

# Marquette County Recreation Plan 2025-2029



Prepared by the Marquette County Resource Management  
Department - Planning Division



## Contents

Figures and Tables .....	3
Appendices .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Community Description .....	5
Administrative Structure.....	5
Roles of Commissions .....	5
General Operations and Staffing .....	5
Funding Sources.....	6
Forest and Recreation Fund Administration .....	6
Recreation Budget .....	7
Capital Budgeting.....	7
Programming .....	7
Volunteer Support .....	8
Relationships with School Districts, Other Public Agencies or Private Organizations .....	8
Recreation Inventory .....	9
County Owned Recreation Facilities.....	9
Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area.....	10
Perkins Park .....	11
Big Bay Harbor of Refuge.....	11
Honor Camp Property .....	12
County Owned Forestland .....	13
Little Trout Lake .....	13
Previous Grant Assistance.....	14
Public Input and Planning Process .....	16
Public Input.....	16
Planning Process.....	16
Survey Results .....	16
Demographics .....	20
Community Population .....	21
Persons with Disabilities .....	21
Goals and Objectives.....	22
Action Program .....	23



## Figures and Tables

---

Figure 1: Marquette County Locator Map.....	4
Figure 2: Administrative Structure.....	6
Figure 3: Marquette County-Owned Recreation Facilities.....	9
Table 1: Marquette County Recreation Budget.....	7
Table 2: Status Report on Grant-Assisted Recreation Acquisitions & Development.....	14
Table 3: Marquette County Recreation Action Program, 2024-2029.....	26

## Appendices

---

Appendix A-1: Accessibility Report	
Appendix A-2: Site Review for Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area Gravel Lot	
Appendix A-3: Marquette County Recreation Survey 2024	
Appendix B: Big Bay Harbor 5 Year Master Plan	
Appendix C: Big Bay Harbor of Refuge Improvement Plan	
Appendix D: Post-Completion Self-Certification Reports	
Appendix E: Plan Adoption Documents	
Appendix F: Plan Certification Checklist	

## Introduction

---

The intent of the Marquette County Recreation Plan, 2025-2029 is to identify the role of the County's recreational resources in meeting residents' recreation needs and to determine the best direction for future improvements to county-owned recreational facilities. It is the County's intention to enhance local recreational opportunities and not compete with local, state, federal, and private recreation facilities.

The plan was written in accordance with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plans. A five-year recreation plan is required to be eligible to apply for recreation grants administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Grants Administration Division. Funding for eligible projects comes from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), the Clean Michigan Initiative Recreation Bond Fund, and the Recreation Passport Grant Program.

A draft of the Marquette County Recreation Plan was released for public review on October 18, 2024. Notices were sent to each municipality in Marquette County announcing that the Plan was available for review and comment on the Marquette County website at [www.mqtcoplan.org](http://www.mqtcoplan.org) and a notice of availability was posted in the local newspaper, the Mining Journal on October 18, 2024. One public comment was electronically received regarding the Perkins Park boat launch dock needing upkeep.

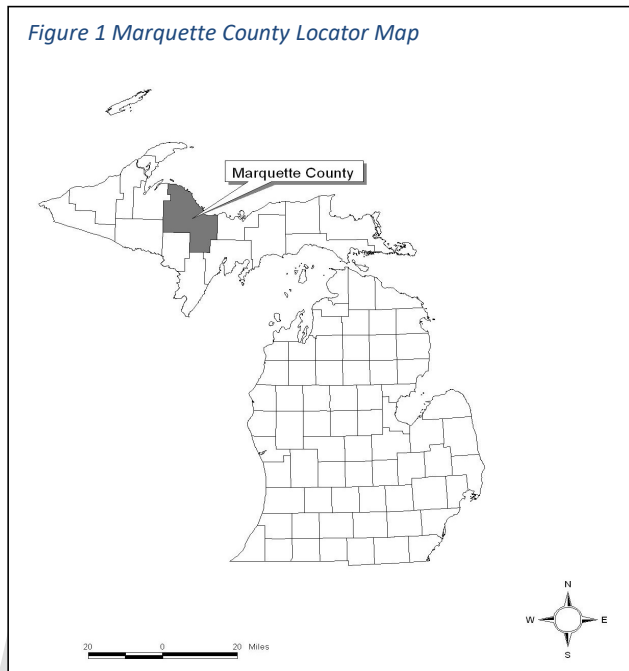
Notification of the public hearing was announced in the local newspaper of general circulation on December 2, 2024 and was posted on the County's website. On December 17, 2024, the Marquette County Board of Commissioners conducted a public hearing on the draft plan. The Marquette County Board of Commissioners adopted the Marquette County Recreation Plan 2025-2029 on December 17, 2024 in accordance with the Guidelines as provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Grants Management Division. The Board voted \_\_\_\_\_ to approve the plan and passed a resolution of adoption. Copies of the adopted Plan were submitted to the Department of Natural Resources and the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission.

## Community Description

Nearly all municipalities in Marquette County participate in recreation planning at their local level. County participation with local units is primarily through review and recommendation regarding recreation plans that local units produce. Further, recreation features that affect more than one jurisdiction, such as the Iron Ore Heritage Trail, receive support from the County both in terms of staff and other resources. The Marquette County Recreation Plan focus is primarily on County-owned facilities (scattered in a few municipalities throughout the County) and coordinating with the “host” communities.

County facilities draw recreation participants from throughout the County and beyond. As such, it is necessary to widely gather input to provide a product that meets countywide needs.

