

REVISED DRAFT – JANUARY 30, 2012

**DRAFT RECREATION PLAN 2012-2016
ST. JAMES TOWNSHIP, BEAVER ISLAND**

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This draft plan has been revised in response to feedback received during the one-month public comment period, and has been transmitted to the St. James Township Board for consideration at a public hearing at its February 1, 2012 meeting. Substantive revisions appear in tracking mode. It was prepared, at the Board's request, by Peter Plastrik.

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PURPOSE OF PLAN

This five-year plan identifies the key recreational assets of St. James Township and the recreational goals, objectives, and action program developed for adoption by the Township Board following public input. It is intended that this recreation plan could also serve as an input for a Beaver Island integrated natural resources management planning process that the Beaver Island Natural Resources and Ecotourism Steering Committee (NRESC) has begun with support from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Michigan State University.

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1. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

St. James Township is located in the northern part of Beaver Island, making up about a sixth of the Island, but also includes the outer islands of Hat, Hog, Garden, Squaw, Whiskey, Trout, High, and Gull. With many miles of Lake Michigan beach frontage and miles of county roads, it is a rural setting with a small village containing single-family homes, a handful of year-round small businesses, three churches, and the Beaver Island Community School, as well as scattered summer homes mostly on small forested or beach lots. The community's well-being depends on the area's natural resources, as it has since the days when Native Americans and early settlers were living on Beaver Island and surrounding islands.

The defining feature of this township is St. James Harbor and its environs where most of the day-to-day commerce of the island, especially boating and the transportation of goods, services, freight, and passengers by water, take place. The harbor area reflects a traditional town development with buildings located close to the road, minimal parking, and mixed uses in multiple-story buildings. This area has maintained its original small "downtown" character. The pedestrian scale, mix of commercial and residential uses, and lack of overcrowding have all contributed to this character.

As stated in the St. James Township Recreation Plan 2002 and restated in the 2006 Master Plan, St. James Township is a recreation-based community. Its population and housing gains are attributed largely to the growth of second-homes, retirement, and seasonal tourism. This has slowed during the first decade of the 21st century due to economic recession of the state and Midwest. Yet tourism, with its short-term visits and seasonal residences, is the township (and Island's) main economic driver. And it is based on access to and immersion in the island ecology of land and water. This signals the critical importance of the township's recreational assets for the township's community and well-being. But it doesn't fully capture the way that recreational activities also help to bring the community together. School sports matches are intergenerational and communitywide events. Fundraising events, such as a 5K run or a bicycle festival, and beach cleanups and habitat enhancement for wildlife, also bring together seasonal and year-round residents as a community. And nearly all of these and other events are implemented by scores of volunteers throughout the community, often without reliance on government funding.

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According to the 2010 U.S. Census, the St. James Township population profile continued a 20-30 year trend of slow growth and aging. The township had 365 residents, almost evenly divided between men and women. This was an increase of 58 residents, or nearly 20%, since 2000. (This fell well short of the population of 410 projected for 2010 by the 2000 Census and Charlevoix County.) Of the 2010 residents, the median age was 51.5, an increase over 2000 when the median age was 45.6—both medians much higher than the state's. In 2010, about 17% of township residents were 18 years old or younger, while about 31% were 60 years old or older.

A similar trend of slow growth is seen in the 2010 Census profile of housing in St. James Township. Ten years earlier, the township had 179 "seasonal" housing units (those occupied during limited portions of the year) and 138 occupied (year-round) housing units. Using this data, the 2006 Master Plan estimated (using a multiplier of 3-5 people per seasonal home) that the seasonal population in St. James Township was between 537-895 people, more than double the year-round population. In 2010 there were 238 seasonal housing units and 178 occupied (year round) housing units, an increase of nearly 40% during the decade.

Further reflecting the overall pattern, property values in St. James Township have stagnated. Between 2006 and 2009, total property value grew from \$40.52 million to \$47.37 million, or an average increase of more than 5% a year. But by 2011, total property value was only \$47.70 million, a growth rate of only .1% annually since 2009.

2. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The following describes how recreation functions are carried out in St. James Township.

