

# Introduction

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## Purpose and Planning Process

As a result of increasing growth pressures and related land use problems, a new master plan was deemed essential. A need to document the current situation, the goals and desires of the county and to encourage a more organized and effective growth and development strategy was recognized by the Alpena County Planning Commission.

The purpose of the Alpena County Master Plan is to translate community values and goals into a framework for decisions on growth, land use, public facilities and services. It contains a long-range vision of how citizens want their community to look and function in the future and guidelines for achieving those goals. The master plan is a legally recognized framework for making decisions about land use in the county. It is intended to aid a broad range of public and private users, including community groups, builders, developers, township officials and other government agencies.

The Alpena County Master Plan is a broad policy document intended to guide more specific land use decisions in the future. Regulations such as zoning and subdivision controls are legal standards applied uniformly with little discretion. Although the master plan is adopted by resolution and carries legal weight when applied to specific land use decisions, it is not considered law. This means that the plan has a certain degree of flexibility that allows review and adjustment should conditions change over time.

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## Location and History

Alpena County is located on the shores of Lake Huron in the northeast section of Michigan's Lower Peninsula (see **Map 1.1**). Covering 568 square miles, the county includes 363,520 acres. It is bordered by Presque Isle County to the north, Montmorency County to the west, Alcona County to the south and Lake Huron to the east.

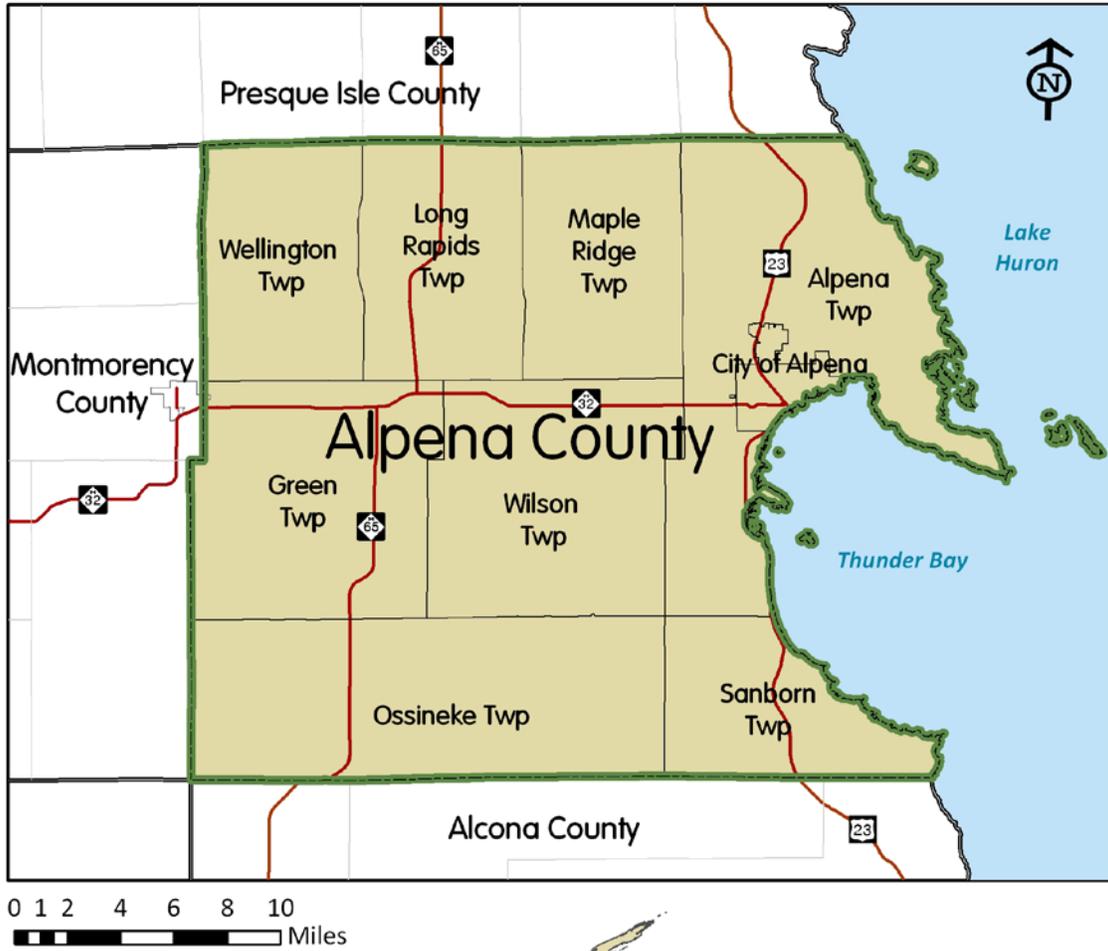
Alpena County is 24 miles long from north to south. East to west, the county varies from 20.8 miles to 30.8 miles, because of the irregular shoreline of Lake Huron. Additionally, there are several offshore islands in Lake Huron that are a part of the county. The following townships are located within the planning area for this document: Alpena, Green, Long Rapids, Maple Ridge, Ossineke, Sanborn, Wellington and Wilson. Also included in the planning area are the City of Alpena, the Census Designated Place of Ossineke, as well as the unincorporated places of Bolton, Cathro, Herron, Hubbard Lake, Lachine, Leer and Long Rapids.

The first European-American settlers were attracted to the Alpena area in the mid-1830's. Their initial interest was commercial fishing. In 1857 the State legislature organized Alpena County, which included what was later to become the counties of Montmorency, Oscoda and part of Presque Isle, as well as the modern day Alpena County. The area started to grow in 1860's due to extensive logging activities. The Thunder Bay River was the basic transportation from logging sites to sawmills located in the City of Alpena and its port on Lake Huron. Because the harbor is protected by Thunder Bay it became a commercial fishing center. The great wildfire of 1871 damaged a large area in the northern half of Alpena County and areas in Presque Isle County. Several people died when the settlements of Cathro, Metz, and Posen were destroyed along with thousands of acres of forestlands.

With the Thunder Bay River, Lake Huron and the extension of rail lines, Alpena became a hub of transportation. Logging and milling activities flourished. In the early 1900's companies were formed with activities related to paper production and uses of limestone, which is quarried in the area. The population in 1900 was 18,254.

The Fletcher family built their first dam on the Thunder Bay River in 1908, to generate electricity to support their new paper mill. They later built three more hydro dams and also dammed Hubbard Lake and Fletcher's pond to hold water for power generation. They created Alpena Power which still serves the area. These dams were sold in 1990 and are presently operated by the Thunder Bay Power Company under FERC permits.

Today, Alpena County is the hub of transportation, healthcare, education, commercial and retail services for the neighboring three counties of Alcona, Presque Isle, Montmorency and further west.



- State or US Highway
- Alpena County
- Local Municipal Boundary



**Map 1.1**  
**Location Map**  
**Master Plan**  
**Alpena County, Michigan**