

III. RECREATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Because of the recreational opportunities in the Village of Empire and the abundance of natural resources, the Village wishes to include recreation as a key component in the Master Plan.

In past years, the Village has provided recreation services and facilities to residents and visitors. The mix of Village-owned facilities, along with other publicly-owned facilities offers a wide range of passive and active recreational opportunities. A description of these facilities is included in the recreation inventory, which begins on the following page. The Village of Empire plans not only to continue providing recreation services to its residents and visitors, but also continue making improvements at the existing facilities, including compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

As a recreation service provider, the Village recognizes the importance of planning for future recreation services and facilities. The Village of Empire has previously prepared the Recreation Plan as a separate document from the Village Master Plan. A major factor in the provision of any service is the question of how projects will be funded. One possible source of funding for recreation projects is through grants available from Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR).

To become eligible for MDNR funding, a community must have an approved recreation plan. Components of a MDNR-approved recreation plan include:

- Community Description
- Recreation Inventory
- Administrative Structure
- Description of the Planning Process
- Action Program
- Basis for the Action Program
- Plan Review and Adoption

Elements of the community description can be found in earlier chapters of this report. A community location map can be found in Chapter I Background Studies. Socio economic characteristics of the Village, natural environment data, and existing land use patterns are also found in Chapter I Background Studies. The remaining components of the recreation plan are covered in this chapter.

INVENTORY OF RECREATION FACILITIES IN VILLAGE OF EMPIRE

An inventory of existing recreation facilities located in the Village of Empire is provided below. Sites are grouped according to jurisdictional ownership. Village-owned facilities are listed first, then other public sites, and finally privately-owned recreation sites. Each listing is followed by a brief description of that location. Figure 3-1 illustrates the location of the recreation sites.

The Village of Empire owns property which is currently being used for recreational purposes. Table 12 contains information on these facilities.

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**Table 12
Facilities Owned and/or Operated By Village of Empire**

Name	Size (acres)	Facilities	Needs for ADA Compliance
Village Beach Park	6.7 acres	<u>South Bar Lake</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Boat Launch Ramp ➤ Swimming Dock (accessible) - seasonal ➤ Picnic Shelter ➤ Children’s Play structure ➤ Picnic Grills ➤ Drinking Fountain <u>Lake Michigan</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Seasonal Boat Launch Ramp ➤ Beacon Lighthouse for boaters/fishermen ➤ Bathhouse w/ Restroom Facility (accessible) ➤ Basketball Court (non-regulation size) ➤ Historic Structures w/ interpretive plaques 	Restrooms
North Park	12.2 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ball fields (2) w/ backstop and fenced outfield ➤ Tennis Courts (2) unlit ➤ Picnic Grills (4) ➤ Walking Path ➤ Path to Creek ➤ Children’s Play Area ➤ Storage Building ➤ Restroom Facilities (2) one accessible ➤ Landscape Buffer 	Restrooms
Downtown Greenspace	0.14 acre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Informational Kiosk ➤ Benches ➤ Farmers’ Market (Saturdays in the summer) 	

Table 13 contains information on other publicly-owned land in the Village of Empire.

**Table 13
Public/Quasi-Public Owned Recreation Facilities**

Name	Owner	Size	Facilities
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(acres)			
Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore	National Park Service	107.7 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Visitor's facility w/ interpretive center and auditorium (leased) ➤ Natural Area ➤ Trails ➤ Picnic Facilities
Chippewa Run Natural Area	Leelanau Conservancy (Non-profit)	110 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Natural Area
Johnson's Park	Empire Lions Club	5.3 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ball Field ➤ Picnic Shelter ➤ Storage Building w/Restrooms
Township Hall	Empire Township	0.28 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meeting Facilities
Village Nature Preserve (West of Johnson Park, formerly Nature Conservancy)	Village of Empire	13 acres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Natural Area (with wetlands)

