

## Chapter 1 - Introduction



**Alcona County** is located in the northeastern part of the lower peninsula of Michigan on the western shore of Lake Huron. The County measures twenty-four miles north to south and thirty miles east to west and encompasses approximately 679 square miles or approximately 434,560 acres. Its eastern border is defined by Lake Huron, which offers some 27 miles of unspoiled beaches. The county is composed of 11 townships: Alcona, Caledonia, Curtis, Greenbush, Gustin, Harrisville, Hawes, Haynes, Mikado, Millen and Mitchell.

There are two incorporated communities in Alcona County: the City of Harrisville and the Village of Lincoln. The City of Harrisville is the county seat and is located on the coast of Lake Huron at the intersection of M-72 and US-23.

Twenty-nine percent of the County is in public ownership and 73 percent of the county is forested. The largest landowner is the Huron National Forest, owning some 311 square miles. Major recreational attractions include the AuSable River, Hubbard Lake, and Lake Huron. Alcona County's population in 2000 was 11,719 persons. Although Alcona County is still very rural in nature, its year round population has increased by 5,367 persons since 1960. The 2000 U. S. Census found that 48 percent or 5,067 houses were seasonal. Given this high number of seasonal structures, large fluctuations in the population occur during peak summer times. Regional transportation access is provided by M-72 that runs east-west, M-65 that runs north-south in the eastern part of the county and US-23, a north-south highway that parallels the Lake Huron coast.

### Hazard Mitigation Planning

In partnership with seven counties in Northeastern Lower Peninsula of Michigan, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments (NEMCOG) worked with each county in its region to prepare hazard mitigation plans. The Disaster Mitigation Act (DMA) of 2000 included new requirements for hazard mitigation planning. In order to become eligible for hazard mitigation grant program funds in the future, counties must prepare and adopt hazard mitigation plans. The County prepared its first Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2005. This planning document represents an update of the 2005 plan.

The intent of a hazard mitigation plan is to inventory possible hazards, assess the vulnerability of community to the hazards it faces, and to provide possible mitigation activities for those hazards. ***The focus of the hazard mitigation plan is to develop projects and policies that can be implemented to reduce or prevent losses from future disasters.*** The Alcona County Hazard Mitigation Plan includes text, tables charts and maps necessary to describe and discuss the following: 1) a hazard analysis based on a current community profile, hazard identification, risk assessment, and vulnerability assessment; 2) a listing of the communities goals and objectives; 3) a discussion of the alternatives for solving problems; 4) evaluation and prioritization of alternatives; 5) selection of feasible mitigation strategies; and 6) recommended mitigation strategies. The plan contains a hazard mitigation element that can be easily integrated into county or township comprehensive plans.

The process of Hazard Mitigation Planning update consists of the following steps:

- Reviewed and updated Chapter 2: Environment. Updated information on the climate, soils, sites of environmental contamination, wetlands, discharge permits.

- Reviewed and updated Chapter 3: Community Profile. Updated demographics and housing information
- Reviewed and updated Chapter 4: Land Use. Updated information on oil and gas wells
- Reviewed and updated Chapter 5: Community Services. Updated all sections of the chapter
- Reviewed and updated Chapter 6: Hazard Identification. The committee updated information on wildfires, severe weather, severe wind storms, extreme temperatures, other natural hazards, and technological hazards. Information on local jurisdictions was updated including compiling new maps for each community.
- Reviewed and updated Chapter 7: Risk and Vulnerability Assessment. Evaluation criteria, and hazard analysis evaluation measures and benchmark factors were reviewed and no changes were made. Alcona County Hazard Rating was reviewed and the committee made adjustments according to updated hazard information. The Risk Assessment and Vulnerability Assessment was updated to reflect data and activities
- Reviewed and updated Chapter 8: Goals and Objectives. The committee added a goal concerning regional cooperation
- Reviewed and updated Chapter 9: Mitigation Strategies and Priorities. The committee made changes to this section, eliminating some actions, adding new actions and amending this list of responsible parties.
- Minor changes were made to Chapters 1 & 9.

NEMCOG staff worked closely with the Alcona County Emergency Management Director and Local Emergency Management Committee to prepare this Hazard Mitigation Plan. Considerable effort was made to gain input from stakeholders in the county. This included meetings with townships; township association; county board of commissioners; local, state and federal agencies; local officials; community leaders and general public.