- The Township Board takes direct responsibility for policies and operations of the township recreation assets that it owns. Paid services such as maintenance are performed by employees or contracted out.
- The current St. James Township budget (April 2011- March 2012) allocates a total of \$29,600 for parks and recreation. This is about 12% of projected (discretionary) revenue for the year.
Detailed projected expenditures:
 - Ballpark maintenance: \$1,250
 - Public beach maintenance and equipment: \$4,200
 - Landscape maintenance: \$3,250
 - Lawn mowing: \$2,750
 - Public restrooms maintenance/upgrade: \$3,750
 - Tennis courts: \$500
 - Campground maintenance: \$1,500
 - Gull Harbor maintenance: \$1,500
 - Pest control: \$250
 - Lighthouse restoration: \$6,000
 - Utilities: \$3,400
 - Township properties expense: \$1,250
- In addition, the 2011-12 budget allocates \$2,500 for sidewalk and path maintenance, and \$48,996 for yacht dock operations (from collected fees).
- Numerous recreational activities are implemented by Island organizations, such as the Beaver Island Chamber of Commerce, sports boosters, and the Beaver Island Wildlife Club, with many Island residents and visitors taking part. In addition, a number of recreation-related businesses

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are active, and the Beaver Island Community School and Central Michigan University, which operates research and educational facilities on the Island, often partner with the township. CMU’s Biological Station conducts community field trips every summer and CMU is creating a museum with an interactive Great Lakes education and outreach exhibit as part of its new research space at the boathouse on Whiskey Point.

3. RECREATION INVENTORY

The following description of St. James Township’s outdoor and indoor recreation inventory is based on discussions with the Township Board members and multiple organizations on Beaver Island, as well as a review of existing township documents concerning what the township owns and operates. It focuses mainly on land and facilities owned by the township, as well as those of the public school and nonprofit organizations operating in the township. (Of course there are also privately owned assets that support recreation, such as recreation services, restaurants, and motels.) For all items in the inventory the “service area” is the whole of Beaver Island, not just St. James Township. All facilities are said to have barrier-free access (although some are not easily accessible by wheelchair) except Whiskey Point Lighthouse, which is closed. Only one site has public restrooms, and several have outhouses.

Name	Location/Size	Ownership	Purpose/Use	Access
1) Jewell Gillespie Park	St. James Harbor, nearly 1 acre	St. J Township	Harbor beach with playground equipment, parking lot and road	Open to public
2) Beaver Island Yacht Dock and property across the street	St. James Harbor, 1 acre	St. J Township (and Peaine Township)	Docks, picnic tables, small building with showers; public restrooms, greenspace	Open to boaters; public access
3) Bud McDonough Ball Field	St. James Harbor, 1.5 acres	St. J Township	Softball field	Open to public
4) BI Veterans Memorial Park	St. James Harbor, ½ acre	St. J Township leased from Wolverine Power	Benches, harbor overlook, monuments, flagpoles	Open to public
5) St. James Township Campground	Northern shore, 42 acres	St. J Township	12 campsites, pit toilets, hand water pump	Open to public
6) Font Lake Boat Launch	Northern shore of Font Lake; small strip of inland lake frontage lots across the road	St. J Township (and Charlevoix County Road Commission)	Boating and fishing	Open to public
7) Harbor Light Park	St. James Harbor at Whiskey Point, 1 acre	St. J Township	Beaver Harbor lighthouse, lake frontage	Open to public
8) St James Township Hall	St. James Harbor, ¼ acre	St. J Township	Meeting room	Limited use
9) Tennis Courts & Park	Inland, west of St. James Village, 2 acres	St. J Township	2 tennis courts, 1 picnic table, small park	Open to public

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10) Vacant harbor frontage lot	St. James Harbor, 66 feet frontage, Lot 6, Block 6 of Stephens Plat	St. J Township has easement rights for this private property ¹	Vacant lot	Open to public; restricted uses
10 11) Donegal Bay	Western shore, 2 lakefront lots	St. J Township	Greenspace lots, access to beach	Open to public
11 11) Paradise Bay Park	St. James Harbor, just south of ferry dock	St. J Township	Sitting park, benches, flower garden	Open to public
12 12) Gull Harbor Natural Area	North of St. James Harbor, 14 acres	St. J Township	Trails, ponds	Open to public
13) Boat Launch Site	At Gallagher Avenue and Main Street	Charlevoix County Road Commission	Boat ramp	Open to public
14) Heritage Park	Inland, across from library	St. J Township, leased to BI Historical Society	Outside historical displays	Open to public
15) Iron Ore Bay – public access	600 feet of lakefront, 22 acres, southern end of Island	St. J Township & Peaine Township	Beach, picnic table	Open to public
16) BI Marine Museum	Facility, St. James Harbor	BI Historical Society	Inside and outside historical displays	Open to public
17) BI Print Shop Museum	Facility, St. James Village	BI Historical Society	Inside historical displays	Open to public
18) Petritz Nature Preserve	27 acres, 500 feet of shoreline	Little Traverse Conservancy	Walking path for access	Open to public
19) Beaver Island Community Schools	Harbor area, 2 acres	BI Community Schools	Soccer field, gymnasium, playground	Limited use
20) BI Community Center	Harbor area, ½ acre	Preservation Association of BI	2 story facility with auditorium, kitchen, game area	Open to public
21) Donegal Bay Road Bike Path	Inland, from St. J Township Campground to western edge of village Gull Harbor Natural Area	Controlled by St. J Township through easement rights with private property owners	2+ miles, asphalt bike path (technically, the bike path extends to Gull Harbor Natural Area Preserve)	Open to public
22) Port of St. James Association privately owned	Western shore and inland; about 500 feet of lake frontage	Port of St. James Association (501c4)	Hiking trails; picnic pavilion, campsites	For use of PSJA property owners and

