

# Isabella County Master Land Use Plan

Adopted December 13, 2001

Updated October 4, 2022

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# INTRODUCTION

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Isabella County sits in the center of lower Michigan. Its major city, Mt. Pleasant, is the County seat and home of Central Michigan University. Prior to the mid-1990s, the University was perhaps the most prominent and well-known of the County's employers. However, today CMU shares that position with the Soaring Eagle Casino which has become a major statewide attraction, drawing visitors from a wide area.

Beyond the City of Mt. Pleasant and its immediate surroundings, the County takes on a distinctly rural character. Scattered single family homes dot many of the mile roads, as is typical throughout Michigan, but population and housing density are very low. A few isolated "settlements" are found in the midst of otherwise rural expanses and some of the County's larger inland lakes are ringed by homes on relatively small lots.

Overall, the County experienced a net decrease in population growth, 9.2% compared to that of the State of Michigan's growth of 1.9% over the last decade. However, several individual communities have substantially outpaced the County growth rate, some more than tripling that rate. Still, most of the County continues to retain the rural agricultural character which is prized by residents and non-residents. Expansive farm fields can be found across the County. Agriculture has been and continues to be a significant part of the Isabella County economy.

A desire to conserve its precious farmland, as well as the rural character, greatly influenced the County's formulation of this Plan. While growth has not reached the rampant proportions found in other, more urbanized areas of the State, clearly the character of Isabella County and the way of life of many of its residents are threatened by unplanned and inappropriate development. The purpose of this Plan, therefore, is to provide a measure of guidance to assist the County Planning Commission and the local communities for which it has zoning jurisdiction in managing growth and planning for the proper use of land.

This document provides a portrait of Isabella County, its people, its resources, and its future. The Plan is the product of many hours of study by many interested and committed individuals. To name them all would be impossible, but certain ones should be highlighted. These include, of course, the Isabella County Planning Commission, as well as representatives from the individual Townships throughout the County. In addition, many interested citizens participated and provided valuable input into the process.

# USING THE PLAN

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Some explanation is appropriate regarding how the Master Plan should be used. First, it is essential to understand that the Plan is a **policy guide**. It is not an ordinance and does not replace zoning. The Plan is supposed to work hand-in-hand with zoning and other County development tools. A few important things to know about the Plan are:

## Let It Be Your Land Use Guide

Remember that the Master Plan is a guide for **future** land use. The Plan Map may not look like the zoning map or the existing land use map. It really shouldn't. The Plan Map is an illustration of the long-range land use pattern of the County, based on the goals and strategies adopted as part of the Master Plan.

The Plan is land use policy. County decisions, as well as those of the private sector, should follow the Plan. New streets, parks, public improvements, etc. should be consistent with the land use policies adopted as part of the Master Plan.

## Coordinate With Townships

The Plan is intended to provide guidance for County-wide land use decisions. However, the County does not have zoning authority in all Townships or in the incorporated communities. Therefore, it is essential that the County serve as a resource or coordinating body to assist these other communities and help them understand the need for mutual cooperation.

During the course of preparing the 2001 Plan, each of the Townships in Isabella County was given the opportunity to shape the Plan. Most took advantage of that opportunity. The Plan, therefore, reflects the values and concerns of all communities.

The 2022 update to the 2001 Plan includes statistical demographic updates, a review of the vision and goals of the Plan, prioritization of the goals through a survey of the ten Townships under County Zoning jurisdiction and updates to several Future Land Use Maps in cooperation with the ten Townships under County Zoning jurisdiction.

It is important that the County use those mechanisms available to it to review and coordinate its activities with the Townships in order to achieve implementation of the Plan. Such mechanisms include reviewing local rezoning requests and ordinance amendments, conducting educational training programs for Township planning and zoning officials, and encouraging all County agencies (Road Commission, Health Department, Drain Commission, etc.) to rely on the Plan for guidance in carrying out their responsibilities throughout the County.

## Refer To It In All Zoning Decisions

One of the principal benefits of having an adopted Master Plan is the foundation it provides for zoning decisions. Just as the Plan is the policy guide for land use, zoning is the principal legal enforcement tool. The two should work in conjunction with one another.

As the Planning Commission and County Board of Commissioners are faced with making zoning and land development decisions — rezoning, site plan review, special use permit, planned unit development, plat reviews, etc. — the relationship of those requests to the Master Plan recommendations should be a primary consideration.

## **Be Flexible**

As important as it is to use the Plan as a guide, it is equally important to recognize that the Plan must be flexible. Changing circumstances, unanticipated opportunities, and unforeseen problems can require a shift in direction. Such mid-course adjustments are not unusual, though they should not be a frequent nor an easy occurrence.

However, because a deviation from the Plan may be appropriate in a specific instance, doesn't mean that the Plan is no longer relevant and should be ignored from that point on. When these conflicts arise, the Plan should be amended to reflect the change. That way it will remain an up-to-date policy guide over time.

## **Use It As A Management Tool**

“No work shall be initiated on any project involving the expenditure of money by a county board, department, or agency for the acquisition of land, the erection of structures, or the extension, construction, or improvement of any physical facility by any county board, department, or agency unless a full description of the project, including, but not limited to, its proposed location and extent, have has been submitted to the county planning commission and the report and advice of the planning commission on the proposal shall been received by the county board of commissioners and by the county board, department, or agency submitting the proposal.” This wording, taken from Sec. 61 of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) requires the Planning Commission to review all County improvements for conformance to the Plan prior to final authorization.

This provision is not intended to give the Planning Commission veto authority over public improvements, but to ensure that formal consideration is given to the relationship of such improvements to the County's Master Plan. In evaluating that relationship, the Planning Commission should look at consistency with land use, as well as the impact of the proposed improvement on other Plan recommendations.

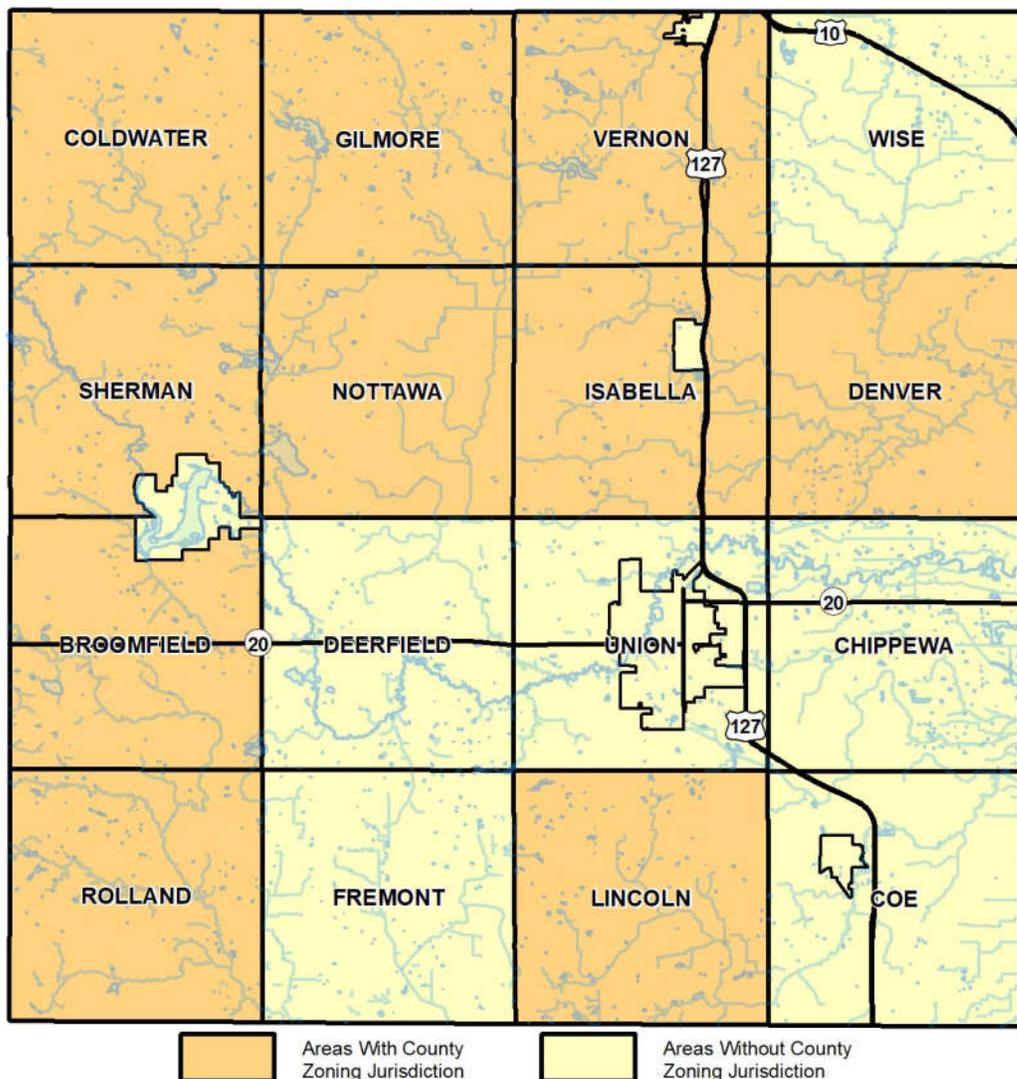
# COUNTY CHARACTER

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## Geographic Region

Isabella County is a generally rural county located in the geographic center of Michigan's lower peninsula. It is due west of Midland, north of Lansing, northeast of Grand Rapids, and southeast of Cadillac.

The 576 square miles that comprise the County contains 16 Townships. At its center is the City of Mt. Pleasant where approximately 33.7% of the entire County population resides, according to the 2020 U.S. Census.



Due to its predominantly rural nature, Isabella County maintains zoning jurisdiction over most of the Townships within its borders. Ten Townships rely on the County for zoning regulation, administration, and enforcement. It is important to note that even though this is a County-wide Master Plan, several communities in Isabella County have adopted their own master plan and zoning ordinance. These communities include the City of Mount Pleasant, a portion of the City of Clare, the Villages of Lake Isabella, Rosebush and Shepherd and the Townships of Chippewa, Coe, Deerfield, Fremont, Union and Wise.

## Strengths/Attributes

There are many assets which create a foundation upon which the future of Isabella County will be built. Among these are:

- **Water Resources:** People are drawn to water. It offers a distinct serenity and variety that is highly valued. The Chippewa River and the many lakes dotting the northwest quadrant of the County provide recreational, environmental, and residential opportunities for the County's population and seasonal visitors.
- **Rural Character:** The predominant character of Isabella County is rural. Over half the County's population lives within the City of Mt. Pleasant or Union Township which surrounds it, leaving the remaining approximately 31,000 people spread out over 540 square miles, an average density of 57 persons per square mile.
- **Agriculture:** Much of the land in the County is occupied by farms. Soils information indicates that Isabella County possesses some of Michigan's richest agricultural soils. Even those areas which contain less favorable sandy soils produce high yields of specialty crops such as potatoes. Agriculture is an extremely important part of the County and regional economy.
- **Central Michigan University:** Isabella County is unique in the State of Michigan for having a large university located in such a predominantly rural area. Beyond the obvious educational opportunities it offers, the school provides a wealth of intellectual, cultural, and technological resources that would otherwise be unavailable within the County. In addition, CMU is a strong catalyst for economic growth.
- **Access/Location:** Nearly cut in half by the north/south U.S. 127 expressway, Isabella County enjoys excellent access from its central location in the State. To the south are Michigan's large cities and centers of employment and entertainment, while to the north are the many vacation and recreational destinations. The transportation accessibility and central location are obvious advantages which contribute to the success and popularity of the Soaring Eagle Casino, a major attraction in the County.
- **Diversity:** One of the true strengths of Isabella County is the wide array of options available to its residents, workers, and visitors. From the natural amenities of rural Isabella County to the employment opportunities found in and around the City of Mt. Pleasant, there is much to celebrate about this County and its future.

- **Soaring Eagle Casino:** While still the subject of debate among the County’s residents, there is little disagreement that the casino has made its presence felt throughout Isabella County. Currently, the largest casino in the State of Michigan, Soaring Eagle has generated substantial economic growth in the area and is making the Mt. Pleasant area a Mecca for year-round entertainment for visitors from throughout the State.

## Existing Land Use

Land use patterns develop according to geographic location, land use and zoning policies, and environmental, economic, social and cultural influences. The location of a building, the routing of a street or highway, construction of sanitary sewers, and many other factors affect, and have an effect on, the shape of existing and future land use patterns. Thus, documenting existing land use and looking at how uses have changed over time is an important part of the planning process. It helps to answer questions such as, “Is land devoted to residential use increasing? Where is development occurring?”

Existing land use for this Plan was mapped using:

- Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) Geographic Information System (GIS) technology;
- 1978 digital data from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Michigan Resource Information System (MIRIS); and
- 2000 aerial slides from the Isabella County Farm Service Agency.

Land use trends outlined in this section were established by comparing the historical 1978 land use information and the 2000 information.

The analysis of existing land use patterns leads to predictions of future development, based on present conditions and trends. The positive and negative aspects of past land use decisions can then be discovered and used to avoid past mistakes and plan for desirable, orderly growth.

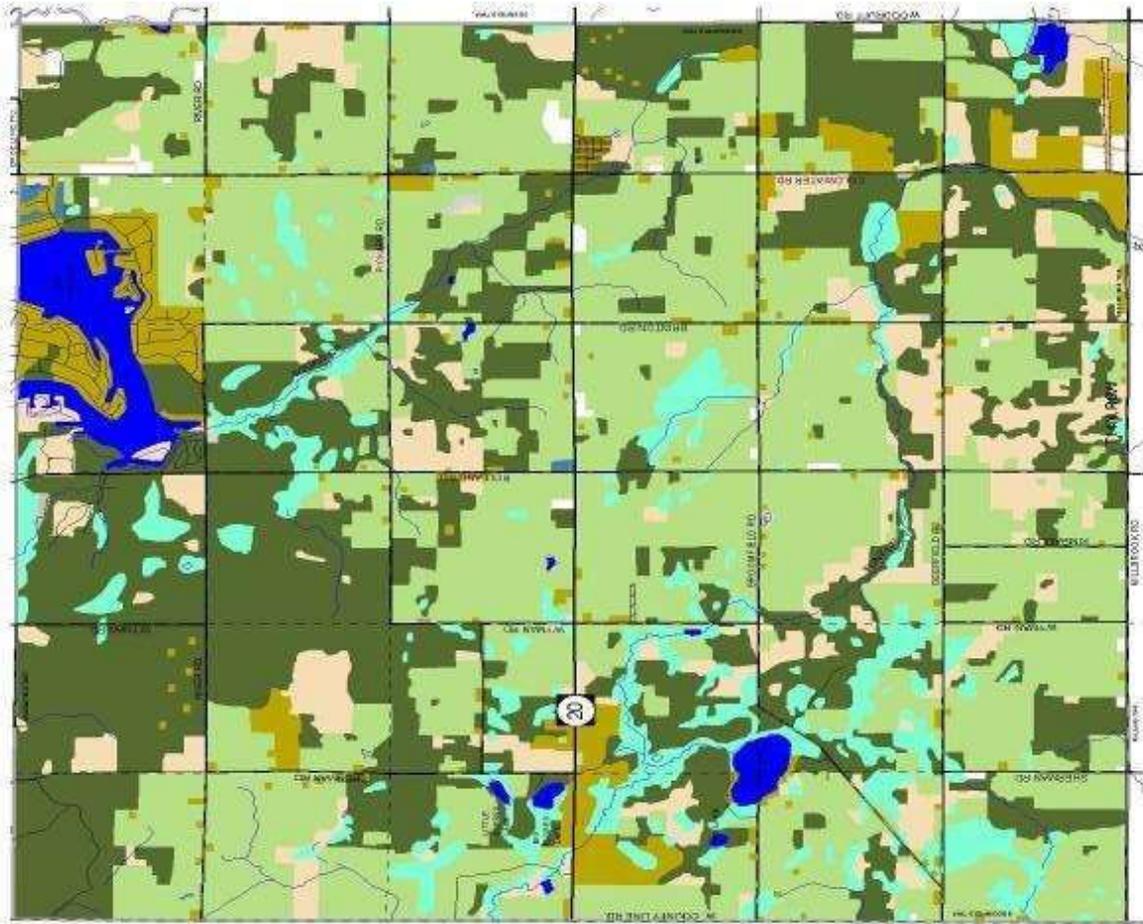
Due to the current availability of the MIRIS data and the lack of an update to the MIRIS data since 1978, the County will transition to the National Land Cover Database for Existing Land Use maps and analysis.

The National Land Cover Database (NLCD) is produced by the United States Geological Society (USGS) and is updated every three (3) years.

Existing Land Use Maps for each Township and a County-Wide NLCD map are included on the following pages.

# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Broomfield Township Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2003

Data Source:

Basic Information - 1975 MDOT/ISE MIRS,  
1990 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning  
(Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)

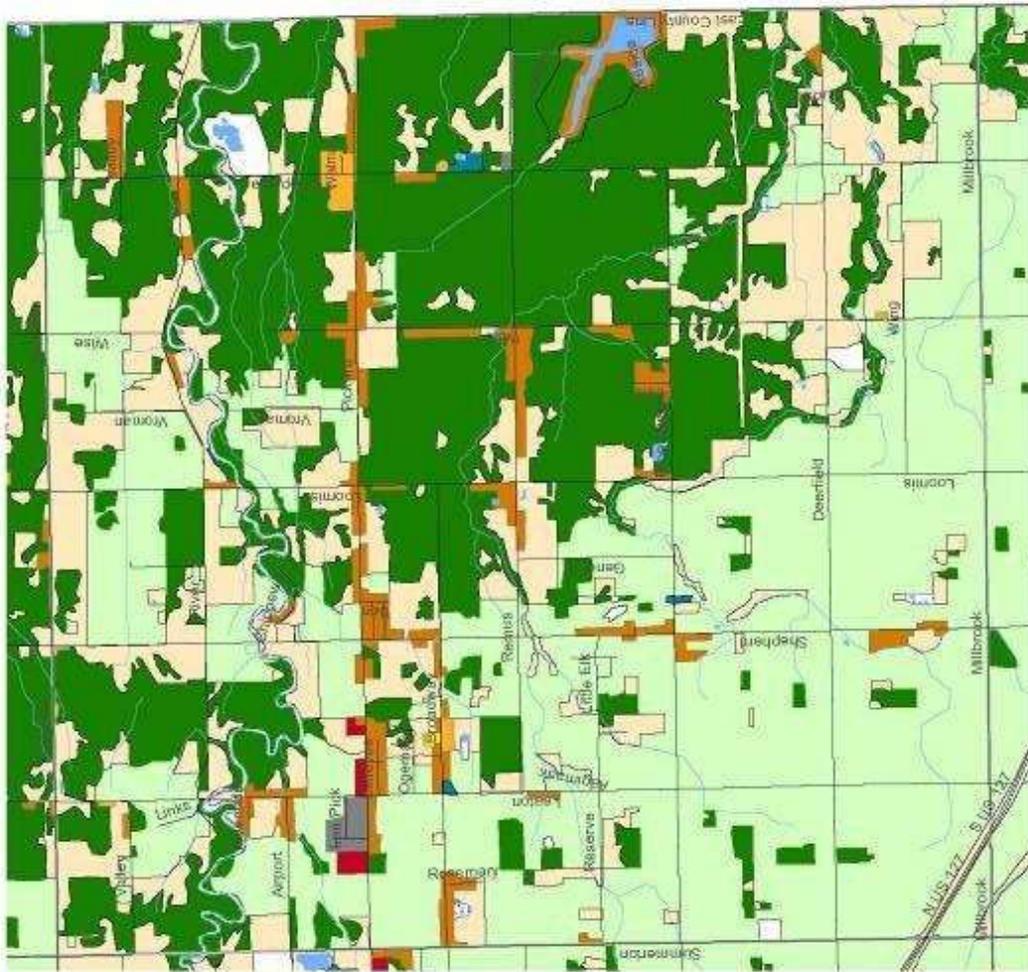
**Existing Land Use & Land Cover**  
**Chippewa Township**  
 Isabella County, Michigan

-  Single Family Residential
-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Mobile Home Park
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Extractive/Utility
-  Public/Quasi-Public
-  Agricultural
-  Vacant Land/Open Field
-  Forest
-  Wetland
-  Unverified



December 2008

Data Source: 1978 MDNR MRIS



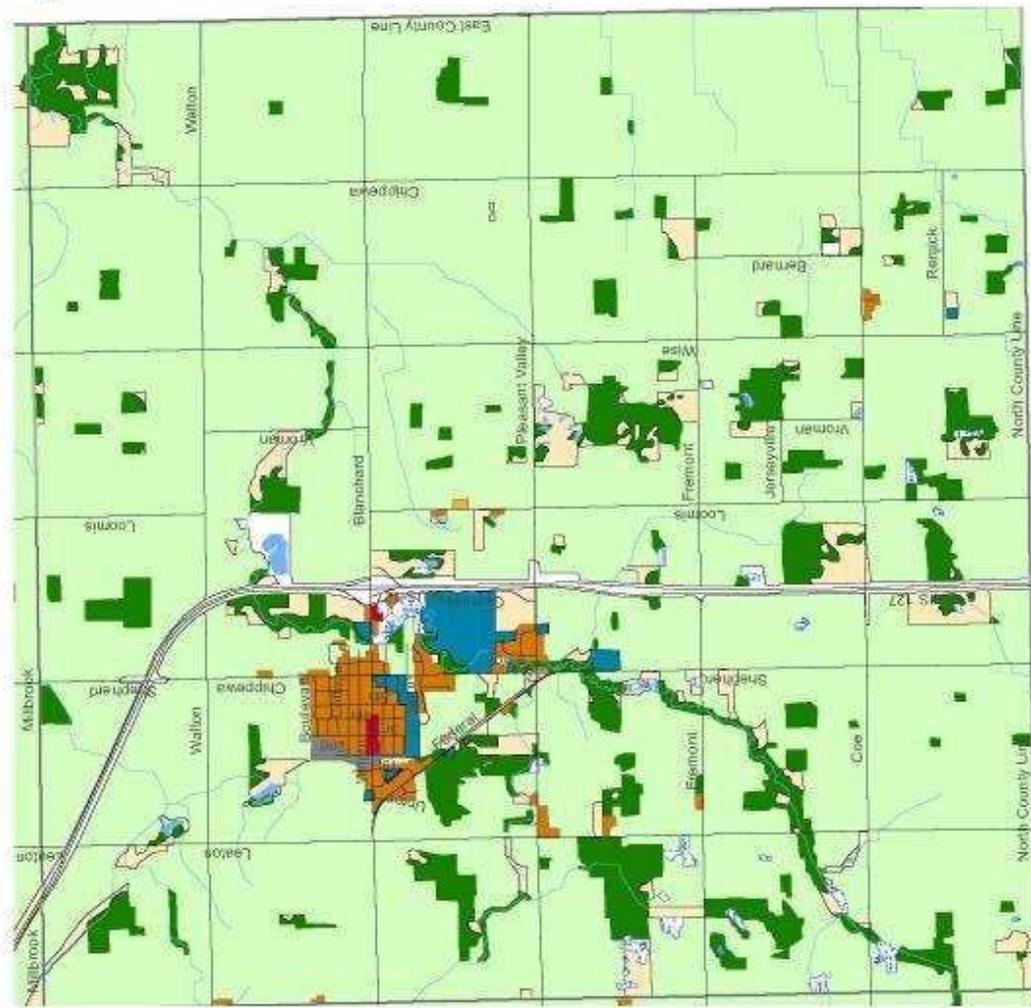
**Existing Land Use & Land Cover**  
**Coe Township**  
**Isabella County, Michigan**

- Single Family Residential
- Multi-Family Residential
- Mobile Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



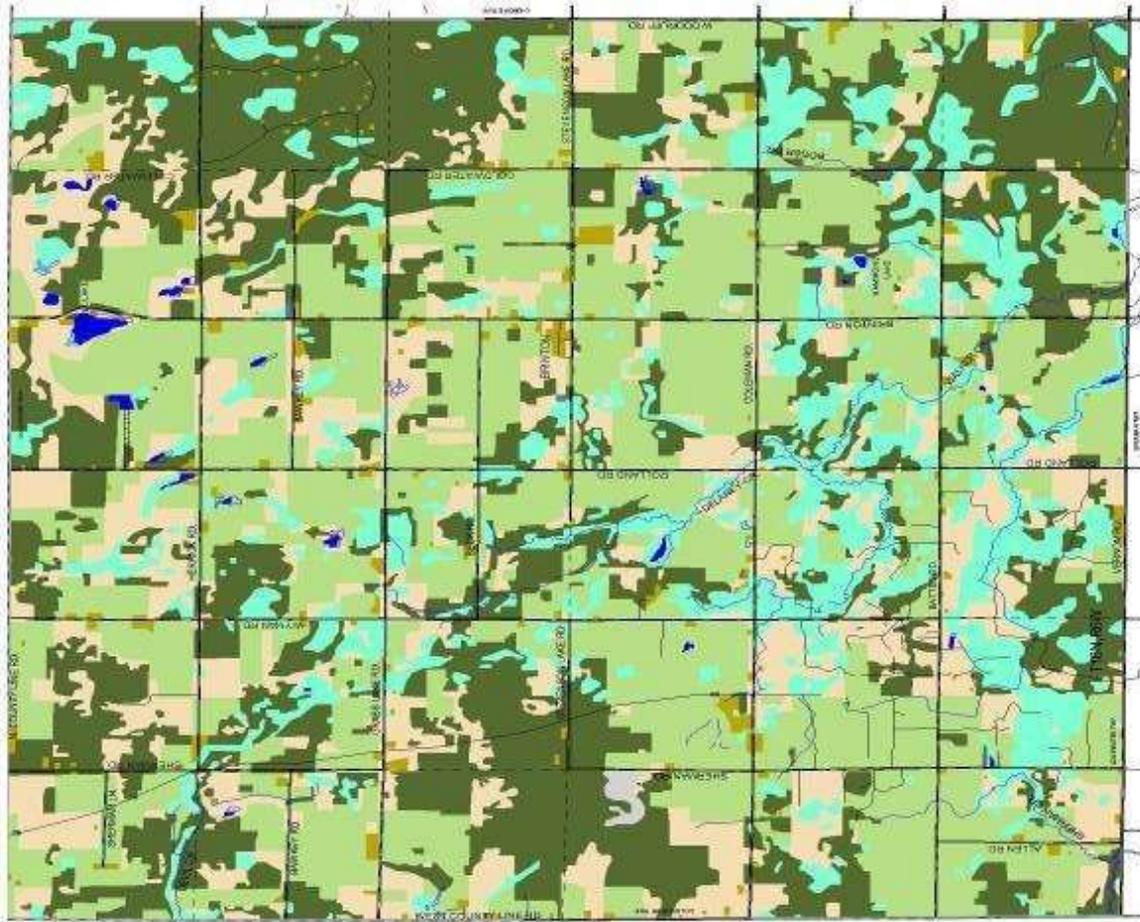
December 2008

Data Source: 1978 MDNR MIRS



# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Coldwater Township Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2003

