

ALMIRA TOWNSHIP

RECREATION PLAN

ADOPTED

ALMIRA TOWNSHIP BOARD

Mark Roper, Supervisor
Tammy Clous, Clerk
Mandy Gray Rineer, Treasurer
Matt Therrien, Trustee
Lori Florip, Trustee

Almira Township Recreation Plan

Table of Contents

I. PURPOSE	3
A. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION	3
1. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS	4
B. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE	9
C. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS	10
D. RECREATION INVENTORY	10
E. ACTION PROGRAM AND RATIONALE	15
F. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEDULE	16
II. APPENDIX	17
A. RESOLUTIONS	
B. TRANSMITTAL LETTERS	
C. NOTICES	
D. MEETING MINUTES	
E. COMMUNITY RECREATION PLAN CERTIFICATION CHECKLIST	

I. PURPOSE

How healthy are you? What does your family do for recreation? Where do you and your family play? What would make you and your family more active? Today sports, leisure and recreation are a mainstay in American life. This Plan addresses these questions to help Almira Township become a healthier community, offer a better quality of life and provide its citizens recreational opportunities.

This Plan provides a concise description of the current and future recreational opportunities in the Township. This Plan is also meant to be a dynamic document that can respond to changing conditions. This Plan will help establish a foundation for the Township to apply for State grants through the Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund (MNRTF), other grants and private donations to make physical improvements to the recreation system.

A. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

Almira Township is a rural community located in Benzie County in northern Lower Michigan. It is bordered by Platte Township on the west, Inland Township on the south, Long Lake Township (Grand Traverse County) on the east, and Kasson Township (Leelanau County) on the north. The incorporated Village of Lake Ann is within the Township's physical boundaries. Increased development has caused Almira Township to continually assume new responsibilities, including providing a sufficient amount of recreational opportunities.

Tourism

Almira Township is located in Michigan's prime tourist and recreational wonderland. Tourism is considered by many to be a major component of the Benzie County economy with such industries as retail trade, the arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations, and food services. Recreation improvements are needed to strengthen the tourist attraction and, therefore, the economy of the region while satisfying the needs of the seasonal and year-round resident population.

Quality of Life

According to a 2001 study by the American Planning Association, 70% of adults in the United States do not achieve the recommended amount of activity each week. The U.S. Surgeon General recommends a minimum of 30 minutes of moderately intense physical activity at least five days per week. The sedentary lifestyle is a primary factor in up to 200,000 deaths annually.

Approximately 64% of Americans are overweight; and one in three is obese. More than a third (36%) of young people in grades 9-12 do not participate in vigorous recreation activities three or more days a week, and one fourth (25%) of those aged 6-17 years are already overweight.

Although these statistics do not specifically represent Almira Township, they do show how critical it is to encourage active lifestyles and provide recreation opportunities for all age groups. As the Township's population grows, this need also increases.

Transportation

Almira Township does not have any state trunk lines passing through the jurisdiction. Approximately forty miles of paved roads and sixty-five miles of gravel roads, of which approximately thirty miles are county roads, serve the community. The Benzie County Road Commission is responsible for maintenance of the public roads within the Township. Almira Township does have to provide funding assistance for road improvements within the Township.

In April of 2006 the Benzie Transportation Authority was formed and in January of 2007 the Benzie Bus opened its doors to the public. The Benzie Bus offers service within the county, also offers service to the Traverse City BATA transfer station and can make connections with the Manistee Transit System. Popular destinations in Almira Township are the Village of Lake Ann, Almira Township Library and Almira Township Park.

Commercial air transportation is available from the Cherry Capital Airport in Traverse City, approximately sixteen miles from Almira Township. Additionally, there is a small private airport designed for "ultra light type" aircraft located on County Road 669, between Hooker Road and Oakley Road.

1. PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Natural features of an area may affect the types of recreational amenities a location can offer. To understand the physical environment, comprehensive knowledge of the surrounding area is necessary.

