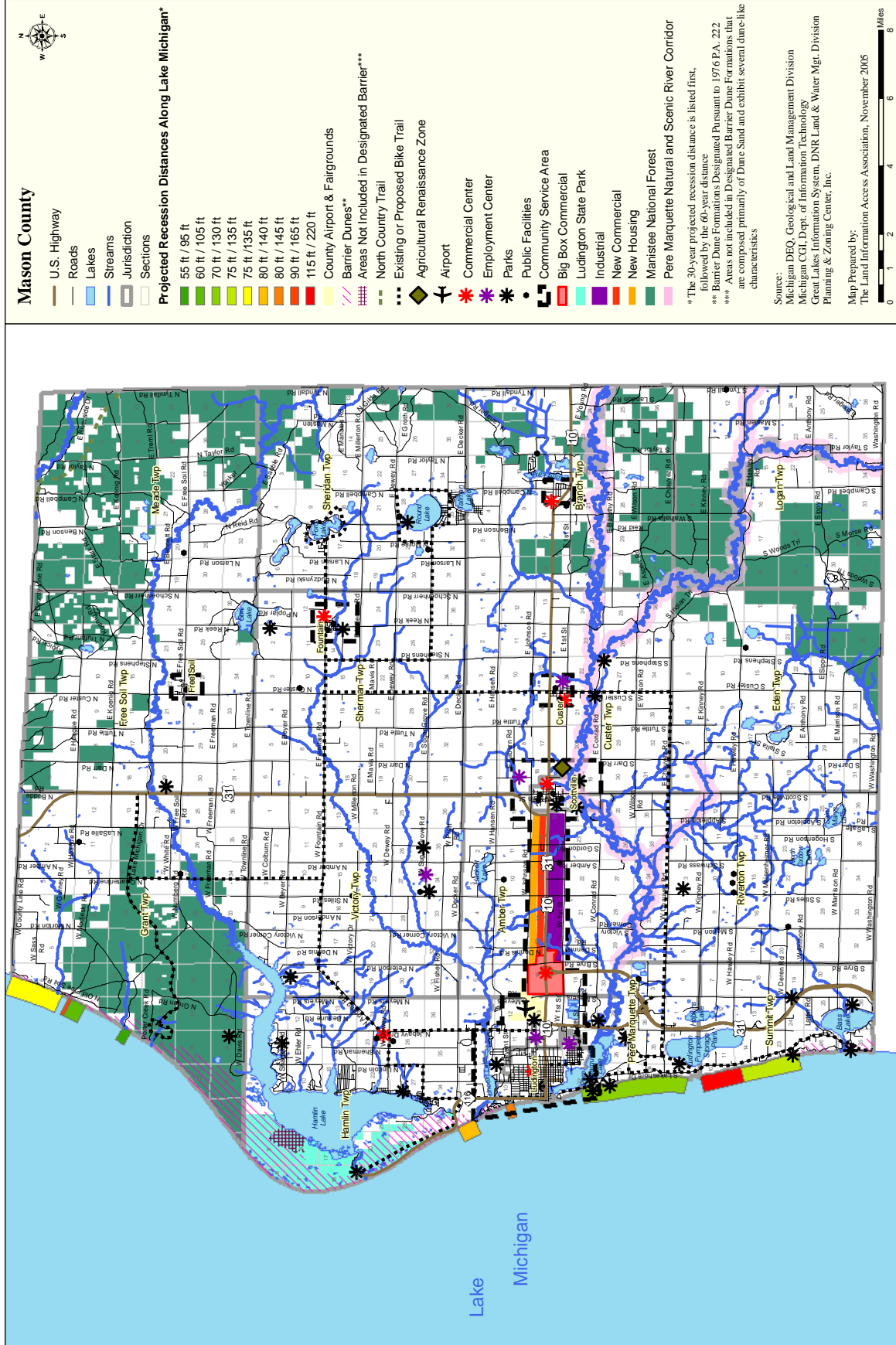
US-10/US-31 Corridor

The US-10/US-31 corridor from the freeway interchange to Scottville should be the focus of future development in order to take pressure off of rural areas and make the corridor an employment center. There will be a mix of uses, including commercial, industrial and residential in order to improve economic vitality and make maximum use of the investment the county has already made in existing public infrastructure. The highway will provide excellent access and the construction of new parallel roads as well as an efficient layout of commercial and industrial properties can help reduce congestion and traffic accidents. Attractive building, sign design, and landscaping will improve visual character. North of the highway commercial development, mixed office, small commercial and both medium density (4 dwelling units/acre) and high density (8-12 dwelling units/acre) housing will provide for walkability and convenience to work and shopping.