Data Source:

1990 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning

(Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)

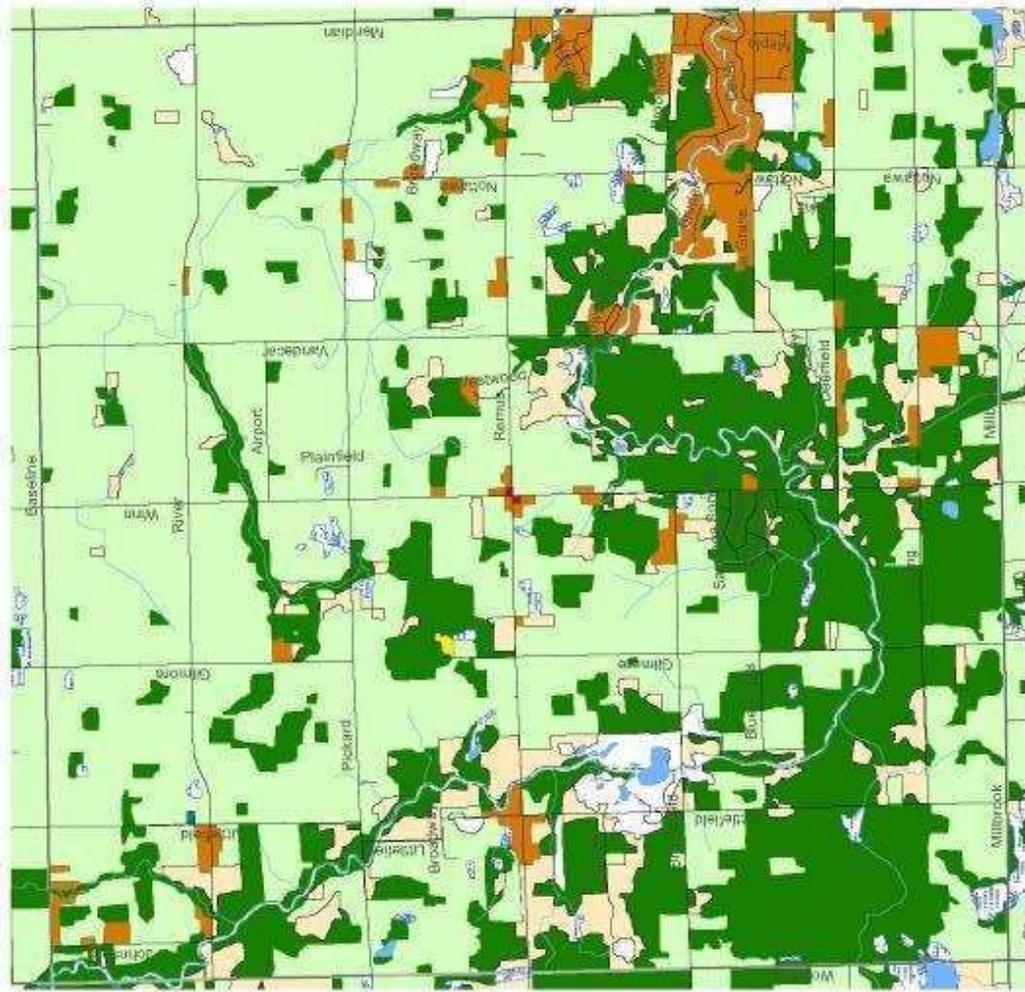
**Existing Land Use & Land Cover**  
**Deerfield Township**  
 Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Multi-Family Residential
- Mobile Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



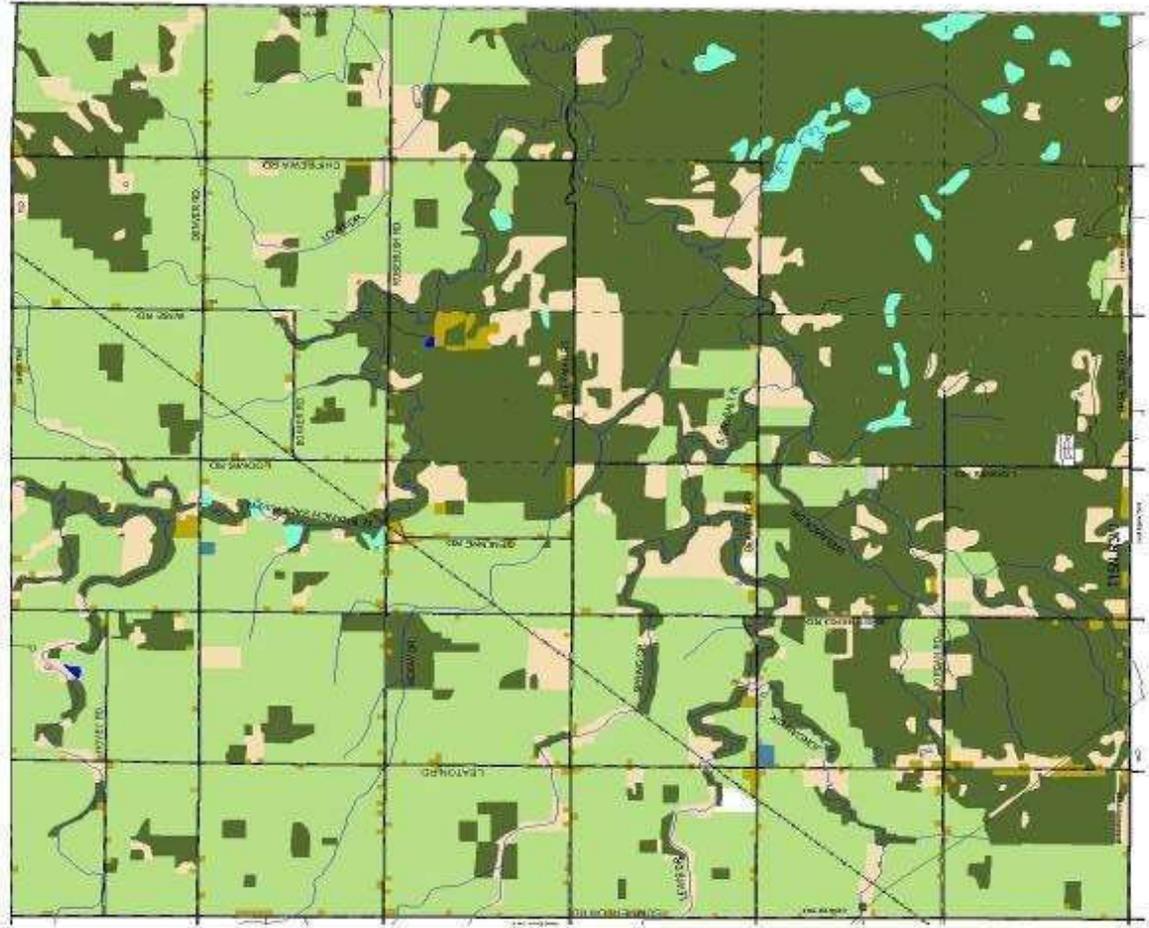
December 2008

Data Source: 1978 MDNR MRLIS



# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Denver Township Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2003  
 Data Source:  
 Base Information - 1976 MDOT/DE MIRS,  
 2000 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning  
 (Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)

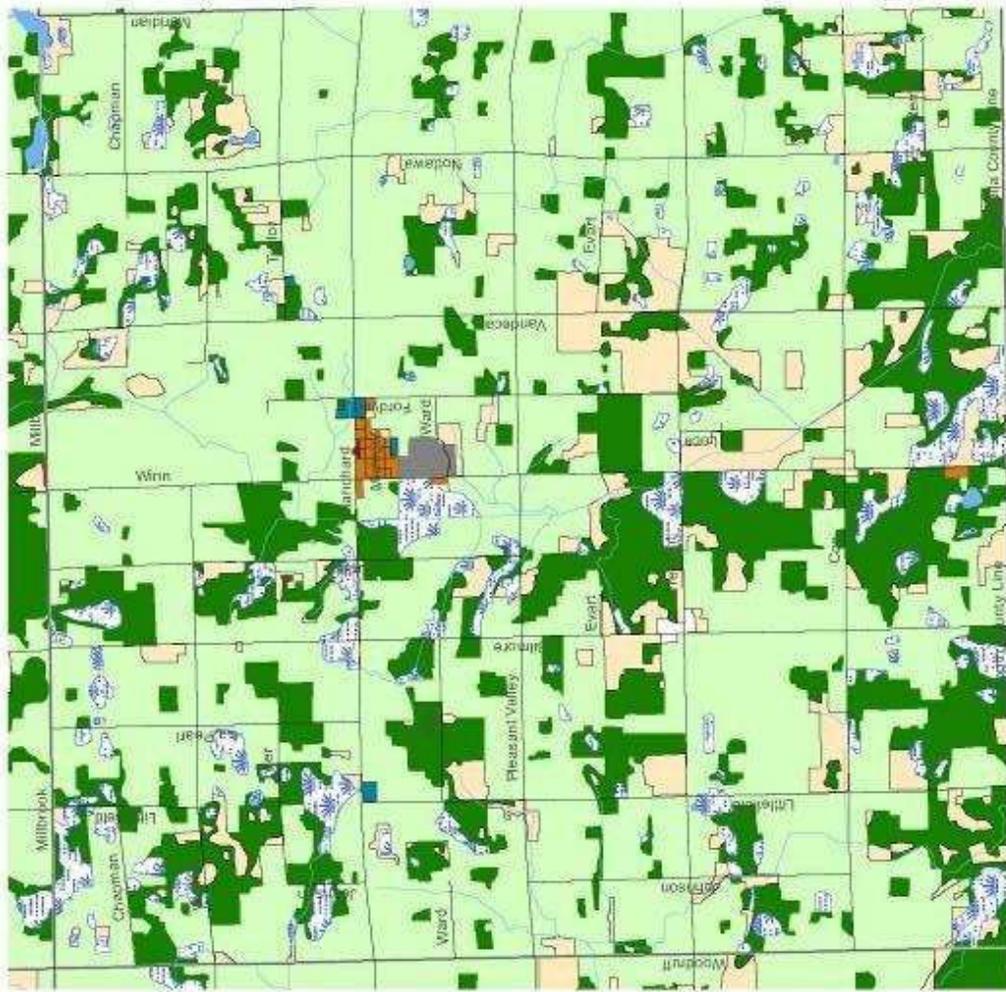
**Existing Land Use & Land Cover**  
**Fremont Township**  
 Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Multi-Family Residential
- Mobile Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2008

Data Source: 1978 MDNR MRLIS



# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Gilmore Township Isabella County, Michigan

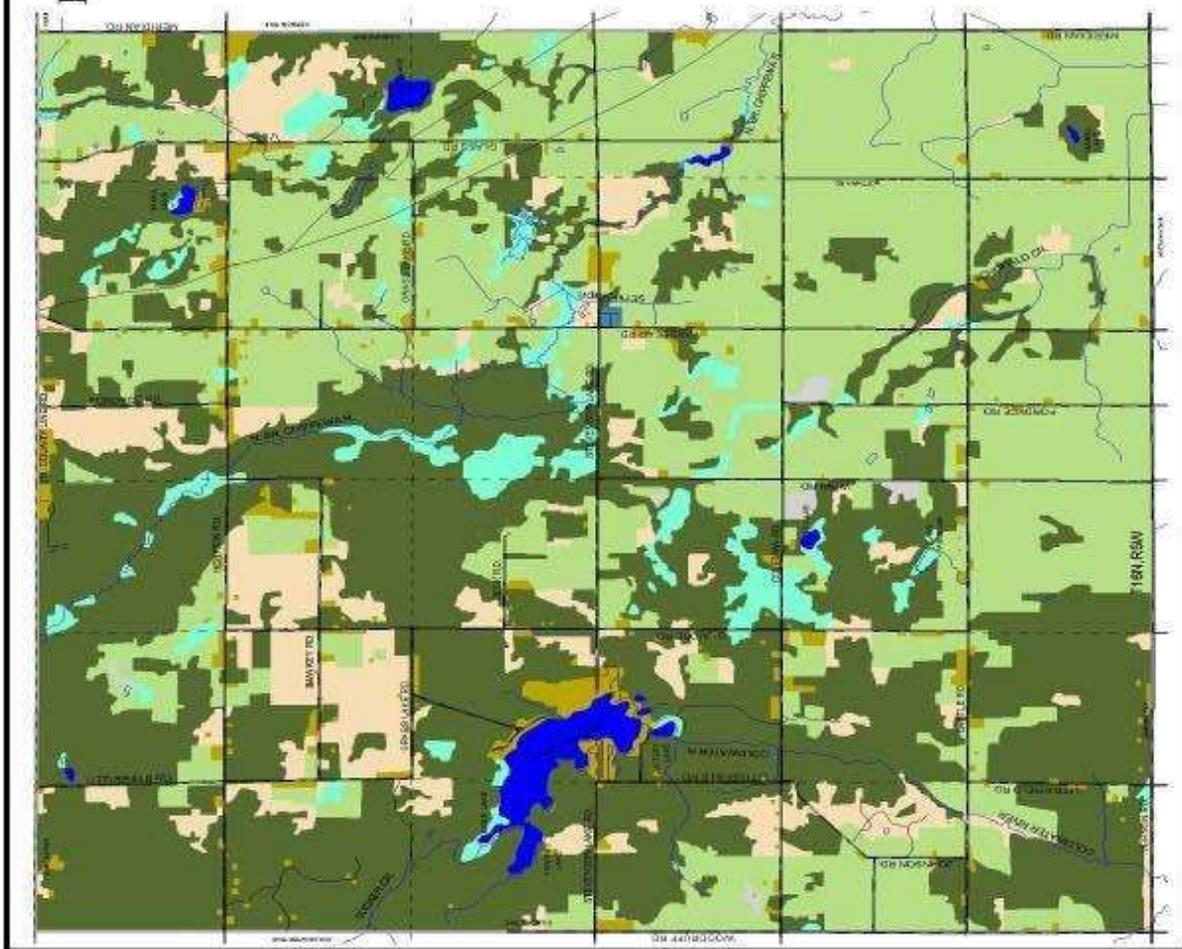
- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2003

Data Source:

Base Information - 1976 MDOT/ISE MIRS,  
 1990 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning  
 (Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)



# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Isabella Township Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified

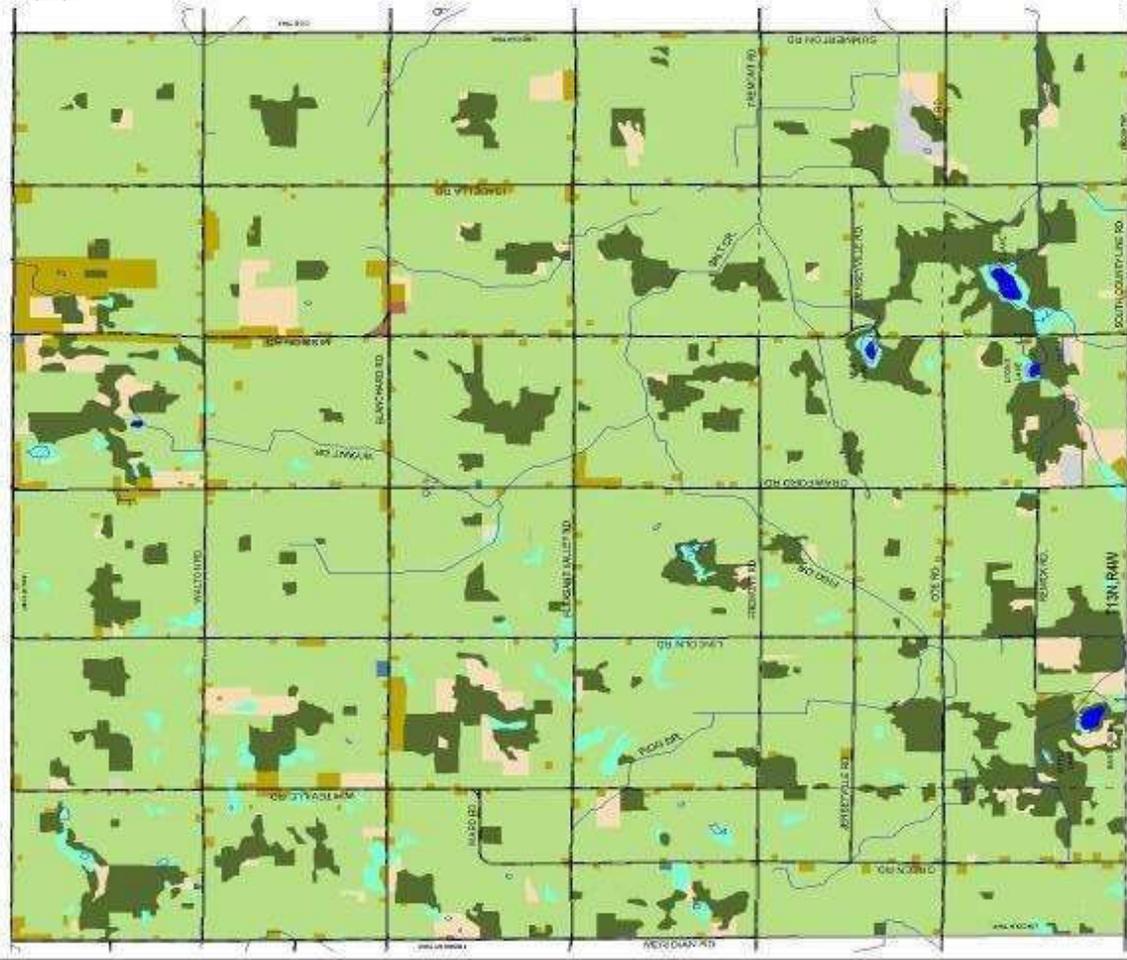


December 2003  
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 Base Information - 1976 MIDUSE MIRS,  
 2000 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning  
 (Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)



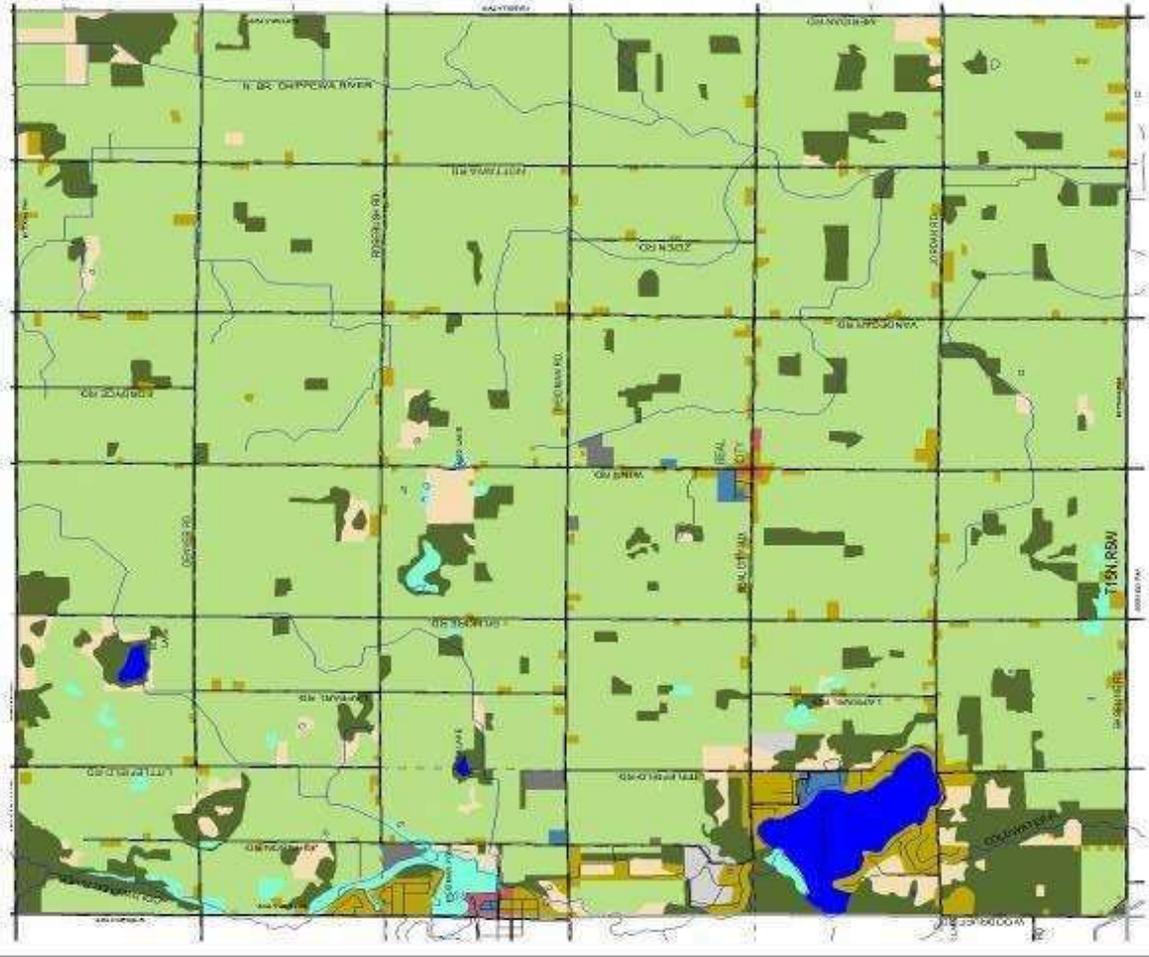
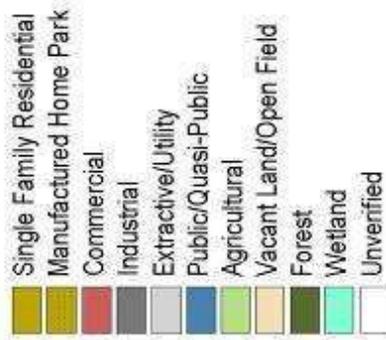
# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Lincoln Township Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2003  
Data Source:  
Base Information - 1976 MDOT/DE MIRS,  
2000 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning  
(Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)

# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Nottawa Township Isabella County, Michigan



December 2003

Data Source:

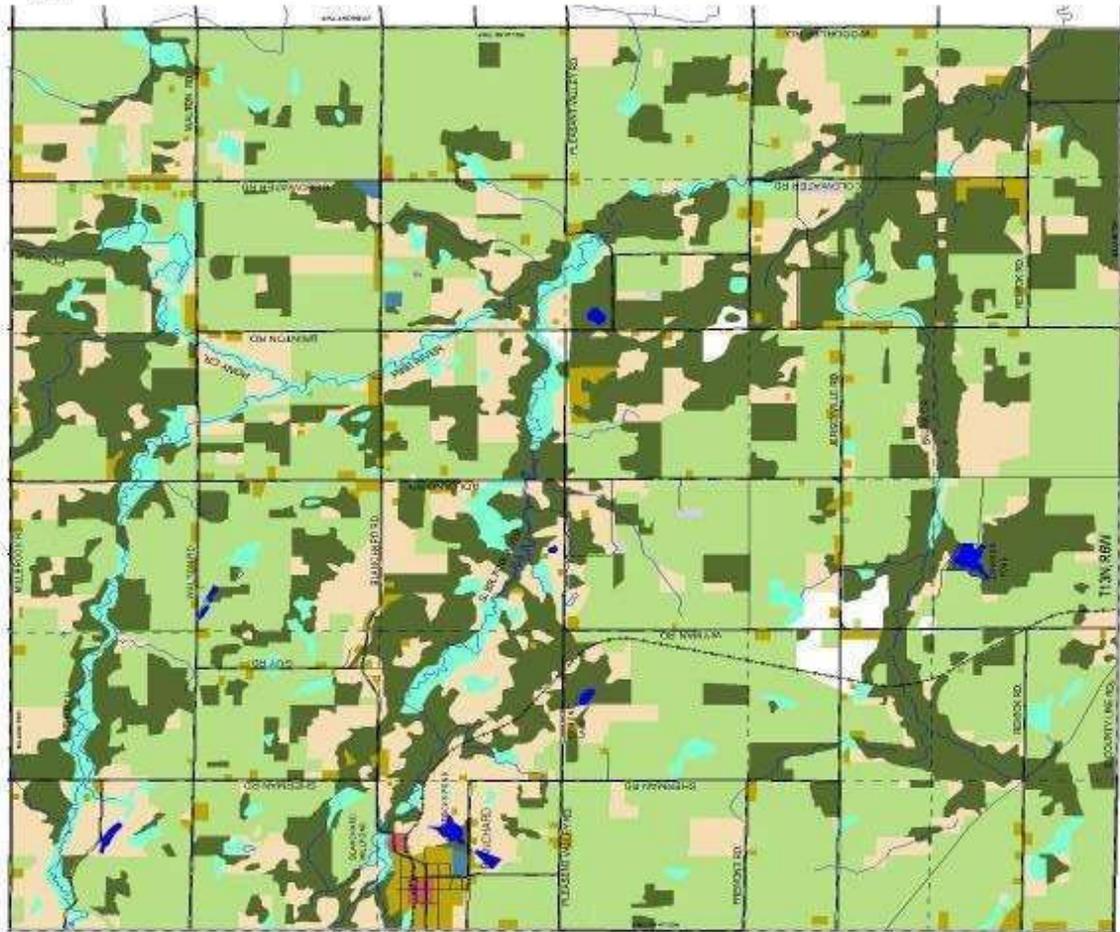
Base Information - 1975 MDOT/ISE MIRS,

1990 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning

(Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)

# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Rolland Township Isabella County, Michigan

- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Extractive/Utility
- Public/Quasi-Public
- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
- Forest
- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2003  
 Data Source:  
 Base Information - 2000 MDOT/ISE MIRS,  
 2000 Land Use/Cover Information - LSI Planning  
 (Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)