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¹ [An August 2000 consent order in Charlevoix County District Court found this property to be a “public highway” and limited use to a public dock, a boat ramp, shrubbery or a fence along the boundaries of the highway, and permitted swimming, fishing, boating, skidding of ice shanties onto/from the ice and launching of snowmobiles.](#)

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common properties: Mt. Pisgah; Donegal Bay Park and Pavilion; several designated hiking trails; Campground				their guests
23) Whiskey Island ²	Small island 4 miles from Beaver Island	St. James Township. Note other outer islands— Garden, Gull, Hat, High, Hog, Pismire, Squaw, and Trout -- have a mix of private and state/federal public ownership. State of Michigan: High, Garden, Hog Islands Seneey National Park: Pismire, Hat, Gull		Different rules apply on different islands Open to public
24) DNR Land and Building ³	St. James Harbor, house and frontage	State of Michigan	Maintained by St. James and Peaine Townships	Used by county sheriff's department

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[Map of township with each of the assets marked is in Appendix section]

In addition to these recreational assets, in 2011 St. James Township entered into discussions with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to trade Whiskey Island (#23 above) for land and facility the DNR owns on St. James Harbor (#24 above), with the aim of increasing public access to the harbor area. As this plan was being prepared, that swap was being approved.

It should be added that the Beaver Island Rural Health Center and Emergency Medical Service, both of which receive funding from St. James Township (as well as Peaine Township) are recreational assets in part, since they serve injured or ill residents and visitors, and promote physical fitness and wellness.

The following parks/facilities have been acquired or developed with support from DNR grant funds:

Park Name/Type	Grant Details	Acquisition Details	Development Details
Gull Harbor Nature Preserve	\$60,000, Gull Harbor Park Agreement; 3/30/92; fund from DNR Trust Fund	Portion of \$80,000 purchase of 13.4 acres, 1,372 feet of	None

² Ownership in process of being conveyed to MI Department of Natural Resources.

³ Ownership in process of being conveyed to St. James Township.

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		frontage	
Path through Gull Harbor Nature Preserve	\$5,000, Funds from Federal Coastal Management through DNR; 1/15/00	None	Install path and benches
Repair & Upgrade of St. James Mooring Facility (BI “Yacht Dock”)	\$1,100,000, Harbor and Docks Infrastructure Agreement; 5/21/03; grant-in-aid through DNR Harbor Development program, Parks and Recreation Bureau	None	2 year project to rehabilitate and upgrade marina at township mooring facility

4. DESCRIPTION OF PLANNING AND PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

This recreation plan was developed through a set of planning and public input processes. The processes began in September 2011 when the St. James Township Board asked Island resident Peter Plastrik, who has experience conducting community-based planning processes and serves as chairman of the Beaver Island Natural Resources and Ecotourism Steering Committee (appointed by the Island’s two townships), to develop a plan for public comment and board consideration by February 2012. Mr. Plastrik developed a proposed planning and public process that was reviewed by the township supervisor. The process that was implemented involved these steps:

- Development of inventory of recreational assets in the township. Since existing lists were out of date, incomplete, and inaccurate, developing a new inventory required conversations with township supervisors, a former township supervisor, a real estate agent, a zoning administrator, a private property association, and the St. James Township board and Planning Commission members.⁴
- Review of recent recreation plans in relevant jurisdictions. This involved review of the Drummond Island recreation plan (2011) and the plans of several townships in Charlevoix County.
- A range of public input processes. A number of efforts were made to solicit input of the Beaver Island community, including year-round and seasonal residents of St. James Township and the rest of Beaver Island, as well as the input of stakeholders including the Tribes, Central Michigan University, and conservation/recreation and business organizations active on Beaver Island. These included:
 - Focused discussions with Beaver Island organizations with a stake in recreation planning: teachers of Beaver Island Community Schools; members of the St. James Township Planning Commission.
 - Discussion with Island educators focused on recreational needs of school-age children. It was noted that there have been several efforts to establish a skating rink on the Island; that a “Winter Olympics” day for children is no longer organized; and

⁴ Former Township Supervisor Don Vyse and longtime Island realtor Edward Wojan provided invaluable assistance in identifying some of the listed assets. William Cashman took on the task of creating a map that identified the location of each of the assets.