The corridor will extend about one half mile north of the highway to Johnson Road and one half mile south of the highway to First Street. Commercial development will be the designated land use in the first $\frac{1}{4}$ mile on both the north and south side of the highway. There can be some mixing of industrial and office uses in this area as this is already a characteristic. In the next band south, down to First Street, the primary use will be industrial in order to take advantage of the railroad. Commercial establishments with a large number of employees may locate in the industrial area on the south side of the highway.

The US-10/US-31 corridor development area will require zoning changes in order to provide for mixed use development, changed designation of zoning districts and to address the appearance of the corridor. The area south of the highway in the corridor is presently zoned commercial, with only a small area zoned industrial. The industrially zoned area of the corridor needs to be much larger. See Chapter 4, Zoning Plan for more information.

Map 3-1 Key Mason County Land Use Policies



Eventually the development of this corridor will extend all the way east to Scottville. However, in the first stage, new residential, commercial, and industrial development will only extend to Dennis Road.

Currently, the US-10 corridor east of Scottville has commercial and higher density residential zoning along the south side of the highway all the way to Custer. There should not be any commercial or high density residential zoning between Scottville and Custer except for the first one half mile east of Scottville and about one quarter mile west of Custer on the north side of the highway. This is because of the lack of public sewer and water, and the presence of both utilities plus a five-lane road west of Scottville.

Big Box Commercial Designated Area

The area around the US-10/US-31 interchange will be designated as “Big Box Commercial.” This is where establishments known as “Big Box Stores” should be encouraged to locate (such as the Meijer, Home Depot, Lowes and WalMart that are already there). This location will provide better access for the larger stores, and will allow for a mix of other types of commercial, industrial and residential uses farther east along the corridor, where a variety of smaller businesses are located, and where the transportation and site impacts of “big box” stores could be more difficult to manage. There is a need for new connecting roads in this area as described in Chapter Five.

Protection of Important Natural Features

In order to protect water quality and sensitive environments in Mason County, careful development approaches will need to be used along rivers, streams, lakes, floodplains, wetlands and dunes. A continuing educational effort will be needed regarding the value of natural features and regulatory and volunteer methods to protect those resources.

Wetlands, Rivers and Streams

Of particular concern are wetlands, rivers and streams. These are shown on Map 3-2, Floodplains and Wetlands. Very few of the floodplains in the county have been mapped through the FEMA National Flood Insurance Program. The FEMA maps help identify areas that should not be built upon in order to limit the potential for property damage and to limit the potential increase in flooding due to floodplain development. Local units of government must request FEMA to produce the maps. Floodplain areas not mapped by FEMA should be identified and development limited in those areas. Map 3-2 provides clues to where some of the floodplains are for which FEMA floodplain maps have not yet been requested. These clues include river segments with multiple stream channels or frequent switchbacks and bends. As of 2013, FEMA has been updating the floodplain maps which should be adopted by 2014.

Wetlands shown on Map 3-2 were identified by the National Wetlands Inventory. Wetlands exist across most of Mason County, which means that development will have to be designed very carefully in order to protect valuable wetland functions. Wetland functions include stormwater storage and cleansing, groundwater recharge, spawning area for fish, nesting habitat for birds and other animals, and natural scenery.

Map 3-2 shows the location of rivers and streams in Mason County, most of which are of very high quality, supporting desirable species of game fish. Rivers and streams should be protected by setting development back from shorelines, providing vegetative filter

strips, directing stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces away from surface water and preventing sediment, toxic chemicals and warmed water from entering the water.

Map 3-1, Key Policies, indicates streams that have protective greenbelt zoning provisions. The Pere Marquette River is designated as a state Natural River, and as a federal Scenic River. These designations mandate certain provisions to help retain the naturalness of the shoreline and to help protect river water quality. Those provisions include deeper setbacks for buildings, greater minimum lot widths, limitations on the size of signs, deeper setbacks for septic systems, a natural vegetation buffer strip, limitations on the clearing of shoreline vegetation and control of access to the river. The county will support enforcement of those provisions in order to protect this economic and quality of life asset.

High Risk Erosion Areas

Map 3-1 indicates where the state has identified Lake Michigan shoreline at high risk for erosion. The map legend indicates the projected rate of recession (erosion of shoreline bluffs in a landward direction), with shoreline segments identified by green bands likely to experience comparatively slower rates than the segments identified by yellow and red bands. The recession rate is expressed by two numbers, with the first representing the distance of projected recession over a 30 year period, and the second number the rate projected over a 60 year period. Development of shoreline properties should not be permitted within the projected recession area. Other measures, such as planting or retaining vegetation on dunes and bluffs, and directing the runoff from impervious surfaces away from the top of bluffs should be required. This will require careful coordination with the DEQ which administers high risk erosion area regulations.