Figure 1 Marquette County Locator Map



## Administrative Structure

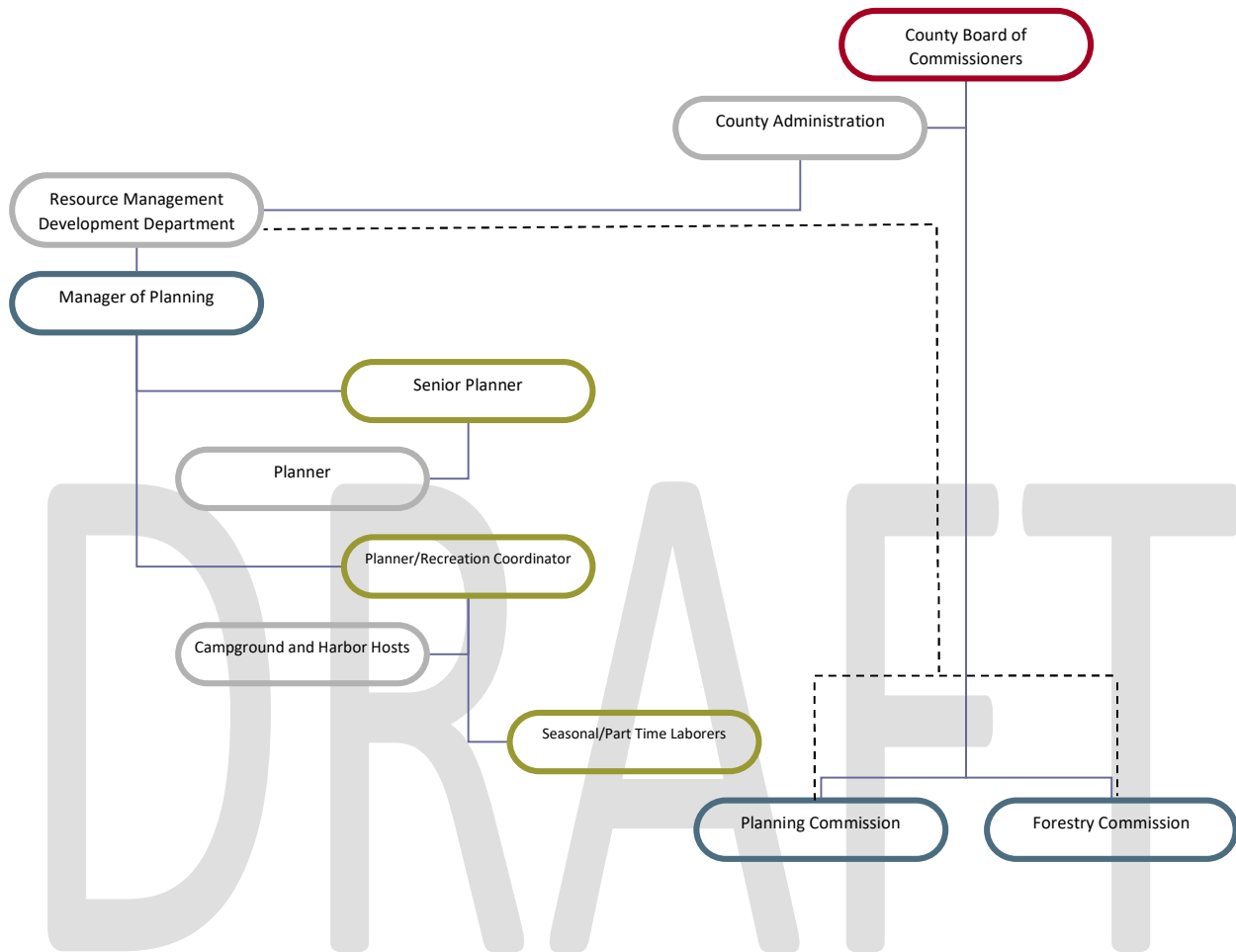
### Roles of Commissions

The Marquette County Planning Commission assists in the development of the Recreation Plan. Once the Plan is created, they assist with implementation primarily by recommending grant applications to the County Board. The Marquette County Forestry Commission, under the authority granted to it by the County Board, monitors monthly budgets funded by the Forest and Recreation Fund.

### General Operations and Staffing

The daily administration and maintenance of County recreation facilities is the responsibility of the Resource Management and Development Department Planning Division. The Department allocates 3.70 full time equivalents to the operation and maintenance of the facilities (3.05 Perkins Park, 0.30 Harbor, 0.25 Sugarloaf, and 0.10 Little Trout Lake). Other staff from the Facilities and Building Code Divisions are available to assist when necessary.

Figure 2 Administrative Structure



### Funding Sources

Funding for Marquette County Recreation sites is provided by the Marquette County Forest and Recreation Fund. Revenues in support of recreation activities are derived from three sources; 1) timber sales in the County Forest, 2) user fees generated by campers at Perkins Park and boaters at the Big Bay Harbor of Refuge, and 3) grants.

### Forest and Recreation Fund Administration

Ultimate authority over the Forest and Recreation Fund resides with the County Board through the budgetary approval process. The County Board has delegated this authority to the Forestry Commission, which is appointed by the County Board. Planning Division staff are responsible for direct oversight of facilities on a day-to-day basis.

## Recreation Budget

The following table represents the 2024 budget and the 2025 budget recommendation. Note the significant expenditures on recreation. In 2024, the County has acquired a Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development grant to make improvements at Sugarloaf Mountain. Perkins Park and Campground received fans and for the yurts with capital improvement funding as well as security cameras. The office at Big Bay Harbor received a new roof and security cameras.

Table 1 Marquette County Recreation Budget

Account	Revenue		Expenditure	
	Actual <u>2024</u>	Anticipated <u>2025</u>	Actual <u>2024</u>	Anticipated <u>2025</u>
Perkins Park	\$ 190,423	\$184,200	\$ 205,121	\$ 233,061
Harbor	\$ 14,250	\$ 17,030	\$ 22,728	\$ 39,600
Sugarloaf	None	None	\$ 19,114	\$ 26,500
Little Trout Lake	None	None	\$ 4,100	\$ 31,400

## Capital Budgeting

There are two types of capital projects: 1) capital programming and 2) capital improvement.

Capital programming includes projects that are infrequent but substantial purchases such as replacement of picnic tables or fire rings, observation deck preserving/staining, etc.

Capital improvement funds are set aside in support of matching funds that are guaranteed in various grant applications.