Topography

Almira Township is characterized by a diversity of topography from relatively flat expanses to gently rolling to some areas with steep slopes. A relatively flat area extends north south in the western portion of the Township with much of the remainder of the township consisting of rolling topography. Additionally, a number of steeply sloped areas are scattered across the Township, often in proximity to one of the lakes. The lowest point in the Township is in the southeast portion, near Sanford Lake, at 803 feet above sea level. The highest points are Varney Hill and Warner Hill in the north-central portion of the Township at approximately 1,122 feet above sea level.

Bodies of Water

The largest body of surface water is Pearl Lake, with approximately 543 acres in surface area located in the northwest quarter of the Township. Ann Lake, the second largest lake in Almira Township at 527 acres, is located in the southeast quarter. More than 30 other smaller lakes can be found in the Township. These lakes and their associated streams and creeks offer scenic and recreational amenities to Township residents and visitors.

Fish and Wildlife

Sport fishing is popular on several inland lakes in Almira Township. The Fisheries Department of Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, conducts periodic fish inventories at selected lakes. An inventory was conducted in 2004 at Ann Lake. Sixteen species of fish were collected at eleven sites. They were brown trout, northern pike, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, blue gill, rock bass, Lake Perch, Cisco, white sucker, pumpkinseed, green sunfish, black bullhead, brown bullhead, yellow bullhead, blunt nose minnow and common shiners. Snapping and painted turtles were also collected during the inventory. According to the MDNRE report, anglers reported good fishing for northern pike and smallmouth bass.

A fish inventory of Sanford Lake was conducted at eight sites in 1989. Species collected were bluegill, large-mouth bass, green sunfish, rock bass, white sucker, yellow bullhead, and brown bullhead. Painted and snapping turtles and bullfrogs were observed along the shoreline. The report indicates, "Some anglers complained about the poor fishing, while others say that it has only decreased slightly. Based on the results of the survey, it appears that Sanford Lake contains one of the best bluegill populations in the area."

A fish inventory of Pearl Lake was conducted at twelve sites in 2016. Species collected were northern pike, blue gill, rock bass, perch, largemouth bass, and assorted pan fish. Turtles and clams were also noted.

Habitat for populations of songbirds, waterfowl, shorebirds, muskrat, beaver, otter, mink and raccoon are provided by the wetlands, lakeshores, and forests within the Township. Predominant mammal species found in the Township's forest and wetlands are squirrel, rabbit, fox, coyote and deer.

Climate

The Township's climatic conditions are similar to those across northern Lower Michigan: long cold winters, and moderate warm summers. However, the proximity to Lake Michigan serves to moderate temperature extremes as compared to more inland communities of northwestern Michigan. The average date when temperatures drop to freezing is in the fall and is typically several weeks later than the areas further inland, with the first frost in the township occurring as late as the middle or end of October. According to the Midwestern Regional Climate Center, Frankfort Station, Benzie County, for the year 2000, **Table 12** illustrates some important weather statistics for Benzie County, including Almira Township.

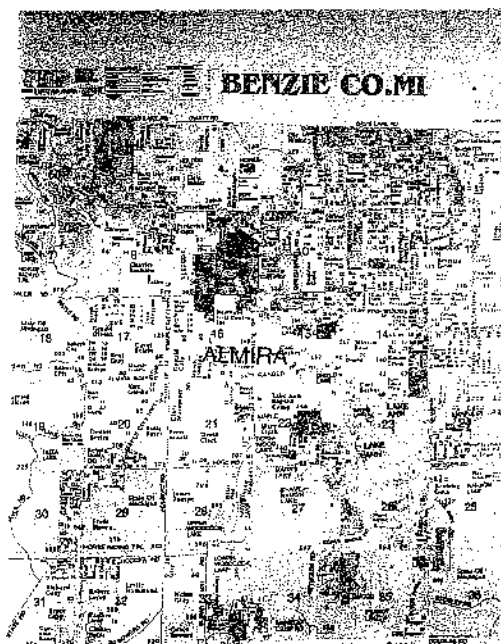
Table 12
Average Weather Statistics
Benzie County

January average minimum temperature	18.4 degrees F
January average maximum temperature	28.1 degrees F
July average minimum temperature	53.5 degrees F
July average maximum temperature	72.45 degrees F
Average annual rainfall	30.25 inches
Average annual snowfall	122.4 inches

From a recreation viewpoint, the climate is sufficiently diverse to support a variety of outdoor activities. Summer temperatures are warm and conducive to swimming, sun bathing, hiking, boating, and the like. Winter brings annual snowfall depths of over 100 inches, which complements the region's popularity for skiing, snowmobiling, and other winter activities.