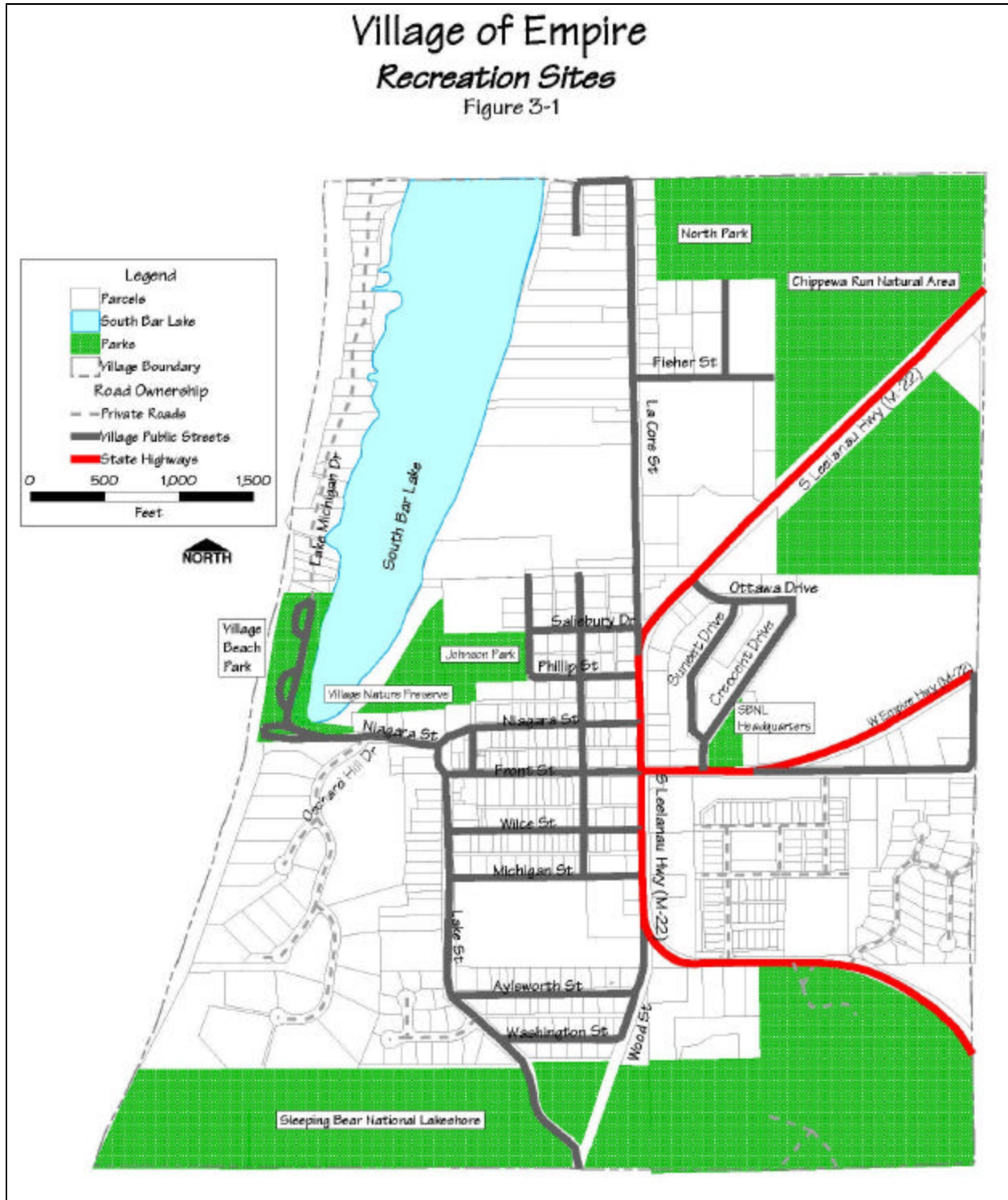


Figure 3-1: Publicly Owned Recreation Site Locations, Village of Empire

Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), all areas of public service and accommodation became subject to barrier-free requirements, including parks and recreation facilities and programs.

With the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), all areas of public service and accommodation became subject to barrier-free requirements, including parks and recreation facilities and programs.

The ultimate goal is to provide recreation opportunities that include everyone, regardless of physical or mental impairment.

When evaluating the accessibility of parks and facilities, barriers should be recognized from the perspective of the participant. These perspectives aid in preparing the design and planning future improvements to both current and existing facilities. Therefore, we can determine whether a site, building, and/or facility is in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines.

Perspectives to Consider

- Could a person with visual impairment have a reasonable means of identifying the facilities?
- If a person is physically disabled, is there a means to access all facilities, and if there are barriers, is an alternate route available?
- If a person has a reading disability, are there standard symbols indicating parking, restrooms, or trailway?
- If a person uses a walking aid such as crutches or braces, could the person move from the point of arrival to the various recreation facilities?

An evaluation of the Village of Empire park and recreational system accessibility to persons with disabilities is being conducted as a component of the recreation inventory found in this chapter. Each site was inventoried for its accessibility status, and results are noted under the discussion on that facility early in this chapter.

