

CHAPTER 4 PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

What does Manistee County look like? The county is blessed with abundant and high quality natural resources: the Great Lakes coastline, extensive river systems, vast forested areas including high value wetlands, a healthy farm economy based on productive soils, attractive lakes, and plenty of land available near existing developed areas for future growth.

Manistee County's high quality natural resources and environment contribute to its quality of life and make it a great place to live, work, and play.

Surface Water: It is estimated that there are 276 miles of rivers and streams in Manistee County, with an estimated 45 miles of state or federal wild/scenic/natural rivers. Manistee County also has 25 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline. There are 9,600 acres of surface water in Manistee County, consisting in part of nine inland lakes each with a surface area greater than fifty acres.

Open Space Lands: Approximately 73 percent of the some 356,000 acres of land area in the county is forested, accounting for some 253,200 acres. A total of approximately 90 percent of the land area of the county is open space. This is a very valuable natural asset of the county. The challenge of the future is to retain this dominant feature of the county as urban growth takes place.

Farmland: 46,440 acres are in active farmland, 18 percent of the county total.

Wetlands: There are approximately 73,000 acres of wetlands in the county, some 21 percent of the total land area. These wetlands are primarily located along the Manistee River and within the Pere Marquette State Forest and the Manistee National Forest. Wetlands contribute significantly to water quality by acting as filters of storm water in addition to sustaining forest growth and providing habitat for wildlife. These areas generally are not suitable for development, but provide open space and recreational values in addition to the production of forest products.

Oil & Gas: There are 1,933 extractive wells in Manistee County. See the map on page 4-4 that shows the location of extractive wells in the county.

Land Ownership: 55% of the land in Manistee County is privately owned, and 45% is publicly owned. Manistee County has a large amount of state and federal land. Of the total 557 square miles (356,655 acres) of land in Manistee County, 143 square miles (91,337 acres) are federally owned and 45 square miles (28,913 acres) are state owned.

- Federal land comprises 26% of the total land area of Manistee County.
- State land comprises 8% of the total land area of the county.

- County-owned land covers 1.4 square miles (897 acres) and comprises .3% of Manistee County’s land area.
- Tribal-owned trust land covers 0.3 square miles (216 acres) and comprises .06% of Manistee County’s land area. This land is tax exempt.
- The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians also owns approximately 2,000 additional acres of land in Manistee County. Property taxes are paid on these lands.
- School-owned land covers 2.3 square miles (1,487 acres) and comprises .4% of Manistee County’s land area.
- City, village, and township-owned land covers 2.7 square miles (1,736 acres) and comprises .5% of Manistee County’s land area.

A summary of land ownership:

Total Land Area	356,655 acres	
Federal Lands	91,377	
State Lands	28,913	
Local Government	2,633	
School Districts	1,487	
Tribal Trust Lands	216	
Total Public Lands		124,626

With population and economic projections calling for gradual increases over the next twenty years, the county, local governmental units and related agencies have an excellent opportunity to retain the high quality natural environment by developing strategies and zoning techniques to encourage growth while retaining important natural features.

How has land use changed?

In 2006, the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments conducted a comparative analysis of land use changes in the county between 1995 and 2000. Generally speaking, there have been modest changes in land use in this five year period.

In summary, the following land use changes occurred:

- 75 acres changed from vacant or bare land to development.
- 312 acres changed from agricultural use to development.
- 138 acres changed from forest use to development.

Although these acreages are not the total land use change during this period, it indicates that land use change is occurring from agriculture and forest uses to development.

The map on page 4-3 shows the existing land cover in the year 2000.

This is a trend exhibited in all areas of Michigan, and is an alert that the county develop a strategy to work with local government, where zoning control rests, to retain important natural features while providing space for new development.

Manistee County Land Cover, 2000

Manistee County Extractive Areas

What about roads? “Infrastructure” is the word used to describe the utility systems of the county. These systems are the “backbone” of the community and are very necessary to the success of advances in the economy and quality of life.

The county’s major highways connect it to the rest of the State of Michigan. US-31 runs north and south through the county and through the City of Manistee. M-55 provides east-west access through the county. M-115 cuts across the northeast corner of the county. M-22 runs along the west side of the county, and is a scenic road that runs north through Benzie County and into Leelanau County, where it has been designated by the state as a Scenic Heritage Route.

What is the condition of the county’s main roads? The state has a system to evaluate the condition of roads. Generally, 50 percent of county roads are in fair to good condition. Roads in fair to failing condition make up 34 percent of the roads and 15 percent are rated as good to excellent. These ratings generally fall below the average of the counties in northwest Michigan.

What about public transportation? Manistee County Dial-A-Ride has been in operation for 30 years. The service provides safe, reliable public transportation through both a “flexible fixed route” and dial-a-ride service that anyone can call for a scheduled pick up.