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that Island children must travel to Charlevoix to learn how to swim. It was stated that the physical condition of many older students declines during the summer when they work. Priorities for recreation planning included creation of a fitness center for students and community members; extending bike path and trails, which could also be used for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing; and a skating rink to increase recreational opportunities in winter.

- Discussion with the planning commission emphasized the potential economic benefits of increased recreational opportunities. Among the topics discussed: Boaters visiting or living on the Island don't have easy access to St James Harbor. Extending bicycle paths to Donegal Bay and perhaps to the east side of the Island could reduce bicycles and walker traffic on the roads and increase visitor access to beaches. Many visitors stop at the Community Center in the village to get information about the whereabouts and condition of hiking and bike paths, but such information guides are not available. The Island is a potential destination for bird watchers, but this has not yet been significantly promoted. It was also noted that creation of a fitness center had been planned by the Beaver Island Community School, and that many Island residents might donate equipment and become paying members so they could exercise in the winter.
- Written input from the Human Services Commission and Jeffrey Powers, long-time leader of the Beaver Island Wildlife Club.
- Development and implementation of a 13-question Community Survey (online and hard copy) of Beaver Island year-round and seasonal residents, in consultation with members of the Beaver Island Natural Resources and Ecotourism Steering Committee and Beaver Island Chamber of Commerce, with distribution support from *The Northern Islander*, *The Beaver Beacon*, Beaver Island News on the 'Net (<http://www.beaverislandnews.com/>), the public library, community center, health center, Island Airways, and McDonough's Market. The survey sought information about typical recreational activities of Islanders and the importance they placed on each of 23 possible planning items.

There were 262 respondents in the following residential categories:

- 130, year-round and seasonal residents of St. James Township
- 97, year-round and seasonal residents of Peaine Township
- 35, visitors to Beaver Island

Of the respondents, 18% were 18 or younger, 33% were 60 or older, which comes close to matching the Island's population profile in the 2010 Census.

Survey findings included:

- Most Engaged-in Activities:
 - Time at the Beach
 - Hiking/Nature Walks
 - Exercising
 - Swimming
 - Dog Walking
- Most Important Less Physical Recreational Activities:
 - Attending concerts/theater
 - Surfing the Internet

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- Reading/Book Club
- Top-Ranked Items for Planning:
 - Continue to expand and develop an invasive species program
 - Expand the number of walking/hiking trails and connect them
 - Increase and connect bike paths around the Island
 - Do more to preserve natural areas to enhance ecotourism opportunities
 - Develop more recreational services for teens and children
 - Do more to support eco-friendly “silent sports”
 - Do more to promote tourism in the fall and winter
 - Help create a fitness center with exercise and strength equipment and room for classes
 - Develop more outdoor winter recreational opportunities
 - Develop more recreational/ecotourism opportunities on the other islands of the Beaver Archipelago, while providing maximum protection for their natural areas
 - Create a public boat launch at St James Harbor
- Compared with other respondents, the 130 respondents who are residents of St. James Township
 - Engaged more in bicycling and motor boating
 - Gave more importance to “Create a public boat launch in St James harbor”
- A one-month public Review and Comment period before a recommended plan was submitted to St. James Township board for adoption. The comment period was publicized at a township meeting, on several popular Island web sites, and by email to the members of the Beaver Island Natural Resources and Ecotourism Steering Committee, and was reported in the *Northern Islander*. Midway through the comment period, the content of all comments received to date was posted at the Island web sites, and the same occurred at the end of the comment period. All comments were forwarded to the Township Board.
- (Still to occur) A public hearing of the St. James Township board on February 1, 2012 at which the plan and proposed revisions was presented for adoption. Official notice of the hearing was disseminated by the township as part of its regular meeting notification process.

5. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Setting goals for the recreation plan should take into account three factors in addition to the current preferences of St. James Township residents, organizations, and businesses:

- What has been the township’s traditional interest in recreation?
- What are the township’s financial resources?
- Given the environmental and community interdependencies of St. James and Peaine Townships, which recreational priorities can be pursued solo and which require Island-wide collaboration?

The Township’s Traditional Interest in Recreation

The 1998 recreation plan for Beaver Island (found in the Charlevoix County plan) identified 8 goals, including:

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- “Create an optimum human environment for the present and future residents of the Island”
- “Ensure diversity, stability and balance of land uses to serve human needs by maintaining and planning for residential areas, cultural activities, adequate public services...”
- “Relate land use primarily to the natural characteristics of the land and the long term needs of the community...”
- “Encourage all future development to place a high priority on aesthetics and environmental conservation.”