## Programming

The County is still in the early stages of program development. Since 2018, the Perkins Park Harvest Festival has taken place during the third weekend in September and has served as a pilot for recreation programming. Although the Harvest Festivals have proven to be a huge success, they do require a significant amount of resources to put on. With limited personnel, future programming must be carefully designed so staff are able to carry out routine functions. Any additional program development should be financially self-sustaining.

### Volunteer Support

Various organizations have provided support at County recreation sites. The Boy Scouts have assisted with projects at Sugarloaf Mountain, the County Forest, and Perkins Park. The Audubon Society has aided in Kirtland's Warbler surveys in the County Forest and trail hiker organizations have assisted at Sugarloaf Mountain.

### Relationships with School Districts, Other Public Agencies or Private Organizations

Many groups, agencies, and organizations use County recreation facilities. Previously, County staff has teamed up with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide educational opportunities for middle school students in the Gwinn School District, featuring a field trip to the County Forest to learn about forest management and observe artificially created Kirtland's Warbler habitat. The County also provides "no fee" licensing of a snowmobile trail through the Forest.

Perkins Park in Big Bay is another County facility used by various agencies and organizations. The Park is used as a "base of operation" for the Big Bay 550 Snowmobile Club Fishing Derby every winter and the Big Bay Sportsman Club sponsors a tournament every spring. The Park has served as the end point of the Big Bay Relay, a running race from Marquette to Big Bay facilitated by the Noquemanon Trail Network. Perkins Park has been used by the Department of Natural Resources for lake access in both summer and winter as part of the *Becoming an Outdoor Woman* program.

Bay Cliff Health Camp, a year-round non-profit therapy and wellness center for children and adults with physical disabilities, uses both the harbor and park. The Marquette Area Public Schools system sends students to Bay Cliff and uses the park and harbor every spring. Powell Township School District hosts an annual picnic at the park.

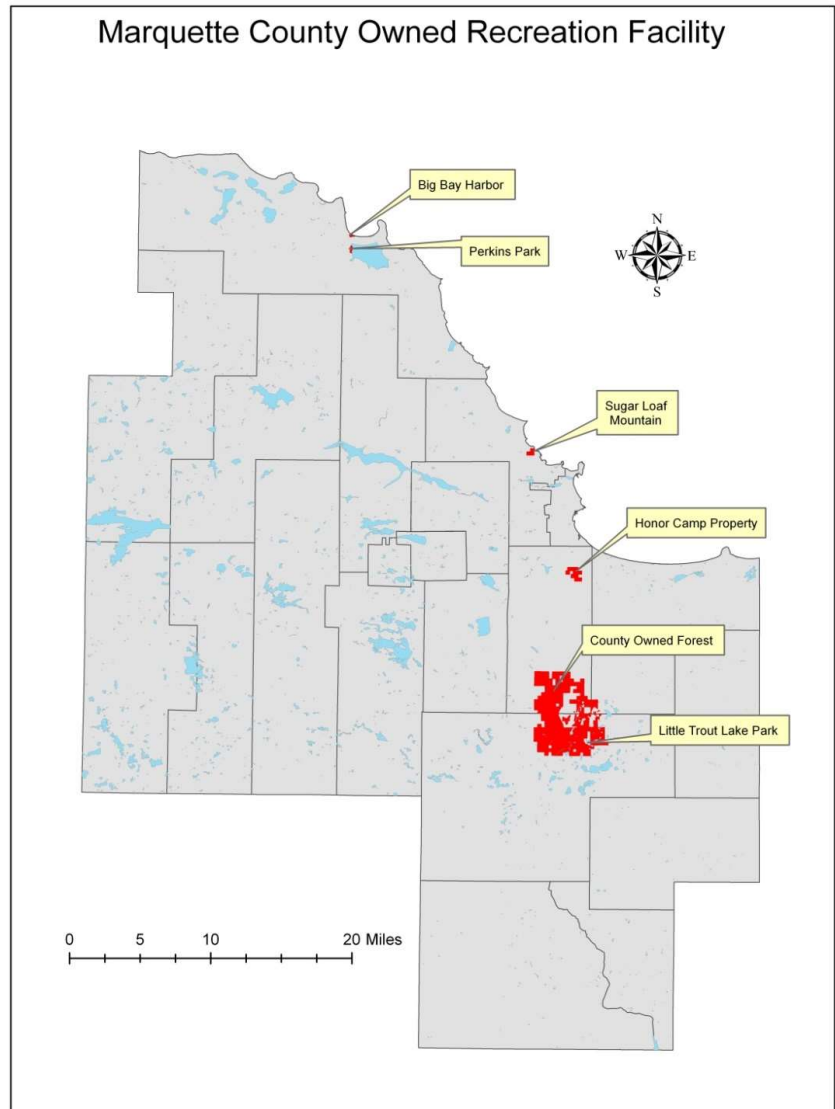


## Recreation Inventory

### County Owned Recreation Facilities

The County of Marquette owns, operates, and maintains four recreational facilities: Sugarloaf Mountain, Perkins Park, the Big Bay Harbor of Refuge, and Little Trout Lake Park. The County also owns nearly 10,000 acres of multi-use forestland, with approximately 9,500 acres in the County Forest and 420 acres at the Honor Camp.

Figure 3. Marquette County Owned Recreation Facilities



### Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area

Sugarloaf Mountain is natural resource area owned by Marquette County and located in Marquette Township. Sugarloaf Mountain is one of the most popular scenic overlooks on the central Upper Peninsula coastline.

According to the Marquette County recreation survey, Sugarloaf Mountain was by far the most popular recreation facility in the County, with more than 82% of survey respondents reporting that they had visited Sugarloaf. Upon 2019 review by Superior Alliance for Independent Living, Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area was rated a 1 for accessibility, with the new Sugarloaf Overflow Parking receiving a 3 for accessibility in 2024.



Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area consists of a 3,200 foot trail of pathway and stairway segments that lead to the mountain's summit 470 feet above Lake Superior. There are viewing platforms on the mountain's summit, which provide a spectacular view of Lake Superior, the rugged lakeshore, and the surrounding forestlands for many miles. Marquette County owns 120 acres at the site, including a paved parking lot, the trail system, and some land west of County Road 550. The County Board has demonstrated their commitment to the preservation and improvement of Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area by funding several development projects. In the past few years, the facility has received improvements including: the installation of a new gravel parking lot, upgraded installation of interpretive signage, a pit toilet, smart waste collection systems, picnic tables, and a bike rack. In the last year, improvements have been focused on maintenance to the structures at the top of the mountain and other trail improvements to address erosion and water diversion.

### Perkins Park

The 45-acre park is a regional park located along the west shore of Lake Independence in the town of Big Bay in Powell Township. The Park has 75 campsites, 48 of which provide electrical hookups. Of those 48 sites, 28 have water and sanitary hookups. There are two sites with rustic yurts. The south and central areas collectively provide 24 campsites without utilities. Beginning in 2025, these sites will have solar power. Upon review by Superior Alliance for Independent Living, Perkins Park was given an accessibility rating of a 2.

The south campground has 20 primitive tent campsites with no individual utility hookups. However, there are three water spigots in the area to accommodate campers. In addition to the campsites, there is a swimming beach, bathhouse, and day use area, boat launch, fish cleaning station, restrooms and a barrier free trail. The park is open for use from mid-May to mid-October.



### Big Bay Harbor of Refuge



The Big Bay Harbor of Refuge is a special uses area located on Lake Superior in the town of Big Bay. The harbor development was a result of a statewide program to construct protective harbors around the Great Lakes so that no boater was more than 30 miles from a protective harbor. The harbor area is 6 acres in size and consists of a break wall, mooring bulkhead, boat launch, and a harbormaster's building. Previous improvements to the harbor include the installation of a water and sewer line, renovations to the restrooms to meet ADA compliance standards, the replacement of a gas dispensing system, and repairs to erosion on the east end of the mooring bulkhead. In 2013 the sidewalk was replaced and minor repairs to the mooring bulkhead were made. Upon site review by Superior Alliance for Independent Living, Big Bay Harbor of Refuge was given an accessibility rating of a 2. A 2013 state-funded dredging grant was used to improve harbor function, and the Harbor was dredged in 2023 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



The harbor has a 275-foot sheet pile and concrete mooring bulkhead. The bulkhead has 10 slips for seasonal and transient boaters. Water and power are available at each slip. The west end of the bulkhead has fuel and sewage pumping, restrooms, and shower facilities for slip renters. A boat launch and parking lot is open to day-use boaters.

The facility is currently used by both small and large watercraft. Larger boats tend to use the bulkhead for broadside moorage. Smaller craft tend to use the undeveloped east end of the basin where individual boat owners have constructed wooden docks extending from the sand bank. Boats are also allowed to anchor in the harbor basin.

As a protective harbor, the Big Bay Harbor of Refuge is very important to the boating community on the south shore of Lake Superior. Storms can develop rapidly and catch boaters by surprise. By design, the harbor is always available for shelter and refueling.

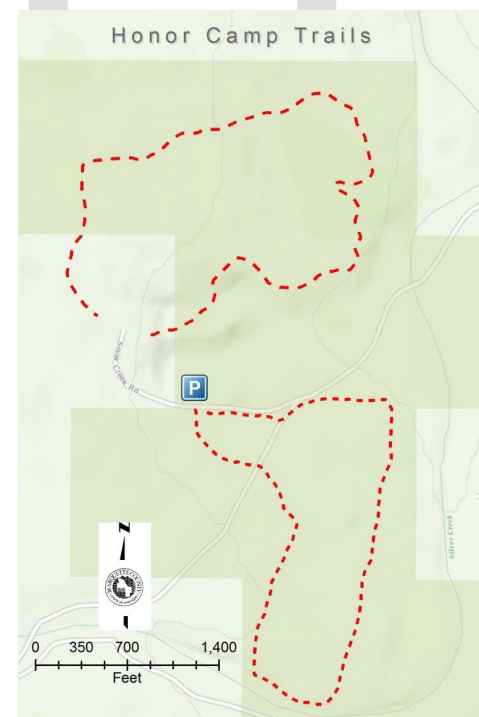
In February 2007, an engineering study was completed to evaluate the condition of the existing land facilities and measure and evaluate the current rates of sand shoaling and dredging frequencies. Recommendations were made for improvements in maintenance and structural modifications to the land facilities. Further recommendations were made to improve and modify the existing breakwater structures in order to minimize periodic dredging activities.

In 2012, the State surveyed Michigan harbors for dredging needs. This statewide survey indicated a serious need for dredging, and the Legislature and Governor approved funding for an Emergency Dredging Program. Big Bay Harbor of Refuge was included in the program and dredging was performed in late 2013. The Harbor was dredged again in the spring of 2019 through an initiative led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). In the summer of 2023, the Harbor was dredged and inspected for future needs by the USACE after repairs were completed on a hole in the break wall. Through the support of the MDNR Waterways Commission, a Master Plan for the Harbor was developed in 2023 and is included as an appendix of this Plan.

### Honor Camp Property

The Honor Camp property is 420 acres in size and is located in the northwest corner of Sands Township. The property is an open space, which is heavily wooded and Marquette County uses it as multi-use forest which includes recreation, wildlife, and timber harvest operations. Features on site include Silver Creek, a portion of Silver Creek Road (County Road NKA), a 1.5-mile looped trail north of the buildings, and another trail loop about 0.2 miles in length south of the buildings.

In 2001, all buildings and property, including the north loop trail head, within a forty-acre parcel were conveyed to Teaching Family Homes. Teaching Family Homes is a non-profit organization that works with youth and their families to address challenges. Teaching Family Homes, under license with Marquette County, has installed several exercise stations along the north loop. The facility is multi-





use and open to the public. In 2019, there was a timber harvest, the proceeds of this sale help to support maintenance at the other Marquette County recreation facilities.