Barrier Dunes

Map 3-2 shows the location of designated barrier dunes. These were originally identified as part of PA 222 of 1976. The "Critical Dune Area" portion of the law was separated out as Part 353 of the Michigan Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, PA 451 of 1994 and retained the title of "Sand Dune Protection and Management", which is administered by the DEQ's Land & Water Management Division. The mining regulation became Part 637 with the title "Sand Dune Mining", and is administered by the DEQ's Geological Survey Division.

There are designated critical dune areas along the shore from the City of Ludington north into Grant Township. Much of this area is in public ownership, either Ludington State Park or the Manistee National Forest. In those areas that are privately owned, the county and local units of government should work closely with the MDEQ and MDNR to ensure that development or mining activities proceed in a manner that will ensure the sustainability of the shoreline dune environment.

Photo 3-2
Mason County Dunes



Photo by Robert Garrett

Public Facilities

The locations of existing public facilities are shown on Map 3-1. While some communities plan improvements to existing facilities (see the Mason County Data Book, Chapter 7, Public Facilities and Physical Services), there are no known plans for the construction of new facilities in the near future. All proposed new public facilities in the county by any governmental entity should be reviewed by the County Planning Commission for consistency with this Plan.

Recreation

Recreation is an important part of the tourism economic sector and of the quality of life for residents of Mason County. Map 3-1 shows the locations of parks, Ludington State Park, Manistee National Forest, the North Country Trail, and existing or proposed bike and snowmobile trails. Completing the proposed bike trail routes and providing for pedestrian and bike connections from residential areas to other points of attraction will be important in making the county more attractive for new businesses and residents. It will also help promote an active and healthy lifestyle for county residents.

Rural Areas

It is the policy of the county that the use of rural lands be devoted to agricultural and forest production and the occasional non-farm residence. Privately owned rural areas are shown in white on the Key Policies Map (Map 3-1). Two changes are needed to see this policy become effective. One, the permitted zoning density on existing agricultural and forest lands should be changed from one dwelling unit per acre, to something substantially less; in the area of one dwelling unit per 40 acres would be best. This is known as a quarter-quarter system. The maximum lot size for each dwelling unit would be 2 acres (unless the District Health Department required more because of soil conditions for the septic system). Thus a farmer with 120 acres would be permitted 3 dwellings on 2-acre lots. This protects large amounts of farm and forest land for long-term farming and forest management. If a landowner desired a higher density, they would have to pursue rezoning to a zone which allowed a higher density. This change

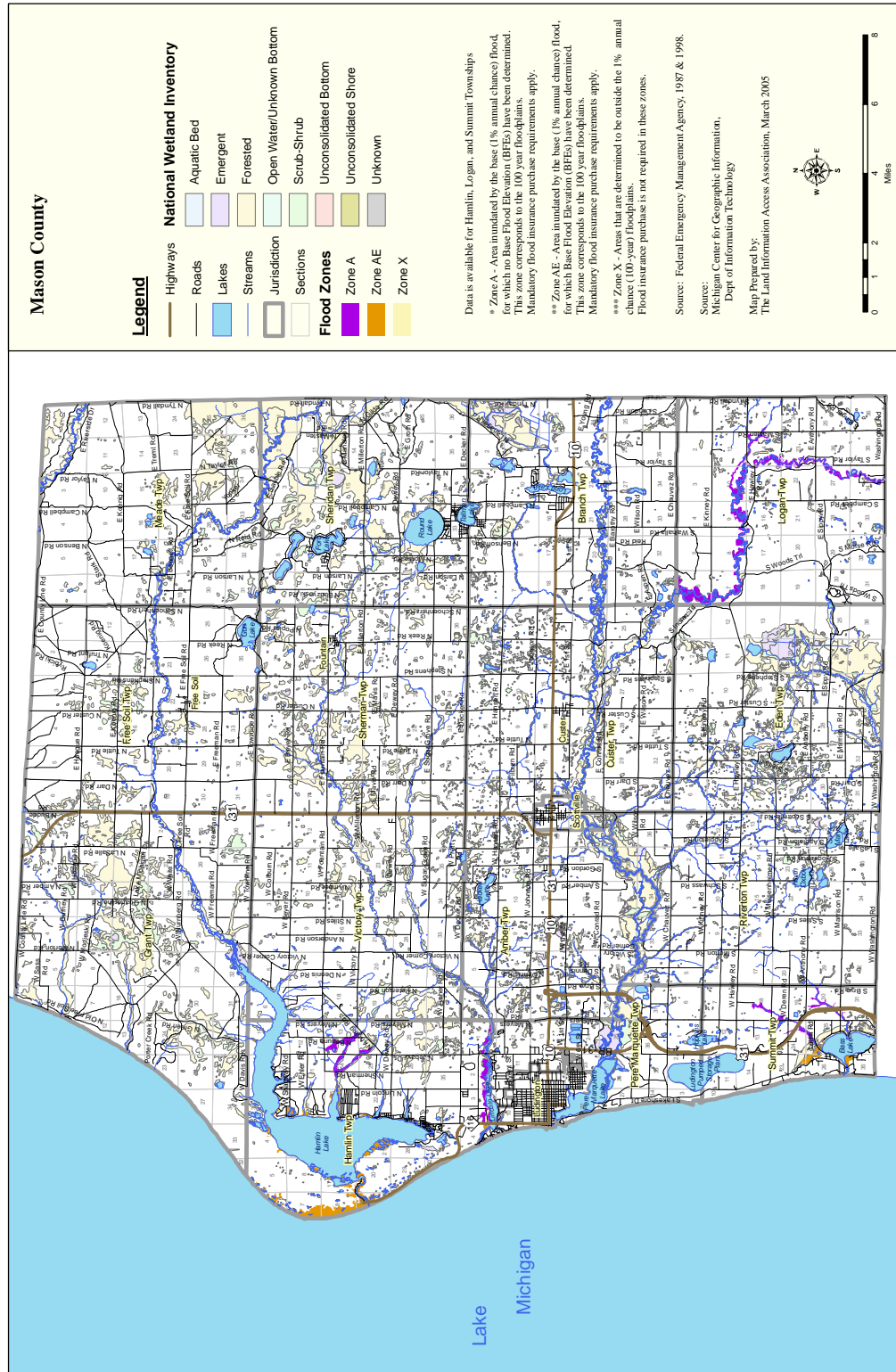
would allow farmers to score higher on the state or federal purchase of development rights (PDR) programs. These are long-term preservation programs where government pays farmers for the development rights to farmland. However, there are other options that should be considered if there is insufficient political support for moving to the quarter-quarter system. These other options are described later in this chapter. Second, the county should explore creating its own PDR program and a transfer of development rights (TDR) program as well. Development rights programs require new ordinance provisions. A TDR program requires the identification of “sending zones” and “receiving zones.” In Mason County, sending zones would be identified in agricultural areas where soils are especially suited for farming and where they may be under imminent threat of conversion from agriculture to other uses. Receiving zones would be set up where more concentrated development is desired, such as in the area designated for medium and high density residential along the US-10/US-31 corridor.

Photo 3-3
**Rural Areas Should be Devoted Primarily
to Agriculture and Forestry**



Photo by Robert Garrett

Map 3-2 Floodplains and Wetlands



KEY LAND USE POLICIES—PART B

This section describes key policies toward land use in townships, cities and villages in Mason County that are not subject to county zoning. It is intended to provide an overview of the direction the county intends for land use change in the future, and how those communities not subject to county zoning can participate in preparing for a common future with other communities in the county. Map 3-1 illustrates key policies.

In general, the intent is to concentrate future development in specific areas while preserving important natural resources, agriculture, forestry and rural character. Development areas include the US-10/US-31 corridor from the interchange to Scottville and in the existing cities and villages when public sewer and water are provided.

Not all of the important Lake Michigan shoreline, inland lakes, rivers and streams in Mason County are under county zoning. Important stretches are in Grant, Hamlin and Pere Marquette Townships, as well as in the City of Ludington, all of which have their own zoning. It is important to coordinate protection of important environmental features across all contiguous jurisdictions, as nature does not respect jurisdiction boundaries.

Community Service Areas

The Key Policies Map (Map 3-1) shows the outline of proposed community service areas around existing cities and villages. Inside these lines is where future commercial or high density development should occur, but only when public sewer and water are provided. The purpose of community service areas is to help communities manage the timing and location of growth so that community services can be provided efficiently and cost-effectively. In order for communities to provide affordable public sewer and water, there will need to be a sufficient number of and concentration of hook-ups to homes and businesses and participation by the development community. The Community Services Area lines shown on Map 3-1 indicate the proposed limits of community service areas over at least the next twenty years. As time passes, an evaluation of growth trends can be used to guide decision making on whether the area designated for community services should be expanded or contracted, and in what directions.

Protection of Important Natural Features

Although more highly developed, the three townships, two cities and three villages not under county zoning have extensive wetlands, rivers, streams and lakeshores. The protective greenbelt zoning for rivers and streams in townships under county zoning should also be adopted by those communities that do not have it. Wetlands and floodplain ordinances should also be adopted. Protection of lands at high risk of erosion along Lake Michigan and protection of designated sand dunes should continue to be coordinated with the DEQ.

MANAGEMENT OF LAND USE IN THE FUTURE

Introduction

This section describes how land is presently used within Mason County and discusses how land is proposed to be used in the future by land use type. The discussion of future land use includes the general distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land for agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, recreational, and other land uses. The categories listed here correlate closely to the zoning districts in the Mason County Zoning Ordinance. As in the Mason County Zoning Ordinance, the residential land use category is divided into several residential land use types according to general characteristics, purpose, location and density. Generalized existing land use is shown in the Mason County Data Book on Maps 4-4 (1978 aerial photograph data) and 4-5 (2001 satellite data). Future land use is illustrated in this chapter on the Future Land Use Map, Map 3-3. The legend uses standard colors for the land uses depicted. At some point the colors on the county zoning map should be changed to the same colors as on this map. Additionally, local governments in the county are urged to use the same colors on local future land use plans and zoning maps.