The 1998 plan noted that “there is a total lack of year round based recreation facilities... A community recreation center that provides a full size gymnasium, racket ball court, weight room and outdoor tennis court is of primary importance to the quality of life. A small separate facility dedicated to senior citizens would be of particular value considering our large segment of older residents.” And, in addition to calling for acquisition of public lakefront properties, it prioritized “a concentrated effort to revitalize numerous publicly owned parcels in the [St. James] harbor by stabilizing the shoreline, landscaping and installing park furniture...” “acquisition of the Gull Harbor property,” and expansion of “the mooring facilities on the harbor.”

Eight years later, the June 2006 master plan for Beaver Island, adopted by St. James and Peaine Townships, provided overarching guidance for this 2012 recreation plan, reflecting a balance between preservation and development. The Island community envisioned a place

that reveres the natural environment and wishes to pass it along to future generations with little alteration... where people have the choice to walk, ride bikes, or drive if they choose... where services are available to all age groups making this a great place for seniors and youth and everyone in between to live, recreate, learn and be cared for... where services and infrastructure are available, yet affordable, and public open space is both abundant and accessible.

Of the 10 guiding principles adopted in the master plan, several are quite relevant for recreation planning and express longstanding priorities of the Island community:

Provide Access To Public Lands To Foster Recreation Opportunity. *The townships have a priceless supply of public land including the forested interior, numerous shoreline tracts, and the nearby High, Hog, and Garden Islands. While limited public hiking/biking access is available to most of these areas, excluding the three small islands, some access is across private property, which means that access is not assured in perpetuity. There is the need to both improve and expand pedestrian and bicycle access to all public lands on the island and guarantee that access will be available to all.*

Develop Youth Activities. *Because the island is a remote place with limited accessibility to the mainland, has a relatively small population, and has fairly limited financial resources, there are seemingly too few things for youth to do to keep their attention and encourage them to remain on the island. Finding the right mix of activities for youth and seeking funding is an important component of this plan.*

The Township’s Financial Resources

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Although St. James Township has limited financial resources, a remarkable set of recreational developments have occurred since the 1998 recreation plan, typically without much or any public funding, including:

- Creation of a 14-acre Gull Harbor Natural Preserve (recreational asset #12), with financial support from the Michigan Nature Conservancy (as temporary purchaser) and the state Natural Resources Commission.
- Construction and operation of a community center in the village by the nonprofit Preservation Association of Beaver Island, serving the elderly and youth population's cultural and recreational needs, without any government funding.
- Repair and upgrade of the St. James Mooring Facility, with financial support from the Michigan Waterways Commission.
- Creation of a bike path along Donegal Bay Road—a \$180,000 project—was funded in large part by a grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation.
- Creation of the ½ acre Beaver Island Veterans Memorial Park, a harbor viewing park, developed with volunteer labor and donations.

The pattern is this: Because of the township's limited government funding, most recreation development on the Island occurs through community, rather than just government effort, and often with funding attracted from the state or federal governments, conservation-minded nonprofit organizations, or individual donors. Sometimes the township provides local matching funds, but rarely all of the funding for a project. With the current stagnation of property values—the main source of township government funds—and its likely continuation into the foreseeable future, the strain on government resources is increasing. As a result, most recreation priorities will have to be funded the way they have been in the past, without substantial contributions from the township. [This also puts an emphasis on making sure that, even if the capital costs of a project can be covered, the operating costs are also calculated and feasible. Thus some Islanders who support the development of a community indoor swimming pool have recognized that the likely operating costs of more than \\$100,000 a year, and perhaps double that, would be difficult to cover.](#)

Which Recreational Priorities Require Island-Wide (Two Township) Collaboration?

St. James Township is only a part of Beaver Island, which because of its small size and distance from the mainland, is an integral system of natural resources. As a result, on some recreation matters it may not make sense for the township to act on its own when, collaboration with Peaine Township (and for that matter, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, which manages the 1/3rd of the Island land owned by the state) would make more sense.⁵ The St. James land area is much smaller than that of Peaine Township and it is much more developed for residential and commercial uses, which means it has less opportunity for trails, land preservation, and waterfront access.

A strong indication of the townships' interdependence when it comes to the Island's natural resources is found in the creation in September 2011 of the Beaver Island Natural Resources and Ecotourism Steering Committee (NRESC), an advisory body appointed by both townships. The resolution that established the NRESC specifically authorizes the group to undertake several activities relevant to recreation planning, including:

⁵ Beaver Island's two township model has been in existence for more than a century.