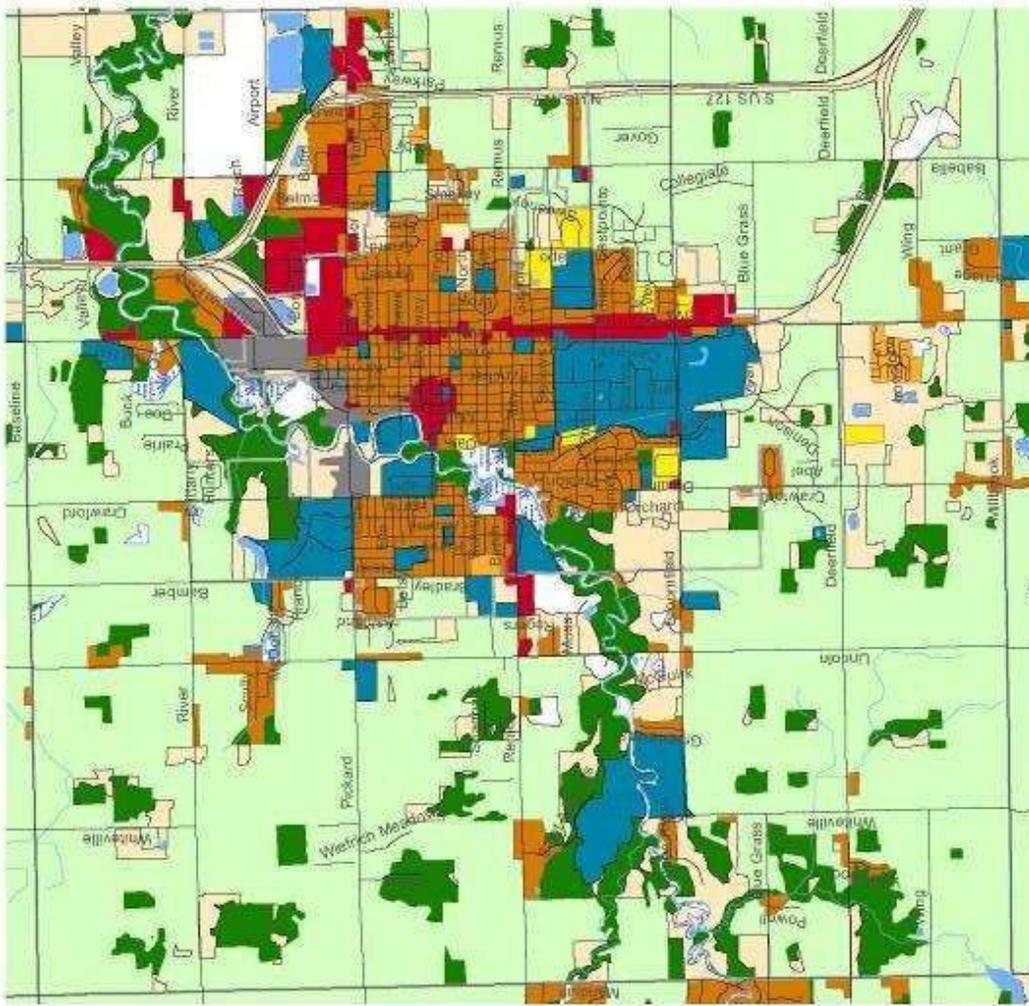
**Existing Land Use & Land Cover**  
**Union Township**  
**Isabella County, Michigan**

-  Single Family Residential
-  Multi-Family Residential
-  Mobile Home Park
-  Commercial
-  Industrial
-  Extractive/Utility
-  Public/Quasi-Public
-  Agricultural
-  Vacant Land/Open Field
-  Forest
-  Wetland
-  Unverified



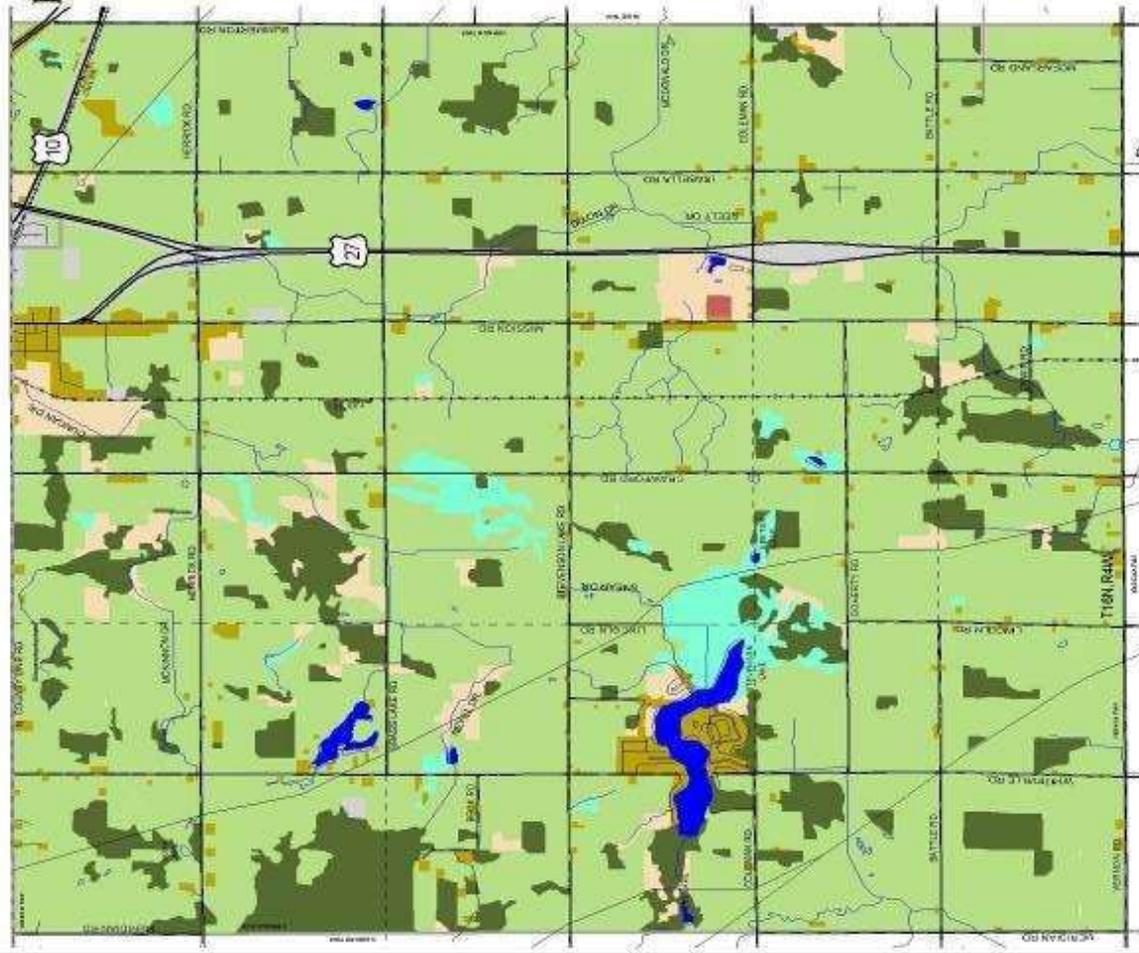
December 2008

Data Source: 1978 MDSR, MIRTIS

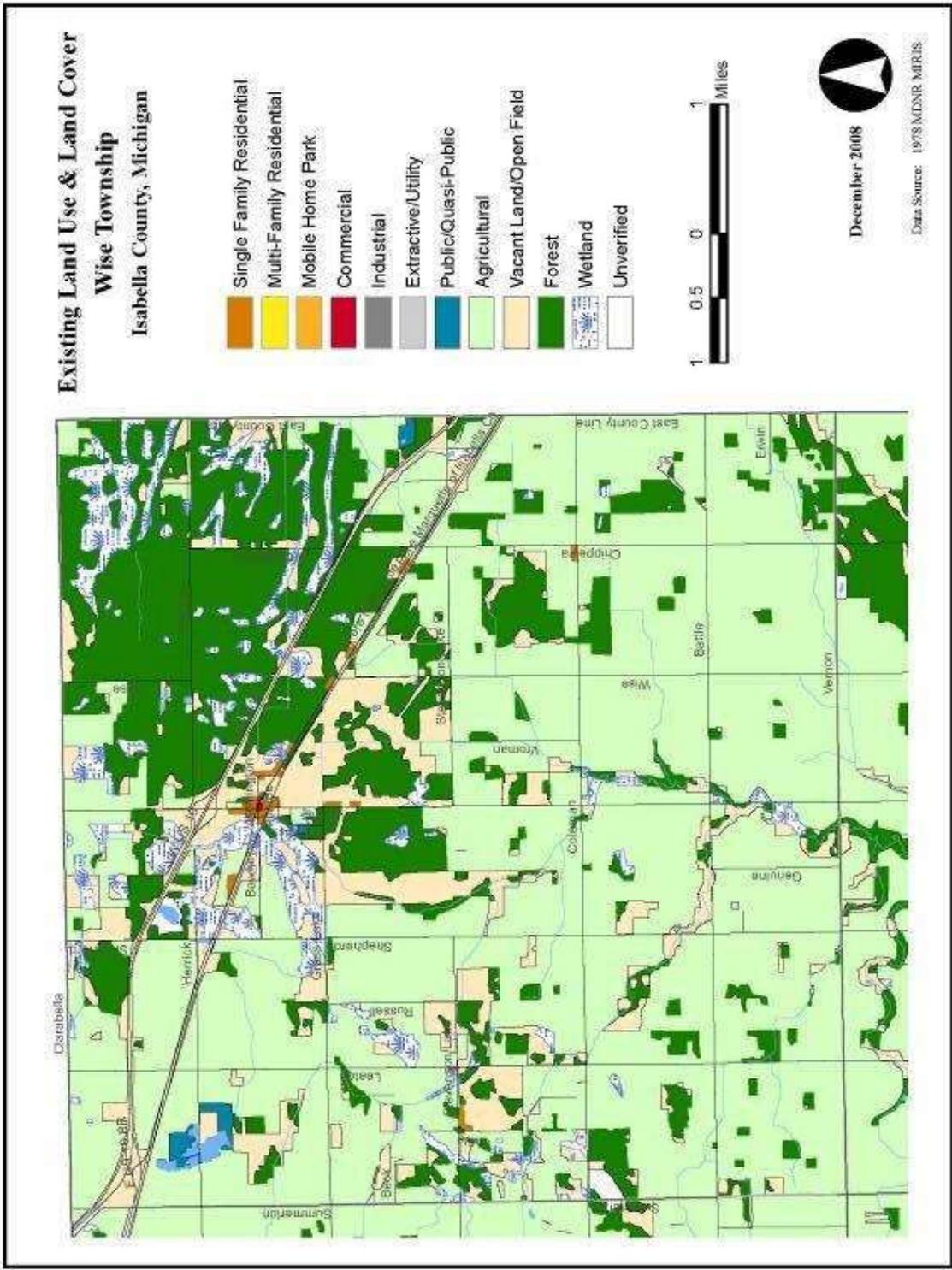


# Existing Land Use & Land Cover Vernon Township Isabella County, Michigan

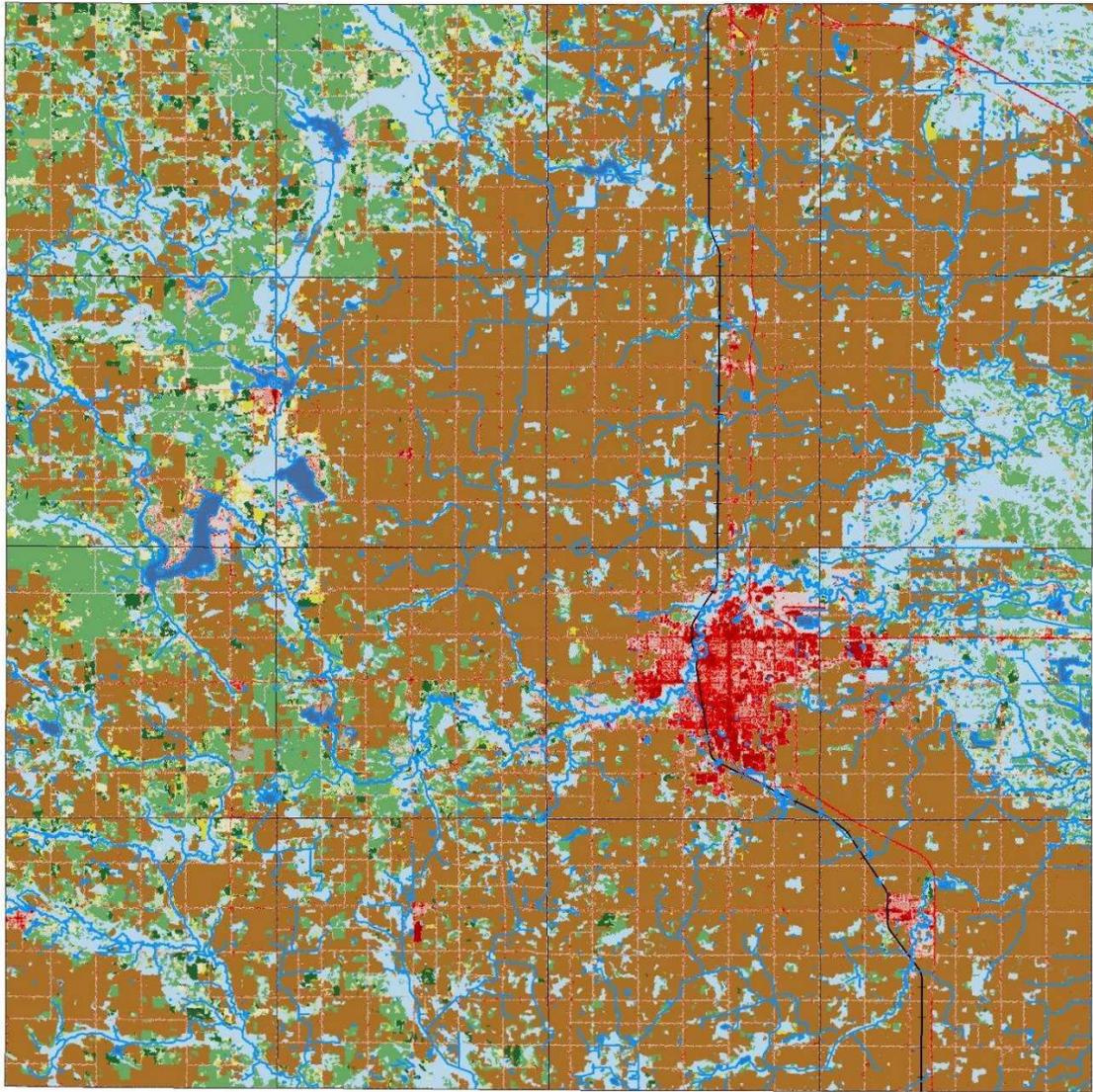
- Single Family Residential
- Manufactured Home Park
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- Agricultural
- Vacant Land/Open Field
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- Wetland
- Unverified



December 2003  
 Data Source:  
 Base Information - 1975 MDOSE MIRS,  
 2000 Land Use/Cover Information - LSL Planning  
 (Based On Aerial Photography Interpretation)



# Existing Land Use & Land Cover



- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  Open Water                   |  Mixed Forest                 |
|  Developed, Open Space        |  Shrub/Scrub                  |
|  Developed, Low Intensity     |  Grassland/Herbaceous         |
|  Developed, Medium Intensity  |  Pasture/Hay                  |
|  Developed High Intensity     |  Cultivated Crops             |
|  Barren Land (Rock/Sand/Clay) |  Woody Wetlands               |
|  Deciduous Forest             |  Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands |
|  Evergreen Forest             |  |

## Isabella County



Created by: Community Development  
 Isabella County  
 200 N. Main St.  
 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061  
 Data Source: NLCD Land Cover 2019

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 StatePlane Michigan South FIPS 2113 Feet Intl

- **Agricultural**

Agricultural lands on the Existing Land Use Map include cropland, orchards, pasture, and confined feeding areas. A majority of the land in the Townships that fall under the County’s jurisdiction, is being used for agricultural purposes.

Changes in agricultural patterns in Isabella County over the past several decades have been consistent with state and nationwide trends. A mid to late 1990s change in the definition of farm used to report to the Census of Agriculture may be responsible for the irregularities in the trend in 1997. The definition change opened the door for smaller specialty farms to be reported through the Census of Agriculture. After 1997, the number of farms, as well as total acreage in farmland continued to decline until 2007.

The 2007 Census reported a slight increase in the number of farms as well as the total acreage. While the average farm size was on the incline prior to 1997, it appears that with the definition change we have seen higher reporting of land in farms and numbers of farms in the statistical data which appears to have lowered the average farm size which is now on the decline.

Year	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012
Number of farms	883	1,038	953	1,018	928
Land in farms (acres)	199,733 *	227,650*	195,432	196,071	188,465
Av. farm size (acres)	226	219	205	193	203
Ag. goods mkt. value (000s)	\$49,110	\$58,061	\$50,126	\$71,433	\$119,400

Table 1 U.S. Census of Agriculture, \*The apparent increase in agricultural acreage is due to a change in the methodology in the USDA Survey

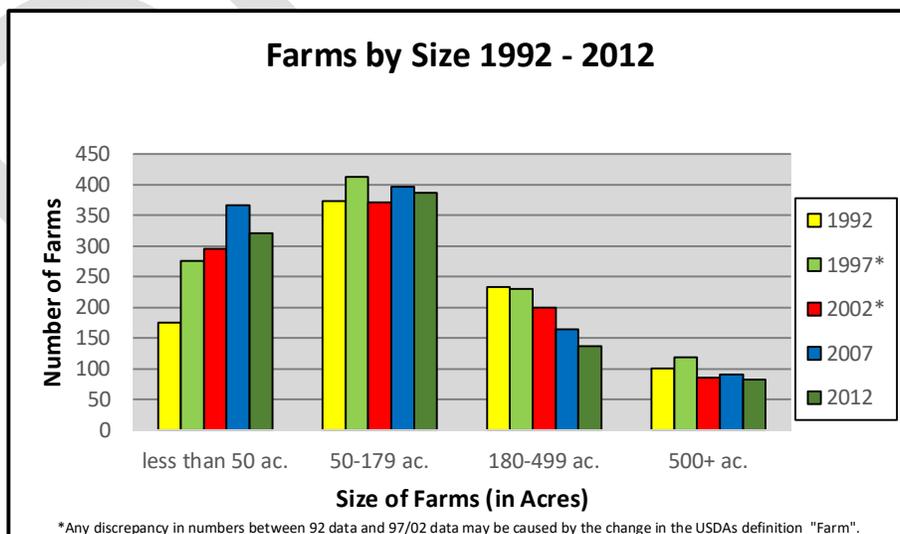
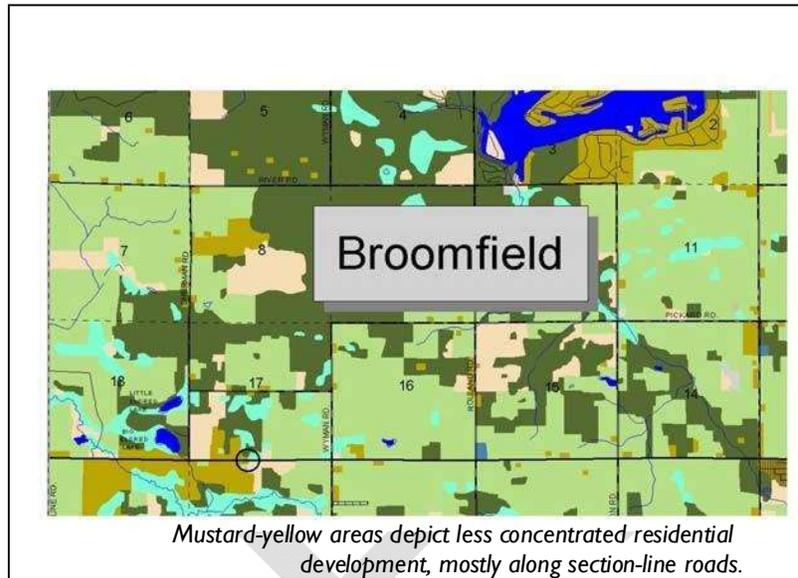


Table 2 U.S. Census of Agriculture

- **Single Family Residential**

Residential development, as previously described for the County, was “concentrated in the City of Mt. Pleasant, in adjacent Union and Chippewa Townships, and in the smaller incorporated communities of Shepherd, Rosebush, and Lake Isabella.”



More recently, that development has become less concentrated, and has occurred along section-line roads, on lands that used to be farmed. This type of development is being seen state-wide, in many rural areas.

- **Manufactured Home Parks**

Manufactured home parks are found throughout Isabella County. Among those communities with County zoning, there are existing parks in Broomfield, and Isabella Townships, as identified on the Existing Land Use Map. County-wide, according to 2022 State records, there are 12 licensed manufactured home parks containing a total of 1,128 sites.

- **Commercial**

The commercial needs of Isabella County residents are primarily met by businesses located in Mt. Pleasant and adjacent Union and Chippewa Townships. The greatest concentrations of businesses are found in the downtown area of Mt. Pleasant and lining both Mission Road and Pickard Road on the City’s east side. Other, more limited commercial sites, are located in the outlying Townships.

The 2000 land use survey did not reveal significant increases in commercial land use.

- **Industrial**

The industrial uses outside the obvious concentrations in Mt. Pleasant and Union Townships tend to be scattered among isolated pockets found in many of the rural Townships. A few areas such as northern Vernon Township, southeastern Broomfield

Township, and western Nottawa Township contain the bulk of “out-county” industrial activity.

- **Public/Quasi-Public**

Public land uses depicted on the existing land use map include:

- parks;
- cemeteries;
- schools; and
- government offices.

Since 1965, parks and recreation planning remains the charge of the Isabella County Parks and Recreation Commission. In 2012, the Commission updated the County Recreation Plan in cooperation with many of the local units of governments. This effort was an important step toward coordinating the activities of the county local units so each can capitalize on each other’s strengths in developing a comprehensive recreation system. For further information regarding parks and recreation programming, please refer to the Isabella County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan or the County website at [www.isabellacounty.org/parks](http://www.isabellacounty.org/parks).

## **Natural Features**

The County is blessed with a variety of natural features which create a unique and diverse character, provide attractive locations for home sites, and afford County residents significant recreational opportunities. Interestingly, many of these features are localized. Rather than being distributed throughout the County, certain natural features are found in one area but not others. Among the County’s most significant natural characteristics are the following:

- **Topography and Surface Features**

Topographically, the eastern and southern sectors of the County are generally flat to gently rolling, while the northern and western areas are moderately rolling to hilly. There is considerable variation in relief with elevations ranging from 700 feet above sea level in the County’s southeast corner to over 1,200 feet in the northwest corner.

Three distinctive topographic divisions occur in a general north/south direction. The eastern part of the County is in the wide Lake Plain which joins Saginaw Bay to the east. The southeastern corner, including much of Coe Township, is part of the old Saginaw Lake bed, where the land is nearly level with increases in elevation occurring in steps rather than slopes. The numerous depressions in this general land formation have become intermittent ponds, receiving and holding water during periods of heavy rainfall and runoff. Most of the Lake Plain area is broadly undulating and, at its western edge, it rises very gently toward the uplands with no definitive transition from one area to another. Elevations throughout this area vary only modestly.

Within the County's mid-area uplands, the terrain is gently rolling with elevations gradually rising to the west. Drainage is generally very good with most land draining to the streams.

Along the western belt, topography varies greatly. Much of the land is fairly level but is punctuated by several high, isolated hills. The highest of these, Bundy Hill in the west central part of the County, is 1,270 feet high. In some parts of the area slopes vary from gentle to rugged. Most of the area is well drained, but frequent depressions in the northwest also collect and store excess waters.

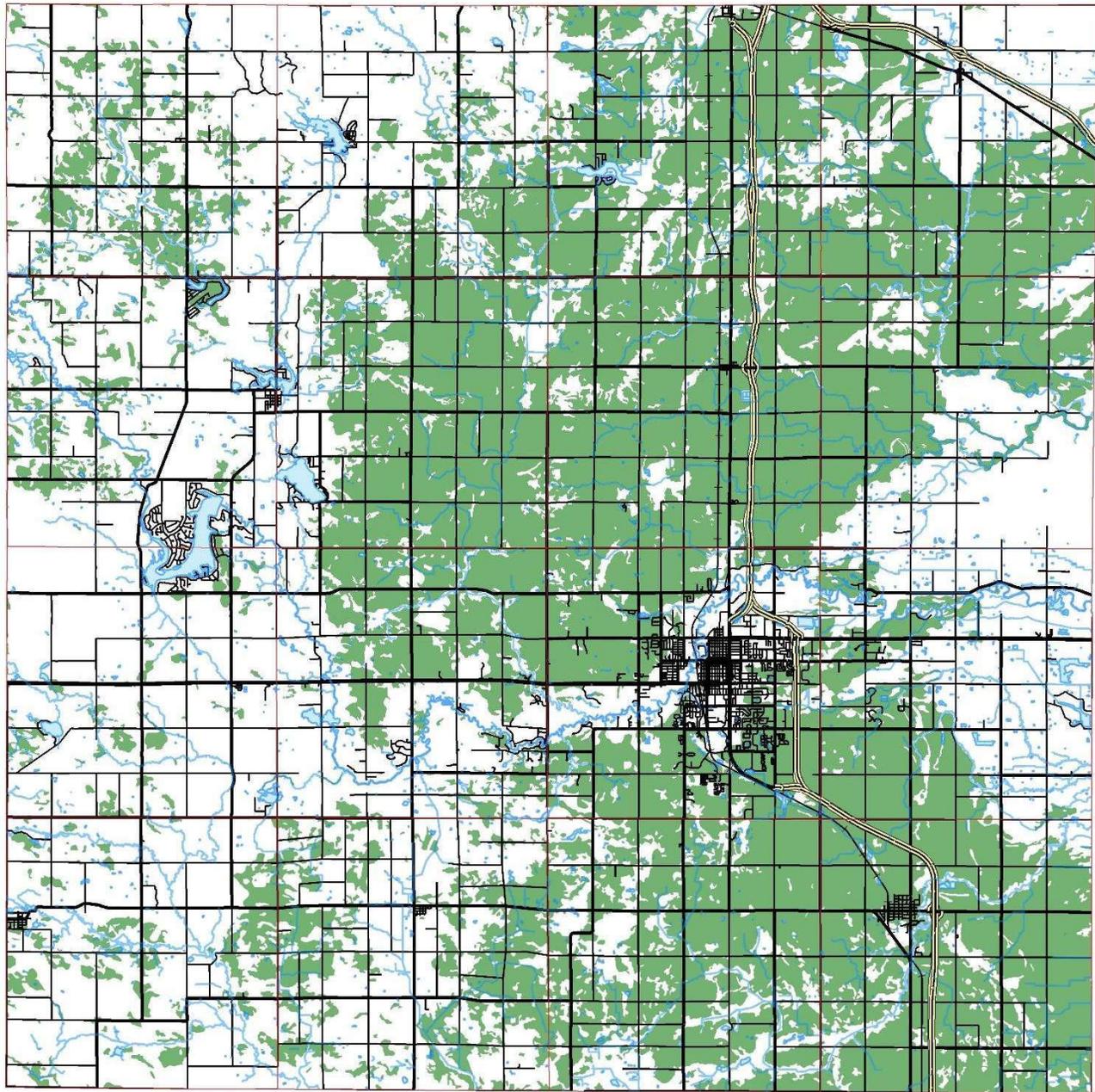
Two significant valley features are also found in the County. These include the valley of the Chippewa River, flowing eastward from the County line to Mt. Pleasant and two separate valleys running north/south which converge south of Weidman to form a broad plain.