Transition Plan

Much of the transition plan for the Village of Empire consists of the removal of small-scale accessibility barriers, which is readily achievable through using the general fund expenditures. This would include the systematic upgrade of play areas, the removal of uneven surfaces and sidewalk obstructions, the placement of accessible parking space signage, and the procurement of additional wheelchair-accessible picnic tables.

Capital improvement expenditures are targeted for more comprehensive accessibility remediation projects, which will be incorporated into the overall improvements of existing facilities. All new playground equipment, site furnishings, landscaping, and other facilities included in the capital improvements plan shall be designed and installed in compliance with the latest adopted U.S. Architectural and Transportation Barrier Compliance Board and U.S. Department of Justice standards.

COMMUNITY RECREATION EVENTS

There are a number of community events held in the area throughout the year. The following is a sample listing of the community events:

Page Break

<u>Month of Event</u>	<u>Community Event</u>
January	Eagles New Year’s Day Breakfast Buffet
February	Empire Winterfest
March	Eagles St. Patrick’s Day Dinner
April	Lion’s Club Pancake Breakfast
May	Annual Asparagus Festival
June	Michigan Trail Riders (Empire to Oscoda)
June	Eagles Field of Dreams Music Festival

June-September	Empire Farmers’ Market – Saturday mornings
July	Anchor Day Celebration
August	Sleeping Bear Dunegrass & Blues Festival
September	Michigan Trail Riders Oscoda to Empire to Oscoda
October	Empire Heritage Days
November	Eagles Annual Spaghetti Dinner
December	Annual Village Tree Lighting and Shopping in the Village

OTHER LEELANAU COUNTY RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Residents of the Village of Empire can also utilize recreational facilities outside the Village bounds. Information on recreational opportunities outside the Village of Empire was obtained from the Leelanau County Recreation Plan (2002). There are a number of additional public and private recreational facilities in Leelanau County. Township, County, and State parks and campgrounds offer a wide range of recreational activities from picnicking and baseball to hiking and swimming. The local public schools within the county also all have recreational facilities. The designated public access sites have boat launches, parking areas, and toilets. Such facilities are maintained by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources or Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. In addition, there are many privately-owned recreational facilities open to the public. The county recreation plan indicates an abundance of private recreation providers ranging from golf courses to canoe/kayak rental liveries, catering to both residents and visitors.

TRAILS

There are numerous recreational facilities classified as trails that are in or run through the Village of Empire and Leelanau County. These trails include approximately 13 miles of walking, hiking, biking, and cross country skiing trails, and approximately 1-2 miles of signed and groomed snowmobile trails.

Village of Empire's recreational activities and facilities are primarily funded through the Village’s general fund. Table 14 illustrates recreation spending for the past three years, in comparison to the Village’s total budget. For the proposed 2005-2006 budget, \$65,516.00 has been budgeted as a recreation line item, demonstrating that the Village Council does routinely allot funding for recreational purposes.

Page Break

Table 14 Village Budget and Recreation Expenditures, 2003 – 2006			
Budget			
FY Beginning March 1	2005-2006	2004-2005	2003-2004
Total Village	\$553,779.00	\$581,920.00	\$443,057.00
Expenditures			
Recreation	\$65,516.00	\$56,435.00	\$38,891.00
Source: Village of Empire Balance Sheets, 2003-2006			

DESCRIPTION OF THE RECREATION PLANNING PROCESS

Prior to this Master Plan (including recreation plan), Village of Empire had maintained an up-to-date, separate

Village Master Plan and Recreation Plan. The Village of Empire adopted its first Zoning Ordinance in November 1985. The Village is aware of the need to plan for future improvements at locally-owned recreation sites and consider in detail how these projects could be funded.

With these needs in mind, the Village of Empire obtained grant funding from the Coastal Management Program of the Department of Environmental Quality and signed a contract with professional community planning consultant, M.C. Planning & Design, to prepare a Village Master Plan. In addition, the Village requested a community recreation plan be incorporated in the Master Plan.

Research for updating the plan and writing the draft document began in March 2005. This research included socio economic data, natural resources, existing land use, and recreation inventory information required by MDNR as part of the recreation plan. Over the next seven months, the consultant met monthly with members of the Planning Commission who reviewed and helped edit the draft recreation plan prior to submission to MDNR.

To encourage public participation in the recreation planning process, all meetings with the Village of Empire Planning Commission were open to the public and posted in local public places.