Land and Water Resource Conservation

Agricultural

Agricultural land makes up about one-quarter of the land in Mason County. Much of the designated agricultural land use is comprised of prime farmland soils (as is and if drained), and farmland of local importance. This district is designed to maintain the economic viability and character of productive farmland and to allow for agri-tourism practices necessary for education and promotion of Michigan-made products.

Most of this district generally matches the areas of prime soils in the county. However, these soils and registered lands in the P.A. 116 Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program may be fragmented within this district. Agriculture is planned as the primary use for at least the next twenty years. If farmers remain committed to farming, then agriculture will be the primary use for much longer. Within this district, all non-farm related residential development including premature, scattered or sprawling strip residential development will be discouraged.

Forty acres should be considered to establish residential density using the quarter-quarter system. Each new dwelling would be on a parcel no more than 2 acres in size unless more area is required by the septic system requirements imposed by the Health Department. This preserves much more land for farming. In order to permit more housing on a parcel, the land would have to be rezoned. Large landowners would be encouraged to cluster permitted units in a small area instead of scatter them throughout a site.

However, other options should also be considered if there is inadequate support for the quarter-quarter system. These options in descending order on the table below do a poorer job of protecting farmland while increasing the number of new residences in the rural area. More residences not only increase pressure on farmers to get out of farming (through complaints and rising property values—hence taxes), they also raise demands for public services—hence taxes over time. They also pose challenges for compatibility between districts and may require a transition zone between areas where farmers commit to long term agriculture and areas of rural large lot zoning.

Other Options to Consider

Technique	Comment
Quarter-Quarter Zoning as proposed above with one dwelling unit per quarter-quarter section (or 40 acres) being the base permitted density. Existing lots less than 40 acres in size would be nonconforming and could be used for residential purposes, but if zoned agricultural, could not be divided further.	Very effective at farmland preservation for as long as farmers want to farm. If farmers want to develop they must seek a rezoning. A variation is to establish zoning standards to guide the district options which would be approvable when a rezoning is requested. For example, if farmers on adjoining lands are committed to long term farming, then the next lowest density would be selected. If surrounding lands are at a common density, such as one dwelling unit (DU) per 10 acres, then that density should be selected. If surrounding land is at a variety of densities, such as 1DU per 10 acres, 1 DU per 5 acres, and 1 DU per 2 acres, then the lowest compatible density should be selected (perhaps part of the farm at one density and the rest at another).
Quarter-Quarter Zoning as proposed above, but only farmers that petition to be rezoned into this district would be so rezoned. This requires a second agricultural zone as well, usually with a one DU/20 acre standard.	This eliminates the political problem, but it may not result in many protected acres. The benefit to farmers would be the higher score to participate in the state PDR program, or in an exclusive agricultural district tax benefit, if that legislation ever passes.
Quarter-Quarter Zoning as described above, but allowing two dwelling units per quarter-quarter section instead of one. The rest would be the same as above.	More residences in agricultural areas slowly undermines long term farming, so this technique is not as good as standard quarter-quarter zoning. It would still need standards to guide rezoning.
Twenty acre minimum lot size in the agricultural district (1 dwelling unit per 20 acres).	Not nearly as effective at saving farmland as quarter-quarter and over time results in 32 dwelling units/square mile which will create a long term public service burden at some future point. Plus, it is much harder for committed farmers to purchase additional farmland, as the land value is higher for residences.
Such other techniques as still protect considerable farmland while keeping the total number of residences per square mile low. These may be combinations of the above, or variations not even mentioned.	If density in the agricultural area is lowered below one DU/20 acres, virtually no farmland will be protected as the minimum unit size for most agricultural operations is 40 acres.

Forestry

Forest cover comprises about 51% of Mason County. This land use includes a mixture of private timber operations, private seasonal recreational holdings, and large lot, low density residential development. As indicated by the name, this land use is primarily wooded. The intent of this district is to assure the continued harvest of forest products and opportunities for forest recreational activities for at least the next twenty years. Land in this district neither requires nor is planned to receive intensive county services such as a high level of road maintenance, transit or public sewer and water service. Within this district, only very low density residential development using the same quarter-quarter method as in the agricultural district. Clustering of permitted units would be encouraged so as to leave very large areas undisturbed.

The lands placed under the Forest District in the zoning ordinance should be carefully examined to ensure the land is presently used for and well suited for long term forest management. Both Norman Township and Stronach Townships to the north of Meade have 40 acre minimum lot sizes on private land in the National Forest. Norman Township sent back comments on the draft Plan saying forty acre minimum lot size zoning in the Mason County Forestry District was consistent with their plan and zoning ordinance. Forty acres is the usual minimum parcel size for economic forest management.