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- “Develop a plan for promoting the Island as a unique opportunity for an ecotourism experience.”
- “Advocate for preservation of areas where our natural resources should be preserved to enhance our ecotourism opportunities and to maintain the unique beauty of Beaver Island.”
- “Identify areas for expanded and/or improved trails for nature walks. Propose improvements which would enhance the experience in those areas, such as board walks, benches, viewing areas, picnic tables, maps, signage, trail markers, brochures, and other such improvements.”
- “Identify bird-watching opportunities on the Island and locations where improvements such as viewing stations and viewing equipment could be located. Create and distribute informational brochures.”
- “Identify potential forest trails where forest land could be preserved, and identify old growth access sites.”

Recreation Goals and Objectives for St. James Township the Next Five Years

GOALS		
1) Maintain and restore condition of natural resources and ecosystems that contribute to recreation and quality of life on Beaver Island	2) Increase recreational opportunities , especially for youth and elderly residents of Beaver Island	3) Increase the recreational assets/services of Beaver Island for attracting tourists and seasonal residents
OBJECTIVES		
A. Address invasive plant and animal species threats that reduce natural resources and threaten property values B. Support restoration and long-term preservation of key natural areas in the Beaver Island archipelago	A. Increase year-round access to physical recreational opportunities . B. Improve quality of recreational assets that improve quality of life for Beaver Island residents.	A. Increase attractiveness of the archipelago’s seasonal recreational opportunities .

6. ACTION PROGRAM

This section of the plan describes how St. James Township intends to achieve its recreation goals and objectives over the next five years. It identifies specific priority projects, as well as projects for which the township may seek DNR recreation grant funding. Priority projects are those that

- Advance as many of the goals as possible
- Enjoy demonstrated support from St. James township residents
- May be feasible to fund and implement during the next five years

| This plan identifies 10 ~~nine~~ projects, with the expectation that additional projects may emerge during the next five years.

1) Combat Invasive Species:

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Beaver Island's community has rallied volunteers, funding from both St. James and Peaine Townships, grants, and state and federal support to combat invasive species, which threaten the quality of ecosystems as well as property values. Respondents to the Community Survey rated this threat to shorelines and property values as the single most important issue to be dealt with. ["Invasive species threaten our beautiful island and can destroy the very things we treasure and enjoy here," commented Islanders Pam and Brad Grassmick, community leaders in combating invasives, They "are a threat to our forests, interior lakes, and wildlife however you choose to use these resources for recreation. Keeping aquatic invasive species out of our interior lakes will be a challenge. Phragmites threatened our beaches... The Emerald Ash borer or Beech bark disease has the potential to decimate our hardwood forests, with implications for wildlife. The Mute swans drove the loons off Barney's Lake and may do so on Font Lake as well. There are a multitude of invasive plants that we are aware of, such as Swamp Thistle, spotted knapweed, Autumn olive, and Japanese knotweed."](#) The nonprofit Beaver Island Association has been a leader in the effort, which has drawn recognition across the Great Lakes area, and financial support from nonprofit conservation organizations, private property donors, and the state and federal governments. But there is much more to do throughout the archipelago. In June 2012 an Invasive Species Summit will be held on the Island to identify the top invasive species that must be combated, continue public education about invasive species, and call the Island community to further action. At the same time, a five-year plan for addressing phragmites is being developed.

St. James Township should reaffirm its commitment to the long-term fight against invasive species through actively engaging partners and increasing its funding for the effort, in concert with Peaine Township. (Goals/Objectives addressed: 1A, 1B)

2) Develop a Community Fitness Center:

The need for year-round indoor recreation space for community residents and visitors has been discussed for more several decades, including the possibility of building a private health club. But the Island community only has limited resources (local and "imported") to pay for major infrastructure projects and then the operating and program costs. In the past decade much of that capacity has been used to pay for the Beaver Island Rural Health Center facility and operations and the Beaver Island Community Center facility and operations—both major accomplishments. The Beaver Island Community School has explored the possibility of creating a small fitness center attached to the school and included this in recent plans for remodeling/expanding the school, but this was a small space intended only for student use.

St. James Township should partner with the Beaver Island school system and the Beaver Island Rural Health Center to develop a business plan for creating a fitness center that would leverage school district resources and donations from Island year-round and seasonal residents. (Goals/Objectives addressed: 2A, 3A)

3) Expand and Connect Island-Wide Hiking & Biking Trail System:

The Community Survey, as well as anecdotal evidence, pointed to hiking and biking (and dog walking) as key ways that Island residents and visitors enjoy both exercise and the Island's natural beauty. St. James Township by itself cannot sufficiently expand and upgrade the Island's trails into a well-maintained system that serves Islanders and attracts visitors to the Island; the system must be Island wide and consider outer islands, thoroughly planned, and community supported.