### **Information Collection**

NEMCOG reviewed relevant plans, maps, studies and reports. Federal, state, regional and local government sources were reviewed to develop a current community profile. Information sources included: U.S. Census, zoning ordinances, master plans, recreation plans, capital improvement plans, parcel maps, aerial photography, MIRIS land use/land cover, USGS topographic maps, U.S Weather Service, NRCS soils maps, Michigan Department of Transportation, Michigan Hazard Analysis, local hazard analysis, Flood Insurance Rate Maps, emergency management plans, and Section 302 Sites from the LEPC

### **Geographic Information System Support**

NEMCOG's Geographic Information System (GIS) was used as a decision support tool and public education tool throughout the process. Existing data sets were incorporated and new data sets created in order to analyze existing conditions and study potential future scenarios. Specialized maps showing community hazards, land cover/use, infrastructure, topography, soils, national wetlands inventory, forest cover, gas and oil wells, zoning, future land use and community facilities were prepared as part of the plan development. Maps helped identify community characteristics, vulnerable populations, and hazard areas. GIS data and maps will be retained by the community for future use to help implement and monitor hazard mitigation activities.

## **Increased Community Awareness of Hazards and Hazard Mitigation**

Information was disseminated to the communities and public through the use of public meetings, presentations, news releases, and contacts. A secondary benefit of the planning process was the education of community leaders and citizens of the community in regards to hazard awareness. This education supported the decision making process and will assist communities in making better, more informed decisions in the future. In addition, the process strengthened partnerships between local units of government, planning commissions, emergency services, public agencies and private interests to pool resources and helped facilitate communication and understanding between various entities. By fostering lines of communication and increasing awareness of the cross jurisdictional impacts of land use and policy decisions, better and more informed decisions will be made in the future.

## **Hazard Mitigation Steering Committee**

The hazard mitigation plan was developed through the Alcona Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). The LEPC has representatives from local units of governments; local, state and federal agencies; law enforcement, fire departments and community organizations. Committee members provided feedback throughout plan development, including identification of hazards and high hazard areas, identification of hazard mitigation strategies and selection of an action plan.

## **Community Involvement**

The planning process provided several opportunities for public, community and agency input and comments. Public meetings involved the County Board of Commissioners during plan development and the draft plan was presented for commissioners' approval. Staff met with the Local Emergency Planning Committee during plan development. The group, together with the Emergency Management Director, was instrumental in guiding plan development. Public meetings were advertised and held in Alcona County. Notices of the public meetings were sent to LEPC members and local communities officials.

## **Meetings**

Region 7 Meeting – January 5, 2012 Provided information on the planning updates. Also, NEMCOG staff met with county Emergency Managers prior to the regional meeting.

Alcona Mitigation Planning Committee (LEPC): Meeting to discuss the planning process and existing conditions sections of the plan, February 10, 2012

Alcona Mitigation Planning Committee (LEPC): subcommittee meeting to update risk and vulnerability assessment, goals and objectives, and mitigation strategies, April 3, 2012.

Alcona Mitigation Planning Committee (LEPC): Review draft plan and approve for review and comment. September 17, 2012

Alcona County Township Association: October 30, 2012

Alcona County Board of Commissioners

## **Participation**

During the development of the Alcona Hazard Mitigation Plan representatives from local units of governmental participated directly in one or more planning and prioritization meetings held around the county. In addition to Alcona County government, other governmental units involved in the process were: Alcona, Caledonia, Curtis, Greenbush, Gustin, Harrisville, Hawes, Haynes, Mikado, Millen and Mitchell Townships, and the City of Harrisville and the Village of Lincoln. These communities are continuing participants in the Alcona County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

### Other Public Outreach

Newspaper article of the planning effort was published in the local newspaper. Information and draft sections of the plan were posted on \_\_\_\_\_s and NEMCOG's web site.

### Public Input for Plan Approval

A copy of the draft plan on CD was sent to all local communities and any agencies requesting a copy for review. All communities had an opportunity to review and provide input on the plan. The plan was posted on NEMCOG's web site.

## **Summary of Review and Adoption of Plan**

A draft plan was reviewed by the LEPC, committee, stakeholders and the public. Comments and suggestions obtained in the review process were incorporated into the final plan. The final plan contains mitigation strategies and an action plan that assigns priorities for specific hazards and mitigation measures; defines roles and responsibilities; and identifies the process for reviewing and updating the plan. The hazard mitigation plan was adopted by County Board of Commissioners, and distributed to all local minor civil divisions for review and adoption.

The Alcona County Hazard Mitigation Plan represents Alcona County and all of the local jurisdictions which include: the Townships of Alcona, Caledonia, Curtis, Greenbush, Gustin, Harrisville, Hawes, Haynes, Mikado, Millen and Mitchell; and the City of Harrisville and Village of Lincoln. While projects have a more county-wide perspective, all of the communities were asked to adopt the plan. It is anticipated that in subsequent years communities will identify projects, present them to the Hazard Mitigation Committee, and request to have the plan amended to include the project.

## **Summary of Recommended Plan Implementation Process**

The primary entities responsible for implementing the Hazard Mitigation Plan are the Alcona County Board of Commissioners and the Alcona County Emergency Management Coordinator. The Local Emergency Management Committee (LEPC) is organized under the Superfund Amendment and Reauthorization Act-Title III Program and meets on a regular basis to carry out its duties. This plan recommends the committee expand its role to function as the County Hazard Mitigation Committee to oversee implementation of the plan. The Alcona County Emergency Management Coordinator will function as the county staff person to provide program administration and project oversight, and therefore must coordinate with the county board of commissioners. The HMC developed a five year action list of projects from the mitigation strategies in the Alcona County Hazard Mitigation Plan. The HMC should review the Hazard Mitigation Plan each year, determine what projects have been accomplished and add new projects to the five year action list. The Hazard Mitigation Committee should identify steps

needed to complete a chosen project, such as funding sources, staff and agencies required to complete the project, timelines and overall project costs. It should be understood, that additional emergency management staff time will be required to assist the HMC in completing its mission.

Since the Hazard Mitigation Committee is a standing committee of the Alcona County LEPC, it will function, as does the LEPC, under the umbrella of the Alcona County Board of Commissioners. Members of the HMC are primarily members of the LEPC, who in turn are appointed by the State Emergency Response Commission, upon concurrence with the LEPC Executive Committee which includes representation from the Alcona County Board of Commissioners, Alcona County Emergency Coordinator, LEPC Chair, and a majority of LEPC members. Local units of government, county departments, and local, state and federal agencies will have the ability to propose and sponsor projects from the Hazard Mitigation Plan. Coordinating with the HMC will support plan implementation and allow the committee to monitor progress and determine timing and scope of plan revisions.

## **A Brief History of Alcona County**

Alcona has a rich history and its human occupation has spanned at least the past eleven centuries. The earliest artifacts found here are stone lance heads, similar to those used by the ancestor's of today's Native Americans from approximately 9,000 BC. Native Americans while traveling to trading posts would stop to camp on Lake Huron's shoreline near "The Great Black Rock", which is north of Greenbush. Out in the lake offerings were placed in the rock's hollowed out surface to ensure safe journeys.

Alcona County was first known as the Negwegon District, formed by the Michigan Legislature in 1840, taking its name from a Chippewa Indian Chief. In 1843, historian Henry R. Schoolcraft changed the name of the District to the Chippewa word meaning "a fine plain". In 1846, the first settlement in the county was located at the village of Springport as a commercial fishing port. The first crop, rye, was raised near Springport in 1857. Additional ports were established at Alcona, Black River, and Harrisville to accommodate the growing fishing fleets and to serve the lumber industry. The Sturgeon Point Lighthouse opened in 1870 as a navigation aid and the Life Saving Station opened in 1876.

In 1856, Davidson and Holden sold their water-powered saw mill to Benjamin Harris. The mill was located at Mill Pond and was developed into a grist and saw mill. The village at this mill, Harrisville, became the county seat when Alcona County was established in 1869. The expansion of logging opened the county westward to Curran by 1875. The largest saw mill, operated by Alger & Co., was at Black River until it burned in 1898.

Today, the commercial ports no longer serve lumber and fishing commerce. The last fishermen, the McCoy's of Black River, closed in 1950. Today lumbering is still important to the Alcona County area. Farming also continues with beef cattle, alfalfa seed production, berries and dairying. The highway and road system serves the transportation needs of the forest producer, farmer and tourists. Alcona county is a popular tourist spot with thirty miles of Lake Huron shoreline and one of Michigan's largest inland lakes, Hubbard Lake. There are miles of trout streams including the AuSable River Valley area, not to mention hiking and snowmobiling, with over one third of the county contained in the Huron National Forest

**Barton City** is located in Millen Township in central Alcona County. Barton City began as an old Lumber Town in the 1880's. At that time, it was called Mud Lake. When surveyors officially

platted the town in 1912, the community was named after an early settler by the name of Frank Barton.

**Curran** is located at the junction of M-65 and M-72 in Mitchell Township in western Alcona County. This community was started by lumberman Phillip Curran in 1875 and the Loud & Sons Lumber Company who built a narrow gauge railroad there in 1890. It managed to survive after the lumber boom, primarily because of its location at the crossroads, (also referred to as "Flynn's Corners), but also due to its location to several lakes, streams and recreational trails - many of them with catchy names, like Lake-in-the-Green, Chin-Whisker Hill and Buck's Pond.

**Curtisville and Glennie** are located in Alcona County's southeast corner in Curtis Township. The township hall is located in Glennie. Both of these communities began during Michigan's lumbering boom in the early 1880's. They continued to survive afterwards as small agricultural communities, primarily in cattle-raising. The post office in Curtisville shut down in 1955, while the post office in Glennie remains open.

#### Curtisville Post Office

The Tote Road came from the Thompson Farm (near the Rollways) to Wilber Creek. There was a deep cut here and the road turned sharply at the bottom. A large hemlock tree about three or four feet through stood at the turn. Ebenezer D. Curtis bored holes in the tree, up and down, and then took a chisel and made a big slot. As the teams came down from the North, they picked mail up and took it to Tawas. On the return trip they brought the settler's mail back and put it in the slot in the hemlock tree. Some winters, Ebenezer D. Curtis snow shod to Mack City, a lumbering town near Mack Lake, to pick up the mail.

Curtisville, Curtis Twp. was organized in 1881 and named for its first settler, Mr. E. D. Curtis; James Simons became the first postmaster of Curtis on June 14, 1881, the office operating until August 23, 1881; the office was restored as Curtisville on December 29, 1897, with cattle dealer Joseph Bell as its postmaster and operated until February 15, 1955. (page: GSM 1899, P.O. Archives). The post offices were in homes. Those who held the post master or mistress position were: Joseph Bell, Edward Bell, Albert Spencer, Eva Heilig, John McMillen, Hannah Phillips, Mary Ellen Gordon, and Pauline Byler. During the time the Alcona Dam was being built, many of people used the post office there. The Postmaster was Mary Freeman. The Clerk was Laura Gordon Beddy, a resident of Glennie. In 1947, there was a big blizzard and the roads were impassable for some time. Russell Anthony, our mail carrier, had a pilot from South Branch fly the mail in. Russell tied the mail in bundles and dropped it at each house.

**Greenbush** is located in Greenbush Township, the southeastern corner of Alcona County. This area was first settled in 1849 when the firm of Crosier & Davison of Detroit built a barrel plant and fishery. Shortly afterwards, the lumbering firm of Morris & McDougal of New York State purchased government land here, and it became known locally as McDougal's Landing. In the late 1860's, it was officially named Greenbush, after the town of Greenbush, New York, at the suggestion of a settler from the east.

**Spruce**, located east of Hubbard Lake, once was a thriving commerce center that served the family farms in the surrounding area. Caledonia Township Hall is located in the community of Spruce. Records show that Hubbard Lake, Alcona County's largest inland body of water, has been a popular recreational draw for decades. If you can imagine a place where getting away from it all includes open tees, lake breezes, large spaces, boat drinks, big fishes, hunting lodges, and luxury cars over dirt roads; you've imagined Spruce, and the Hubbard Lake area.

**Harrisville**, the Alcona County seat, is located on the pristine waters of Lake Huron at the junction of M-72 and US-23. This community began when fishermen Simeon Holden and Crosier Davison established Davison's Mill here in 1854. They sold out to Benjamin Harris and his sons who came from New York. The township and city were named after them in 1860 when the township was established. It incorporated as a village in 1887 and later as a city in 1905.

Tourism is the main business in Harrisville today, with several motels and bed & breakfast establishments situated near and along the Lake Huron coastline. The Harrisville State Park is south of town and offers camping and swimming on Lake Huron. Harbor Park is located right in town, just to the north of Main Street, and is a good place for a picnic, sightseeing the marina, or listening to the rapids at the mouth of Mill Creek flowing into the harbor.

**Lincoln** is located approximately 8 miles west of Harrisville just north of M-72 . Like many other towns in the region, Lincoln began as a lumbering settlement in the 1880's when the Detroit, Bay City and Alpena Railroad came through. Originally called West Harrisville, it was renamed Lincoln, (probably after President Abraham Lincoln), in 1899. It incorporated as a village in 1907.