#### County Owned Forestland



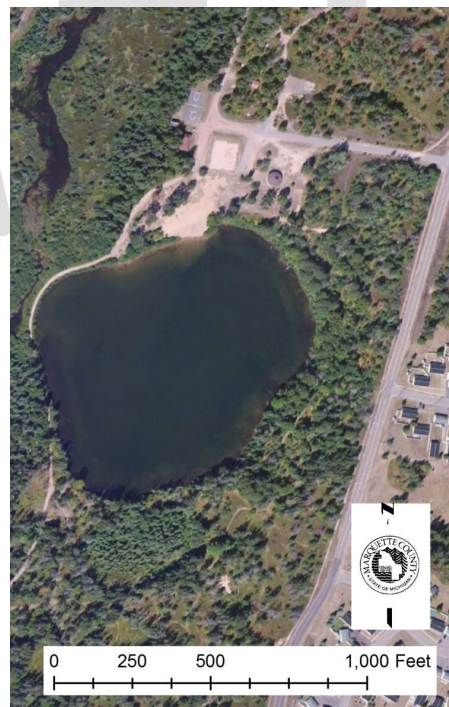
The Marquette County Forest consists of approximately 9,500 acres of managed forest in Sands and Forsyth Townships in close proximity to the community of Sawyer. It is a multi-use forest, producing forest products and providing recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Some of the recreational opportunities include hunting, fishing, ORV riding, horseback riding, snowmobiling, berry picking, and bird watching (Kirtland's Warbler of note). The county has a Forest Management Plan, separate from this document, which is used for managing the forest.

#### Little Trout Lake

This 111-acre community park is located in Forsyth Township, within the KI Sawyer Community. The park was originally developed by the U.S. Air Force for its personnel and their families, but since the closure of K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base in 1995 it has operated as a day use facility. Upon review by Superior Alliance for Independent Living, Little Trout Lake Park was given an accessibility rating of a 1.

The park consists of a 10-acre lake with a small swimming beach, pavilion for outdoor grilling and picnic tables. Other amenities include sand volleyball courts, basketball court, horseshoe pit, and swing set.

In October of 2023, Marquette County was awarded \$997,600 from the Department of Natural Resources SPARK Grant Program to revitalize the park. Proposed plans include the following: infrastructure improvements, installing utilities, increasing accessibility, and establishing designated trails and interpretation. Within the next five years, there will be a development of a wellness hub at the pavilion at Little Trout Lake which will serve as a trailhead for a larger trail system. The Silver Lead Creek Greenway Trail is anticipated to run along the Silver Lead Creek for approximately three miles and will provide a mixed use recreation space for the community.



### Previous Grant Assistance

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources recreation grants program has played an integral part in meeting the recreational needs of Marquette County residents and visitors. The County has received assistance through most of the available grant sources, including the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, Clean Michigan Initiative Recreation Bond Fund, Michigan State Waterways Commission and the Recreation Passport Grant Fund. Federal recreation money managed by the State through the Land and Water Conservation Fund has also been used to fund upgrades and improvements at County recreational facilities. The following table lists grants received, their purpose, and the status of project completion and grant close-out.

*Table 2 Status Report on Grant-Assisted Recreation Acquisitions & Development*

Grant #	Park Name	Scope Item and Current Condition	Status
26-00057	Perkins Park	Two unit bathhouse with toilets, showers, change courts, utilities, boat launching ramp, access road for campgrounds and picnic area, grade and seed the beach and picnic areas.	Closed
26-00698	Perkins Park	Picnic area water system, site improvement, beach area, and Land and Water Conservation Fund sign	Closed
TF87-043	Sugarloaf Natural Area	Develop a summit platform, spur trail, and parking lot at Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area.	Closed
TF90-216	Honor Camp Access Road	Acquisition of approximately 168 acres of land to provide better access to the 460 acre county recreation facility.	Withdrawn
TF90-218	Shooting Complex	Acquisition of 160 acres of land for a public indoor/outdoor shooting facility	Withdrawn
TF92-084	Shooting Sports Complex	Development of a public shooting sports facility with multiple range capability to be located at the county forest site.	Withdrawn
TF95-189	Perkins Park	Construct boat ramp, fishing pier, boardwalk, floating docks, fish cleaning station, and two parking areas, bank stabilization and landscaping	Closed
CM99-169	Perkins Park	Construction of two shower/restroom facilities, demolition of an existing restroom and conversion of existing bathhouse to incorporate a pavilion at this County campground.	Closed
26-01604	Perkins Park	Construction of larger pull-through campsites and utility extension to sites, road reconfiguration, berm	Closed

		and vegetative screen, picnic area relocation, nature observation trail.	
TF04-089	Sugarloaf Mountain	Upgrade existing trail and stair system to provide improved access to Sugarloaf Mountain and scenic viewing opportunities of Lake Superior.	Closed
TF08-028	Perkins Park	Development to include universally accessible improvements including a new park entrance building, campsite redevelopment, trail, universal access to Lake Independence, native landscaping, and universal design for playground.	Closed
RP12-416	Little Trout Lake Park	Development to include repurpose existing concession building into a public toilet facility and improve picnic space. Project will include sustainable elements and universal design features.	Withdrawn
RP16-0050	Perkins Park	Park improvements to include renovation of the fish cleaning station, replacement of the water supply valve and other necessary utility work, and a new roof on the restroom and bathhouse building.	Closed
TF17-0030	Sugarloaf Mountain	Development to improve the existing parking area, which also serves as a trailhead for the Iron Bell/North Country Trail which traverses the park. Will also add picnic tables, bicycle racks, and a new solar-powered waste collection and compaction system. The waste system will alert maintenance staff when the remote location needs to be serviced. A webcam installed at the observation deck will provide access to Sugarloaf's panoramic views to people of all abilities.	Closed
MDARD RD	Sugarloaf Mountain	Establish Marquette Co. Rec-Tourism Network. Sugarloaf Trail Assets Assessment. Complete high-risk safety improvements and construction of the Marquette Co. Rec-Tourism Network Hub at Sugarloaf. Develop inventory of recreation based tourism sites, publish and distribute, survey participating LUGs on project outcomes	Closed
ARPA-0953	Little Trout Lake Park	Park updates include the following: infrastructure improvements, installing utilities, increasing	Open



		accessibility, and establishing designated trails and interpretation.	
--	--	---	--

Data Source: Grants Management, Department of Natural Resources, 2024

## Public Input and Planning Process

### Public Input

The County of Marquette owns and operates several recreation facilities. It is the goal of this Plan, through public input, to develop, maintain, and utilize these facilities in a manner consistent with the needs and desires of Marquette County residents and other users of County recreational facilities.