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St. James Township should engage Peaine Township, private landowners, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in the development of an ambitious, multi-island plan to pursue added hiking and biking trails. (Goals/Objectives addressed: 2B, 3A)

4) Increase and Coordinate Natural & Historical Site Signage:

Occasional efforts by the township(s) and the Beaver Island Historical Society have not yet led to deployment of signage that would fully meet the needs of visitors and residents, and have not yet covered natural sites of interest. In addition, efforts to produce brochures (most recently by the Beaver Island Natural Resources and Ecotourism Commission) and online maps for visitors that identify natural and historical sites, as well as recreational assets such as hiking trails, have been sporadic and incomplete. And information could be provided about which areas of the Island [and outer islands](#) are open for hunting and which are not. It's important, though, not to go overboard with signage, so that the Island doesn't start to look like the mainland.

St. James Township should support an Island-wide effort to implement "best practice" in signage and other materials that will encompass natural, historical, and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, while not marring the Island's beauty. (Goals/Objectives addressed: 2B, 3A)

5) Create a Public Boat Launch Site at St. James Harbor:

Harbor development has long been a Township priority, because it contributes to residential quality of life and the Island's attractiveness to visitors. In 2011 St. James Township began discussions with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources aimed at gaining township control over a harbor site that could be used as a public boat launch site that includes parking space. In the Community Survey, St. James residents put particular importance on this possibility. Such a site might also include a public fishing pier and a boat-washing station. In the Community Survey, 91 respondents said they would use a boat-washing station to prevent the spread of invasive plant species to the lakes when they move their boat between Lake Michigan and the Island's inland lakes. [The new site that St. James Township seeks to own may be a more feasible site than either the county road commission boat ramp or the "highway" site \(#s 13 and 10 in the recreation asset list\).](#)

~~Assuming that it gains control of the harbor site,~~ ***St. James Township should seek a DNR grant support to determine the feasibility and cost of develop and implement a plan to create a barrier-free public boat launch public site with sufficient public parking and, if feasible, a fishing pier and boat-washing station.*** (Goals/Objectives addressed: 2B, 3A)

6) Increase Ecotourism Momentum:

In recent years Beaver Island has taken steps to increase ecotourism of all sorts. The community has staged an annual marathon and an annual bicycle festival that take advantage of the Island's natural scenery. Seasonal businesses for kayaking, scuba diving, and eco-touring started up. The Island's rich endowment of birds has received attention from avid birdwatchers and birding organizations, and the eagle nests in the archipelago have been studied by researchers. Recently, the Beaver Island Chamber of Commerce indicated an interest in providing financial support for a bird festival event, perhaps during the spring migrations.

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Although there is no Island plan for ecotourism, there are several obvious needs and opportunities that could build more momentum behind ecotourism: (1) [complete](#) clean up of old dump sites on Garden Island and a decaying building on High Island, and (2) development of the Island as a destination for bird watchers.

St. James Township should allocate at least \$5,000 to support an effort organized by Island organizations, in collaboration with the Michigan DNR, to make substantial progress in removing trash on the outer islands; ~~and~~ should encourage the Natural Resources and Ecotourism Steering Committee to work with the Chamber of Commerce to initiate an annual bird-watchers event on the Island; [should support ecotourism-related businesses in holding a brainstorming session in the summer to identify ways to promote ecotourism business development; and should encourage the Chamber to continue to promote traditional outdoor sporting activities like hunting and fishing.](#)

(Goals/Objectives addressed: 1B, 2B, 3A)

7) Combat St. James Campground Shoreline Erosion/Observation Deck:

The St. James Campground along the north shore would benefit from construction of a stairway to access the beach below while controlling erosion made by campers attempting to access the beach. The top of the stairway on the bluff could be a site for a barrier-free platform for viewing the outer islands and bird watching, as well as night-time sky watching activity. The Beaver Island Natural Resources Ecotourism Steering Committee, with approval of the St. James and Peaine Township Boards, is working with the Conservation Resources Alliance to obtain a grant to construct stairs/deck at the campground. No local matching funds would be required thanks to an arrangement with the Little Traverse Conservancy to have some of its land-acquisition expenditures count toward the grant.

St. James Township should work through the Natural Resources and Ecotourism Steering Committee to maintain a partnership with the Conservation Resources Alliance and ensure effective implementation of the grant should it be approved. (Goals/Objectives addressed: 1B, 2B, 3A)

8) Improve Access to Recreational Opportunities for Residents and Visitors with Special Needs:

The Beaver Island Human Services Commission has offered a number of suggestions about how to improve access to recreational opportunities for Island residents and visitors with special needs/disabilities. Among the suggestions most relevant to recreation planning were:

- Provide access for wheelchairs at the Jewell Gillespie Beach by maintaining an all-terrain beach mat to the water's edge.
- Explore the possibility of getting St. James Public Marina certified as a handicapped friendly marina.
- Obtain adaptive recreation equipment for use by school, residents and visitors, including all-terrain wheelchairs for beach access or a "Duet" bicycle which is a wheelchair tandem cycle.