Land Cover

According to the 2000 Census, Almira Township's land area is 33.8 square miles. A consultant mapped existing land use in the Township in March 1998. The map of existing land illustrates the distribution of land uses throughout the Township. Michigan Resource Information Systems (MIRIS) land cover/use classification categories were used to map the existing land use. The original State MIRIS mapping (1978) was updated with 1987 aerial photographs in combination with extensive field checking (conducted in March 1998). The updated information was then computerized to produce the existing land use map and statistics. **Table 13** presents the land uses in current rank order, showing the number of acres and percent of the Township in each of the land use categories.



Current Land Use Map

Table 13
Almira Township Existing Land Use Statistics

<u>Land Use Category</u>	<u>Number of Acres</u>	<u>Percent of Township</u>
Upland Forest	12,393.4	53.8
Non-Forested/Undeveloped/ Open	4,511.4	19.6
Wetlands/Lowland Forest	1,464.1	6.4
Water	1,421.1	6.2
Residential	1,324.2	5.8
Agricultural	1,227.8	5.3
Institutional/Recreation	327.0	1.4
Village of Lake Ann	276.7	1.2
Industrial/Extractive/Utilities	52.9	0.2
Commercial	37.9	0.2
TOTAL	23,036.5	100.1

Note: Due to rounding, the total percentages of land uses do not equal 100 percent.

Upland Forest

The forested lands are the most predominant land cover in the township and account for 53.8 percent, or 12,393 acres, of the Township. Of the forested lands, northern hardwoods comprise approximately three-quarters of the upland-forested lands, with pine as the second most common upland forest type, followed by aspen-birch associations. Large upland-forested areas are noted along the southern and western regions where State forestland exists. Mapped woodlands include such tree types as beech, maple, aspen, birch, white pine and red pine.

Non-Forested/Undeveloped/Open

The non-forested land category consists of herbaceous open and shrubland. As shown in **Table 13**, more than 19 percent of the Township is in the non-forested category. Non-forested areas are scattered throughout the Township and are found in nearly all sections of the Township, except Sections 26 and 17.

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 identified wetlands include areas that support lowland hardwoods and conifers, such as northern white cedar, willow and aspen species, as well as lowland brush and grasses. Wetlands and lowland forests comprise 6.4 percent of the Township area. Due to past draining and development, this amount has decreased from what was originally classified as wetland. The majority of the wetland areas can be noted on the Existing Land Use Map in the southwest portion of the Township, in the vicinity of Ann Lake, and many of the other smaller lakes and streams in that portion of the Township (Sections 21,22,24-28,31, and 35). A few additional wetland areas are clustered in the northeast portion of the Township (Section 1, 11-13).

Water

Open water comprises over six percent of Almira Township. Included in this category are Ann Lake, Pearl Lake, and more than 30 other smaller inland lakes.

Residential

As can be seen on the Existing Use Map and table, residential use ranks fifth in the amount of land currently in this use. Residential use occupies more than 5 percent (1,324 acres) of the land in the Township. Residential development on various size parcels is distributed throughout the Township and in the platted subdivisions. This category would also include multiple family housing, although none was identified during the field checking.

Agricultural

Agricultural lands currently comprise approximately 1,227 acres or 5.8 percent of the Township. The agricultural land is clustered in the central and north central portion of the Township with a few scattered parcels located in the southwest portion of the Township.

Institutional/Recreation

This category includes both institutional and recreational land categories, which cover 1.4 percent of the Township's land area. Included in this category are Township offices, Township fire and ems facilities, parks, campgrounds, public access sites, cemeteries, the Lake Ann Camp, and a 27 hole golf course including a 9 hole 3 par golf course. These sites are shown on the Existing Land Use Map.