The service covers the entire county with a morning and afternoon run. The “flexible fixed route” is targeted toward the senior population and goes on a daily route through town, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Service is also provided daily to Munson Medical Center in Traverse City and to West Shore Community College. Approximately half of the Dial-A-Ride customers are persons with disabilities. Approximately one-quarter of the customers are seniors.

What about private autos? From 1997-2002, vehicle ownership increased 11.6% in Manistee County. This was higher than the state increase in vehicle ownership during that same time period of 8.3%, but lower than some other counties across northwest Lower Michigan. By type, passenger vehicles comprised the largest percentage of auto registrations during the 2002/2003 fiscal year at 53.1% in Manistee County, followed by 25.8% of registrations as commercial vehicles, 19.0% as trailers, and 2.0% as motorcycles.

Where do people drive? The commuting pattern data from the 2000 Census show that a large majority (79.2%) of workers who live in Manistee County remained in Manistee for their jobs. However, many workers (nearly 65%) do not work in the townships where they live. The percentage of workers who travel outside their township of residence for work is relatively high in Manistee County due to the concentration of jobs in the City of Manistee, the Village of Eastlake, and Filer and Manistee Townships.

Within the City of Manistee, 57.9% of residents held jobs within the city. In contrast, at least 90% of workers who lived in Marilla and Springdale Townships had jobs within the

City of Manistee or other areas. In most of the townships in the county, over 70% of workers traveled outside their township for jobs.

For 1990-2000, overall commuting levels from Manistee County to other counties increased from 16.4% in 1990 to 20.2% in 2000. Seven townships experienced a decrease in commuting during this same period. The largest percentage increase took place in Marilla Township, where commuting increased from 24.2% of the total worker population to 45.9%. Both Dickson Township and the City of Manistee experienced increases of over ten percentage points.

What about air transportation? The Manistee-Blacker Airport provides air service to the county. The airport is located 3 miles northeast of the City of Manistee. An average of 28 aircraft operations takes place daily at the airport. Approximately 42% of flights are local general aviation, 40% are transient general aviation, 12% are air taxi, 6% are commercial, and less than 1% are military in nature. The airport recently completed construction of a new terminal building in 2007 that greatly enhances the services of the airport. In addition, security fencing and a new instrument landing system has expanded the use and function of the airport.

The railroad in Manistee County: Current use of the rail network in Northwest Michigan is minimal and non-existent in most northern counties of the region. Freight transport is the primary use of the rail system, however one tourist dinner train still operates in the region. The Manistee industrial area continues to receive excellent service by a rail line that enters the City of Manistee in southwestern Manistee County.

According to the data from the Michigan Department of Transportation, in 2000 Manistee County was the primary shipper in the northwest Michigan region, moving 57% of the region's rail freight along the CSX line, the highest user of rail freight in northwest Michigan. In 2005, Marquette Railroad leased CSX lines north of Grand Rapids. A study to relocate the rail line around Manistee Lake is under consideration.

Water transportation and marinas: A full domestic port facility is available at Manistee Lake. The Manistee River Channel, which is connected to the harbor, needs to be maintained to 23 dredged feet to allow commercial ships to navigate the river to Manistee Lake factories.

In addition to several marinas, Manistee County has one of the few deep water ports on Lake Michigan. Industries on Manistee Lake depend on this access, which expands employment opportunities. Great Lakes shipping is expected to expand and has great potential to enhance business and tourism growth in Manistee County.

What about water and sewer service? Water and sewer infrastructure are essential and can shape the future of growth and environmental quality in developing areas. Water and sewer lines are expensive infrastructure elements. When sewer systems are not available, development must utilize septic systems to treat sanitary waste. This can hinder higher density development and can potentially lead to some long-term environmental impacts.

How about internet broadband? In 2003, a comprehensive LinkMichigan Telecommunications Plan was prepared for Mason, Lake, Manistee, Newaygo, and Oceana Counties by Capital Consultants, Inc. with funding provided by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

The report showed that internet access is currently provided within the region defined in the study by three major carriers including Charter Communications, SBC, and Verizon, and by 13 smaller, local internet service providers. Survey data gathered for the report indicated that most businesses see their need for broadband access growing significantly in the future. Over the next two years, 35% responded that their need would double, and 17% believed that their need would be three times or more what it was in 2003.

The Manistee Intermediate School District is providing fiber optic connections to all schools within the ISD service area. The broadband network is available in selected areas of the county from private vendors.



Pumping Oil Well adjacent to a Subdivision

Questions? For more detailed information concerning physical conditions in Manistee County, please refer to the “Manistee County Master Plan Resource Book” published in August 2005 by the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments.