

Chapter 3 - Community Services and Facilities

Key factors that contribute to the quality of life of a community are the type and variety of services available to residents and visitors. Unlike more populated communities, smaller rural communities do not have the financial resources to provide many of the services that would normally be considered essential. In the case of fire and ambulance, many rural communities work cooperatively with adjacent communities to provide essential services.

This chapter of the Master Plan will identify the types and extent of services available to residents and businesses in South Branch Township. Although these services may be sufficient for the needs of the current population, future development may increase the demand to upgrade or expand the services and facilities to maintain a satisfactory living environment.

Water and Sewage Disposal

South Branch Township does not provide public water or sewage disposal systems for Township residents. The residents and business owners must rely on on-site private wells for domestic drinking water needs and private on-site septic systems for wastewater disposal. District Health Department # 10 regulates and maintains a permitting system for private wells and septic systems. Two important determinants for siting a septic system are soil types and degree of slopes. Chapter 4 - Natural Resources discusses the soils of the South Branch Township.

Waste Disposal

Primarily, residents and business dispose of their garbage at two Township operated transfer stations. One is located in Section 32 of T.25N. – R.2W. and the other in Section 2 of T.26N. – R.1W. Township residents pay a flat fee on their tax bill for disposal of solid waste. Non-residents pay a users fee. Businesses must contract with waste haulers to transport garbage to waste disposal facilities. Solid waste is disposed of in the USA Waste/Waste Management landfill facility located in Maple Forest Township in Crawford County. Current projected capacity of the landfill is 20 years.

Utility Services

The types of utility services vary depending upon the types of ownership and the density of development. A higher level of services such as natural gas and cable is provided to the more populated areas of the Township, such as the southwestern portions of T.25N.-R.2W. Due to the large amount of public land utility services are lacking in some areas of the township. The costs of providing utilities to isolated residences can be prohibitively high.

Michcon/DTE provides natural gas service in the southwestern parts of South Branch Township. Consumer's Energy and Great Lakes Energy provides electricity to township residents. Verizon North provides local telephone service, while there are numerous competitive telephone companies that provide cellular phone service. Charter Communications provides cable services in the southwestern populated parts of the township. Satellite TV is available in all parts of the Township. High speed internet is available to Charter Communications (cable) and M-33 Access (wireless).

Transportation

The transportation network consists of state trunkline, county primary and secondary roads; seasonally maintained, unimproved public roads and private roads. State trunkline route M-18 traverses the entire township, running east-west in the southwest (T.25N.-R.2W.) through Sections, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and north-south in the southeast (T.25N.-R.1W.) through Sections, 31, 32, 33, 28, 27, 22, 15, 14, 11, 2 and northeast (T.26N.-R.1W.) through Sections, 35, 34, 26, 27, 22, 23, 15, 14, 11, 10 and 2. State trunkline route M-72 traverses the northern part of South Branch Township, running east-west through Sections, 30, 29, 28, 27, 26, 25, 35 and 36. Both M-18 and M-72 provide vital links bringing goods, services and people to and from the region.

The County primary road network is made up of County Road 502, Chase Bridge Road, Pere Cheney Road, Old 144 and S. McMasters Bridge Road. The balance and majority of the transportation network are gravel, dirt and two-track roads including public and private roads. Primary and secondary public roads are under County jurisdiction, and are maintained by the Crawford County Road Commission.

The Crawford County Transportation Authority operates a county-wide dial-a-ride bus service that is headquartered in Grayling. Funding for operation of the service is provided by a county millage, user fees, and state and federal grants.

Regional air service is available at Saginaw MBS Airport, Flint Bishop Airport, Detroit Metro Airport, Lansing Airport, Grand Rapids Airport and Cherry Capital Airport in Traverse City. Gaylord, Roscommon and Grayling have airport facilities for private planes. The Department of Natural Resources maintains an airport facility near Roscommon and the Air National Guard operates an airbase in Grayling.