- **Soils**

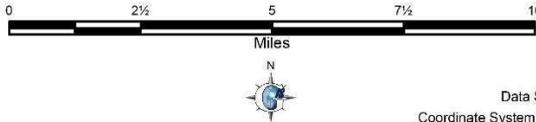
Soils throughout the County vary from rich, well drained loams to poorly drained muck. These soil characteristics greatly influence, if not determine, the suitability of land for agricultural purposes, development, and the use of on-site septic systems. The major determinants of soil suitability for land use include the composition of the soil, permeability, steepness of slope, drainage characteristics, susceptibility to erosion, and depth to bedrock.

A critical factor to Isabella County's economy is the presence of "prime" agricultural soils. These are the soils determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to be the most productive, richest farming soils. While several Townships throughout the County contain scattered patches of "prime" soils, the greatest concentrations of such soils are found in Coe, Denver, Deerfield, Isabella, Lincoln, Nottawa, Union, Vernon and Wise Townships. It is important to note, however, that while not considered "prime" many areas of sandy soil have proven extremely valuable in the production of specialty crops such as potatoes.

# Isabella County Michigan



 Prime Soils



Created by: Community Development  
Isabella County  
200 N. Main St.  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
(989) 317-4061

Data Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture SSURGO Database  
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 StatePlane Michigan South FIPS 2113 Feet Intl

- **Water**

Isabella County contains over 2,700 acres of water bodies including lakes, streams, and reservoirs. Most prominent of these are the Chippewa River, Lake Isabella, Coldwater Lake, and Littlefield Lake. All of the prominent lakes are located in the western half of the County, while streams meander throughout the entire County.

Seven of the 16 Townships contain over 200 acres of water, accounting for a total of approximately 2,300 acres (85 % of the County's water resources). Sherman Township has the largest area devoted to water (515 acres) and Broomfield Township closely follows (507 acres). Both of these Townships are situated along the west border of the County.

- **Wetlands**

Isabella County contains approximately 13,000 acres of wetlands ( $\pm$  3.5% of the County's land area). Most of these are of the forested or shrub/scrub types and are generally found along the west edge of the County.

Coldwater Township contains over 3,000 acres of wetlands, the most of any community in the County. Five other Townships (Broomfield, Fremont, Sherman, Wise, and Rolland) have 1,000 or more acres of wetlands within their boundaries. Collectively, these Townships, along with Coldwater, account for nearly 10,000 acres of wetlands ( $\pm$  76 % of the County total).

- **Forests**

The County contains substantial forest resources comprised of upland hardwoods, lowland hardwoods, upland and lowland conifers, and Christmas tree plantations. Over 86,000 acres of forest lands (23% of the County's land) are found throughout the County. Nine Townships contain 5,000 or more acres of forest, with the largest amount found in Gilmore Township (10,065 acres). Other Townships with significant forests are: Denver (9,915 acres.), Sherman (8, 371 acres), and Chippewa (8, 268 acres).

# DEMOGRAPHICS

## Population

The population of Isabella County has steadily grown throughout most of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the exception of the period between 1980 and 1990, when the County's population remained relatively unchanged. Additionally, between 2010 and 2020 there was a 9% decrease in population

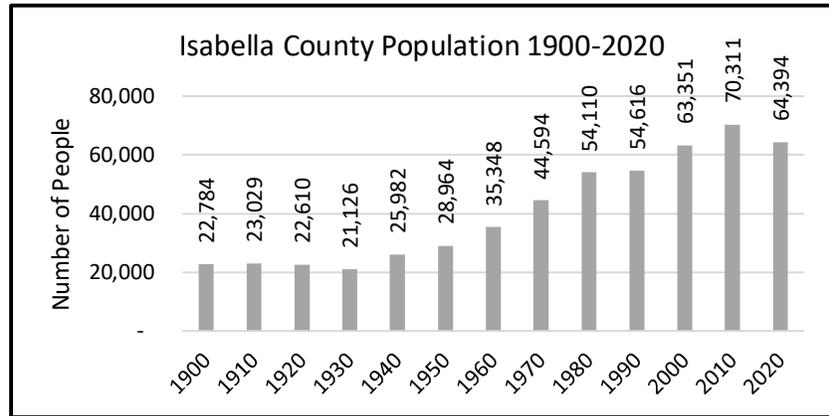


Table 3 U.S. Census Bureau

Taking a longer perspective, however, since 1940, the population has increased over 170%. Greatest gains were experienced between 1950 and 1980, during which time the population nearly doubled. However, many of the individual Townships experienced a much higher growth rate. The population of Broomfield and Sherman Townships, for example, grew by over 70% in the 1970s, and the population of Deerfield Township increased by 50%.

While growth was slow during the 1980s, over the 1990s and through the early 2000s it picked up again. The 2000 Census population of Isabella County was 63,351 persons. By 2010, the population increased to 70,311. The 11% increase was the fourth largest increase of all the counties in the State of Michigan. This increase is in contrast to the 9% decrease in County population during the last decade. The decrease is marketable larger than the State of Michigan's 1.9% increase over the same period.

Population is distributed unevenly throughout the county. The majority of the population is concentrated in the south-central section, around the county seat, the City of Mt. Pleasant. This is by far the County's largest population center with a 2020 population of 21,688, 33.7% of the total county population. The northern half of the County is significantly less populated than the southern half.

Since Mt. Pleasant is the county's largest employment center, it is not surprising that the three most densely populated Townships in the County – Union, Chippewa, and Deerfield – which had a combined 2020 population of 19,402, are all surrounding the City of Mt. Pleasant. This combined population for these three Townships plus the City of Mt. Pleasant accounted for 64.0% of the County's population.

<b>County Population by Community 1980 – 2020</b>						*n/a : Data not available at time of publication.	
<b>Community</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>%change 2000- 2010</b>	<b>%change 2010-2020</b>
<b>Broomfield twp.</b>	1,246	1,266	1,620	1,849	1,857	14.1%	0.4%
<i>Village of Lake Isabella</i>	N/A	N/A	327	509	*n/a	55.7%	*n/a
<i>Outside Village of Lake Isabella</i>	1,246	1,266	1,293	1,340	*n/a	3.6%	*n/a
<b>Chippewa twp.</b>	3,784	4,130	4,617	4,654	4,446	0.8%	-4.7%
<b>Coe twp.</b>	3,141	2,967	2,993	3,079	3,032	2.9%	-1.6%
<i>Village of Shepherd</i>	1,534	1,413	1,536	1,515	1,469	-1.4%	-3.1%
<i>Outside Village of Shepherd</i>	1,607	1,554	1,457	1,564	1,563	7.3%	-0.06%
<b>Coldwater twp.</b>	714	732	737	777	801	5.4%	3.0%
<b>Deerfield twp.</b>	2,160	2,598	3,081	3,188	3,257	3.5%	2.1%
<b>Denver twp.</b>	1,059	1,019	1,147	1,148	1,199	0.1%	4.3%
<b>Fremont twp.</b>	1,215	1,217	1,358	1,455	1,445	7.1%	-0.7%
<b>Gilmore twp.</b>	966	1,072	1,376	1,459	1,314	6.0%	-11.0%
<b>Isabella twp.</b>	1,916	2,025	2,145	2,253	2,096	5.0%	-9.2%
<i>Village of Rosebush</i>	336	333	379	368	353	-2.9%	-4.2%
<i>Outside Village of Rosebush</i>	1,580	1,692	1,766	1,885	1,743	6.7%	-7.5%
<b>Lincoln twp.</b>	1,698	1,794	1,936	2,115	2,069	9.2%	-2.2%
<b>Nottawa twp.</b>	2,042	1,968	2,278	2,282	2,225	0.2%	-2.6%
<b>Rolland twp.</b>	1,105	1,138	1,210	1,305	1,406	7.9%	7.2%
<b>Sherman twp.</b>	1,405	1,725	2,616	2,991	3,127	14.3%	4.3%
<i>Village of Lake Isabella</i>	N/A	N/A	916	1,172	*n/a	27.9%	*n/a
<i>Outside Village of Lake Isabella</i>	1,405	1,725	1,405	1,819	*n/a	7.0%	*n/a
<b>Union twp.</b>	29,052	28,424	33,561	38,943	33,387	16.0%	-16.6%
<i>City of Mt. Pleasant</i>	23,746	23,285	25,946	26,016	21,688	0.3%	-20.0%
<i>Outside City of Mt. Pleasant</i>	5,306	5,139	7,615	12,927	11,699	69.8%	-10.5%
<b>Vernon twp.</b>	1,389	1,316	1,375	1,416	1,300	3.0%	-5.3%
<i>City of Clare</i>	0	8	33	47	78	42.4%	39.7%
<i>Outside City of Clare</i>	1,389	1,308	1,342	1,369	1,222	2.0%	-12.0%
<b>Wise twp.</b>	1,218	1,233	1,301	1,397	1,355	7.4%	-3.1%
<b>Isabella County</b>	54,110	54,624	63,351	70,311	64,394	11.0%	-9.2%

Table 4 U.S. Census Bureau

In contrast, more sparsely populated Townships such as, Coldwater, Denver, Gilmore, Vernon and Wise are located in the northern half of Isabella County. The least populated community in Isabella County is the Village of Rosebush with 353 people. In addition, a very small segment of the City of Clare (only 78 persons), according to the 2020 U.S. Census, lies within Isabella County, while the rest of the city is within Clare County. The table below illustrates the two extremes in population distribution throughout Isabella County.

The City of Mount Pleasant is now and will, in the foreseeable future, remain the dominant population center in the county. Like most central cities, however, its population is likely to remain stable, at best, if not show a gradual decline. As the following table illustrates, Mt. Pleasant’s proportion of the County population has steadily eroded as the Township’s gain population at the City’s expense.

Top 4 Largest and Smallest Communities in Isabella County (2010 and 2020)						
2010 Rank by Population Size	2020 Rank by Population Size	Community	2010		2020	
			Number of Persons	Percent of Total County Population	Number of Persons	Percent of Total County Population
1	1	Mt. Pleasant City	26,016	37.0%	21,688	33.7%
2	2	Union Township	12,927	18.4%	11,699	18.2%
3	3	Chippewa Township	4,654	6.6%	4,446	6.9%
4	4	Deerfield Township	3,188	4.5%	3,257	5.1%
17	17	Denver Township	1,148	1.6%	1,199	1.9%
18	18	Coldwater Township	777	1.1%	801	1.2%
19	19	Rosebush Village	368	0.5%	353	0.5%
20	20	Clare City, Isabella County	47	0.07%	78	0.1%

Table 5 U.S. Census Bureau

Rural living appears to be a preferred alternative for many, once urban, residents in Isabella County as much as it is in the rest of the country. Not surprisingly, the Townships nearest to the City of Mt. Pleasant are among those with the largest population gains. Union Township, which surrounds the City of Mt. Pleasant on all sides, continues to maintain the largest percentage of County population (outside of Mt. Pleasant) at 18.2%.

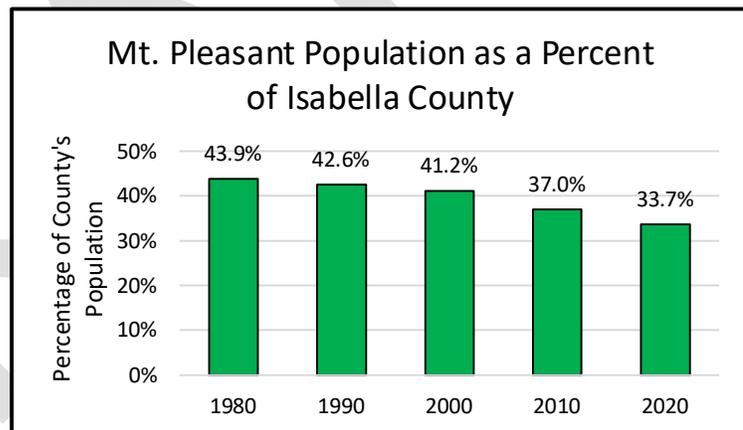


Table 6 U.S. Census Bureau

Population projections from the Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives predict a near 16% increase in population in Isabella County by 2030. The same report however, predicts a slowdown of population increase between 2030 and 2040 to 5.3%.

## Urban and Rural Population

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 46.6% of the population of Isabella County lived in a rural non-farm setting. Additionally, 3% of the population lived on a farm. The total 2010 percentage of rural residents in Isabella County (51.4%) was much higher than for the State of Michigan as a whole (28.1%).

The distribution of the population is consistent with existing land use patterns. The small number of farm residents as compared to the large amount of land used for agricultural purposes is consistent with the growing national trend of fewer but much larger farm operations.

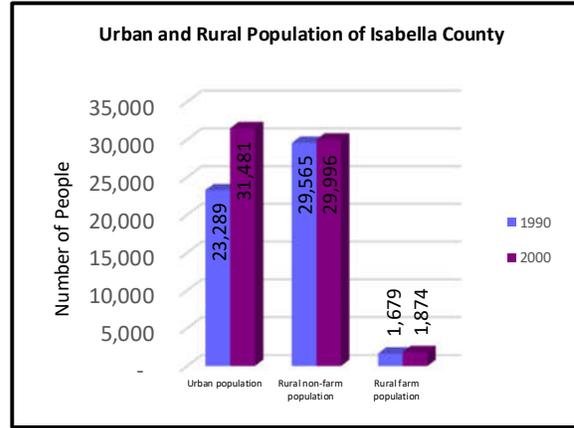


Table 7 U.S. Census Bureau

## Age

The population of Isabella County is young. Nearly half the population consists of people under 25 years of age, nearly 20% of the people are between 20 and 24 years of age. Median age is only 38.9 years as compared to 41.1 for the State of Michigan.

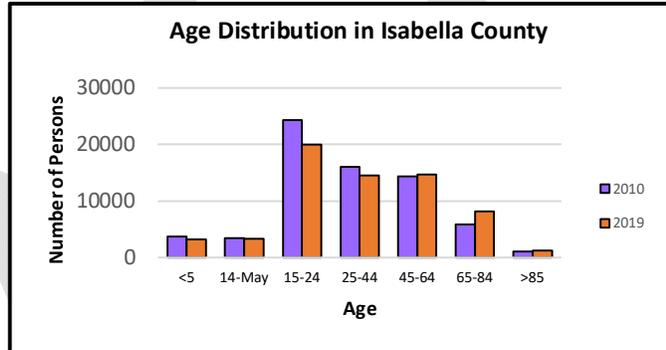


Table 8 U.S. Census Bureau

However, the low median age of the residents of Isabella County is due mainly to the low median age of the residents of its largest population center, the City of Mt. Pleasant.

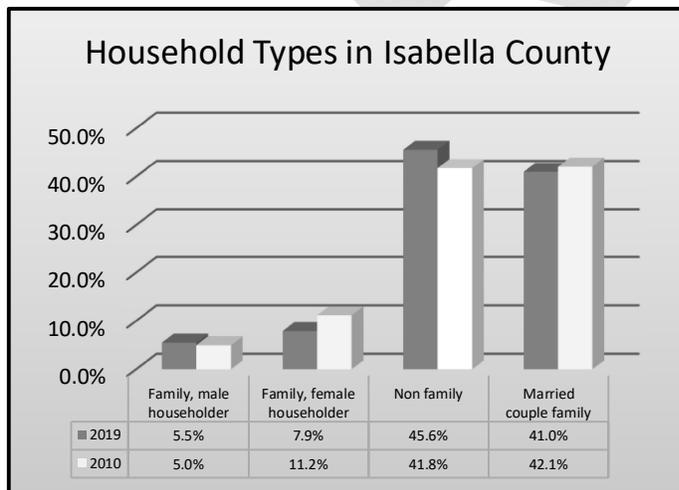


Table 9 U.S. Census Bureau

The City of Mt. Pleasant is the home of Central Michigan University and, therefore, the current home of many college students. Not surprisingly, the Township with the lowest median age, 23.4 years, is the one surrounding Mt. Pleasant, Union Township. The median age in all other Townships is close to the state's median, 41.7 years.

# Households

There were 24,690 households in Isabella County in 2020. Less than half (41.8%) of the households were comprised of married-couples, which is lower than the State rate (45.9%). Almost half (45.6%) of the households in the County were non-family. Over half of those consisted of persons living alone. The percentage of persons living in group quarters (institutions, dormitories, etc.) in Isabella County was also relatively high, 8.0%, compared to the state average of 2.2%. This dramatic disparity is obviously due to the CMU’s student population.

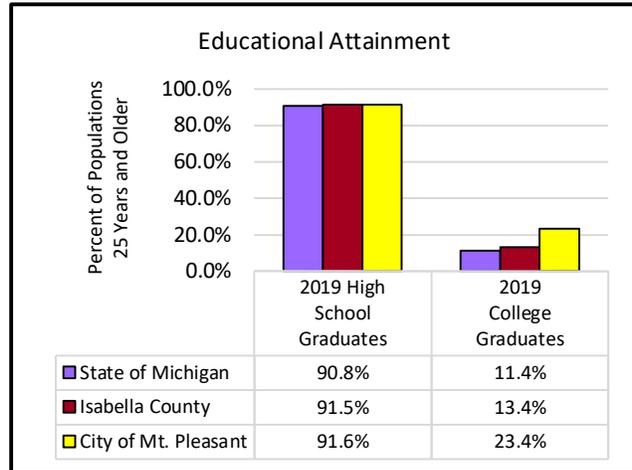


Table 10 U.S. Census Bureau

# Education

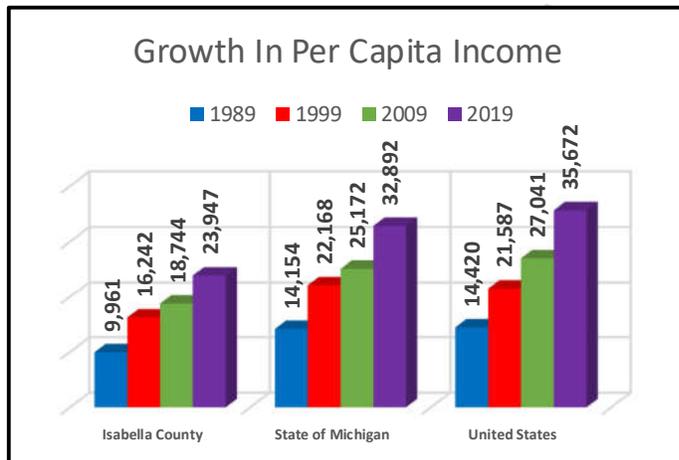


Table 11 U.S. Census Bureau

Isabella County has a well-educated population. The percentage of high school graduates among persons over 25 years of age in the County, as of 2019 was 91.5%, as compared to 90.8% in the State of Michigan. The percentage of college graduates was the same when compared to the State at 29.1%. As one might expect, the highest educational attainment in the County could be found at the home of Central Michigan University, the City of Mt. Pleasant, where the percentage of high school graduates in 2019 was 91.6% and of college graduates was 44.5%. As of 2019, there were 27,673 persons enrolled in school, 65.4% of them attending college.

## Income

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, per capita income in Isabella County is lower than that of the State and the country as a whole. It grew at a slightly lower rate than the State during the decade 2009-2019, 27.8%, as compared to 30.7%. Per capita income in the Country as a whole increased 31.9% during this same time period. Incomes within individual communities in the County varied widely.

Residents of Deerfield Township enjoyed the highest per capita income in 2019, \$39,979. The lowest was found in the city of Mt. Pleasant, \$19,984.

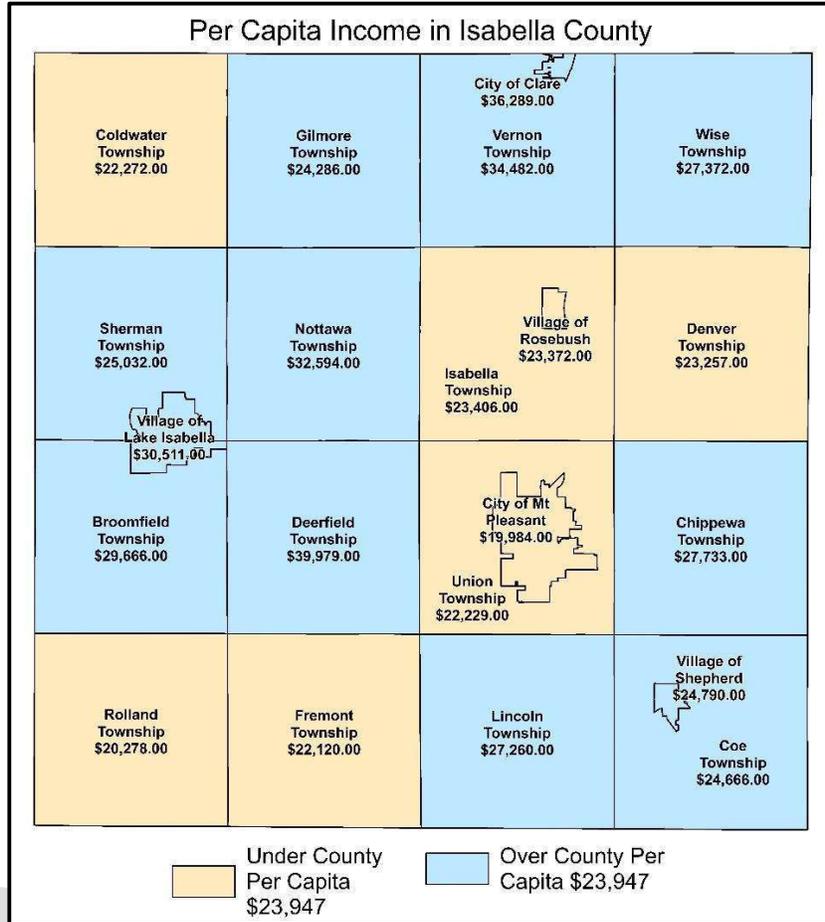


Figure 1 U.S. Census Bureau

The median household income in 2019 for the County was \$45,201, as compared to \$59,584 for the State. While this income difference may look alarming at first sight, it is important to remember that this figure is influenced by the large number of college students living in the County whose income is typically relatively low.

## Employment

Unemployment rates in Isabella County over the past twenty years have been consistent with national trends. They show a gradual increase from the early 2000s until a dramatic increase beginning in 2009. This trend is consistent with nation-wide unemployment rates during the period's recession.

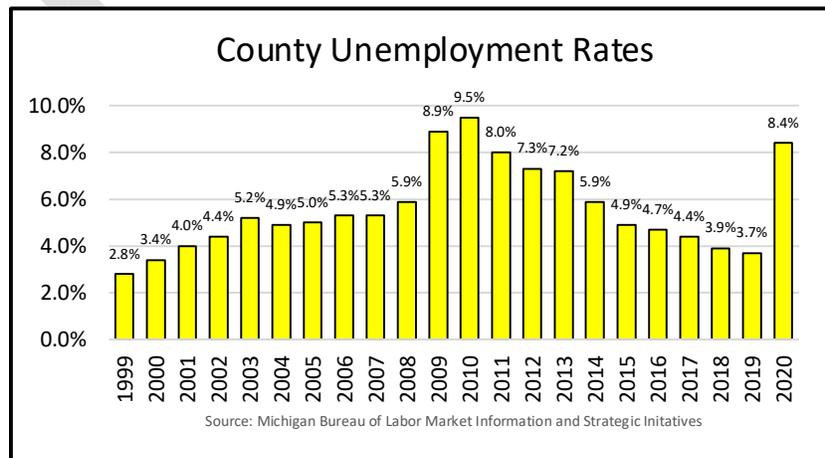
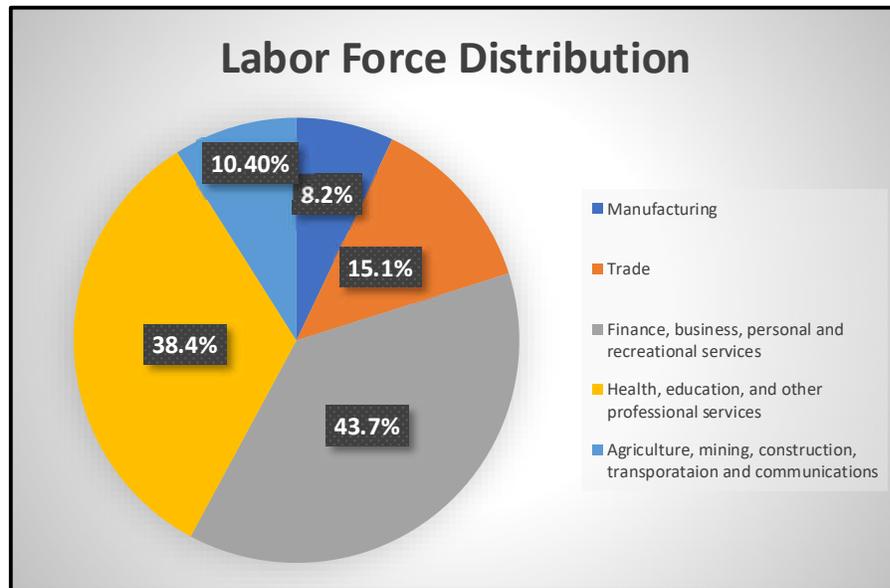


Table 12 Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives

Following the spike in 2010 at 9.5%, the unemployment rate has steadily decreased through 2019. Not surprisingly, the unemployment rate jumped nearly 5% to 8.4% in 2020, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and nation-wide economic shutdowns.

According to the 2019 U.S. Census estimates, the single largest portion of the County’s work force was occupied in educational, health care and social service professions (30.1%). Followed by those employed in the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food service professions (17%) and retail trade (11.4%).



## Industries

Agriculture, wind turbine and oil and gas energy production, and manufacturing of machinery for industry, food services and wood products substantially contribute to the County’s economy. The biggest employer in the County, however, is the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe with its resort/casino and tribal government operations, which, as of 2022

Table 13 Michigan Bureau of Labor market Information and Strategic Initiatives

according to Middle Michigan Development Corporation, employed 2,978 persons. Central Michigan University is the second largest employer with 2,071 employees. Almost all major employers are located in or around the City of Mount Pleasant.

