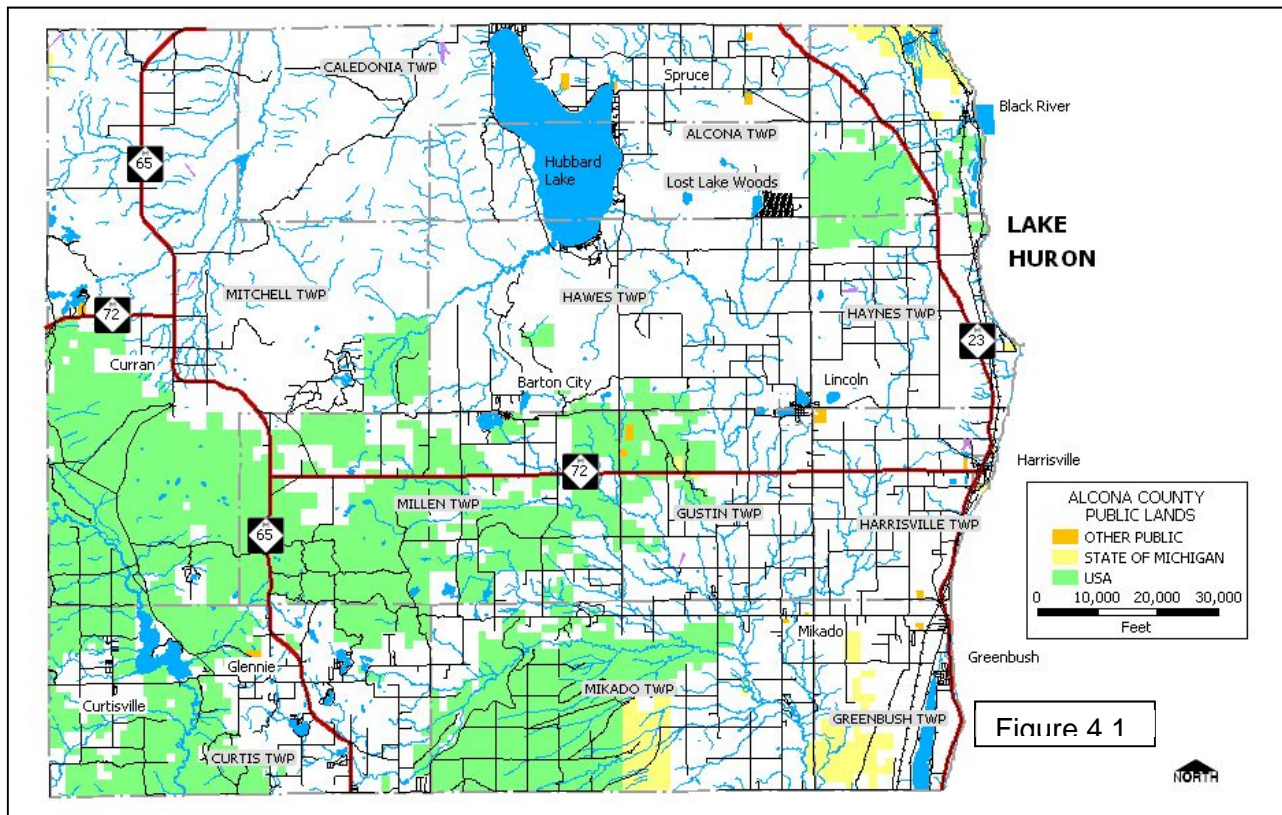


Chapter 4 - Land Use Characteristics

Land Divisions and Ownership

Most of the private ownership is divided into tracts 10 acres or larger. Large hunt clubs, owning several sections of land are common in the northwest part of the county. Small lots and subdivisions can be found within the communities of Lincoln, Harrisville, Barton City, Curran, Spruce, Black River, Glennie, Mikado, Greenbush, Lake Huron Shoreline, and around the many lakes within the County

The Huron National Forest occupies considerable portions of the southern half of Alcona County. State lands can be found in Caledonia, Greenbush and Mikado Townships. Negwegon State Park, a day use park is located in Alcona Township. Harrisville State park, a popular campground, is located in Harrisville Township, just south of the City of Harrisville. Primarily due to these two large holdings, 29 percent of the land is in public ownership and 73 percent of the county is forested, see **Figure 4.1**.



Land Cover/Use

With the economic downturn in 2007, minimal development has occurred in the county. Therefore, no significant changes in development have occurred since the previous plan was completed.