Proposed Transition Zone

If the quarter-quarter zoning or some higher density is ultimately approved in the agricultural areas, then a transition zone with a density in the one dwelling per 10 acre range may be necessary to serve as a buffer around farmland committed to long term agricultural use. However, any density greater than one dwelling per 10 acres will exceed the capacity of gravel roads and put great demand on the Road Commission to pave those roads. Paving will only increase demand for more dwellings in agricultural and forestry areas, so great care should be exercised before establishing a transition zone, or establishing any density greater than one dwelling per 10 acres.

Greenbelt District

This overlay district applies to relatively large, contiguous environmentally sensitive areas within Mason County, along rivers and streams to a depth of 300' on each side. This land use category reflects the desire to maintain the environmental quality of ecological systems not yet severely degraded by intensive development. Segments of the Manistee River, Big Sauble River, Lincoln River and the north and south branches of the Lincoln River are prominent among the rivers and streams included. While residential lots of a minimum of ½ acre are permitted in this district, provisions such as a native vegetation strip, limitations on construction within the floodplain, and setback requirements for septic systems are also included. While the greenbelt zoning district provides specific standards, on site evaluation of development proposals will remain important.

Natural River District: Pere Marquette Natural and Scenic River Corridor

The Pere Marquette River from the Pere Marquette Highway bridge east to the county line, and including several branches are designated as both a Natural River by the State of Michigan, and a Scenic River by the Federal government. The Natural River designation requires increased setbacks and lot widths, a natural vegetation strip with limited vegetation clearing, limits on signs, and other provisions for a corridor extending 400' landward from each side of the river. The Federal Scenic River designation extends

approximately ¼ mile inland from the centerline of the river on each side. Scenic rivers are those rivers or river segments that are free of impoundments, with shorelines or watersheds still largely primitive and shorelines largely undeveloped, but accessible in places by roads. Scenic rivers are managed to help prevent damage due to overuse or misuse of the shoreline.

Natural river regulations may be enforced by the federal or state governments, as well as by county and local governments. Public access should continue to be provided, but the impact of those access sites should be minimized and periodically evaluated. Treatments to eradicate Lamprey Eels are permitted. Educational opportunities about the importance of the natural and scenic river designations and appropriate management of the rivers should be provided.

Public and Conservancy Land Uses—Manistee National Forest and Ludington State Park

These lands provide for recreational opportunities and the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas. This designation includes lands in the Manistee National Forest, Ludington State Park, other Michigan Department of Natural Resources lands, local parks and any land conservancy properties. To date, the efforts of land conservancies in Mason County have been primarily focused on providing expertise for the management of ecosystems, rather than on acquisition of land for long-term preservation.