A meeting of the consultant and the Village Planning Commission was held in September 2005 to devise an action plan based on suggestions obtained from a July 2005 work session. Additional meetings were held with the consultant and Village to review and revise the draft document on October 6, 2005 and November 1, 2005. Finally, interested citizens were invited to attend a public hearing on March 9, 2006. Notice was published in the Traverse City Record Eagle on February 18, 2006 and the Leelanau Enterprise on February 23, 2006, as well as posted in local public places. Fourteen interested citizens attended the public hearing. After the public hearing the complete document was finalized for initial submission to MDNR.

Page Break

RECREATION GOALS

The Village of Empire, because of its environmental attributes, expanses of public (state and federal) land, and the low population density, currently enjoys a favorable reputation as an outdoor recreation area. To sustain and increase the current level of recreational activities for all age groups, the Village should encourage the growth of open-space recreation.

- Encourage the preservation and continued vitality of Critical Dune Areas.
- Develop multi-purpose pathway system in the commercial area and throughout the Village to connect the downtown to the area parks, recreation areas, National Park Service facilities, and other existing trails.
- Pursue the development of bike lanes/designated bike routes where separate pathways are not feasible.
- Through zoning and review procedures, proposed subdivisions, site condominiums, planned unit developments, and commercial developments should be encouraged to provide or participate in the development of neighborhood parks.
- Maintain open space and scenic vistas by encouraging Planned Unit Development, clustering, and conservation easements.
- Maintain existing and establish new trails for biking, cross-country skiing, and walking in the Village.

The Village of Empire has a system of parks, ball fields, and recreational facilities. To meet the needs of the growing seasonal population and the increased tourist activity, it is important to improve and expand these recreational facilities. Recreational facilities should be developed to meet the needs of the whole community, all age groups, and income levels.

- Encourage the consideration of recreational facilities as an integral part of community development plans.
- Ensure all new playground equipment for Village parks is ADA compliant.
- Provide ADA compliant bathroom facilities at all Village parks.
- Enhance and expand public beach and water access facilities for residents, seasonal residents, and visitors.

Community-wide programs that provide opportunities for year-round recreation, personal enrichment, art, musical, and theatrical groups are contributors to the quality of life and attractiveness of the Village. It is important to ensure accessibility to adequate public recreation facilities and cultural activities for area residents and visitors. Coordinated programs and facilities that reflect the character and desires of the community can play a key role in attracting new commercial activities.

- Explore the development of a community center.
- Encourage community arts and crafts, musical, and personal enrichment programs for all age groups and for seasonal-and year-round residents.
- Encourage and promote cultural facilities and events that meet the needs of the entire community.

Page Break

BASIS FOR ACTION PROGRAM

For each project listed in the Action Program and Capital Improvements Schedule (Table 18), a rationale or basis for need is presented in one of the tables below (Tables 15-17).

Table 15 Village Beach Park Facilities and Basis for Action	
Existing Conditions	Proposed Action
<u>Restroom facilities</u> - 45 years old and not adequate to meet summer demand (one commode per lavatory)	Construct new accessible facility with increased capacity. Upgrade system to accommodate anticipated usage.
<u>Basketball Court</u> - non-regulation size court with wooden backboards, with cracking concrete pad, subject to accumulation of blowing sand.	Construct new accessible, regulation-size basketball court, with plexipave or similar approved surface, with two steel backboards.
<u>Park development</u> - Existing parkland well utilized and does not allow for expansion.	Acquire additional adjacent property on South Bar Lake to allow for the construction of an ADA compliant boardwalk with seating, to protect sensitive shoreline vegetation.
<u>Shoreline restoration/rejuvenation</u> - shoreline compromised by sand build-up, invasive purple loosestrife, undirected foot traffic, and stormwater runoff.	Control purple loosestrife and blowing sands, and provide designated routes for foot traffic to preserve and maintain the South Bar Lake area for recreational use.
<u>Park Lighting</u> - Existing lights for parking area and restroom facilities utilize overhead poles/wires and	Locate utility lines underground to reduce hazards of poles, and improve the aesthetics of the park. Replace

cause light pollution which impacts the visibility of the night sky.	lights with fully shielded down lights, to minimize the impact on the night sky without compromising the safety.
<u>Parking capacity</u> - RVs and motor homes frequently occupy much of the limited parking area.	Acquire additional land for overflow parking to accommodate the large vehicles within walking distance of beach and downtown.
<u>Signage</u> - a series of unrelated signs regulate the activities at the Beach Park.	Develop and implement a coordinated signage system for all parks, and consolidated Beach Rules sign.