<b>PRINCIPAL EMPLOYERS IN ISABELLA COUNTY</b>			
<b>Company Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Employees</b>	<b>Product Description</b>
Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe	Chippewa Township	2,978	Resort and Services
Central Michigan University	Mt. Pleasant	2,071	Education
Bandit Industries, Inc.	Broomfield Township	610	Manufacturing
Mt. Pleasant Public Schools	Mt. Pleasant	497	Education
Morbark Inc.	Deerfield Township	465	Manufacturing
McBride Quality Services	Union Township	450	Health Care
McLaren Central Michigan	Mt. Pleasant	413	Health Care
Welbilt/Delfield	Union Township	400	Manufacturing
Walmart Super Center	Union Township	398	Retail
Meijer	Mt. Pleasant	370	Retail
Isabella Bank	Mt. Pleasant	367	Finance
American Mitsuba Corporation	Mt. Pleasant	354	Manufacturing
Unified Brands	Broomfield Township	283	Manufacturing
J. Ranck Electric	Mt. Pleasant	217	Construction

*Table 14 Middle Michigan Development Corporation, February 2022*

## **Housing**

Over the past several decades, housing growth in Isabella County was notably greater than it was statewide. During the 1980s, the County’s housing growth figure (9.8%) remained still higher than the one for the State (5.6%). In the 2000 Census, the county witnessed a 23% increase in its housing stock while the state only saw a 10% increase. In the 2010 Census, the County increased 15.7% compared to the State that increased only 7%. According to the 2020 Census, the County’s historic rapid increase slowed to 2.9%, still higher than the State’s 1.8%

The relatively high housing growth in the County may best be explained with the general trend of rural areas growing faster than urban areas nationwide. Other contributing factors are the associated growth and development of Central Michigan University and the Soaring Eagle Casino and Resort.

Housing growth in individual communities of the County has been uneven. According to the 2020 Census, the City of Mount Pleasant saw a decrease of 2.6% whereas Union Township saw an increase of 19.5%. The Townships around the City of Mt. Pleasant, particularly Deerfield and Chippewa, have historically had the highest growth in housing. However, recent trends show years the fastest growing Townships for the percent increase in housing units have been Denver, Fremont and Union Townships.

### Median Housing Values

The median value of homes in the County in 2020 was estimated at \$136,900 as compared to \$162,600 in the State of Michigan. In 2020, the highest median values were recorded in Broomfield and Deerfield Townships. The City of Mount Pleasant and the surrounding Township of Union also had relatively high housing values.

According to 2020 U.S. Census estimates Lincoln, Nottawa, and Vernon Townships along also exceeded the County’s median housing value. It is important to note that housing values in the State have grown much faster than they have in the County over the last 30 years.

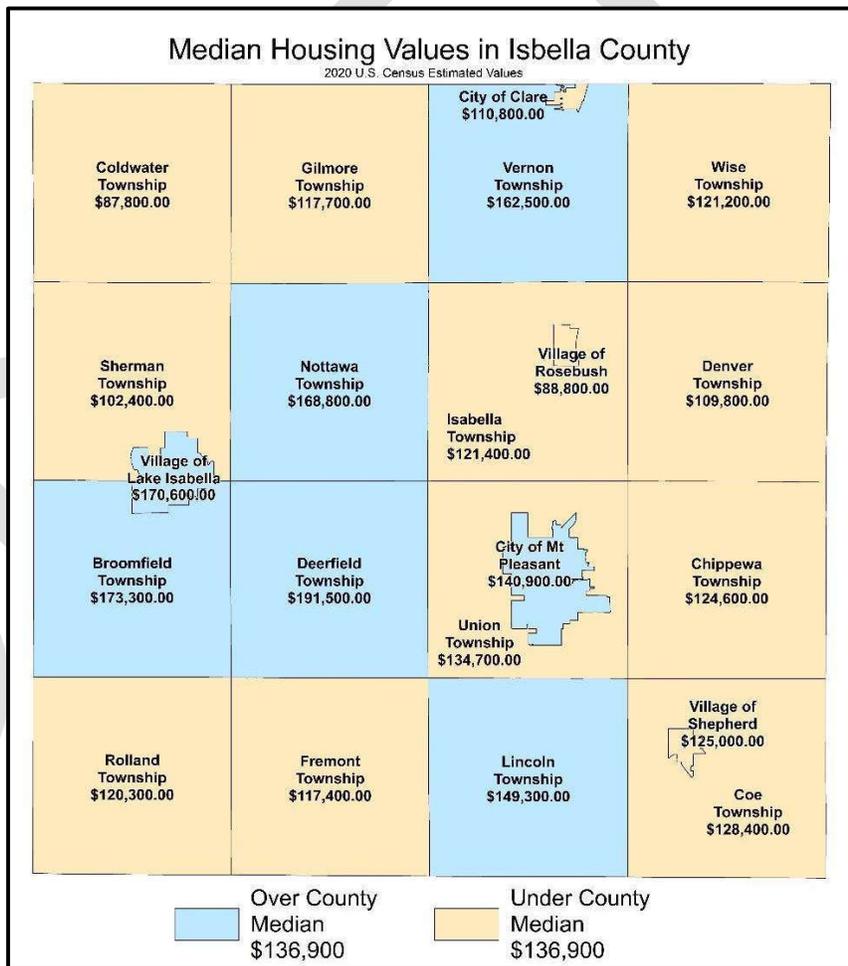
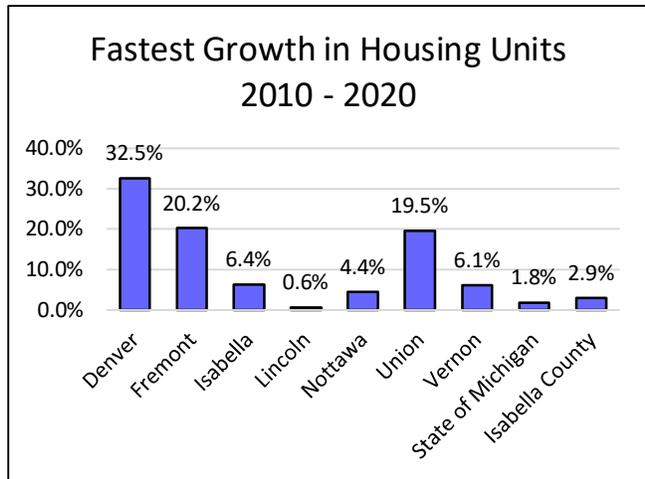


Figure 2 U.S. Census Bureau

# PLANNING ISSUES

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In the early stages of preparing this Plan, the County Planning Commission, its staff, and consultants met individually with representatives of each Township in an effort to understand local concerns regarding land use. In addition, the Townships appointed individuals to attend the many work sessions held to discuss the Plan. This input, coupled with the analysis of data found throughout this document, led to the identification of a number of challenges facing the County and its constituent communities that formed the focus of the Master Plan.

These challenges, or issues, are discussed on the following pages. They are of county-wide concern, though their relative importance in some cases varies by community or geographic area of the County.

## Rural Character/Open Space

The abundance of open space in Isabella County, including lakes and other natural resources, is a prized resource. Open space is valuable not only for its aesthetics and its role in rural character, but also for tourism, its contribution to the State economy, and its environmental benefits. Open space contributes significantly to the quality of life experienced by those who live in Isabella County. The conservation of open space protects ground and surface water by helping to reduce soil erosion, flooding, and nutrient over-loading in water bodies. Open space also provides wildlife habitat, improved air quality, and reduces noise.

*Can everyone have a piece of the country and still retain the community's rural character?*

The abundant diverse landscapes, including shorelines, riparian areas, open fields, forests, and farmlands, have drawn residents to many areas which have long been quiet, rural corners of the County. As more individuals are attracted to these areas, preserving the unique character that drew them there in the first place becomes a growing challenge. So, the question becomes, can everyone have a piece of the country and still retain the community's rural character?

Rural character is not defined by a precise set of criteria. It is a perception, an intangible atmosphere or "feel" rather than a specific quality. No one feature creates rural character. Rather, it is a combination of many features that, together, create the character that people are both drawn to and want to preserve. Among the commonly described features are:

- tree-lined roads
- farmland
- woodland
- wildlife
- gravel roads
- clean air and water

- lack of development
- natural streambanks
- natural lake shorelines
- views of the night sky
- small villages and communities

Like agricultural conservation, rural conservation is complicated. Individual property rights must be balanced with the public good. Ironically, as more people seek the ambiance of a rural lifestyle, the qualities that attracted them are gradually diminished and eventually lost. It is also common for those persons who sought life in the country to soon become disenchanted due to lack of public services, the frequent presence of farm odors, the slow pace of traffic on back roads, and the travel distances to conveniences previously taken for granted.

## Agricultural Conservation

Isabella County contains some of the richest agricultural soils in the State of Michigan. In addition to this “prime” land, many sectors of the County contain extensive areas of sandy soil, ideally suited to specialty crops such as potatoes. Clearly, agriculture is the predominant activity in the unincorporated areas of the County and is a major component of the County and regional economy.



Obviously, the need to protect such valuable agricultural resources is not only an issue of concern in Isabella County, but is important on a much broader scale; statewide and nationally. The productive quality of farmland throughout Isabella County can rival the best lands in the State. Therefore, any threat to the long-term continuation of farming in the County must be taken seriously.



Agricultural resources throughout Michigan are generally considered to be in jeopardy within the next twenty years if current development trends continue. The value of farmland, and its accelerating loss has been well documented in other sources. In order to maintain the quality of life to which Michigan residents have become accustomed, regulatory measures to conserve farmland will be necessary in some areas. It is generally thought that current low density development patterns create parcel sizes which are “too big to mow, but too little to plow.” While rural character may be able to be preserved, saving farmland is much less certain.

Given the critical importance of farmland to the economy, to the production of food for the population, and to the enhancement of the environment, it would seem that the conservation of these lands would be so obvious as to not even warrant discussion. However, there are a number of very practical concerns that challenge the continued viability of the agricultural way of life at its current scale.

First, is the economics of farming. Like any business, if the cost of production exceeds the revenues generated, the operation cannot afford to continue for long. The solution then is to sell to someone who can operate profitably or to convert the land to another use altogether. Since the County's prior land use plan was prepared in 1986, thousands of acres of agricultural land have been converted to other uses.

Second, while the agricultural lands are widespread, many of these areas are interspersed with non-agricultural land, wood lots, lakes, or marginal farmland, all of which may be attractive for residential development. As rural roads become dotted with single family homes, pressures on the farmer gradually mount to sell off some or all of the land due to increased taxes, "nuisance" complaints from the new neighbors, or offers to purchase at prices that far exceed farm revenues.

Third, while there is undeniably an overall public purpose associated with the conservation of farmland, it must be recognized that the land is privately owned. Every property owner is entitled to a reasonable use of his or her property and, therefore, the public interest in preserving precious farmland must be balanced with individual property rights.

## **Environmental Protection**

Closely aligned with both agricultural and rural conservation, environmental protection is another critical issue Isabella County possesses many sensitive natural features whose qualities are threatened by the spread of development. Among these are the County's many lakes, wetlands, and rivers.

The Chippewa River is one of the most prominent features shared by several communities. Overuse of the river, development along its shores, and polluted runoff are combining to diminish the quality of this resource. The same may be said of many of the County's larger lakes whose banks are rimmed with single family homes and where access to the general public is unavailable or limited.

Groundwater contamination is a related issue. Concentrations of septic systems, loss of wetlands, and intensive livestock operations give cause for concern about the long-term purity of the groundwater running beneath the County's rural landscape. As this is the source of drinking water for most people in Isabella County, its protection demands attention.

## **Commercial/Service Locations**

As the population living outside the City of Mt. Pleasant and other, much smaller, urban centers increases and spreads further out, the desire for convenient shopping facilities in reasonable proximity will also grow. While large-scale or linear commercial development is inappropriate in rural Isabella County, smaller areas of concentrated commercial and service uses would fill a need.

Control of such areas is often difficult, however. There may be a tendency to scatter commercial uses throughout a community, at nearly every major cross-roads. Or it may be tempting to stretch

commercial uses out for miles along a major trunkline, eliminating the convenience of having a concentrated commercial core and creating a blight on the rural landscape. The widespread scattered development of businesses in rural areas or the temptation to over zone for such uses in an effort to compete with other communities or locations can create a serious negative impact upon the community character.

## **Residential Choice**

While most of the County outside the City of Mt. Pleasant is rural and sparsely developed with scattered single-family homes, some provision must be made for alternate housing choices to accommodate the needs and desires of the entire population. Affordable housing, higher density housing, and residential variety beyond detached single family homes should all be available.

This range of options, however, must be tempered with appropriate planning considerations such as the ability to provide acceptable water and sewer service, availability of other needed public services, compatibility with surrounding land use, impact upon the environment, consistency with master plan goals, and proportional balance among alternative housing forms. Like industrial and commercial development, such housing options are not universally acceptable in all sectors of the County. There are limited locations within Isabella County where alternatives to the single-family home on an acreage parcel may be appropriate.

## **Industry, Tax Base & Jobs**

Industry means added tax base and local jobs. To most communities the possibility of attracting even small industries is viewed as a benefit to be pursued. Because of the desire to accommodate uses that will offer some additional tax revenue or create even modest employment opportunities, proper land use practices are often ignored. Zoning ordinances are revised to make way for a specific use which may not be compatible with others in the district; or property is rezoned without regard to the policies and direction provided in the local Master Plan or compatibility with adjacent uses.

Rural areas, such as those which typify Isabella County, are generally not suited to significant concentrations of industrial development. They lack adequate public infrastructure (water, sewer, fire, police, roads, etc.) and, therefore, are not suited to this type of development. What may seem to be a benefit to the community, initially, often creates conflicts and ends up costing more than it contributes.

Existing employment centers in Mt. Pleasant, Clare, and a few other smaller communities have the needed infrastructure and are within an easy commute to all areas of the County. Isolated industries in remote locations run counter to proper land use planning. Where such development exists, it may be expanded upon, but new locations should be discouraged.

## **Airports and Approved Airport Plans**

Airports are community assets providing significant benefits. They facilitate the movement of people, goods and services, promote tourism and trade, stimulate business development and support a variety of jobs.

The objective of land use planning is to guide land use development to be compatible with airport operations.

The Michigan Zoning Enabling Act, Act 110 of 2006, requires all Michigan Aeronautics Commission approved airport approach plans or airport layout plans filed with the Isabella County Planning Commission be incorporated into the County Master Land Use Plan.

The following airports have filed approved Plans with Isabella County:

- Clare Municipal Airport
- Mount Pleasant Municipal Airport
- Lake Isabella Airport
- Woodruff Lake Airport
- Ojibwa Airport

## **Role of County Planning Commission**

Even with its statutory authority to zone, County government often finds itself in an adversarial position with Townships. In many cases, there is a built-in conflict between the County's areawide perspective and any individual Township's localized view of things. As a result, Townships are often wary of the County imposing its will upon another unit of government. In Isabella County, the zoning authority gives the County more than an advisory role in local development decisions. However, the County must also be sensitive to local desires and concerns when exercising this authority.

The County has other important planning responsibilities, as well, however. For example, it has a major role as a coordinator, bringing the Townships together to discuss common concerns and needs. The County can also serve as a resource for the Townships. Individually, each Township would not have a need for or the financial ability to hire full-time staff for many of the functions the County can perform. Likewise, Isabella County has an opportunity to serve as an educational resource for the Townships, providing data, training, and other forms of information relevant to the many communities collectively.

# VISION & GOALS

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The function of the Master Plan is to provide guidance for long-range land use and community development decisions. One of the basic components of the Plan, then, is the vision statement which sets the tone or establishes the County's philosophy for the future. The vision is accompanied by more specific goals, and detailed policies, to provide step-by-step direction to the decision-makers.

The following vision, goals, and policies were formulated by the Isabella County Planning Commission in conjunction with local officials and citizens from throughout the County. These statements express their desires for the future of Isabella County

## VISION

*Create an atmosphere in which all communities can work toward the mutually supportive objectives to create a livable setting offering the benefits of rural character, an agricultural economy, and a pristine environment, coupled with social and economic opportunity, urban amenities, affordable housing, an adequate infrastructure, and managed growth.*

## GOALS

### Environment

- To protect the quality of the groundwater supply throughout the County (Ranked Survey Result 1.7)

*Policies:*

- Encourage development to locate where public water and sanitary sewer are available or programmed or where an approved private system will be provided.
  - Relate minimum density and lot size requirements to the suitability of soils to accommodate on site systems.
  - Promote consistent policies between County and State Health Departments relative to the use of alternative private systems and minimum lot size requirements.
- To preserve or improve the quality of the County's water resources, such as the Chippewa and Salt Rivers, their tributaries, lakes, and wetlands. (Ranked Survey Result 2.0)

*Policies:*

- Create an overlay zoning district which can be applied to the lands abutting water resources to manage growth and development, ensure sufficient setback distances, and preserve natural features.
- Coordinate the County efforts with the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service.
- Work with the Department of Environment Great Lakes and Energy to enforce water quality regulations.
- Consider the potential impacts of storm water runoff on water quality.

- To Preserve the natural character of adjacent lands along the Chippewa, Salt, and North Branch. (Ranked Survey Result 2.5)

*Policies:*

- Provide incentives to preserve frontage and vegetation along the river banks.
- Create an overlay zoning district which can be applied to the lands along the river banks.
- Consider the established federal flood plain boundaries as a part of any proposed regulations.

- To preserve the rural character of those portions of the county containing significant natural features that are outside the urban influence of the County's incorporated areas. (Ranked Survey Result 2.1)

*Policies:*

- Provide incentives for conservation of significant features through flexible development regulations, density bonuses, or similar tools.
- Promote the dedication for public enjoyment of private property containing significant natural features.
- Adopt and promote the use of open space zoning concepts for development in areas containing significant natural features.
- Investigate and, if appropriate, promote a program of transferable development rights (TDR) or purchase of development rights (PDR).
- Encourage cooperative and coordinated planning efforts among neighboring communities.

## **Economy**

- To Support agricultural activity as an essential part of the County and State economy. (Ranked Survey Result 1.9)

*Policies:*

- Identify those agricultural lands throughout the County that have the highest priority for conservation based on soils, topography, and surrounding uses.
- Designate appropriate locations within the County's agricultural areas for intensive farming operations based on compatibility with surrounding uses, potential for future development in the vicinity, and similar relevant criteria.
- Promote implementation of a program of transferable development rights (TDR) and purchase of development rights (PDR)

- To support and encourage economic diversity. (Ranked Survey Result 2.3)

*Policies:*

- Support local and regional development organizations such as the Middle-Michigan Development Corporation.

- Coordinate economic development efforts with local school systems and CMU to ensure educational training curricula match employer needs.
- Maintain a high quality of life to attract and retain employees.
- Promote and support reuse of existing facilities and conservation of significant architectural resources.
- Assist individual communities plan for and identify appropriate locations for industrial and commercial development.
- Support State initiatives to diversify energy consumption and increase clean energy production through renewable energy resources.

## **Growth**

- To accommodate desired urban and rural growth in a well-managed and orderly manner. (Ranked Survey Result 2.4)

*Policies:*

- Discourage unplanned, sprawl conditions.
- County bonding authority for public utility projects should only be used for those projects that are consistent with the County Master Plan goals and policies.
- The Planning Commission should seek the cooperation of relevant County agencies, such as the Parks and Recreation Department, Road Commission, Health Department, and Drain Commission when implementing the Plan.

- To minimize frontage residential development along main roads in the County. (Ranked Survey Result 3.6)

*Policies:*

- Adopt zoning regulations which provide incentives for clustering.
- Establish maximum lot size requirements , as well as minimums, in agricultural zoning districts.

## **Land Use**

- To protect and retain prime and important agricultural lands from encroachment by incompatible land uses. (Ranked Survey Result 2.2)

*Policies:*

- Recognize the importance of agricultural land as an irreplaceable natural resource.
- Adopt zoning regulations for agricultural lands that limit the intrusion of nonfarm uses.
- Research the feasibility of a County-wide program for purchasing and/or transferring development rights on significant agricultural land.
- Work with the State of Michigan on new programs and legislation.

- To create local business centers throughout the County. (Ranked Survey Result 2.9)

*Policies:*

- Identify specific locations in all geographic sectors of the County where concentrated commercial/service nodes would be appropriate, based on existing land use patterns, traffic access, proximity to population concentrations, and anticipated growth.
- Encourage commercial development in locations consistent with the Master Plan recommendations and the following criteria:

- adjacent to existing commercial development
  - paved, major roads
  - intersection location
  - near concentrations of residential development
  - served by public utilities, if available
- To promote land use compatibility among adjoining communities (Ranked Survey Result 3.0)
 

*Policies:*

  - Promote the County’s role as coordinating and reviewing authority among all Townships, not just those with County zoning.
- To ensure ample opportunity is available for affordable housing in all sectors of the County. (Ranked Survey Result 2.7)
 

*Policies:*

  - Designate locations for various densities of residential development in appropriate locations throughout the County relative to existing development patterns, availability of utilities and other needed public services, transportation access, proximity to commercial nodes and employment centers, and suitable soil conditions.
  - Encourage residential development at density levels consistent with the future land use recommendations of the County Master Plan.
- To provide for changes in the home and work place environment. (Ranked Survey Result 3.3)
 

*Policies:*

  - Ensure that zoning regulations do not unreasonably restrict appropriate home occupations.
  - Adopt zoning regulations that permit some flexibility with respect to mixing compatible uses.

## **Infrastructure**

- To improve traffic movement and vehicular circulation throughout the County. (Ranked Survey Result 1.8)
 

*Policies:*

  - Coordinate road improvement efforts of the County Road Commission with future land use recommendations of the County Master Plan.
  - Assign a higher priority to road improvements (paving gravel roads, widening existing roads, constructing new roads) that will serve areas where development already exists or which will serve areas planned for such development.
- To direct growth toward those areas where adequate public services and facilities are available or can be economically and efficiently provided. (Ranked Survey Result 2.6)
 

*Policies:*

  - Closely link land use and zoning decisions with the availability or likelihood of public services such as water, sanitary sewer, police, fire, schools, libraries, and parks.
  - Discourage zoning changes that would result in premature development of locations where

public services cannot be provided or could only be provided at a high cost to the public.

- To provide balanced recreational opportunities throughout the County. (Ranked Survey Result 2.4)

*Policies:*

- Support the recommendations contained in the Isabella County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan.
- Promote recreational opportunities in proximity to areas of existing or planned development concentrations.
- Utilize available parks and recreation funding sources to acquire sensitive lands and preserve them from development.

- To recognize County-wide transit as an important public service and promote land use practices that will support efficient transit operation. (Ranked Survey Result 3.0)

*Policies:*

- Consider the feasibility of transit service when making land use decisions.
- Encourage clustering and high-density residential development in appropriate locations on or near major transportation routes where transit service may be feasible.

## **Communication**

- To maintain an active dialogue between the County Planning Commission and individual Townships. (Ranked Survey Result 1.6)

*Policies:*

- Meet regularly with the Townships throughout the County regarding land use and zoning issues.
- Send copies of Planning Commission meeting agendas and minutes to each Township.
- Establish a regular agenda item for Township issues as part of the County Planning Commission meeting.
- Create task forces or committees to study specific issues of concern to Townships or particular geographic sectors of the County.

# SURVEY RESULTS

Below are the results of the Master Plan goals survey that was conducted by Community Development Support Staff, during the 2022 update.

***Goals ranked from most important to least important, as determined survey of Township Officials:***

1 = Very Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 4 = Not Important

To maintain an active dialogue between the County Planning Commission and individual Townships	1.6	To preserve or improve the water quality of the County’s water resources, such as the Chippewa and Salt Rivers, their tributaries, lakes and wetlands	2.5
To protect the quality of the groundwater supply throughout the County	1.7	To preserve the natural character of adjacent lands along the Chippewa, Salt, and North Branch	2.5
To improve traffic movement and vehicular circulation throughout the County	1.8	To direct growth toward those areas where adequate public services and facilities are available or can be economically provided	2.6
To support Agricultural activity as an essential part of the County and State economy	1.9	To ensure ample opportunity is available for affordable housing in all sectors of the County	2.7
To preserve the rural character of those portions of the County containing significant natural features and are outside the urban influence of the County’s incorporated areas	2.1	To create local business centers throughout the County	2.9
To protect and retain prime and important agricultural lands from encroachment by incompatible land uses	2.2	To promote land use compatibility among adjoining communities	3.0
To support and encourage economic diversity	2.3	To recognize County-wide transit as an important public service and promote land use practices that will support efficient transit operation	3.0
To provide balanced recreational opportunities throughout the County	2.4	To provide for changes in the home and work place environment	3.3
To accommodate desired urban and rural growth in a well-managed and orderly manner	2.4	To minimize frontage residential development along main roads in the County	3.6

# Master Plan Review Subcommittee Township Officials Survey Results

1 = Very Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 4 = Not Important

# Surveys Received	Broomfield 4	Coldwater 3	Denver 1	Gilmore 1	Isabella	Lincoln 1	Nottawa	Rolland 5	Sherman 2	Vernon 1	Overall Average
<b>Environment</b>											
To improve traffic movement and vehicular circulation throughout the County	2.0	1.7	1.0	1.0	*	2.0	*	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
To preserve the natural character of adjacent lands along the Chippewa, Salt, and North Branch	2.8	1.7	1.0	1.0	*	2.0	*	2.6	2.5	4.0	2.5
To preserve the rural character of those portions of the County containing significant natural features and are outside the urban influence of the County's incorporated areas	1.8	1.3	1.0	1.0	*	2.0	*	2.4	2.5	3.0	2.1
To protect the quality of the groundwater supply throughout the County	1.5	1.3	1.0	1.0	*	2.0	*	1.4	2.0	2.0	1.7
<b>Economy</b>											
To support Agricultural activity as an essential part of the County and State economy	1.0	2.7	1.0	2.0	*	2.0	*	2.4	1.5	1.0	1.9
To support and encourage economic diversity	2.3	2.3	1.0	2.0	*	2.0	*	1.8	1.5	3.0	2.3
<b>Growth</b>											
To accommodate desired urban and rural growth in a well-managed and orderly manner	2.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	*	3.0	*	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.4
To minimize frontage residential development along main roads in the County	2.8	3.0	1.0	3.0	*	4.0	*	3.2	4.0	4.0	3.6
To promote land use compatibility among adjoining communities	1.7	3.0	1.0	3.0	*	3.0	*	2.8	2.5	4.0	3.0
To create local business centers throughout the County	2.8	2.7	1.0	4.0	*	3.0	*	2.4	1.5	3.0	2.9
To ensure ample opportunity is available for affordable housing in all sectors of the County	2.8	2.0	1.0	2.0	*	3.0	*	2.2	2.0	4.0	2.7
To provide for changes in the home and work place environment	2.5	2.3	2.0	3.0	*	4.0	*	2.8	2.5	4.0	3.3
To protect and retain prime and important agricultural lands from encroachment by incompatible land uses	1.5	2.3	1.0	2.0	*	3.0	*	2.0	1.5	2.0	2.2
<b>Infrastructure</b>											
To improve traffic movement and vehicular circulation throughout the County	1.8	1.3	1.0	2.0	*	2.0	*	2.0	1.5	1.0	1.8
To provide balanced recreational opportunities throughout the County	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	*	2.0	*	1.8	1.0	3.0	2.4

	Broomfield	Coldwater	Denver	Gilmore	Isabella	Lincoln	Nottawa	Rolland	Sherman	Vernon	Overall Average
To direct growth toward those areas where adequate public services and facilities are available or can be economically and efficiently provided	2.8	2.3	1.0	2.0	*	2.0	*	2.8	2.0	3.0	2.6
To recognize County-wide transit as an important public service and promote land use practices that will support efficient transit operation	2.3	2.7	2.0	3.0	*	3.0	*	2.4	3.0	3.0	3.0
<b>Communication</b>											
To maintain an active dialogue between the County Planning Commission and individual Townships	1.3	1.7	1.0	1.0	*	2.0	*	1.8	1.5	1.0	1.6

1 = Very Important, 2 = Important, 3 = Somewhat Important, 4 = Not Important

\*No response received from the Township

Averages were calculated based on one survey ea. for all five board members and overall average is calculated by averaging individual questions scores from all questionnaires.

# THE PLAN

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The Plan is more than a final document. The text, tables, and maps that fill these pages are representations of the concerns, philosophies, and visions of the County through its Planning Commission. A great deal of effort went into the formulation of this Master Plan. Many meetings were held. Dozens of interested citizens and local officials attended work sessions. And a formal public hearing was held to provide for even wider participation.

Throughout the process of examining issues, formulating a vision, and recommending future land use patterns, the Planning Commission worked in partnership with representatives from the Townships. Each of the many work sessions involved lively discussion regarding the individual interests of specific Townships in relation to the broader interest of Isabella County as a whole. The resulting Plan reflects a desire on the County's part to achieve a sound pattern of land use, while recognizing the reality of existing conditions.

It may now be tempting to pronounce the Plan completed and move on to other things. If this happens, the long, involved process of planning will have been no more than a time-consuming exercise. Now the work really begins. The County Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners, along with the many public officials responsible in one way or another for the day-to-day development activities in Isabella County, must consciously adhere to the adopted goals and recommendations outlined in this Plan document.

The purpose of the Plan is to serve as a guide for long-range community strategies, as well as short-term land use decisions. Before such decisions are made, the Plan should be consulted and carefully evaluated to ensure that those decisions will be consistent with the intent and spirit of the Plan.

The land use categories used in the Plan and the accompanying Future Land Use Map are described below. It is important to note that these do not always correspond to zoning districts. Zoning regulations and district boundaries should, indeed, reflect the Plan recommendations. But while the Plan is long-range in its scope, the zoning ordinance is short-term and will not immediately reflect the same patterns as the Master Plan.

## **RURAL LAND CONSERVATION**

Much of the County's land area is designated as Rural Land Conservation. This encompasses the developed and undeveloped lands that remain rural and, in most cases, still exhibit those features which define the County's rural character - lakes, wetlands, open spaces, woods, fields, hills, and wildlife.

While much of this land continues to be farmed, it has begun to experience parcel splits and accompanying single family home development scattered along the main roads. The purpose of this land use category is to define those areas of the County where controlled non-farm residential development can be permitted at very low densities, and which should respect the character of the land and surrounding area, as well as the continuation of agricultural activities.

The location of these lands generally serves as a buffer or transition area bordering the Agricultural Conservation lands, offering opportunities for rural living and a degree of protection for the more pristine agricultural lands.

It is recommended that the County adopt zoning regulations that reinforce the Master Plan goals and policies through planned unit development provisions, cluster zoning, PDR/TDR, and other incentives to preserve the assets of these rural areas. Through the use of such techniques, permitted densities can actually be increased slightly, but with less impact on the rural character. Development under these techniques may be allowed on lots or parcels much smaller than five acres. This allows the conservation of valuable rural characteristics, reduces development costs, and results in more desirable residential environments.

## AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION

As discussed previously in this document and reflected in the goals and policies, the conservation of agriculture as a critical use of land in the County and key component of the economy is of major importance. The Future Land Use Map depicts a pattern of land that is designated “agricultural conservation”. This represents those lands that are predominantly farmed, contain “prime” soils, are found in relatively large and contiguous patterns, and are in locations that are less threatened by the spread of urban development.

This is not to suggest that these are the only farmlands worth protecting, but, because of the many factors listed above, these should be the areas of highest priority for protection from intruding development. The majority of these lands are found in the central and northern parts of the County. Other concentrations are located in the extreme southwest corner and the south/ southeast corner of the County.

While it is not the intent of the Master Plan to specify development restrictions, it is recommended that the County establish zoning regulations relative to agricultural lands that are specifically designed to promote the conservation of agricultural operations within the County and to discourage incompatible development, in particular the intrusion of nonfarm single-family homes into areas designated for agricultural conservation. A variety of techniques are available for this purpose and may include:

Sliding Scale (Example)	
Area of Parent Parcel	Additional Lots Permitted
1 to 10 acres	1
10.1 to 20 acres	2
20.1 to 40 acres	3
40.1 to 80 acres	4
80.1 to 160 acres	5
160.1 to 320 acres	6
over 320.1 acres	7

- Sliding scale zoning:** This technique limits the number of times that a parent parcel (a parcel existing on the date of ordinance adoption) can be split, based on its size, i.e., the larger the parcel the more splits that may occur, up to a maximum number established (as shown on the example chart). Unlike exclusive use zoning, sliding scale zoning allows some nonfarm residential development without special land use or other reviews. Sliding scale zoning can be useful in agricultural areas that are

being affected by residential development and land speculation by allowing some increased use of land for development of non-farm uses.

Minimum and maximum building lot sizes can be used to encourage the location of non-farm development on less productive farmland and/or in areas where development is more concentrated to direct growth onto already fragmented land. The use of sliding scale zoning is most effective in areas where a wide range of parcel sizes exist and non-farm residential development has already begun to occur. The use of buffer areas (see later discussion) is highly recommended to avoid land use conflicts between new residential development and agriculturally related activities, such as pesticide spraying.

- **Nonfarm homes as a special use:** Exclusive use agricultural zoning can be an effective way to protect farmland from conversion. Exclusive use zoning is most appropriate where there is limited pressure for residential development and existing large areas of prime or unique agricultural resources. The purposes of an exclusive agricultural zone may include:
  - protecting productive farms and farmland;
  - avoiding conflicting land uses;
  - maintaining a viable agricultural economic base;
  - reducing production costs by not introducing residential development; and
  - maintaining open space/rural character.

New non-farm residences are often strictly regulated in exclusive use districts. Site development standards would include a maximum lot area for non-farm, residential uses, approval of such uses through a special land use process, and a large minimum lot area for a farm dwelling unit. Other provisions might include a maximum lot to depth ratio of 1:3; and large minimum lot widths and setbacks.

- **Purchase of development rights:** The purchase of development rights has a similar setup and advantages as conservation easements. The landowner voluntarily sells the development right to his property, for compensation for not developing the land. The landowner still maintains ownership of the land to continue using the land for farming practices.

The value for the purchase of the development rights is the difference between the fair market value and the agricultural use value of the land. With the income from the sale of the development rights the landowner has money to expand existing farm operation, pay off debt, college education, inheritance to non-farm related children, retirement, and much more. Besides, extra income, the sale of development rights allows the land to be assessed at a lower tax rate, decreasing property tax and inheritance taxes of the land.

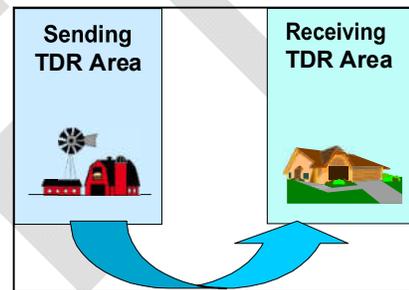
One fundamental concern with PDR programs is funding the program. In Michigan, as well as nationally, funds are very limited, and applications for PDR purchases extremely competitive. Funds for the program may come from private agencies like American

Farmland Trust, state bond referendums, grants, donations, P.A. 116 lien fund, or an increase in other local funding sources, such as a voter approved millage.

As with conservation easements, the landowner maintains full ownership of their land for agricultural uses and the land can be sold or transferred, but can never be used for non-farm development. However, none of these programs are entirely permanent and may be designed to allow some way out by proving through stringent test that keeping the land open for productive agriculture is no longer possible in that area. Then most programs allow the landowners to buy back development rights.

- **Transfer of development rights:** Transfer of development rights is another voluntary conservation option that compensates the land owner for not developing their land by allowing the development rights to be transferred to a development district.

For TDR to work properly two districts need to be established. A conservation, or “sending” area, where no development will occur, and a “receiving” area that uses the rights for higher development densities above that which is otherwise allowed under current zoning.



TDR has similar characteristics to PDR. Each has as its focus the protection of agricultural land while allowing the landowner to be compensated for not selling and developing their land. Compensation benefits include reduced tax assessments, and the right to buy, sell, or transfer the property, and the knowledge that the land will be preserved for future generations to use and enjoy. TDR requires more planning and oversight by local government.

## LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL

The areas designated for Low Density Residential development are generally found adjacent to or near the County’s lakes and/or tend to be those areas where development already exists. Many of these areas have been platted and contain very small lots. The intent of this classification is to concentrate single family residential development, preferably in subdivisions or site condominiums, in locations where such trends have already begun and which are in relative proximity to commercial service nodes.

Due to the fragile nature of the lakes and their environs, further intense development should be discouraged. While infill development can occur on existing lots, new subdivisions comprised of small lots should not be permitted. The Plan puts a high priority on preventing further overcrowding and additional expansion of intensive development near the more developed lakes within the County, as well as preserving and preventing intensive development on those lakes which are not already significantly developed. Further, intensive development of already developed lakes and significant development of yet relatively pristine lakes will degrade water quality, threaten drinking water aquifers, and compromise the environment.

Densities should be limited, unless a public or approved private community sewer system is installed. In addition, the County zoning regulations affecting lakefront development should be examined and updated accordingly.

## **MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL**

It is the County's desire to provide a reasonable range of housing options throughout its boundaries. Therefore, the Plan designates several areas for Medium Density Residential development which could accommodate uses such as condominiums, multiple family, or manufactured home communities.

Areas designated Medium Density tend to be in locations where such development already exists. Many are existing manufactured home communities, while a few are multiple family housing developments. Due to the lack of public sewer in the outlying areas of the County, such housing concentrations rely on private on-site sewer systems.

The lack of public utilities and other public services to support heavy concentrations of development anywhere in the County must temper the intensity of any such development. Approved community sewer systems are essential for larger density use. If and when public sewer becomes available to such areas, the appropriate density could be increased.

In addition to water and sewer, however, residential concentrations create demands for other public facilities and services. These medium density developments, therefore, should be sited in proximity to existing or planned services and facilities to minimize their impact on the infrastructure and avoid demands for the premature extension of costly public improvements. Among the criteria that were considered for the location of "Medium Density Residential" areas are the following:

- location at the intersection of paved County primary roads, providing both north/south and east/west traffic movement;
- reasonable proximity (within two miles) of an existing or planned commercial center;
- located in areas that will not create undue pressures for additional development within "agricultural conservation" areas; and
- located within or adjacent to other concentrations of development.

While not all areas designated as "Medium Density Residential" meet these criteria, those that do not are older existing developments. New projects should meet the above criteria.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL**

The large geographic area encompassed by Isabella County and its generally rural character necessitate the distribution of some conveniences throughout all areas to serve the population. The Master Plan designates several such "neighborhood" commercial areas. Land use within this category is envisioned to be very limited retail/service business, generally located within existing

towns or at major crossroads. They are intended to be tight concentrations of business activity, rather than linear strips stretching out along county roads. Restaurants, gas stations, convenience and grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware stores, banks, and similar locally oriented businesses would be appropriate in these locations. Large scale shopping centers, drive-in restaurants, and highway-oriented commercial should be discouraged.

## **GENERAL COMMERCIAL**

This is a broader category of business center found in a few locations across the County, mainly along Mission Road in Vernon and Isabella Townships near U.S. 127. It is intended to accommodate a more intensive range of commercial uses than the Neighborhood Commercial areas. These might include larger retail centers, auto-oriented businesses, and commercial recreation.

However, it is not the intent of this category to replace or compete with existing community and regional shopping facilities located within and adjacent to the City of Mt. Pleasant. Such large-scale retail centers should remain the focal point for the entire County. The General Commercial areas should supplement other available commercial sites due to their location in proximity to major transportation corridors and/or population concentrations. Further, the designated General Commercial areas should not be permitted to become commercial strips along the arterials.

## **INDUSTRIAL**

Although largely limited to the City of Mt. Pleasant and Union Township, industrial development has occurred in limited concentrations in Broomfield and Vernon Townships and future development should be directed to these areas. A lack of public utilities and highway access limits the potential for large development, especially considering that these amenities are available in the City of Mt. Pleasant and Union Township.

The lack of public infrastructure will inhibit widespread industrial development throughout the County. But small facilities, compatible with the character of the areas in which they are located would be appropriate in these designated areas.

## **PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC**

Lands designated as Public/Quasi-public are publicly-owned lands and facilities, as well as institutional uses such as churches, schools, and cemeteries. Churches, schools, cemeteries, and public buildings are located throughout the County, while state-owned lands are located in Denver and Rolland Townships.

## **OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Zoning Ordinance Update**

Much of the Master Plan's future implementation will depend on zoning regulation. Upon adoption of this Plan, therefore, the Isabella County Zoning Ordinance should be reviewed and updated, as needed, to ensure that the necessary tools are in place to support the recommendations and policies contained in this document. Specifically, the number of zoning districts should be evaluated to correspond more closely with the land use categories used in the Master Plan. New techniques, such as cluster zoning options and density bonus incentives, should be incorporated into the ordinance, as well. Separate agricultural conservation and rural conservation regulations should also be adopted.

- **Environmental Protection**

Protection of the County's many sensitive features and conservation of its rich natural character will require more than basic zoning regulation. Other, more specific measures that should be considered include wetland and woodland ordinances that go beyond local zoning and afford greater control over site-specific conditions.

Techniques specifically aimed at lake and watershed protection should also be considered. These may include increased minimum lot size and/or width requirements for lakefront lots, as well as regulation of docks, funneling, and lake access.

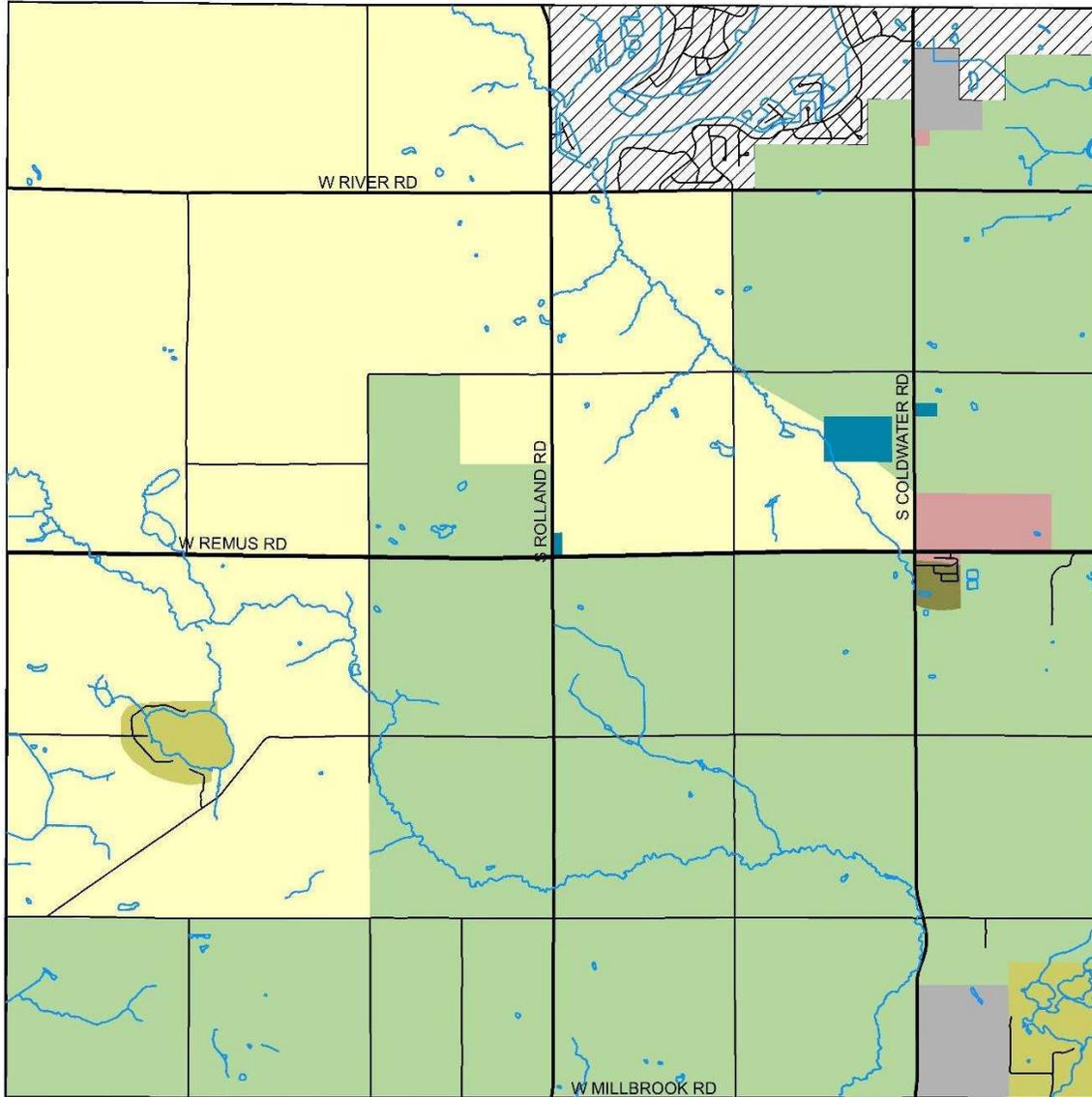
Due to the current and foreseeable lack of public water and sewer throughout most of the County, groundwater protection is extremely important. Sufficient lot sizes should be required to accommodate on-site septic systems on individual parcels and private community systems should be required for large-scale developments where public sanitary sewer is not available.

While the County has the authority to adopt regulatory measures, there are other organizations that can and do play an important role in protecting sensitive environments. Among them are the Nature Conservancy and the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy, both of which have the ability to acquire (through purchase or donation) particularly unique lands for conservation and conservation purposes.

- **Purchase of Development Rights**

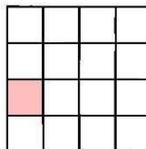
An agricultural conservation tool discussed previously in this Plan would involve a technique gaining national attention. This is the outright purchase of the private development rights from farmers. The objective of this program is to compensate the land owner for conserving the property for agriculture by paying him the difference between the land's value as farmland and its value for development (typically large lot residential). This ensures the landowner a reasonable return on the land while preserving it for agricultural purposes.

# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
- GENERAL COMMERCIAL (GC)
- INDUSTRIAL (I)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)
- LOCAL PLANNING (LP)

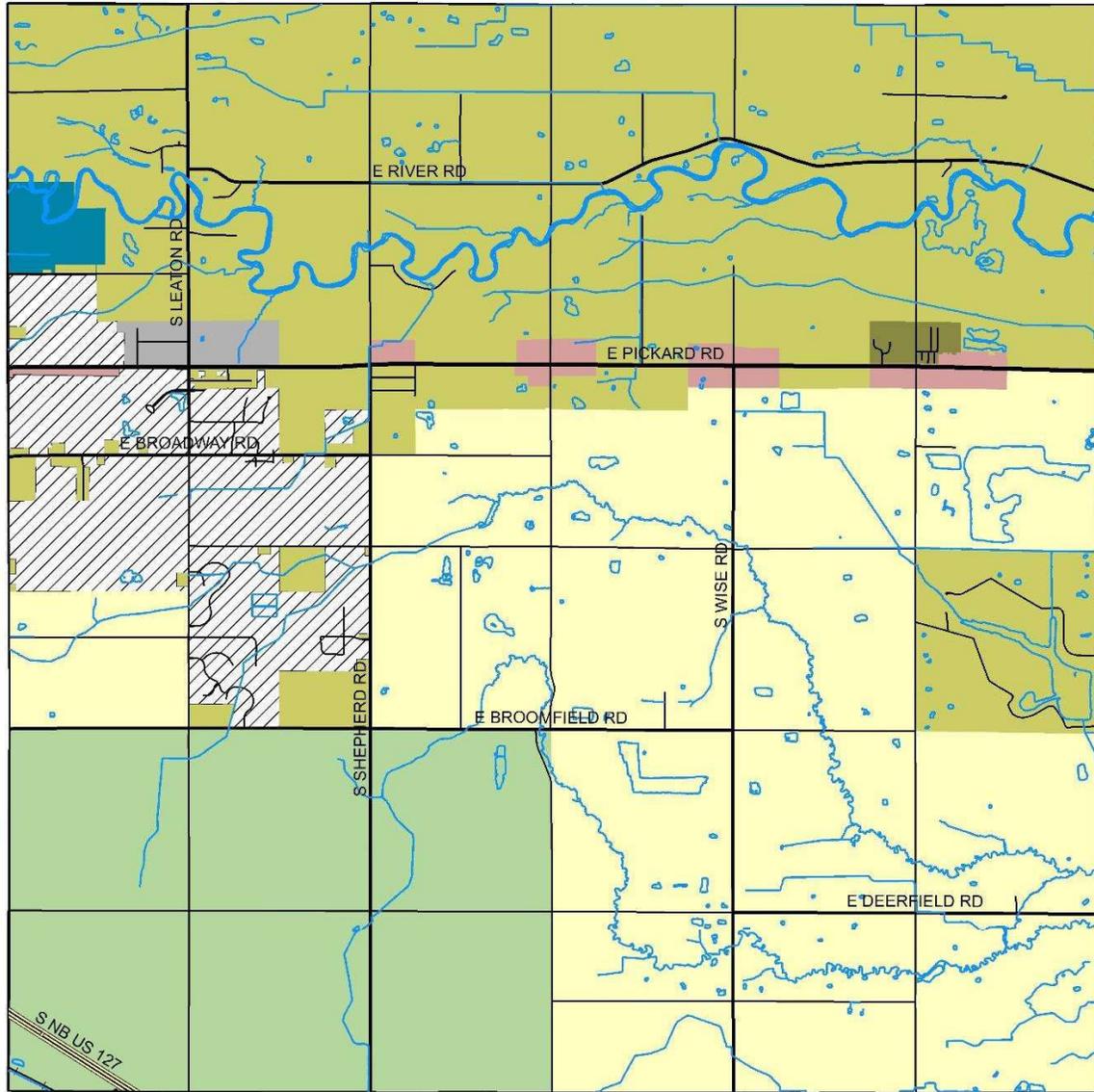
## Broomfield Township



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 Isabella County  
 200 N. Main St.  
 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

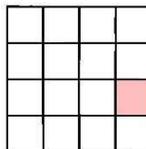
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 StatePlane Michigan South FIPS 2113 Feet Intl

# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
- GENERAL COMMERCIAL (GC)
- INDUSTRIAL (I)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)
- LOCAL PLANNING (LP)

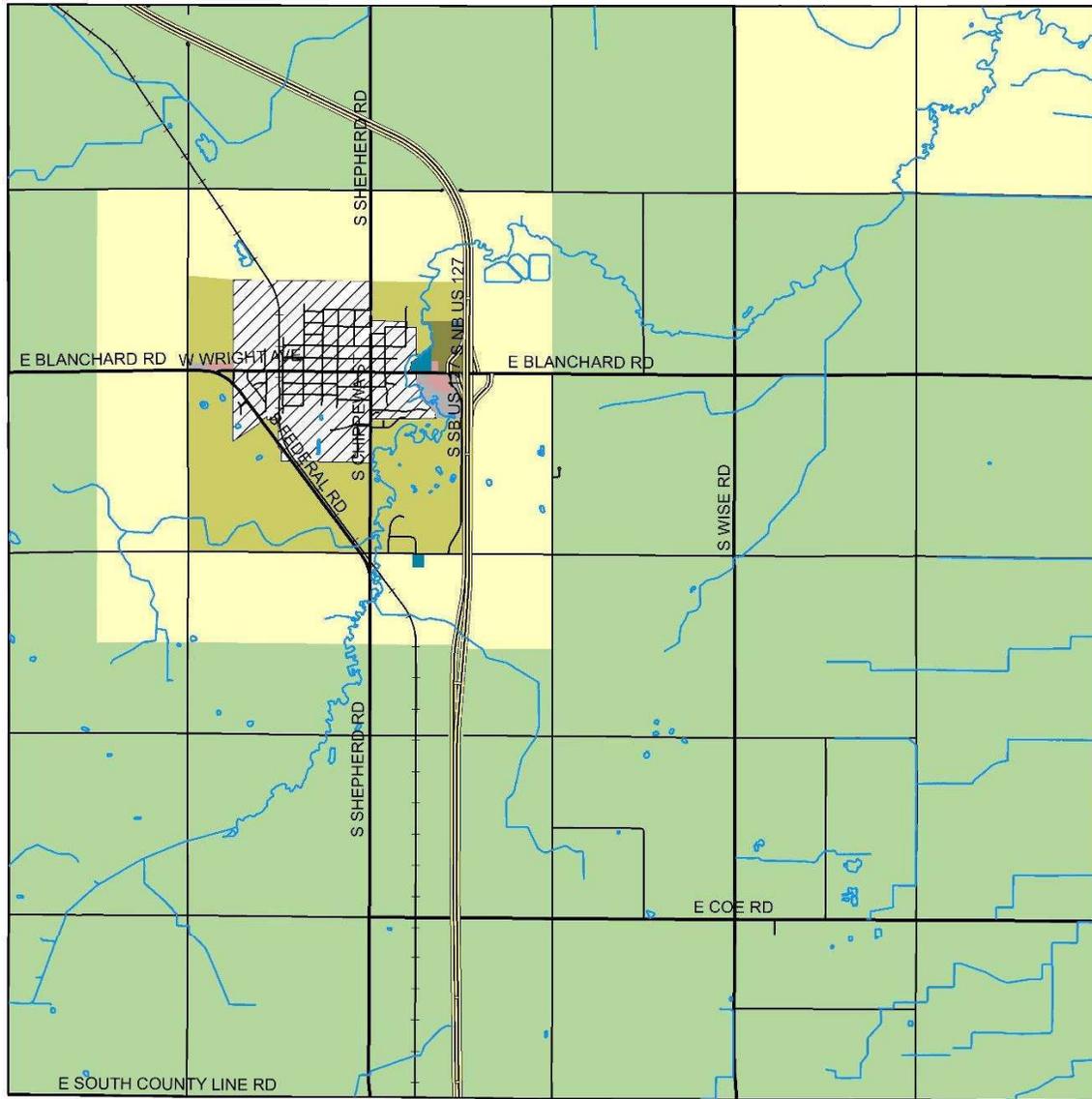
## Chippewa Township



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 Isabella County  
 200 N. Main St.  
 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

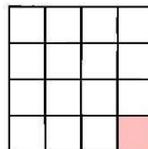
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# Future Land Use



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- GENERAL COMMERCIAL (GC)
- INDUSTRIAL (I)
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- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)
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- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)
- LOCAL PLANNING (LP)

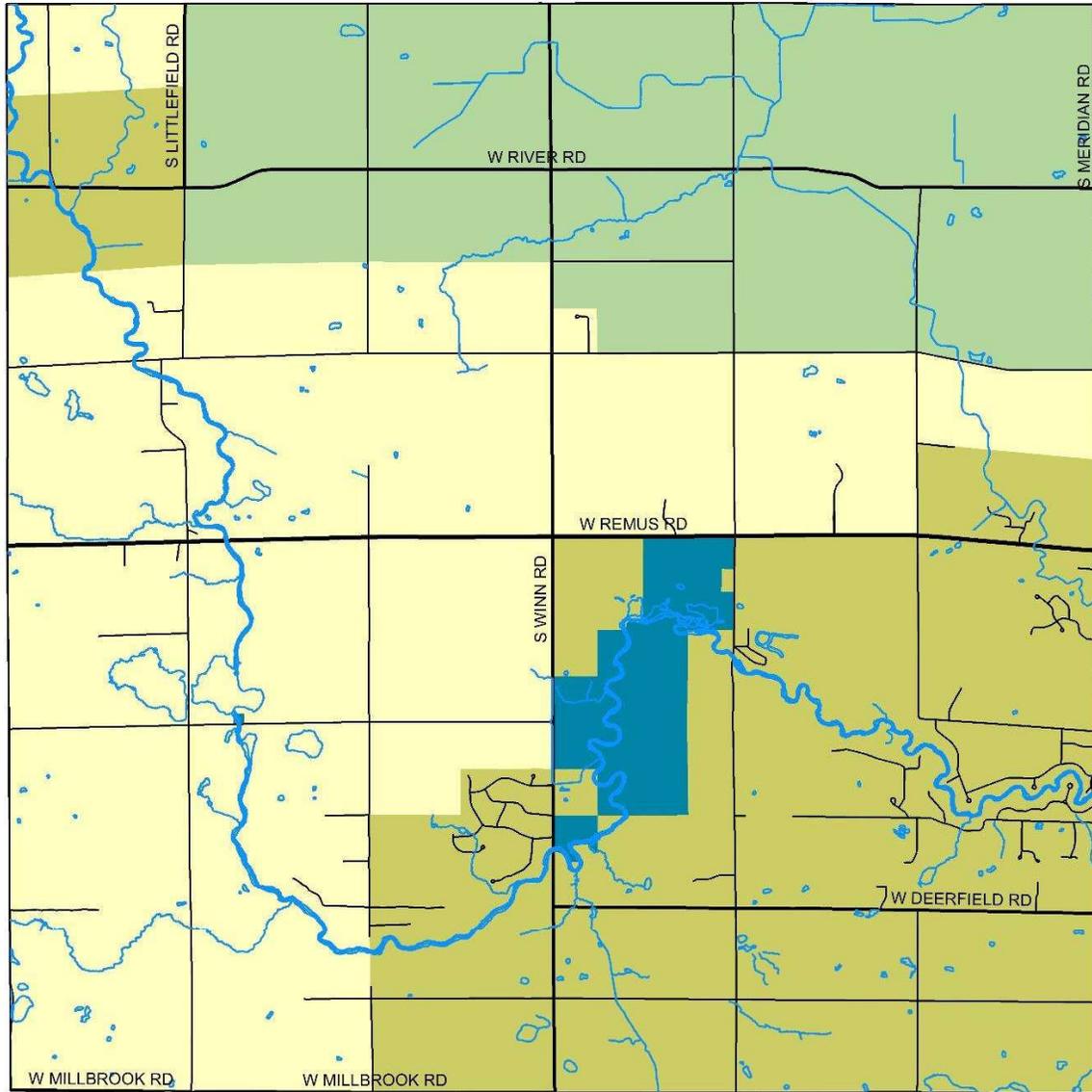
## Coe Township



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 (989) 317-4061

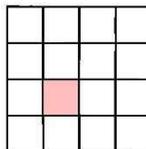
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# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)

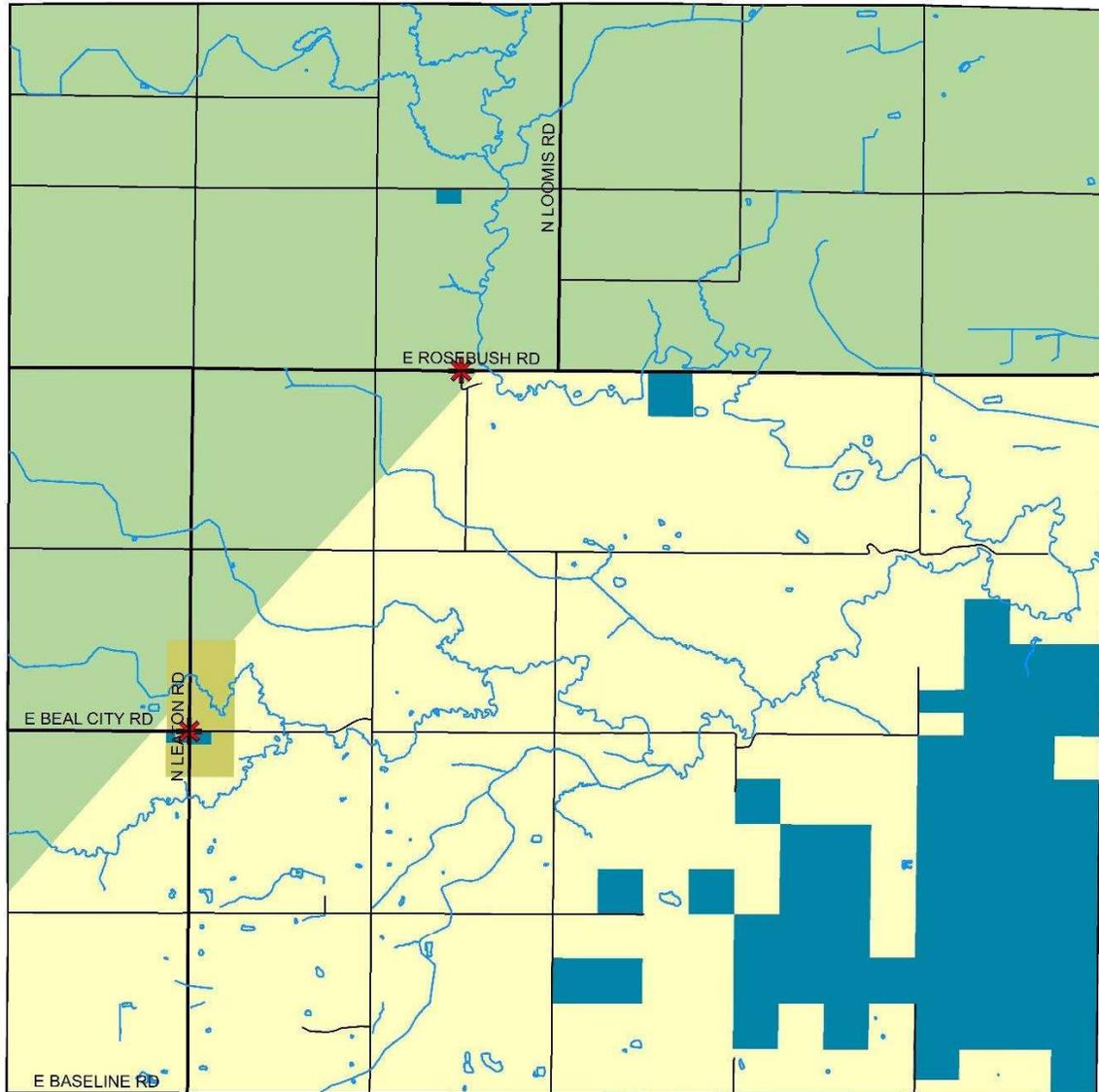
## Deerfield Township



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 Isabella County  
 200 N. Main St.  
 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

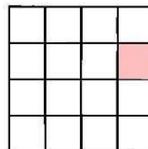
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# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)
- \* NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL

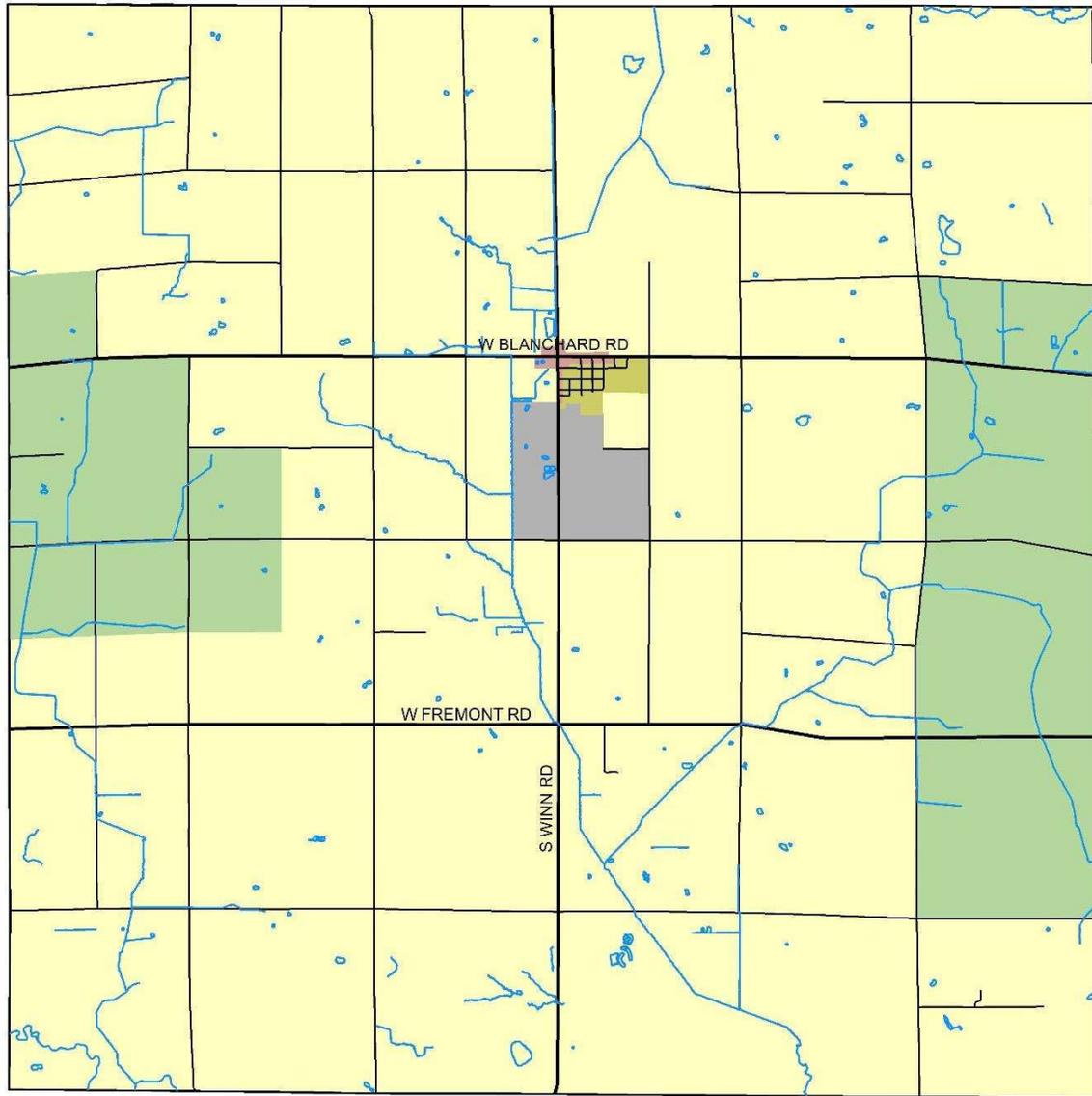
## Denver Township



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 Isabella County  
 200 N. Main St.  
 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

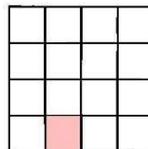
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# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
- GENERAL COMMERCIAL (GC)
- INDUSTRIAL (I)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)

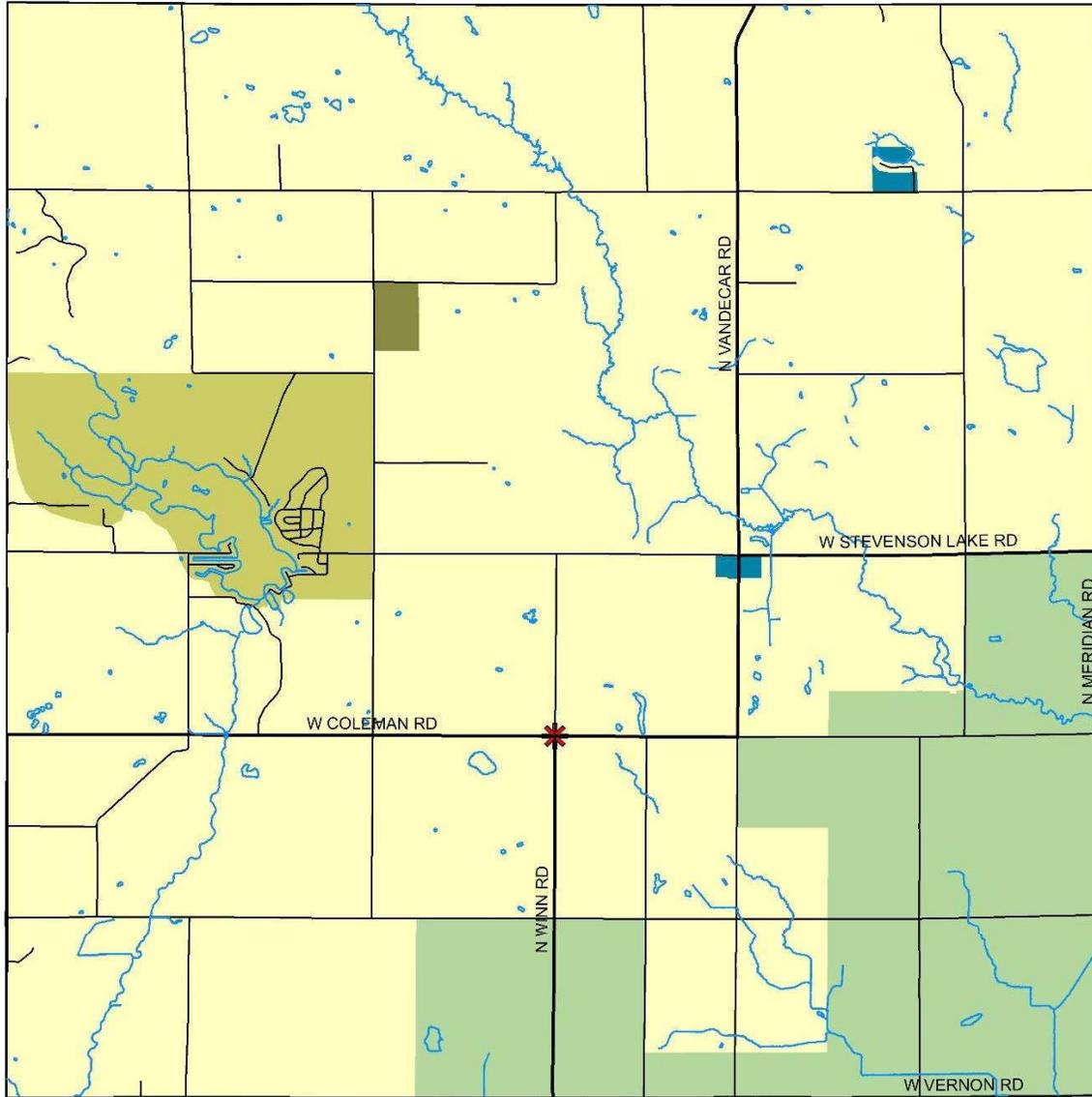
## Fremont Township



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 Isabella County  
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 (989) 317-4061

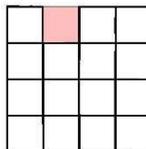
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# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)
- \* NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL

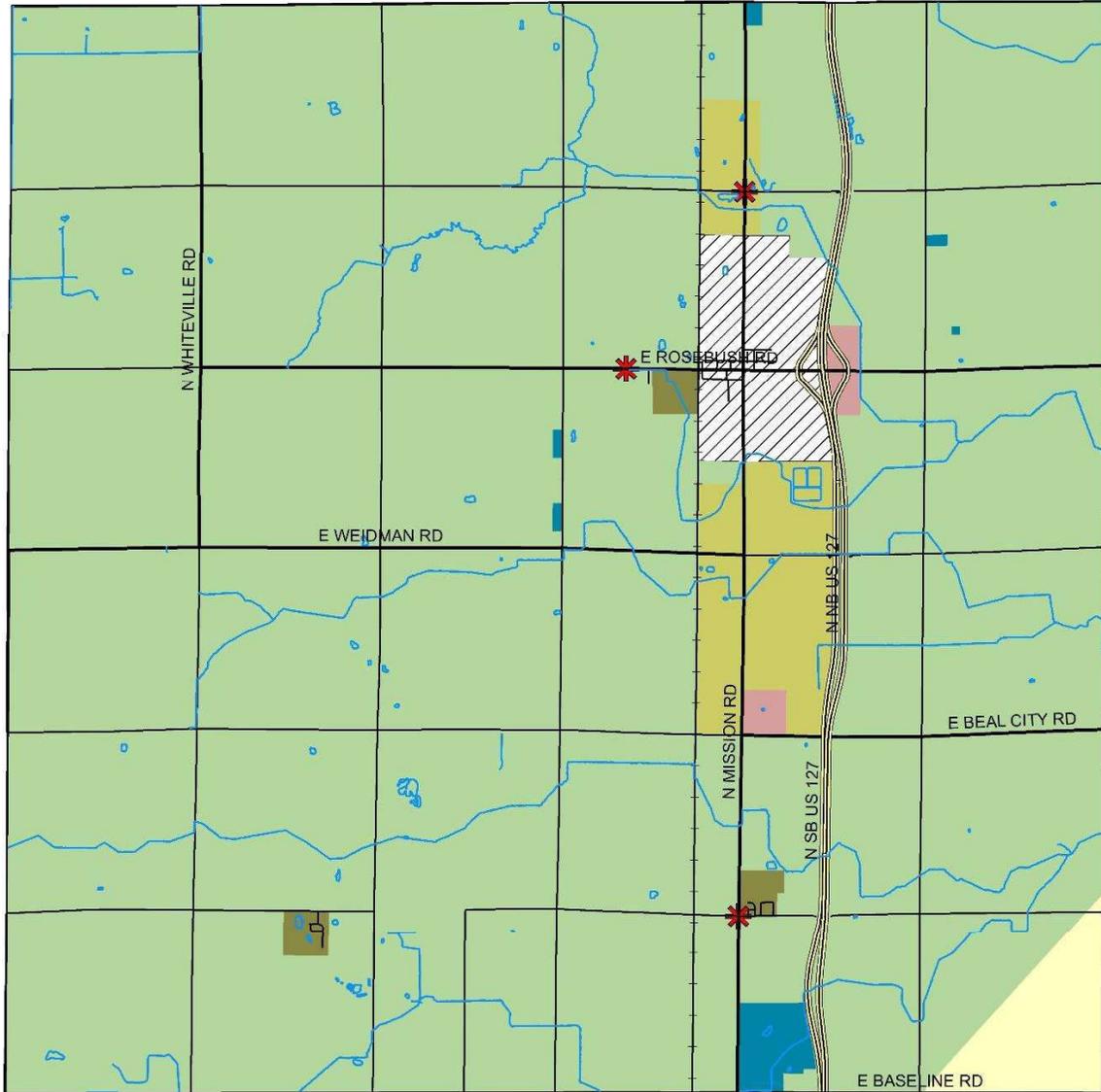
## Gilmore Township



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 Isabella County  
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 (989) 317-4061

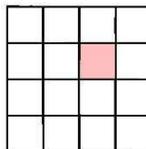
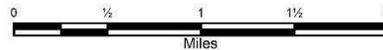
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# Future Land Use



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- GENERAL COMMERCIAL (GC)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)
- LOCAL PLANNING (LP)
- NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL

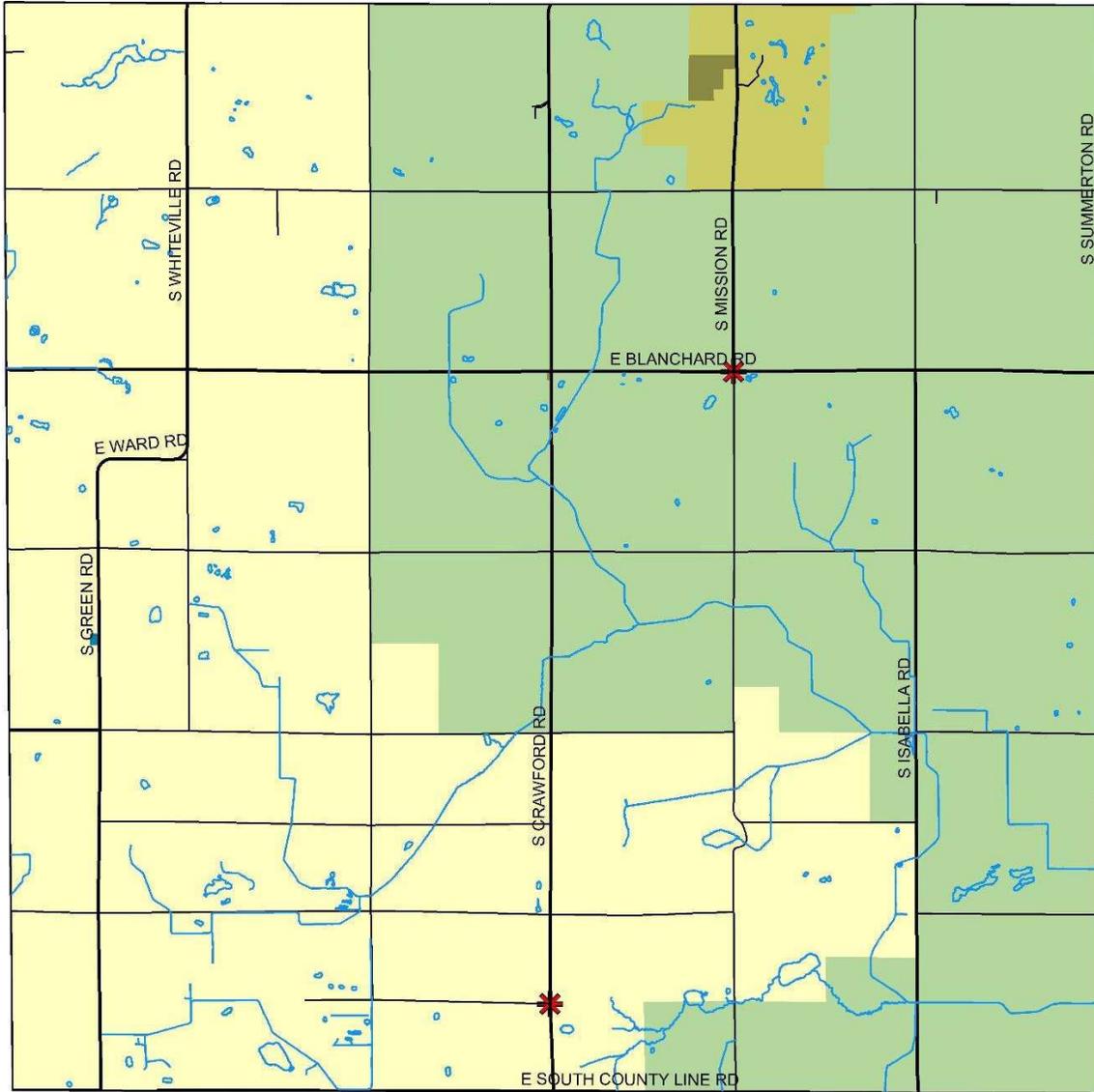
## Isabella Township



Created by: Community Development  
 Isabella County  
 200 N. Main St.  
 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

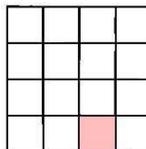
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# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
- LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (LDR)
- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)
- \* NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL

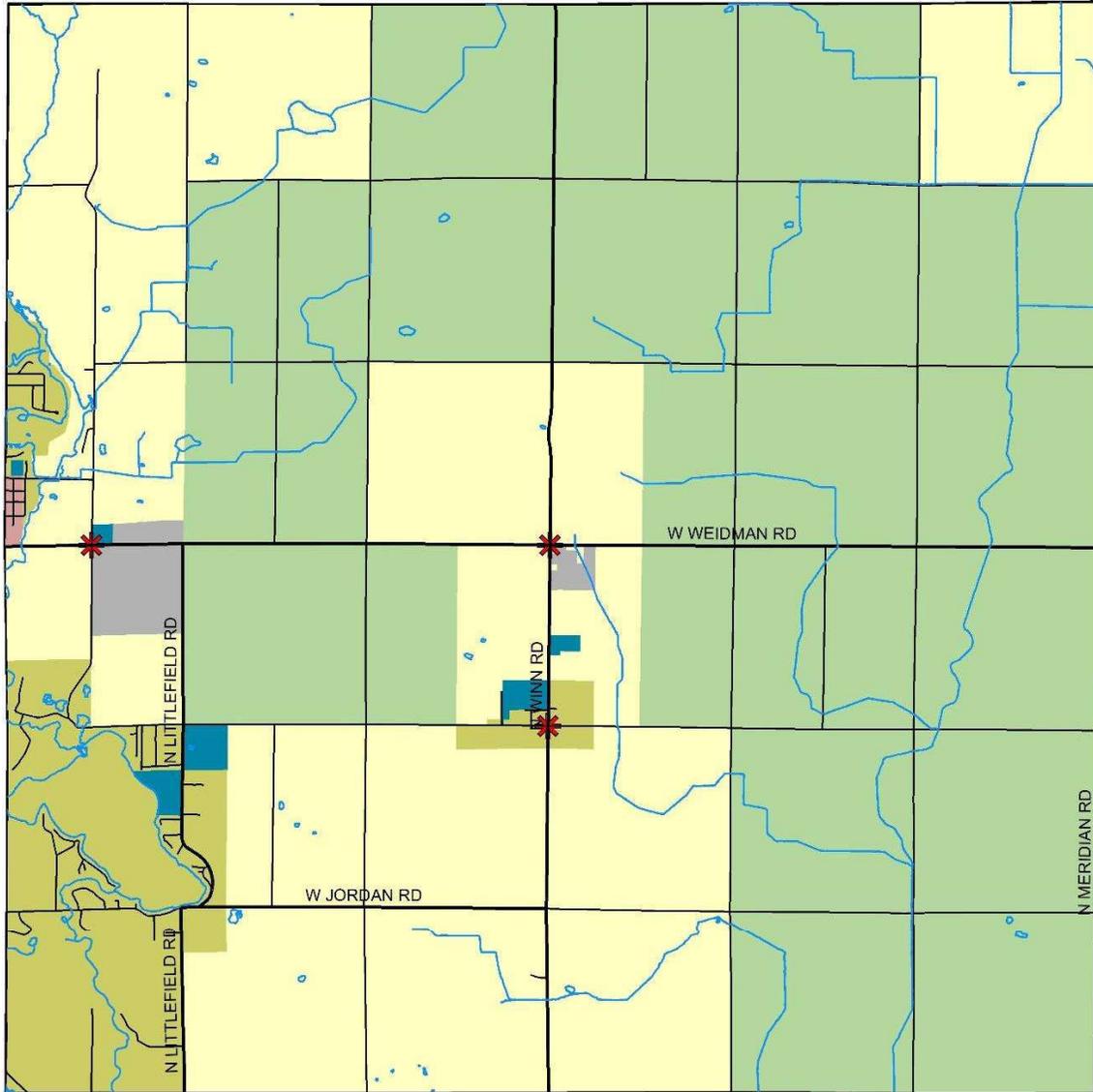
## Lincoln Township



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 Isabella County  
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 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

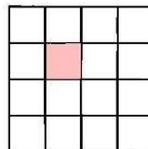
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# Future Land Use



- AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION (AC)
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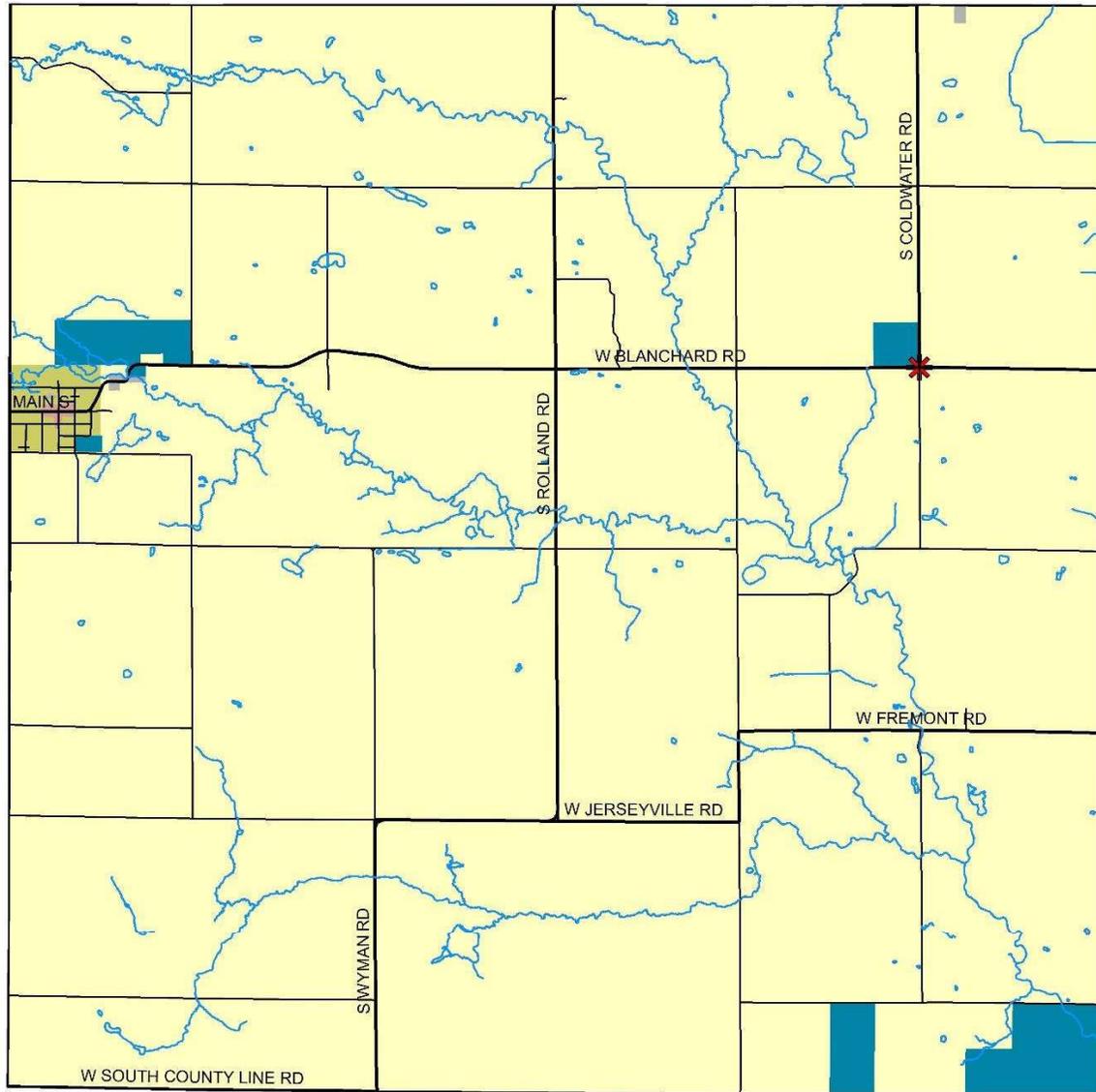
## Nottawa Township



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 Isabella County  
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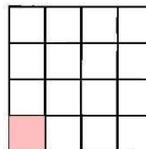
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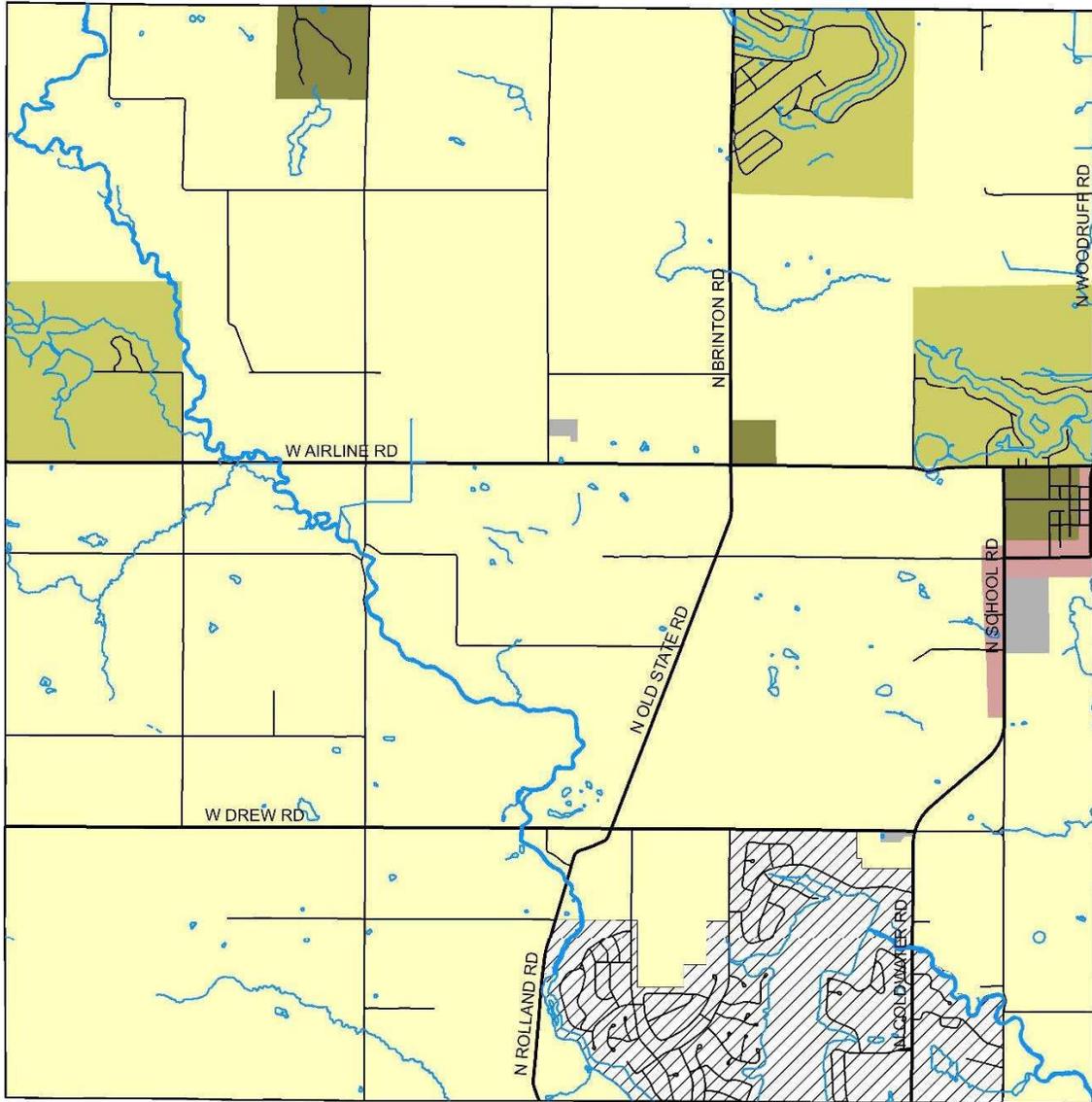
## Rolland Township



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 Isabella County  
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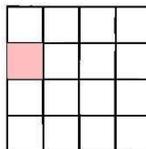
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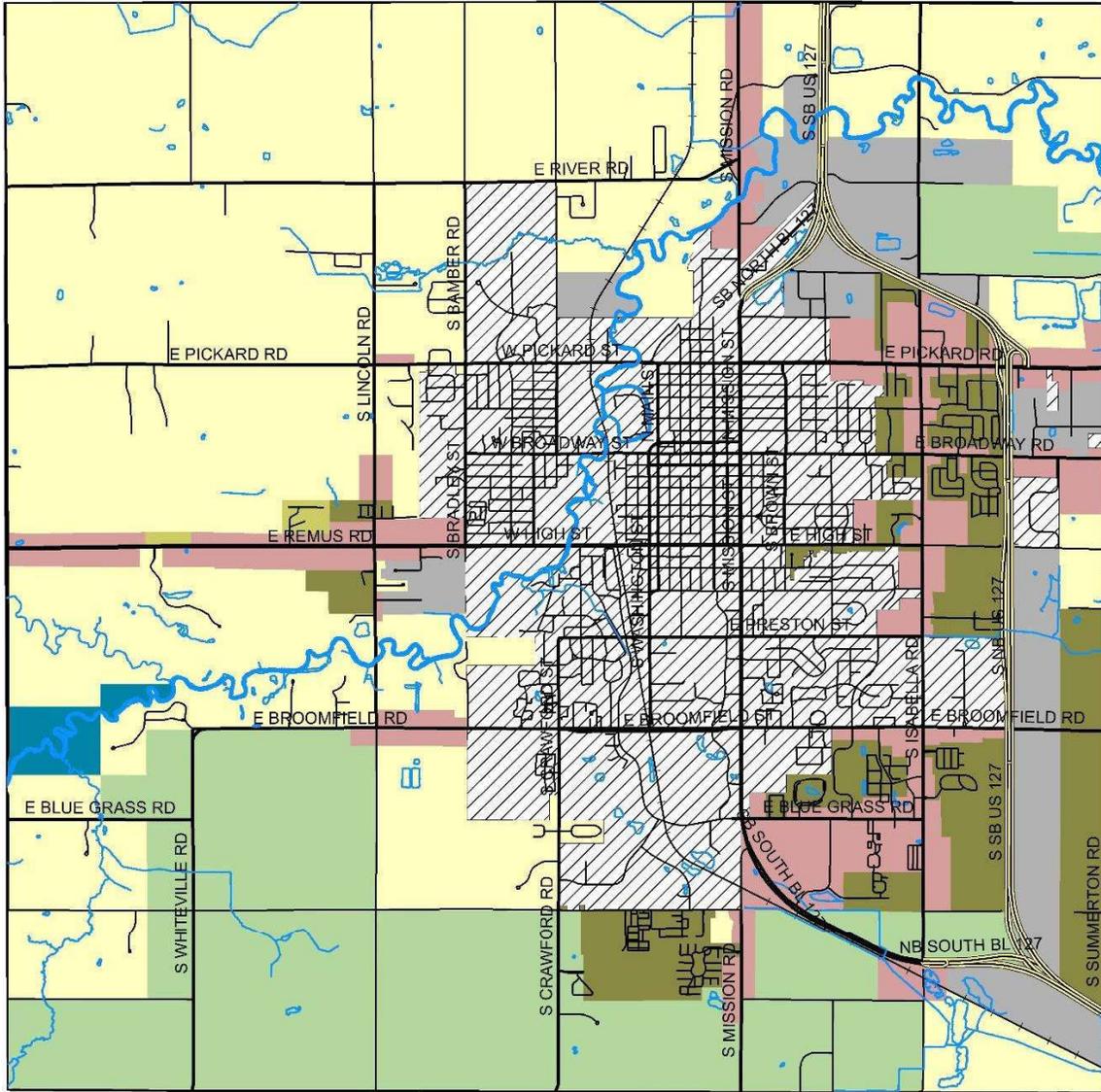
## Sherman Township



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 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

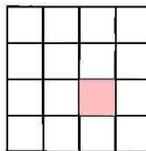
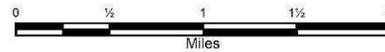
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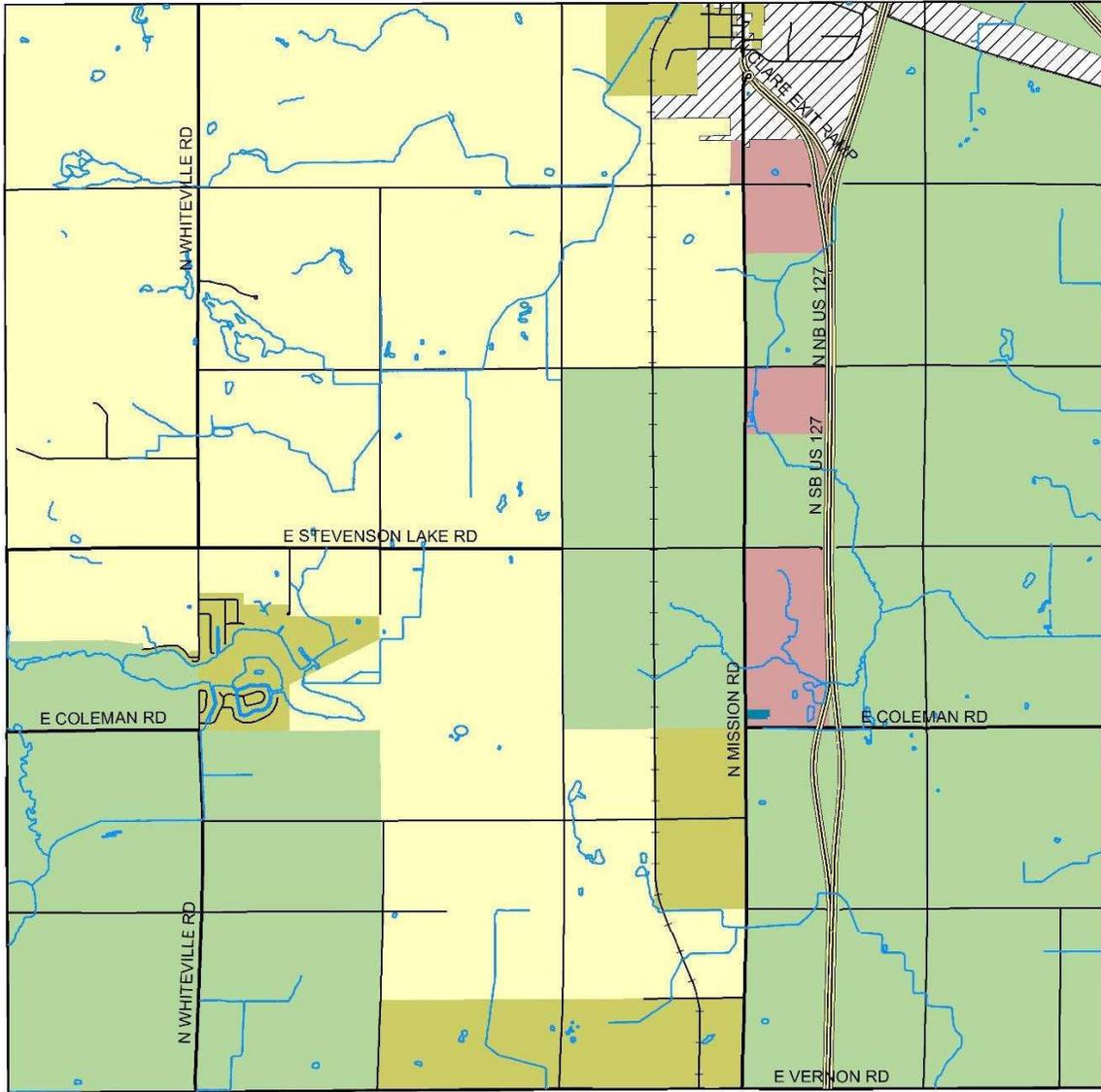
## Union Township



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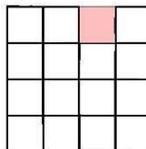
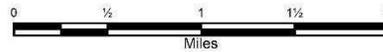
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- LOCAL PLANNING (LP)

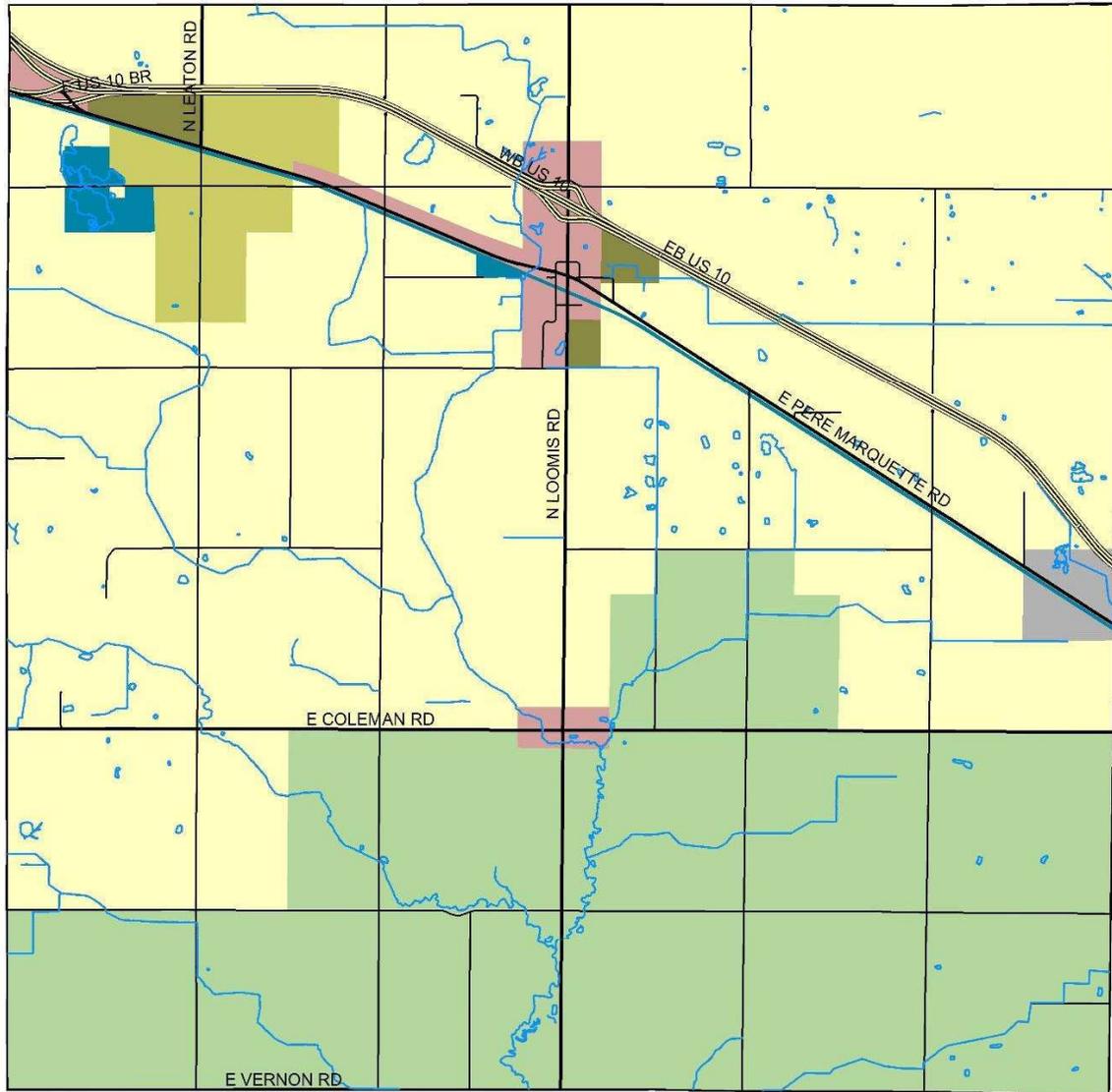
## Vernon Township



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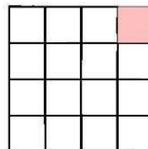
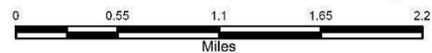
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# Future Land Use



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- MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL (MDR)
- PUBLIC / QUASI-PUBLIC (P/QP)
- RURAL AGRICULTURAL RESIDENTIAL (RAR)

## Wise Township



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 Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858  
 (989) 317-4061

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# Summary

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The Planning Commission is encouraged to conduct a regularly scheduled (typically annual) review of the Plan. Even if no changes have been warranted during the course of the prior year, it is wise to take time to consider the continued relevance of the Master Plan. This is a good time to make amendments to keep the Plan current and consistent with County philosophies. Such a meeting would also be an opportunity to invite the Townships to comment.

The most often heard reasons for not following a Plan are that it is out of date or is no longer relevant. It seems many units of government undertake a master planning effort with the idea that once the plan is completed the job is done for twenty years until it's time to do a new plan. With this philosophy, the plan will become obsolete very quickly.

It is unrealistic to expect the Plan to remain unchanged for its 20-year life. Neither the Planning Commission nor its professional advisors can predict the future. While the Plan provides a broad framework for land use decisions, site-specific issues may arise that were unanticipated and deserve close scrutiny. Where uses are approved contrary to the Plan, the plan should be amended to reflect the change. By routinely following this procedure, the Plan will continue to be an up-to-date, reliable planning tool.

**A RESOLUTION TO ADOPT THE AMENDED  
ISABELLA COUNTY MASTER PLAN**

**WHEREAS**, Public Act 33 of 2008, the Michigan Planning Enabling Act, provides for duties of the County Planning Commission; and

**WHEREAS**, the Isabella County Board of Commissioners has charged the Isabella County Planning Commission with the creation of a Master Plan in accordance with Public Act 33 of 2008; and

**WHEREAS**, the Isabella County Planning Commission shall promote public interest and provide education of the Master Plan; and

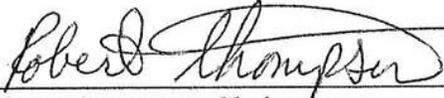
**WHEREAS**, the Isabella County Planning Commission has been assisted by the Isabella County Community Development Department in the preparation of the amended Master Plan; and

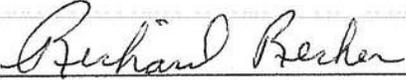
**WHEREAS**, the Isabella County Planning Commission has held a public hearing on the proposed amendment to the Master Plan on June 11, 2009.

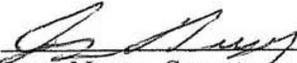
**NOW THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED** that the Isabella County Planning Commission hereby adopts the amended Master Plan for Isabella County, along with the text, maps, charts, graphs, and other descriptive materials contained in the Plan; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that a certified copy of the amended Master Plan be submitted to the Isabella County Board of Commissioners for final approval as per Resolution #06-26 of the Isabella County Board of Commissioners.

Attested:

  
Robert Thompson, Chairperson

  
Richard Recker, Vice-Chairperson

  
Jerry Neyer, Secretary

Vote: Yes - 7; No - 0



**Office of the County Clerk**

200 N. Main St.  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858

Phone (989) 772-0911 ext. 265

Fax (989) 772-6347

[www.isabellacounty.org](http://www.isabellacounty.org)

Joyce A. Swan, County Clerk  
Shelly Nelson, Chief Deputy  
Brenda Young, Secretary  
Carol Anderson, Records Clerk  
Kim Krehmar, Clerk  
Sara Bailey, Court Clerk  
Connie Bunker, Court Clerk

July 28, 2009

I, Joyce A. Swan, Clerk of the County of Isabella, do hereby certify that on July 21, 2009 the Isabella County Board of Commissioners approved the Isabella County Master Plan amendment adopted by the Isabella County Planning Commission by resolution #PC-09-01.



Joyce A. Swan, Clerk of the Isabella County  
Board of Commissioners