Photo 3-4
Ludington State Park

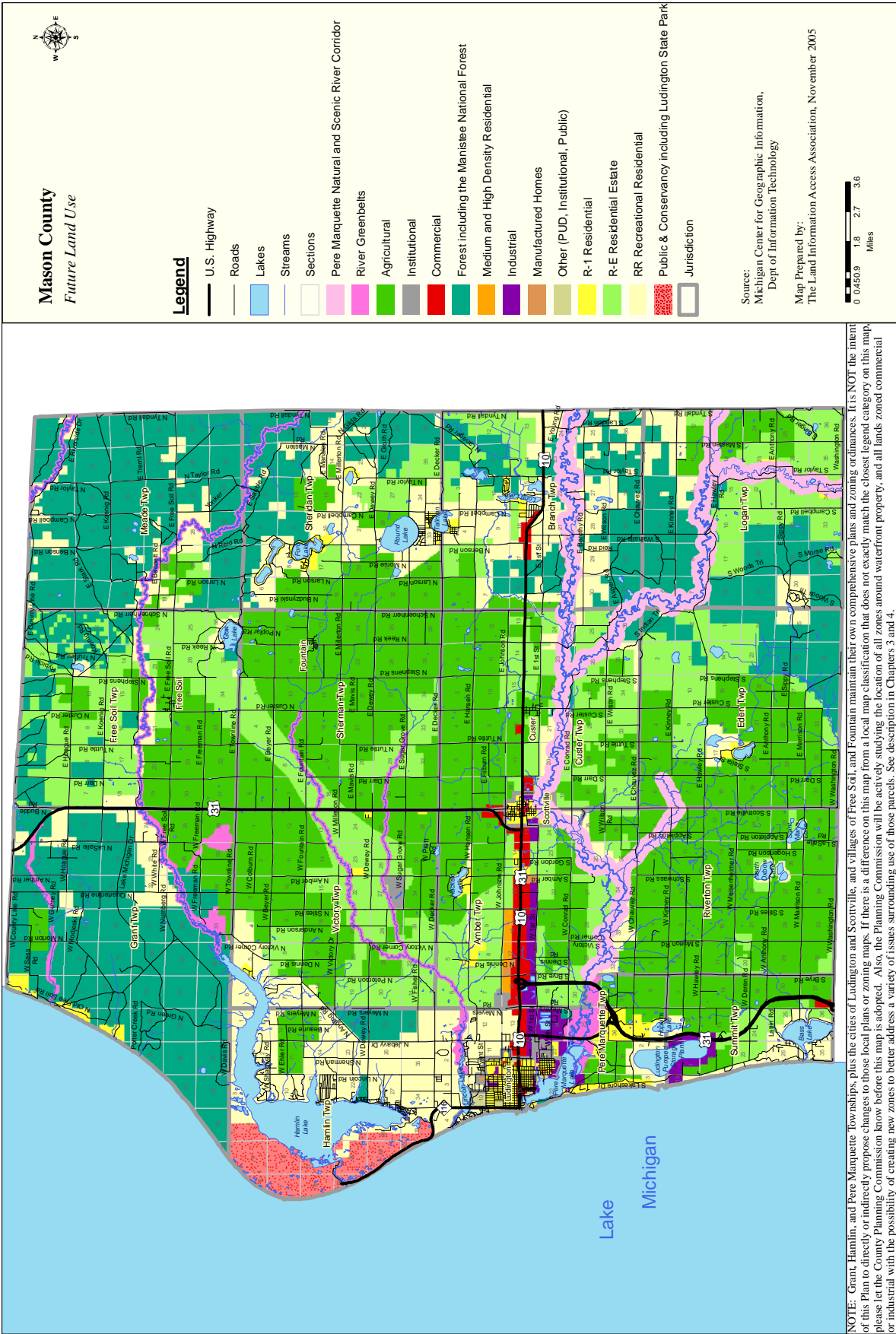


Photo by Robert Garrett

The county and local units of government should actively participate in discussions on the management of these lands in order to help promote citizen interests and ensure the continued benefit of these largely public lands. Sensitive environments such as wetlands, floodplains, sand dunes and areas of threatened or endangered species not already in public ownership should be protected by the acquisition of those lands by public entities or private conservancies where possible.

Local educational opportunities regarding sustainable management of public and conservancy lands should be encouraged, including guidance on appropriate management of private lands adjacent to public and conservancy lands.

Map 3-3 Mason County Future Land Use



Urban and Built Lands

Lands that are built upon comprise only 3.8% of Mason County. These include residential, commercial and industrial development. While only a small percentage of the area of the entire county, they have a significant visual and environmental affect. The discussion that follows describes how residential, commercial and industrial land uses should be managed in the future in order to insure that urban land uses have a positive affect on the county.

Rural Estates Residential

This land use district is intended to provide land for residential growth of a rural character in areas that are presently without public sewer and water and likely to remain without such services. It is also intended to permit continued agriculture, and to serve as a transition from agricultural uses to residential uses. The Rural Estates Residential district is spread throughout the county, but generally is not on prime agricultural lands. This district accommodates low density single family development on large lots where there may also be large gardens, limited farming, horses and other livestock managed by the gentleman or gentlewoman farmer. Residential development is presently permitted on lots of one acre or more. Conservation subdivisions and clustering should be encouraged within this land use as a means of preserving open space, and where feasible, the continuation of farming. Farms within this district are encouraged to continue in farming, and non-farm residents should be provided educational opportunities regarding the dust, noise, smells and chemical use that are part of normal farming operations, and the importance of farming to the local economy.

Recreational Residential

This land use district is intended to provide for the orderly development of areas bordering on or adjacent to publicly owned recreation lands and/or undeveloped portions of inland lakes of the county. Most of the areas of this district occur in large blocks, such as in Hamlin Township, as well as among National Forest lands in the eastern part of the county, and in small tracts bordering inland lakes and rivers. Activities relating to recreational pursuits occur within or adjacent to this district and provide for such services as hotels and motels, boat liveries and community commercial service. Public sewer and water do not exist in these areas and county services are minimal. In some instances lake boards or associations have been created to represent riparian land owners within this land use district. Owners of these parcels should be encouraged to practice stewardship of the natural resources adjacent to their properties. This means protecting lake water quality by limiting imperviousness, limiting the use of fertilizers and pesticides, providing a vegetation strip along lakeshores and riverbanks and making sure sediments do not enter surface waters. Private land owners adjacent to public lands can also practice stewardship by ensuring that fires do not spread to forest lands, junk is not deposited on public lands, and clearing of vegetation is limited. Land owners in this district should be provided educational opportunities on lake stewardship and forest land management practices.

- Presently this district is being “asked” to do too much and it isn’t working very well to meet either landowner needs or natural resource protection needs in many places. One problem is that the district has a 1/3 acre minimum lot size requirement, but many waterfront lots are already much smaller. Continue to monitor the policy adopted in the Zoning Ordinance that lessens setbacks in the RR district based on the width of the lot.

R-1 Residential

This district is intended to provide for medium density single-family residential development. Lot sizes of ¼ acre are permitted in areas where public sewer and water are available. Larger lot sizes are necessary in places where public sewer and water are not available, and lot size is determined by the ability to adequately provide for both an on-site well and a septic system. This district is limited in area in the county, and is located along US-31 and along the Lake Michigan shore in Pere Marquette Township, along the Lake Michigan shoreline in Grant Township, along Hanson Road in Amber Township and in scattered locations in the eastern part of the county. It should be the minimum district density for new development south of Johnson Road, east of the US-10/US-31 freeway interchange and west of Stiles Road.

Manufactured Home Parks

There are manufactured homes in manufactured home parks (also called mobile home parks) in Mason County and on individual parcels. Two manufactured home parks are provided for as a future land use in the US-10/US-31 development corridor. One is on the south side of the highway by Amber Road and the other is on the north side, adjacent to and just north of Meijers. In addition to existing mobile home parks in Pere Marquette Township, they are expected to be adequate for the provision of manufactured home parks for the near future. It is important that manufactured home parks be located where there is adequate sewer and water service, and all-weather roads adequate for the traffic load. That makes them an eligible land use along the US-10/US-31 development corridor.

Medium to High Density Residential

This district is intended to provide for single-family homes with a density greater than four units per acre and preferably 8-12 units per acre. This density is usually associated with small lot subdivisions, condominium development, mobile home parks and multi-family housing. These areas need to be close to job centers, shopping and other activities. High density residential is only available where there is public sewer and water available, and will help support publicly-provided infrastructure. For the near future, the only new areas of high density residential will be in Ludington, Scottville and along and north of the commercial area on the north side of the US-10/US-31 corridor between Ludington and Stiles Road. High density residential as infill where parts of this district are not already developed at maximum density would be an effective use of existing infrastructure. This district should also include sidewalks and bike trails that connect to schools, shopping, offices, industries, parks and civic facilities. Bike and walking paths should also connect into rural areas of the county.

Commercial

This land use district includes areas of concentrated commercial development along with areas planned for future permanent commercial activities. The intent is for this district to encourage retail, business and service uses to be concentrated within areas that allow for high volumes of traffic flow, are provided with public sewer and water, contiguous and adjacent to similar land use activities.

The primary areas of commercial land use are along the US-10/US-31 corridor from Ludington to Scottville. Other commercial areas include the US-31 corridor immediately north of Scottville, but not any farther north along US-31; the first half mile east of Scottville along and on the south side of the US-10 corridor; along and on the north side

of the US-10 corridor west of Custer; along a half mile segment of the US-10 corridor in Branch Township and in a few other isolated locations.

All commercial areas should be designed in order to contribute to a high-quality visual character of Mason County. They should also employ access management principles as detailed in the Mason County US-10/US-31 Corridor Access Management Plan.

Industrial

This district includes both existing areas of, and desired areas for industrial development. It provides for manufacturing, as well as assembling and fabrication activities in a manner that will minimize the effects on abutting land use districts. Industrial districts are intended to be located in areas that typically provide full public services such as public sewer and water, or where they can be easily extended. It is also the intent to provide sufficient space and traffic flow for industrial activities, and buffering from less intensive land uses or environmentally sensitive areas.

Photo 3-5
Mason County Industry



Photo by Robert Garrett

The industrial land use district includes existing industrial businesses both in the industrial park in Ludington and those in other areas, such as in Pere Marquette Charter Township. It includes the area both south and north surrounding the Ludington Pump Storage Facility. It also includes a new industrial area along and to the south of the US-10/US-31 corridor between Ludington and Scottville. This is an area served by both railroad and highway. Because drainage is a problem in this corridor, special attention must be paid to on-site storage of stormwater. Other small industrial areas will also exist in Scottville, Custer and other villages. Because of the wide variation in industrial uses a distinction should be made between “heavy” and “light” industrial districts. This will require rezoning some parcels. See Chapter Four for more information.

Industrial sites should be designed to have a positive visual character, to protect sensitive environments and to have buffers with less intensive uses, such as residential.

Analysis of Plans and Ordinances of Adjoining Jurisdictions

How one community develops at its borders affects the communities on the other side of that border and vice versa. It is important for Mason County to understand the potential affect of adjacent community plans and ordinances while developing its own plan. The proposed arrangement of future land uses described in this chapter and the policies proposed to support that arrangement are compatible with existing plans in adjoining jurisdictions. Zoning in jurisdictions within Mason County were evaluated to ensure consistency along county borders.