**Mikado** is located on Van Etten Creek in Mikado Township in southeastern Alcona County. Like so many in the area, this town originated during the lumbering days of the late 1800's. Lumberjacks and businessmen were drawn to the region to harvest and process the vast stands of old growth timber. Daniel L. Bruce purchased land west of Greenbush from the U.S. Government in 1884. The property, located adjacent to Detroit & Mackinaw Railroad, was surveyed and mapped in 1884. A map of Bruce Plat and accompanying legal documents were registered that year. The following year, Daniel built the Bruce Hotel and Livery stable. With the influx of lumberjacks and families, the hotel and small community thrived. The young community was called West Greenbush. Daniel Bruce wrote to the Postmaster General in Washington D.C. suggesting the name of "Bruce's Crossing" for the new village. There was already a town by that name in the Upper Peninsula, so a different name was chosen by the Assistant Postmaster General. The town was named Mikado after the Gilbert and Sullivan Operetta, which is how a town in northeast Michigan came to have a Japanese name.

**Sturgeon Point Lighthouse** was completed in 1869. In 1887 the original lens was replaced with a Third-and-a-Half Order lens--a size used exclusively on the Great Lakes. This lens still shines from Sturgeon Pt.

The 70 ft tower and attached white keeper's house are in excellent condition. While the light is still active, the Coast Guard leases the site to the Alcona County Historical Society, which operates a museum and gift shop. The rooms in the keeper's house are maintained as they might have looked in the late 1800's.

One of the few remaining one room schoolhouses still standing in Michigan, the **Bailey School**, is a reminder of simpler times. Built of Norway Pine in 1907, the school is still furnished with items used during that time; a recreation bench, teacher and students' desks, drinking pail and dipper, and wood stove for heat. The building has its school bell still atop the roof. The school served the community until the 1940-41 school year. During its last year, the school had thirteen students and the teacher earned \$125.00 per month. When the school was closed the students were transported to Alcona schools.

In 1973 the schoolhouse was partially restored at its location in Mikado Township. In 1989 it was disassembled and moved to Sturgeon Point where it has been rebuilt and restored to near

original condition. The annual Strawberry Social is held at the school on the last Sunday of June.

The **Alcona Historical Society** was formed to preserve the rich history of the Alcona County area. The society realizes the value of the past and its importance to future generations. Members of the Society take pride in their stewardship of the Sturgeon Point Lighthouse and donated hundreds of hours each year to greet visitors and explain the history of the lighthouse and Great Lakes. The restored Bailey School adds a new dimension to the historical story at Sturgeon Point and reflects the Society's dedication to all aspects of the region's history. The organization relies on its members to fulfill the mission for which it was founded; to locate, preserve, protect, restore and record the historical records, objects, sites, and lands of Alcona County. Please join us in this important work.

Until the early 20th Century, northern Michigan was almost completely dependent on waterborne commerce for all of its needs. Thousands of sailing vessels and early steamers plied the Great Lakes at a time when there were almost no aids to navigation to guide them along the dangerous coastline with its treacherous rocks, shoals and reefs. One such reef extends 1.5 miles out into Lake Huron at Sturgeon Point, just north of Harrisville, Michigan. In 1869, the Lighthouse Service began construction of the lighthouse at Sturgeon Point to mark this hazard. Sturgeon Point Lighthouse became operational in the spring of 1870 and has been in continuous service for 128 years. It is still an operational lighthouse. In 1876 the U.S. Life Saving Service established a Life Saving Station just south of Sturgeon Point Lighthouse. This station provided around-the-clock rescue capability for vessels in distress. With the formation of the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915, Sturgeon Point became a Coats Guard station. The lighthouse was electrified and automated in 1939 and the last personnel left in 1941. The Coast Guard buildings were subsequently destroyed, however, the the lighthouse itself survived but was severely vandalized.

In 1982 the Alcona Historical Society leased the lighthouse and began a three - year restoration project. The interior of the keeper's house was completely restored, and the buildings were painted. Almost all of the work was done by volunteers. The lighthouse and keeper's house are of masonry construction on a limestone block foundation. The tower is 70 feet, 9 inches tall and is 16 feet in diameter at its base. The light is a 3.5 order Fresnel lens made in Paris, France. The light apparatus is still maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard. The keeper's house is now a maritime museum which is open to the public seven days a week from Memorial Day to mid - September. The lighthouse tower is not open to the public. The grounds are open all year.