Industrial/Extractive/Transportation

Land in this use category covers less than 1 percent of the Township and includes the landing strip in Section 32, just off Maple City Highway. Additionally, two other areas are mapped as this land use: a sand and gravel excavation operation off Almira Road (East of Maple City Highway), and a saw mill on the South side of Almira Road (also east of Maple City Highway).

Commercial

A small commercial area is located along Maple Street, which includes self-storage units, auto repair, hair salon, restaurant, water testing lab business and boat maintenance and storage. Although not mapped, limited commercial activities are located in the Village of Lake Ann. For most shopping needs, residents travel to large regional commercial areas, such as Traverse City. Land used for commercial purposes comprise less than one percent of the Township's area.

B. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Structure

As a small rural community Almira Township's administrative structure is relatively simple. The Almira Township Board has the responsibility of providing recreational facilities for Township residents. In this capacity, they listen and work with citizens to learn of recreation deficiencies and needs.

In the summer of 2009, the Almira Township Planning Commission conducted a survey of Township residents for use in updating the Master Plan. Survey results are used by the Board to plan what recreation facilities are needed, when they can be built or provided, and how to fund them. In addition, the Recreation Resources Committee, an appointed citizen's group, assists in the management of existing recreation facilities.

Almira Township employs 1 Full Time Equivalent Maintenance Supervisor, who is responsible for parks maintenance.

In December 2002, the Township purchased a 220 acre parcel of land referred to as Ransom Lake Natural Area, with assistance from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trust Fund, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, a citizens' group called Almira Citizens for Preservation, and with support from many individual citizens.

In March of 2010, the Township purchased property within the Village of Lake Ann known as Almira Township Lakefront Park, again with assistance from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment Trust Fund, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, the Almira Citizens for Preservation and with support from many individual citizens.

Funding

Almira Township receives most of its funding from State Revenue Sharing and property taxes. The General Fund for the Township for 2023 is \$745,687. The Township also receives a specified millage for maintenance of the Township Parks. The Parks & Recreation Fund for 2023 is \$54,210.

C. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The original Almira Township Recreation Plan was written in 1996 re-written in 2005, updated and amended in 2001 and 2008 respectively. A community survey was conducted in the summer of 2009 by the Almira Township Planning Commission. The Almira Recreational Resources committee reviewed and approved the Recreation Plan at their October 25, 2010 meeting, sending it on to the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on November 3, 2010. After the public hearing the Planning Commission sent the Plan to the Almira Township Board with suggested changes. The Township Board held a public hearing on February 14, 2011 and approved the Plan. The Almira Township Recreation Plan was adopted by the Almira Township Board on April 11, 2011. This current update was completed by the Parks and Recreation Committee and forward to the Township Board July, 2023.

D. RECREATION INVENTORY

EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES IN ALMIRA TOWNSHIP

The recreation inventory is a basic step in the planning process. The recreational facilities and parks inventory includes areas owned and/or maintained by the Township, State, or other municipalities located within Almira Township. These facilities serve both local and regional needs.

Facility:	<u>RANSOM LAKE NATURAL AREA</u>
Description:	This property is 220 acres, which includes 3,500 feet of Ransom Creek frontage. This property is used for hunting, fishing, hiking, cross-country skiing, wildlife observation, mountain biking, etc.
Condition:	This property is to be kept in its natural state, open to the public for hiking, hunting, fishing, bird watching, and nature study. The property has been improved and now includes 2 bridges, fishing dock, rest area, two handicap accessible bathrooms.
Barrier Free:	There are 2 barrier-free parking areas.
Owner/Status:	Almira Township

Facility: ALMIRA TOWNSHIP PARK

Description: The park is a 42-acre park located at 7276 Ole White Drive. It has three baseball diamonds, basketball courts, pickleball courts/tennis courts, a one mile paved walking trail, and an 18 hole disc golf course. It also has a bandstand and pavilion area with indoor plumbing and a couple other covered picnic areas. Nearby there are playscape and swing sets that are open during the summer months. In wooded areas there is a fairy garden pathway and a Veteran's Memorial pavilion. A recycling drop off is also located in the Park.