Table 16 North Park Facilities and Basis for Action	
Existing Conditions	Proposed Action
<u>Tennis Courts</u> - the cracked asphalt surface poses some potential safety concerns.	Repair existing surface and add layer of plexipave or similar surface to create a safer surface to promote continued use by all age group, and provide a hard surfaced ADA compliant area at the entrance to the Tennis Courts.
<u>Access/Connection to Chippewa Run</u> - to reach the Chippewa Run Natural Area from North Park, Chippewa Run Creek must be crossed.	Construct an ADA compliant footbridge to provide a safe crossing and protect the creek banks and surrounding area from unnecessary erosion caused by undirected crossings.

Table 17 Village Trail System Facilities and Basis for Action	
Existing Conditions	Proposed Action
<u>Separate Trail systems</u> - extensive trail systems exist, but are not connected. These trails include the Michigan Shore-to-Shore trail, which connects to the North Country Trail, and two extensive but separate trail systems in the National Lakeshore.	Form a multi-jurisdictional task force to pursue the linkage of existing trail systems. Create or designate necessary trails/routes to connect existing trails and provide signs to clearly identify connections.
<u>Bike Path from M-109 to Empire needed</u> - many recreational and tour group bicyclists use the Lake Michigan Circle Tour route along M-22; without a designated bike path safety is a concern.	Pursue (with MDOT) the completion of the bike path from M-109 to Empire, to provide for safer routes.
<u>NPS Visitors Center disconnected from "downtown"</u> - currently there is not a sidewalk/pathway connection between the Visitor's Center and the Village business district.	Provide a sidewalk/pathway connection with signage to encourage people to "park & walk" from the visitor's center to downtown. This would help to address the parking issues and promote Empire as a pedestrian-and bike-friendly community.

Chippewa Run Natural Area - undeveloped natural area.	Establish trail heads and trails to allow for managed passive use of the property.
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ACTION PROGRAM

The action program is presented below in a Table 18 that describes improvements to existing facilities and the development of new facilities. Anticipated funding sources will be in the form of cash from the Village general fund, in-kind labor, Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, Leelanau Conservancy and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) grants. Sources of the grants are: Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), Coastal Management Program (CMP), Inland Fisheries Grant Program (IFGP), Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), Natural Heritage Small Grants, and other appropriate grant programs.

Table 18 Recreation Capital Improvement Schedule			
Project	Priority Year	Funding Source	Funding Amount
Village Beach Park			
Restroom Facility	1	MNRTF and Village	\$ 158,000
Basketball Court Improvements	1	CMI-RBP and Village	14,000
New or Shielded Lights	1	Village	6,000
Acquire South Bar Frontage	2	MDNR and Conservancy	Negotiations with property owners
S. Bar Western Shore Rejuvenation	2	CZM, IFGP, NHSG, and Village	12,000
Wetland Enhancement & Boardwalk Area	3	MNRTF, NHSG, and Village	18,000
Consolidated Beach Rules Sign	3	Village	1,500
Temporary Fishing Dock	4	Village	13,000
Overflow Parking	5	Property Owner and Village	19,000
Underground Utilities	1	Village	30,000
North Park			
Tennis Court Improvements	3	CMI-RBP and Village	11,000
Footbridge over creek to Natural Area	2	MNRTF, NHSG, and Village	10,000
Village Trail System			
NPS Visitors Center "Park and Walk"	1	SBDNL, Property Owners and Village	25,000
Trail linkage system	2	MDOT, SBDNL and Village	95,000
M-22 Improvements - Sidewalks	2	MDOT and Village	99,000
Downtown Greenspace Park			
Park Benches, Tables and Bike Racks	1	MNRTF and Village	2,500
Portable Gazebo	4	MNRTF and Village	9,500

Funding Sources

CMI-RBP	Clean Michigan Initiative-Recreation Bond Program
Conservancy	Leelanau Conservancy
CZM	Coastal Zone Management
IFGP	Inland Fisheries Grant Program
MDNR	Michigan Department of Natural Resources
MDOT	Michigan Department of Transportation
MNRTF	Michigan Natural Resources
NHSG	Natural Heritage Small Grants
SBDNL	Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
Village	Village of Empire

Page Break

PLAN REVIEW AND ADOPTION

The Recreation Plan was reviewed by Leelanau County Planning Staff/Leelanau County Planning Commission, as well as public comments accepted as part of a Public Hearing held for both the Master Plan and Recreation Plan on March 9, 2006.

Comments from Leelanau County and the Public Hearing minutes are included in Appendix B.

The Recreation Plan was adopted by the Village of Empire Planning Commission on June 12, 2006 and by the Village Council on June 27, 2006. Copies of the minutes from the meetings when the plan was adopted are provided in Appendix C.