In 1978 a countywide land cover use inventory was completed under the Michigan Resource Information System of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. This is the only countywide land use inventory ever completed. The map of 1978 land cover use, shown as **Figure 4.2**, illustrates the distribution of land uses throughout the County. **Table 4.1** is a listing of the land cover/use categories by acreage. Upland forest, mainly aspen, oak and jack pine forest types, was the primary land cover/use in Alcona County. This is still the case today. The top five largest categories included upland forest, lowland forests, farmland, upland openings, and non-forested wetlands. These five categories accounted for 95 percent of the land cover/use. While residential and commercial development has occurred since the 1978 inventory, the amount of undeveloped land is still expected to be around 92 percent of the County.

Residential

As can be seen on the Existing Use Map and table, residential use occupied almost two percent (7,820 acres) of the land in the county. As would be expected, residential development was concentrated within communities of Harrisville, Lincoln, Greenbush, Glennie and Barton City. Seasonal residential development was located adjacent to inland lakes and along the Lake Huron Shoreline. General trends in residential development have been construction of primary or secondary homes on lots two acres and larger. Housing around the lakes and along Lake Huron have been transitioning from seasonal into year round dwellings. As well, residential development is more common along major roads. A large open space, recreational-residential development, called Lost Lake woods, is located in eastern Alcona Township.

Commercial

The largest concentrations of commercial uses are found in the communities of Lincoln and Harrisville. Strip commercial development is also located along US-23 south of Harrisville. Most of the commercial land uses are service and retail in nature, catering to local residents and tourists. Small pockets of commercial uses can be found in several rural locations around the county. These rural commercial uses are typically convenience retail uses that serve the rural residents and tourists. Lands used for commercial purposes comprised less than one tenth of one percent of the county's area.

Category	Acres	Percent of Total
Residential	7,820	1.8%
Commercial	223	0.1%
Industrial/Extractive	988	0.2%
Institution/Recreation	1,014	0.2%
Agricultural	41,621	9.4%
Non-forest	38,023	8.6%
Upland forest	252,660	56.9%
Lowland forest	71,926	16.2%
Wetlands	16,382	3.7%
Surface water	13,135	3.0%
Beaches and dunes	534	0.1%
Total	444,326	100%
Source: Michigan Department of Natural Resources - MIRIS: 1978		

Industrial Extractive/Transportation

Land in this use category included industrial, extractive (sand and gravel pits) and transportation (airports) and accounted for less than one percent of the land area. Today, industrial development can be found in Lincoln and Harrisville.

Institutional/Recreational

This land use includes such uses as schools, churches, cemeteries and recreational areas. This category accounted for 1,014 acres or 0.2 percent of the land area in the county. Approximately 29 percent of Alcona County is in public ownership, most of which is in the Huron National Forest. While these lands were not mapped as recreational, the considerable amount of public land does offer residents and visitors ample area for a wide range of outdoor recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, cross country skiing and snowmobiling.

Agricultural

According to the 1978 inventory, a majority of the agricultural lands were concentrated in the eastern part of the county. The townships with the greatest percentage of agricultural lands were Caledonia, Haynes, Hawes, Harrisville, Gustin and Mikado, with smaller amounts found in Greenbush and Curtis Townships.. While there has been a downward trend in acreage dedicated to agricultural uses, these lands are falling idle as opposed to being developed for urban built-up uses like other parts of the state and country.

Non-Forested Uplands

The 38,023 acres (8.6 percent) of non-forested upland openings made it the fourth largest land cover in the county. This category consists of herbaceous open and shrub land. This land cover was scattered throughout the county with larger concentrations in the central part. Much of the non-forested land was once active farmland. Given the downward trend in acreage dedicated to farming, this category has increased over the last 25 years.

Upland Forest

The upland forest lands were the most predominant land cover in the county and accounted for 57 percent or 252,660 acres of the county. The most prevalent forest types were aspen, oak and jack pine. Young jack pine forests provide critical nesting habitat for the globally rare Kirtland Warbler. Other forest types include red and white pine and northern hardwoods.

Lowland Forests and Wetlands

Wetlands include land that has sufficient water at, or near, the surface to support wetland or aquatic vegetation. These areas are commonly referred to as swamps, marshes and bogs. The wetland category comprises non forested types such as lowland brush (tag alder and willow), cattail marshes, bogs and wet meadows. Non-forested wetlands accounted for 16,382 acres or 3.7 percent of the county. Lowland forests grow on soils with a seasonally high water table and are often classified as wetlands. Lowland forests include areas that support lowland hardwoods and conifers, such as northern white cedar, black spruce, balsam fir, elm, red maple, ash and aspen species. At 71,926 acres or sixteen percent of the county's area lowland forest was the second largest land cover/use type. Lowland forests are usually swampy in nature and often are classified as wetlands.