Condition: The majority of the Park is in good condition; however, some of the playground equipment is dated and needs to be improved. The baseball fields could use improvements such as dugouts and fencing.

Barrier Free The Park is barrier-free and accessible to all residents

Owner/Status: Almira Township.

Facility: ALMIRA TOWNSHIP LAKEFRONT PARK

Description: 1.65 acre waterfront property located on Maple Street in the Village of Lake Ann, intended for use as a public park and swimming beach.

Condition: This Park has Two Pavilions with Picnic Tables and Charcoal Grills. Restroom/Changing Room with handicap accessible Flush Toilet and Running Water, Paved Parking Area and Walking Path to Sand Beach Area

Barrier Free The Park is barrier free

Owner/Status Almira Township.

Facility: LOWER WOODCOCK LAKE PRESERVE

Description: 230 acres, owned and managed by The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy. It contains the entirety of 22 ACRE Lower Woodcock Lake and ½ mile of frontage on the Platte River.

Condition: This preserve was established in 2020. There are over 4 miles of hiking trails, a kayak launch and dock on the lake and two gravel parking areas.

Facility: MISTWOOD GOLF COURSE

Description: This is a one hundred sixty (160) acre golf course with twenty-seven holes that can be played in 9, 18, or 27 hole games. One of the 9 holes is a 3 par course. Amenities include a restaurant and a pro golf shop.

Condition: The golf course is in good condition.

Barrier Free Provisions have been made to make the golf course accessible to everyone.

Owner/Status: The golf course is privately owned.

Facility: BURNETT PARK

Description: This Park is located in the Village of Lake Ann, and contains two (2) basketball hoops, playground equipment, picnic tables, and handicap accessible portable bathroom. This is a known gathering area for the community and hosts many events.

Condition: The Park is in good condition.

Barrier Free The Park is barrier free

Owner/Status: Village of Lake Ann

Facility: LAKE ANN STATE FOREST CAMPGROUND/CROSS COUNTRY SKI MOUNTAIN BIKING AND HIKING TRAIL

Description: The State Forest Campground has rustic camping with pit toilets and no running water.

Condition: Good.

Barrier Free Varied

Owner/Status: State of Michigan

Facility: STATE OWNED LAND

Description: This land is heavily forested to open land and is used for hunting, hiking, and other outdoor activities.

Condition: Good

Barrier Free: Varied

Owner/Status: State of Michigan

Facility: MICHIGAN SHORE-TO-SHORE TRAIL

Description: This trail is part of a statewide equestrian trail.

Condition: Adequate.

Barrier Free Yes.

Owner/Status: This is a statewide trail system that is maintained by the State of Michigan.

Facility BOAT LAUNCHES

Description: Almira Township contains eleven (11) public boat access sites. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources operates eight (8) boat launches. The boat launch sites are on Ann Lake, Stevens Lake, Davis Lake, Gary Lake, Pearl Lake, Brooks Lake, Herendeene Lake, and Lime Lake. The Benzie County Road Commission has two (2) boat launches: one on Pearl Lake and one on Bronson Lake.

Condition: Gravel or sand.

Barrier Free Varied

Owner/Status: Varied

INFORMATION REGARDING EXISTING FACILITIES IN SURROUNDING AREAS

In addition to those in the Township, there are many recreational facilities and parks located in surrounding Townships. These areas provide local residents and tourists regional opportunities for recreation. The following listing describes recreation resources owned by Benzie County or that cover more than one governmental jurisdiction.

1. Benzie County Crystal Lake Park: The Park contains three hundred and twenty (320) feet of Crystal Lake frontage and thirteen (13) acres of hilly and wooded land area, surrounded by no development. This property is owned by the Benzie County Road Commission and is leased to the Benzie County Board of Commissioners with restrictions that it only be used for park purposes.