In partnership with the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD), the Marquette County Planning Division conducted an online survey using Survey Monkey, which was launched on April 22, 2024, and was closed on June 30, 2024. The survey was posted on the County Facebook page, promoted by local municipalities, and shared via Facebook pages and email lists by several community organizations. In addition, a survey was emailed to campers at Perkins Park (see Appendix A-2 for a copy of the survey).

State guidelines require an opportunity of adequate length for the public to review and comment before the Plan is locally adopted. An advertisement announcing the release of the draft Plan appeared in the Mining Journal on October 18, 2024, beginning a 30-day review period. This was followed by a public hearing by the Marquette County Board of Commissioners on December 17, 2024.

### Planning Process

There were three major components that went into development of this Plan: 1) public input from surveys (Appendix A-1), 2) assessment of relevant demographics, and 3) a Recreational Facility Accessibility Report (Appendix A-2).

### Survey Results

The survey results indicate that recreation is very important to the residents of Marquette County. The survey was conducted solely online, and included questions about Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area, Perkins Park, Big Bay Harbor of Refuge, Little Trout Lake, the Honor Camp Property, and the County-Owned Forest. Respondents were asked if they had ever visited each facility, what they liked about it, and what, if anything, has ever discouraged them from visiting it. We received a total of 481 responses to the survey. The following are the major survey findings:

#### Sugarloaf Mountain

Respondents were asked if they had ever visited Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area. 474 respondents answered the question.

- 389, or 82.1%, said they had visited Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area.

Respondents were then asked what they liked about the facility.

- 91.9% selected "The natural beauty of the area."
- 88.6% selected "View from the top."



- 43.21% selected “New parking lot.”
- 44.6% selected “Stairs and hand railings to assist with the climb.”
- 28.80% selected “Waste and recycling amenities.”
- Written responses included “Keep it as natural as possible. Plant native species.”, “Improved toilet amenities”.
- Several respondents called attention for the need for trail maintenance and upkeep.

Respondents were then asked “If you choose not to visit Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area, what is your reason?”

- 26.3% selected “It has become too popular, so I go elsewhere.”
- 23.7% selected “I’m not interested.”
- 9.2% selected “I don’t know where it is, or I am not familiar with the park.”
- Written responses included “Unable to hike to the top.”, “too many people now”.
- Multiple respondents requested for the area to be open year round, for the addition of trail connections with other local outdoor destinations, and a water station.

### Perkins Park

Respondents were asked if they had ever visited Perkins Park in Big Bay. 447 respondents answered the question.

- 161, or 36%, said they had visited Perkins Park.

Respondents were then asked what they liked about the facility.

- 60% of all respondents said “Swimming in Lake Independence.”
- 42.7% selected “RV Camping.”
- 46.7% selected “Cleanliness of

facilities.”

- 32% selected “Tent Camping.”
- 19.3% selected “Annual Harvest Fest.”
- Many respondents also mentioned the public boat launch, barrier free accessibility, the park staff, Pickin’ in the Park or other Art/Music events, the playground, and access to Lake Independence.

Respondents were then asked “What was your primary reason for visiting Perkins Park and Campground?”

- 50% selected “Day Use.”
- 44.2% selected “Camping.”
- 25% selected “Boating Access.”

Additionally in 2024, Perkins Park campground visitors were asked to complete a camping survey. Results include:



Respondents were then asked “What improvements, if any, would you like to be made to Perkins Park and Campground?”

- Suggestions included improvements to the playground, beach, and restroom facilities and more patrolling to enforce rules at night.

Respondents were asked then “If you chose not to visit Perkins Park and Campground, what was your reason?”

- 35.6% selected “I don't know where it is or I am not familiar with the park.”
- 24.2% selected “I’m not interested.”
- 22% selected “The distance is too far to be convenient.”

### **Big Bay Harbor of Refuge**

Respondents were asked if they have visited the Big Bay Harbor of Refuge in the past 5 years. 427 respondents answered the question.

- 97, or 22.7%, said they had visited Big Bay Harbor of Refuge in last 5 years.

Respondents were then asked what they liked about the facility.

- 93.5% of all respondents selected “Natural beauty of the area.”
- 16.3% of all respondents “Facility amenities.”
- 13.04% of all respondents selected “Host/Host guest service.”
- 13.04% of all respondents selected “Boat slips.”

Respondents were then asked “What was the primary reason for visiting?”

- 55.8% of respondents selected “Natural beauty of the area.”
- 14.7% of respondents selected “Fishing.”
- 12.6% of respondents selected “Boating.”

Respondents were then asked what improvements, if any, they would like to be made to the Big Bay Harbor of Refuge.

- Written responses included increased fishing access, adding a grinder to the fish cleaning station, and improved bathroom facilities.

Respondents were asked their reason for why they chose not to visit Big Bay Harbor of Refuge.

- 68% of all respondents selected “I don't know where it is, or I am not familiar with the Harbor.”
- 14.2% of all respondents selected “I’m not interested.”

### **Honor Camp Property**

Respondents were asked if they had visited the Honor Camp Property in Sands Township in the last 5 years. 425 respondents answered the question.

- Only 29, or 6.8%, said they had visited the Honor Camp Property.

Respondents were then asked what they liked about the property.

- The majority of respondents who had visited the property selected “The natural beauty of the area”
- 50% of respondents selected “The trails.”

- There seemed to be virtually no awareness about public access of this property based on only 29 of 425 respondents being aware of the property.