St. James Township should commit a minimum of \$5,000 as a 1:1 challenge grant to raise an additional \$5,000 from donors, to be spent [on priorities identified by the Human Services Commission](#) during the next five years to support special-needs recreation opportunities in the township.

(Goals/Objectives addressed: 2B, 3A)

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9) Conduct Market Research for a Great Lakes Islands Nature Center in St. James Village:

Many important conservation organizations and government entities recognize the extremely high natural resource value of the Beaver Island area within the Great Lakes. At the same time, Central Michigan University, which operates research and educational facilities on the Island, is becoming a leader in Great Lakes research and locating research facilities on Beaver Island. (CMU is leading a \$10 million grant for an unprecedented effort to protect and restore Great Lakes coastal wetlands; is building a \$350,000 experimental mesocosm facility on the Island; and is constructing a 28-foot research vessel that will be berthed at the Island.) These developments may set the stage for considering the potential impact of locating a Great Lakes Nature Center on Beaver Island—as a unique educational asset for visitors and residents.

St. James Township should encourage key Island businesses, CMU, environmental and outdoor organizations to examine the potential benefits and feasibility of establishing a Great Lakes Islands center on Beaver Island. (Goals/Objectives addressed: 2B, 3A)

10) Invest in improving the quality of existing township recreation facilities.

Given the importance of recreation for Beaver Island’s economy, it makes sense to continuously invest in maintaining and upgrading the quality of existing township recreation facilities, not just developing new projects. Two upgrades that might take priority are:

- Adding a backboard to the tennis court, which is used by elderly residents and visitors, and has attracted donor support in the past.
- Improving the public restrooms in the village.

St. James Township should invest up to \$5,000 a year during each of the next five years to improve the quality of existing recreation facilities. (Goals/Objectives addressed: 2B)

Potential Funding for Projects

As stated earlier, recreation projects in St. James Township tend to come together through the collaboration and funding of multiple partners, often without tapping the limited resources of St. James Township. For each of the projects in this plan, potential multiple sources of funding have been identified below:

Project	Potential Funding Sources
Combat Invasive Species	Donors, St. James and Peaine Townships
Develop a Community Fitness Center	Beaver Island Community School; donors; Townships; revenue from membership fees
Expand and Connect Island-Wide Hiking & Biking	Donors, Townships, Volunteer labor

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Trail System	
Increase and Coordinate Historic & Natural Site Signage	Donors, Beaver Island Historical Society, St. James and Peaine Townships
Combat St. James Campground Shore Erosion & Observation Deck	Conservation Resource Alliance grant proposal (local match provided by Little Traverse Conservancy)
Create a Public Boat Launch Site in Harbor	Natural Resources Commission grant/township matching funds; donors
Increase Ecotourism Momentum	Beaver Island Chamber of Commerce
Improve Access to Recreational Opportunities for Residents and Visitors with Special Needs	Township funds; donors
Conduct Market Research for a Great Lakes Nature Center	Donors; Island businesses; foundations supporting Great Lakes environment
Invest in Improving Quality of Township Recreation Facilities	Township funds

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APPENDICES [to be included in final report]

- A. Sample resolution for township board (provided by Michigan DNR)
- B. Survey questions
- C. Report on survey results (made public in early December 2011)
- D. Letter from Human Services Commission
- E. Inventory of Public Comments Received
- F. Map of Recreation Assets in St. James Township

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SAMPLE RESOLUTION FOR ADOPTION

St. James Township
Recreation Plan
Resolution of Adoption
Board of Directors of St. James Township

WHEREAS, the Board of Directors of St. James Township has undertaken a Five Year Parks and Recreation Plan which describes the physical features, existing recreation facilities and the desired actions to be taken to improve and maintain recreation facilities during the period between 2012 and 2016, and

WHEREAS, a public comment session was held February xx, 2012, at _____ to provide an opportunity for citizens to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the Recreation Plan, and

WHEREAS, the Board of Directors of St. James Township has developed the plan for the benefit of the entire community and to adopt the plan as a document to assist in meeting the recreation needs of the community, and

WHEREAS, after the public meeting, the Board of Directors of St. James Township voted to adopt said Recreation Plan.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Board of Directors of St. James Township hereby adopts the St. James Township Recreation Plan as a guideline for improving recreation for the residents of St. James Township.

Yeas:

Nays:

Absent:

I, (name), Clerk of St. James Township, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and original copy of a resolution adopted by the Board of Directors of St. James Township at a Regular Meeting thereof held on the __ day of February, 2012.

Signature:

Seal (if available)