2. Betsie Valley Trail: This trail is located on the former Ann Arbor railroad right-of-way. The route traverses the County along the Betsie River from the Frankfort/Elberta area to Beulah and south to Thompsonville Village and the junction with the former C&O railroad.
3. Betsie River Corridor: The Betsie River is a designated *Natural Wild and Scenic River* that runs from Grass Lake to Betsie Lake and Lake Michigan. It is protected through a fifty (50) foot no-cut vegetative buffer and two hundred (200) foot setback for all man made structures. This corridor is a major canoeing, kayaking and fishing resource.
4. Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore (SBDNL): is a National Park located in both Benzie and Leelanau counties. It consists of 71,199 acres of forest, inland lakes and dunes. There are 100 miles of maintained hiking trails, 3 campgrounds, and miles of Lake Michigan beach.

ACTION PROGRAMS

The Township's Action Program is based on a listing of the community recreational needs gathered, from public input. These recreational needs have been prioritized at a public meeting. The Township used this prioritization list to develop the Capital Improvements Schedule, reflecting citizen's desires and tourism

- **Project Name:** Ransom Lake Improvements Phase II

Replacing the far footbridge across Ransom Creek inlet.

Adding a boardwalk to wet areas of the trail system.

Estimated Cost: \$45,000

When this should occur: Within the next 3 years.

- **Project Name:** Betsie Trail Connection

Construct a connection between the Betsie Valley Trail System in southern Benzie County to the Ransom Lake Natural area, the Almira Township Park, east through Long Lake Township and then to the TART (Grand Traverse Area Trail).

Estimated Cost: To be determined.

When this should occur: To be determined.

- **Project Name:** Almira Township Park Improvements

Although the Township Park is in good condition, some of the equipment is deteriorating. In addition not all of the recreation needs for citizens are being met, especially for children aged six years and younger and residents older than 65. Township residents would like to continue the update of playground equipment, add dugouts, fences and lighting to the baseball fields, build a shuffleboard court, a larger more permanent ice skating rink (board frame and liner, estimated around \$4000) and tables for games such as chess and construct a concession stand. There also is interest in establishing a dog park on this property, more hiking/biking trails to connect to nearby Mistwood Golf Course, and constructing a “Pump Track” course, which would provide healthy exercise for any wheeled vehicles and users of all ages and abilities and lastly converting the unused volleyball court into a native flower pollinator garden.

Estimated Cost : \$50,000 to \$ 200,000 depending on the amount of improvements.

When this should occur: 2023 to 2026

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEDULE

The Capital Improvement Schedule details the anticipated acquisition and development of recreation parcels for the next five years. For each item listed, the expected year for that improvement is indicated. Each project has been prioritized based on public input and availability of land. It is the intent of this Capital Improvement Schedule to have flexibility when pursuing a grant for a project. Certain projects were deemed to have the same priority, but their acquisition or development depends on other factors, such as availability of land or the workings of other governmental units. Prior to the pursuit of a grant for a specific project, a special public hearing will be held explaining why a particular project is being selected and to receive input.

- Acquiring property easements to construct safe walking/biking paths to connect the Village of Lake Ann to township parks and neighborhoods. The proposed pathways are:

<u>Pathway</u>	<u>Completion Year</u>
Village of Lake Ann to Ransom Lake/Hardwood Acres Subdivisions	TBD
Village of Lake Ann to the Township Beach	TBD
Village of Lake Ann to the Almira Township Park	TBD
Village of Lake Ann to the Windtree Oaks Subdivision	TBD

- Acquisition of Environmentally Vulnerable Property TBD

APPENDIX

- I. RESOLUTION
- II. TRANSMITTAL LETTERS
- III. NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING – ALMIRA TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION
- IV. NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING – ALMIRA TOWNSHIP BOARD
- V. MINUTES OF TOWNSHIP BOARD, TOWNSHIP PLANNING COMMISSION AND
TOWNSHIP RECREATION RESOURCES COMMITTEE
- VI. COMMUNITY RECREATION PLAN CERTIFICATION CHECKLIST