Respondents were then asked “If you choose not to visit the Honor Camp Property, what is your reason?”

- 81.8% selected “I don't know where it is, or I am not familiar with the area.”
- 12.2% of respondents selected “I’m not interested.”
- The majority of county residents seemed to be unaware of the Honor Camp Property stating they don’t know where the property is and that it does not easily come up on Google. Suggestions included increasing publicity for the area.

#### **County-Owned Forest (9,500 acres of forest surrounding K.I. Sawyer)**

Respondents were asked if they had visited the County-Owned Forest in Forsyth and Sands Townships within the last 5 years. 417 respondents answered the question.

- 75, or 18%, said they had visited the County-Owned Forest.
- Respondents were then asked what they liked about the property.
- 58.3% of all respondents selected “The natural beauty of the area.”
- 52.8% of respondents selected “The trails.”
- 59.7% of respondents selected “Berry picking/Foraging.”
- 25% of respondents selected “ORV activities.” And “Wildlife viewing.”

Respondents were then asked “What improvements, if any, would you like to be made to the Marquette County Forest?”

- Written responses included “I’m an emergency responder for Sands Township and County Rescue. I’ve lived here for 54 years and this is the first time I’ve heard of “Marquette County Forest.”, “Better maintaining of orv trails for all horses and bikes too.”, “Something discouraging people from dumping trash/leaving trash at campfires”, and “Manage for more than jackpine.”

Respondents were then asked, “If you choose not to visit the County-Owned Forest, what is your reason?”

- 75.9% selected “I don't know where it is, or I am not familiar with the area.”
- Written responses indicated that there is a general lack of public knowledge regarding the forest and what it has to offer.

#### **Little Trout Lake Park**

Respondents were asked if they visited Little Trout Lake Park, located in K.I. Sawyer, in the past 5 years. 434 respondents answered the question.

- 58, or 13.4%, said they had visited Little Trout Lake Park.

Respondents were then asked what they liked about the facility.

- 38.3% of all respondents selected “The beach or swimming in the lake.”
- 31.9% selected “Berry picking.”
- 34% selected “Park amenities like the picnic table and pavilion.”
- 21.3% selected “Playground equipment.”

Respondents were then asked “What improvements, if any, would you like to be made to Little Trout Lake Park?”

- Written responses included water cleanup, bathrooms reopened, and the addition of pickle ball courts.

Respondents were asked “If you chose not to visit Little Trout Lake Park, what was your reason for not visiting?”

- 66% of respondents selected “I don't know where it is or I am not familiar with the park” suggesting that, like most other County recreation facilities with the exception of Sugarloaf Mountain, a lack of awareness is limiting usage.
- 20% of respondents selected “I am not interested.”
- 11% of respondents selected “The distance is too far to be convenient.”
- Several respondents noted their reason for not visiting the park was due to the lack of upkeep of the base and lack of amenities.

Respondents were then asked what they would change about Parks and Recreation in their community. 238 survey respondents answered this question.

- 50 of 238 written responses included a desire for pickle ball courts.
- 28 of 238 respondents called attention to the lack of advertising and awareness of these county facilities.
- 20 of 238 written responses included playground additions and improvements.
- 20 of 238 respondents included mention of various amenity improvements.
- Several respondents would like to see an increase of indoor recreation facilities as well as better signage, education, improvements and maintenance of existing trail systems.

Respondents were then asked what they value about parks and recreation in their community. 233 survey respondents answered this question.

- 62 of 233 respondents mentioned the value of the natural beauty of the area.
- 38 of 233 respondents mentioned the appreciation for the close proximity and easy access to recreation.
- 31 of 233 respondents highlighted the value that the maintenance, amenities and cleanliness of the area has on their outdoor experiences.
- Other key areas of mention were the large variety of activities that are accessible in the county, the enhancement recreation has to quality of life, the health and wellness value that recreation brings, and appreciation for the large number of hiking trails in the area.

A copy of the complete survey with a report of the responses is available in Appendix A-2.

### Demographics

Though no longer required in a Recreation Plan, there is still relevance to the County in data related to the make-up of the population (particularly as it relates to age and physical capabilities) in determining trends that might affect long-term considerations in the development/redevelopment of County facilities. The following are tables and descriptions used in our analysis.



## Community Population

The County of Marquette is the largest county in the State of Michigan (1,873 square miles), and the most populated county in the Upper Peninsula with a population of 66,017 (U.S. Census 2020) (see Figure 1). The median age is 39.2 years old with nearly equal male and female composition. The population is mostly white (90%), with approximately 1.6% of Marquette County residents identifying as Native American and 1.2% as Black/African-American.

As in the rest of the United States, the population of Marquette County is aging. The number of people aged 65 or older is at an all-time high. The County's population is aging at an even faster pace than the nation or the State. This is coupled with a decline in the youngest part of the population, to the point that the population of people aged 65 and older has exceeded the population of people under the age of 15.

## Persons with Disabilities

According to the 2022 American Community Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, 5.4% of the population of Marquette County, or 3,536 persons between the ages of 18 to 64, had one or more of the following disabilities: hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living.

A person is considered to have a disability if they have difficulty performing functions such as seeing, hearing, talking, walking, climbing stairs, or lifting and carrying. Disabilities also include difficulty performing daily activities or social roles such as schoolwork and working at a job.

The likelihood of having a disability increases with age. The U.S. Census reports that 14.6% of Marquette County residents age 65 and over are living with disabilities. As the population in Marquette County continues to age there will be an increase in residents with disabilities. The County of Marquette has addressed this issue by seeking ways to upgrade county owned facilities to accommodate and enhance the recreational experience for disabled citizens.

The Big Bay Harbor of Refuge also received improvements that make access easier for individuals with disabilities. Several years ago, restrooms were upgraded to meet ADA requirements, and in 2013 the sidewalk along the mooring bulkhead was replaced and made fully accessible.






In the fall of 2019, in partnership with the Central Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Regional Commission (CUPPAD) and the Superior Alliance for Independent Living (SAIL), the County conducted accessibility assessments at County-owned recreation facilities. The Accessibility Report for County Parks and Recreation Facilities (see appendix A-3) was received on November 15, 2019. The updated parking area at Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area was evaluated by SAIL for accessibility in November of 2024, an Accessibility Report for the parking area was included in this document (see appendix A-4). As can be seen in the Accessibility Report and this Recreation Plan's Action Program, a number of deficiencies were identified that we intend to mitigate.

## Goals and Objectives




---

A goal states a general concept or desired end. Objectives are more specific ways in which the goals are accomplished. Goals and associated objectives are listed below.




1. **Improve and maintain County recreation facilities in order to provide desired recreation opportunities for residents and visitors to the area**

-  Provide and promote recreational areas for passive and active recreation
-  Use facility master plans in determining and prioritizing capital investment
-  Use federal and state assistance programs to develop recreational facilities
-  Encourage more efficient use of existing facilities before building new facilities
-  Perform regular maintenance to prolong use of existing facilities



2. **Incorporate Universal Design in new facilities and when upgrading existing amenities**

-  Implement findings of the Accessibility Reports for County Parks and Recreation Facilities
-  Coordinate with local units of government to leverage recreation-related projects, including promotion and marketing
-  Adherence to American with Disabilities Act Requirements in future development and grant specifications



3. **Incorporate recreation planning as a component of the County Master Plan**

-  Continue use of surveys and public meetings to solicit public opinion on recreation needs and facilities
-  Complete studies/master plans of Perkins Park, Sugarloaf Mountain Natural Area and Little Trout Lake
-  Include regional trail initiatives such as the Iron Ore Heritage Trail and Noquemanon Trail System in comprehensive planning

4. **Promote cooperation among governmental units, other public and private organizations and businesses in developing recreational programs and facilities**

-  Review proposed recreation plans for consistency with the County Master Plan and Recreation Plan
-  When feasible, participate in local governmental recreation planning efforts

5. **Continue provision of Harbor of Refuge for safety of Great Lakes boaters**

-  Provide moorage, fuel and other essential services to boaters
-  Monitor harbor water depths and solicit assistance to maintain sufficient draft depths

## Action Program

Through the public survey and Recreational Facility Accessibility Report, various needs were identified. Accordingly, strategies were developed as to how County recreation facilities could be best improved or modified to meet these needs. The following Action Program shows how a combination of County and grant funds can allow us to attain our goals for the upcoming 5-year planning period.

Table 3: Marquette County Recreation Action Program, 2025-2029

Year	Facility	Improvements	Est. Costs	Funding Source	Responsible Agency
2025	Perkins Park	Split rail fence – 500 linear feet	\$25,000	Capital Outlay	RM/D
2025	Perkins Park	Install surveillance in day use area, increase lighting along paths, vehicular speed reduction techniques, increase signage about rules	\$6,000	Capital Outlay, General Funds	RM/D
2025	Perkins Park	UTV Electric	\$30,000	Capital Outlay	RM/D
2025	Perkins Park	Cabin Renovation- Including foundation wrapping, energy efficiency improvements	\$200,000	MNRTF, Land Bank Authority Blight Elimination, Brownfield Redevelopment	RM/D
2025	Little Trout Lake Park	Improvements to park infrastructure including, utilities, ADA paths, pickle ball courts, wellness hub, gathering spaces, parking, and existing recreation activities.	\$999,000	DNR SPARK Grant	RM/D
2025	Big Bay Harbor	Septic System Replacement	\$300,000	Land & Water, Waterways, Boating Infrastructure, MNRTF, Capital Outlay, EGLE	RM/D
2026	Perkins Park	Paint restroom and shower facilities, upgrade lighting and other energy efficiencies,	\$40,000	Capital Outlay, RPG	RM/D

		pavilion ceiling, & fish cleaning station roof replacement			
2026	Perkins Park	Lakeshore & day use enhancements including, play yard, relaxation and family zones, dock & pier, beach, trails, nature-based storm water management, parking, safety & security	\$300,000	Capital Outlay, MNRTF, RPG, CZM	RM/D
2027	Sugarloaf	Unimproved Trail Improvement Plan (restoration)	\$60,000		
2026	Big Bay Harbor	Infrastructure replacement including water heater, fuel pump, pump out	\$60,000	Clean Vessels Act Pumpout Grant, Capital Outlay, RPG, EGLE	RM/D
2026	Little Trout Lake Park	Silver Lead Creek Greenway and Trail	\$1,400,000	MNRTF, Philanthropic, EPA, EGLE	RM/D
2027	Big Bay Harbor	Big Bay Harbor Master Plan implementation	\$1,500,000	Land & Water, Waterways, Boating Infrastructure, MNRTF, CZM, Capital Outlay	RM/D
2028	Perkins Park	Site delineation, infrastructure expansion including electricity and Wi-Fi	\$120,000	Capital Outlay, MNRTF, RPG, Broadband	RM/D
2028	Perkins Park	North area development- new walk-in and yurt/tent sites with access and vault toilets	\$300,000	Capital Outlay, MNRTF, RPG, CZM	RM/D
2029	Perkins Park	Install self-registration and information kiosk	\$25,000	Capital Outlay, MNRTF, RPG	RM/D
2029	Perkins Park	Composting program and infrastructure development and equipment	\$20,000	Capital Outlay, RPG	RM/D



2029	Perkins Park	Park entrance improvements including office layout, parking, sign, and drive	\$300,000	MNRTF	RM/D
2029	Perkins Park	Pop up business incubator near entrance of Perkins Park w/ EV Charging	\$175,000	Capital Outlay, RPG	RM/D
2029	Perkins Park	West area development- new group camping area, maintenance building, non-vehicular access improvements	\$300,000	Capital Outlay, RPG	RM/D
annual	Sugarloaf	Trail erosion and parking lot repairs	\$3,000	General Funds	RM/D
annual	Perkins Park	Site leveling/improvements of 2-3 sites per year	\$8,000	General Funds	RM/D

DRAFT