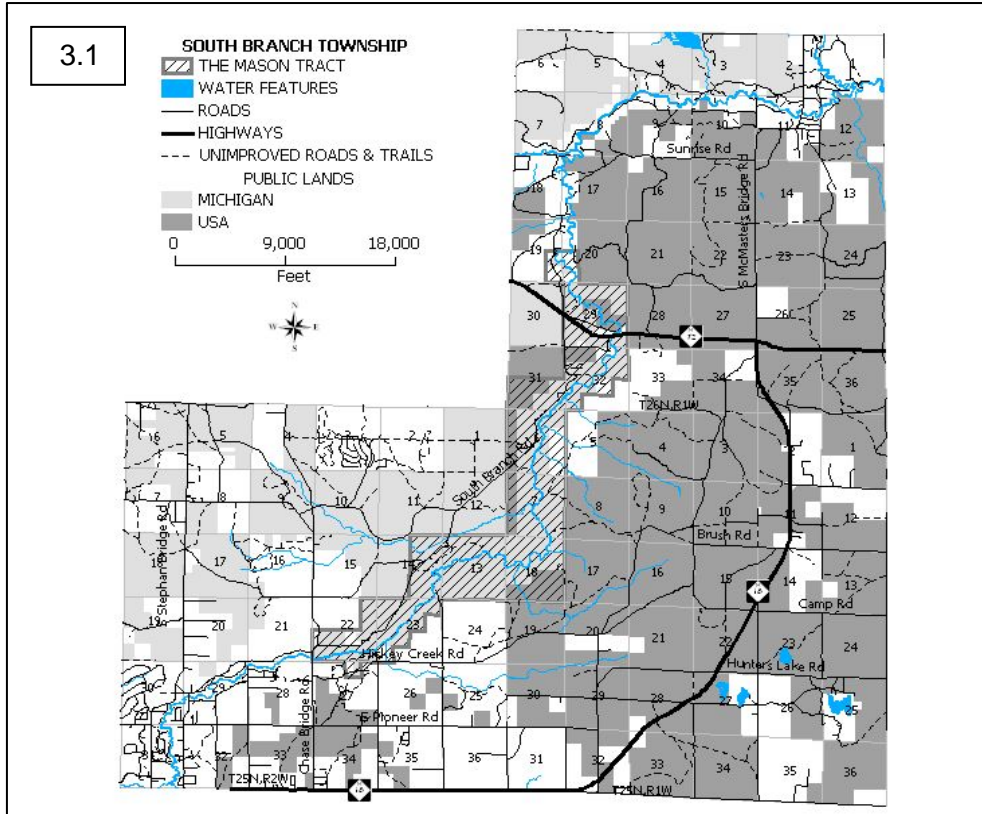
Public Lands and Buildings

The location and amount of public lands is a dominating force on land use patterns in South Branch Township. Some 68 percent of the land area is publicly owned. The US Forest Service (USFS) is the largest single owner covering approximately 31,028 acres or 46 percent of the land area. USFS lands cover much of T.26N.-R.1W. and T.25N.-R.1W. There are 14,488 acres owned by the State of Michigan. Uses of these public lands will continue to play significant roles in the character and future of the community. For example, Kirtland's warbler management areas and the Mason Tract have special management considerations that limit types of uses. Figure 3.1 depicts land ownership in the Township.

The township maintains two public buildings, the Township Hall and Township Fire Hall. Both located in southwest quarter of Section 36, T.25N.- R.5W. The Fisherman's Chapel is a publicly owned building located along the east bank of the South Branch of the Au Sable River within the Mason Tract. Construction of the building was funded by the estate of George W. Mason. Though regular church services are not offered at the chapel, the facility is used for weddings, baptisms, eulogies, and countless, peaceful meditations of anglers from around the world.

The George Mason River Retreat, also known as the Mason Tract includes 4,700 acres of land and 11-plus miles of beautiful and productive trout water. According to the Higgins-Roscommon Chamber of Commerce, *"The initial 1,500 acres conveyed to the State of Michigan by the late George W. Mason, was formally accepted by the Conservation Commission August 12, 1955. To provide a wider protective fringe, boundaries have been extended along both sides of the stream throughout most of the area to include nearly 1,330 acres acquired from the U.S. Forest*

Service in the year 1957, and some 360 acres that are still in private ownership. It is the expressed wish of Mr. Mason that this area be enjoyed, and remain, a wilderness. The Mason Insurance Trust Agreement provides separate funds for planting trout in the river and for the construction of a chapel. This area is open to public fishing, boating, hunting and trapping under the same regulations applying elsewhere to the use of state owned land. Overnight camping is permitted at Canoe Harbor Campground, which is a monument to the Civilian Conservation Corps from the 1930's."



Schools Libraries and Museums

South Branch Township is located in the Gerrish-Higgins School District. Students K-12th grade attend school in Roscommon. The Gerrish-Higgins School District is part of the Crawford, Ogemaw, Oscoda and Roscommon (COOR) Intermediate School District. The ISD provides [special education](#), [career and technical education](#), [information technology](#) and [general education](#) programs and services on request that single local districts find difficult or impossible to provide.

Kirtland Community College (KCC) located in Roscommon and North Central Michigan College (NCMC) located in Petoskey, are two-year institutions serving the higher education needs of area residents. They offer several associate degree programs, career and technical training, liberal arts and transfer programs. NCMC has an institute for business and industry training that provides customized training programs. In addition, NCMC and KCC are host sites for universities which offer degree programs.

Kirtland Community College opened the Michigan Technical Education Center (M-TEC) in Gaylord the fall of 2001. M-TEC offers certificate, certification and associate degree programs in construction and manufacturing technology. The University Center at Gaylord offers partner programs through Central Michigan University, Davenport University, Kirtland Community College, Madonna University, Michigan State University, North Central Community College and Spring Arbor College. Programs include certification, dual enrollment, general education, bachelor of arts, bachelor of science, masters of arts, masters of science, lifelong learning and associates degrees. Post high school education is also available at Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City, Central Michigan University in Mt. Pleasant and Mid-Michigan Community College in Harrison.

There are no libraries or museums located in South Branch Township. Residents generally drive to Roscommon or Grayling to access these facilities. There are Crawford County branch libraries in Frederic and Lovells. Residents can access the library at Kirtland Community College.

Churches and Cemeteries

The Racer's Baptist Church is located on M-18 along the southern border of the Township. There are three cemeteries in South Branch Township, Pioneer Cemetery located in Section 32 of T.25N. – R.2W., Rock Cemetery located in Section 11 of T.25N. – R.1W., and Ball Cemetery in Section 22 of T.25N. – R.1W, near the old CCC Camp.

Public Safety

Law enforcement protection for South Branch Township is the responsibility of the Crawford County Sheriff Department and the Michigan State Police. The Crawford County Sheriff

Department is located in Grayling. State Police Posts are located in Gaylord and Houghton Lake. Advanced life support service is provided by Mobil Medical Response (MMR), based in Grayling and Beaver Creek Township. The Countywide enhanced 911 emergency service, operated from Crawford County Central Dispatch, is available for all county residents.

Fire protection is provided by the South Branch Township FD which is a volunteer department covering 144 square miles. The Department responds to approximately 180 call per year. At the present time the department has 28 members, 20 firefighters, four Michigan First Responders, eight EMT – basics, two EMT – specialists, two EMT paramedics, two state certified fire inspectors, two instructor/coordinators, and two state certified firefighters. The Department operates two pumpers or engines, two tankers, two 6x6 wildfire trucks, a water point pick-up truck, one small wildfire truck and one basic level ambulance. South Branch has mutual aid agreements with Beaver Creek Township, Lovells Township, Richfield Township, Higgins Township, and Grayling Township. The Department of Natural Resources operate fire stations for wildfire suppression in Mio and Grayling.

Fire Department started in 1974
EMS Rescue started in 1987
EMS Ambulance started in 1991
River Rescue started in 1999

Chief – Ernie Windolph
Assistant Chief – Curt Miller
1st Captain – Lyle Traver
2nd Captain – Michael Janissee
1st Lieutenant - Rich Vlasic
2nd Lieutenant – Suzanne Pennell

Medical Facilities

There are no medical facilities located in South Branch Township. Clinics, doctor and dentist offices are located in Roscommon, Houghton Lake, Gaylord and Grayling. An Urgent Care facility and Northsport Rehabilitation are located in Roscommon. For health care services not available at these facilities, residents travel to Northern Michigan Hospital in Petoskey, Munson Medical Center in Traverse City, West Branch Regional Medical Facility in West Branch, Grayling Mercy Hospital in Grayling and Otsego Memorial Hospital in Gaylord.

District Health Department #10 is often able to fill health care needs of the community, which are not available or affordable elsewhere. The Health Department service area includes Crawford, Kalkaska, Missaukee and Wexford Counties. Programs offered by the Health Department fall under three categories: home health care services, environmental health services and personal health services.

North Central Community Mental Health provides support services to developmentally disabled persons as well as persons needing mental health services. The North Central Community Mental Health service area covers Crawford and Roscommon Counties.

Recreational Facilities

Nearly all of the outdoor recreational facilities, both public and private, focus on the center piece of the community, the South Branch of the Au Sable River. Below is a list of recreational facilities:

Public Owned Facilities

1. South Branch Township Ball Field (located adjacent to the Town Hall)
2. Meads Landing - Public access to South Branch Au Sable River
3. Steckert Bridge - Public access to South Branch Au Sable River
4. Chase Bridge - Public access to South Branch Au Sable River
5. McMasters Bridge - Public access to Main Branch of the Au Sable River
6. Smith Bridge - Public access to South Branch Au Sable River
7. Canoe Harbor Campground – DNR operated on the South Branch Au Sable River
8. Conner's Flats Public Access – Main Branch of the Au Sable
9. Mason Tract Pathway - 11.5 mile groomed ski and hiking trail
10. Mason Tract – 4,700 acres of land and 11 miles of South Branch of the Au Sable River
11. White Pine Canoe Campground
12. Rainbow Bend Canoe Campground

Private Owned Facilities

1. Paddle Brave Campground and Canoe Livery
2. Whippoorwill Campground
3. Forest Dunes Golf Course
4. Cindy Lou Zoo – Petting Zoo
5. Jeremy and Lois Jones Nature Preserve
6. Water's Edge Canoe Livery
7. Quinlan's Landing