Two of the most important functions of wetlands are water quality protection and ecological corridors. As can be noted in **Figure 4.2**, the major wetland areas are adjacent to streams and lakes. The networks of wetlands receive surface water and subsurface water discharge, creating the many streams and creeks which in turn flow into the area lakes. The interconnected

resources exemplify how activities distant from major water bodies can still have an impact on the water quality.

Surface Water

According to the *Alcona County Resource Plan*, there are 233 bodies of water in Alcona County. Lakes and impoundments were mapped as open water and accounted for three percent of the area in the county. The largest lakes that are at least partially found within the County are: Hubbard Lake (9,200 acres), Alcona Dam Pond (1,008 acres), Cedar Lake (775 acres in the County), Jewell Lake (193 acres), Vaughn Lake (115 acres), and McCollum Lake (81 acres in the County). The county's major waterways are the Au Sable River, Pine River, Black River and Thunder Bay River.

Planning and Zoning

Land use planning and zoning are administered at the city, village and township level. Alcona County does not have a county planning commission. While each community administers their own zoning, and maintains their own planning commission and zoning boards of appeals, three townships (Alcona, Caledonia and Hawes) operate under a joint master plan. The Tri-Township planning committee was initiated in 1994 and continues to meet on a quarterly basis to coordinate planning and zoning activities.

The City of Harrisville, Village of Lincoln and all townships (Alcona, Caledonia, Curtis, Greenbush, Gustin, Harrisville, Hawes, Haynes, Mikado, Millen and Mitchell) have exercised their authority under state statutes to administer their own planning and zoning. Therefore each community has a zoning administrator, planning commission and zoning board of appeals that administers its zoning. The planning commissions are responsible for overseeing the master plan, recreation plan and zoning ordinance. The Township Board and municipal councils are the governing bodies responsible for managing finances and making policy decisions. None of the communities have planning and zoning staff and rely on planning commissions to oversee planning and zoning activities. Communities do not have staff, but rely on elected officials to conduct township business.

Planning and Zoning are the principal tools that local communities have to manage growth, preserve community character, protect property values and enhance the economic viability of the area. Planning helps establish and focus the desired future of the community and zoning ordinances are used as one of the primary ways to implement the community master plan and achieve the goals of the community.

A key element of the community master plan is the future land use plan. This is the culmination of the planning process that entails an analysis of existing conditions, public input and goal setting, and finally establishing the community's desired future. The community-wide future land use plan includes a map that depicts where the community envisions types and densities of development. As well, the plan may address important resource areas to protect. Accompanying text describes future land use categories, compatible uses, incompatible uses and development densities. Special issue areas may include utility service areas, roads, open space development and waterfront development. The future land use plan is a policy document designed to guide land use decisions over a given planning horizon, usually 20 years. By comparison, the zoning ordinance and zoning map is a local law that regulates how property can be developed today.

Land-use planning and zoning are governmental functions critical to public safety. However, because these functions are political as well, they are subject to intense differences of opinion and to public controversy. Therefore, they tend to lag behind development until the problem becomes aggravated. Being political they are also subject, even after enactment into law, to pressures for variances and modifications. With few exceptions, they cannot be made retroactive and, consequently, older developments are not much affected by them. Where land-use planning and zoning have been enforced, however, they have achieved significant degrees of fire safety (Oreg. St. Dep. For. 1978b, San Bernardino County Bd. Sup. 1974).

While building codes provide guidance on how to build in hazardous areas, planning and zoning activities direct development away from these areas, especially floodplains and wetlands. They do this by designating land uses that are compatible to the natural conditions of the land, such as open space or recreation in a flood plain, or by simply allowing developers more flexibility in arranging structures on a parcel of land through the planned development approach.

Capital improvement plans guide major public expenditures for communities for the next 5 to 20 years. Capital expenditures may include creating access roads and fire breaks, hazardous fuels reduction projects including community vegetation management, vegetation removal, and vegetation clearing and/or thinning, and retrofitting existing public structures against wildfire, etc.

Master plans, including the future land use plan, are implemented through zoning, capital improvement programs and recreation planning. Zoning is the primary tool used by most communities to implement their master plan. Zoning regulates the type, intensity and location of development in a community. As such, zoning provides communities a means to implement hazard mitigation strategies for land use development, which may include standards for private/public road construction; driveway standards; requirements for developments (such as subdivisions, condominium, commercial, recreational and industrial) to have two egress ingress roads; and house addresses to be displayed on 911 signs at the driveway end.

Another important zoning tool available to communities is the Planned Unit Development (PUD). Use of PUDs provides flexibility to both the community and developer to incorporate Firewise development standards. In high risk areas, PUD standards should include use of defensible zones, fuel breaks, road and driveway design, signage for street identification, ingress and egress roads, underground utilities and vegetative maintenance for managing dangerous fuel loads in high fire risk areas.

