

Bates Township Master Plan

2026 update
Proposed MP

PC-approved
for Township Board consideration

6/2/2026

Adopted by Bates Township Planning Commission
(~~W~~Month XX, ~~20~~26)

Foreword

This master plan is a major revision of Bates Township's previous Master Plan, which was adopted in 2019. After six years, the Township considered a new plan to be warranted in conjunction with major revisions to the Zoning Ordinance. Furthermore, there was a desire to make the topic of housing a key focus area, including through more innovative approaches to development, highlighting and promoting a greater variety of formats and options.

This plan, along with the zoning ordinance, received major financial support from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority's Housing Readiness Incentive Grant Program.

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Executive Summary

This Master Plan was developed by the Bates Township Planning Commission under the authority of the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 and was informed by strong public input. It was adopted by the Bates Township Board on [date].

Vision

Bates Township showcases the rich natural beauty of its forests and lakes as well as the rural residential, commercial, and light industrial area. Bates maintains a unique rural character and heritage, while encouraging responsible development, natural resource production, robust physical infrastructure, and year-round community well-being.

Purposes of the Master Plan

- Identify community priorities and promote community, economic, and infrastructure development
- Support strategies and tools to increase housing production
- Guide the future use of land in the township and serve as a rational basis for regulations in the Zoning Ordinance

Goals Identified in this Master Plan

1. Foster development of new housing in appropriate areas of the township
2. Ensure that housing types and characteristics in respective zoning districts are harmonious with surrounding properties and neighborhoods
3. Assist township residents in securing access to materials management services that are lacking or unaffordable in the area
4. Influence orderly and appropriate repair of roads by the Iron County Road Commission
5. Maintain and strengthen the township's position against blighted properties
6. Support success and growth of the township's business community
7. Foster local economic and community progress by supporting broader area development that also benefits the township
8. Increase opportunities for walking, bicycling, and other nonmotorized trail activities

Location and Population

- Located in Iron County, Michigan near the City of Iron River

- With a population of 925 (2020 Census), Bates is one of the larger townships in the area
- Many current and in-migrating residents are retirees
- The population is distributed across a wide variety of locales: lakefronts, riverfronts, inland areas along rural roads, and one platted neighborhood of several blocks
- The website [niche.com](https://www.niche.com) recognizes Iron County as having the 2nd-lowest cost of living in Michigan

Natural Resources

- The township's land is characterized primarily by forests, lakes, and wetlands; approximately half of the township is within the Ottawa National Forest
- Natural resources, including water bodies, are a critical asset for quality of life, recreation, and the visitor economy (tourism)
- Corporations and U.S. Geological Survey are actively exploring for metals and minerals to potentially be mined in or near Iron County, including nickel and rare earth elements.

Housing

- [Niche.com](https://www.niche.com) considers Iron County the 9th-best county to buy a house in Michigan
- The vast majority of the township's housing is of the *single-family detached* format; many of these homes are seasonal
- There is an opportunity for development of "missing middle" housing in the area to improve affordability and to accommodate, in particular, middle-income workers and seniors who desire to downsize
- The township recognizes that certain missing middle formats are best suited to an urban environment, and this may present an opportunity to collaborate with nearby municipalities, such as the City of Iron River, to meet broader housing needs
- Private developers are encouraged to build structures that fit with the vision of the broader community

Infrastructure

- Bates Township has high-quality transportation and public utility infrastructure that is highly valued by residents
- Road and utility improvements are guided by separate plans
- The Township Park on Sunset Lake is an asset for residents and has potential to draw more visitors

- Bates Township water has been tested and determined to be one of the best supplies in the Upper Peninsula

Community Development and the Economy

- Community development priorities from the 2025 Bates Township public opinion survey:
 - Maintain existing public infrastructure at its current quality level or higher
 - Preserve the rural setting including by maintaining value and feel of already-developed single-family residential areas
 - Preserve the character and single-family use of lakes in the less-developed northern area of the township
- Bates Township welcomes and will consider all proposals for responsible business development; the township is interested in creation of good job opportunities and community-facing businesses that will directly benefit residents and broader community

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1. Purpose and Basis for Planning

Urban Planning

Urban or city planning has evolved over the course of hundreds of years. The field began with artistic physical design of cities in antiquity, a paradigm that continued on and off through the 1800s. Modern urban planning began around the turn of the 20th century, when the focus shifted toward support of legal control of development with the advent of zoning.

Today's comprehensive or "master" planning, which is the focus of this document, consists of broad guidance of future development through a tiered implementation system. Generally, issues are identified, broad goals are set, and several manageable objectives are identified to satisfy each goal (in some cases, not all three tiers are necessary). Then specific actions are identified to implement the objectives. Any actions pertaining to public works infrastructure such as roads become part of a capital improvements program. This is where the initiatives in a master plan become visible to the public and have a direct impact on budgeting.

The time horizon of a master plan varies based on a community's needs and in accordance with law. In Michigan, planning commissions are required to review plans annually, with a determination every five years as to whether a new plan is warranted.

Zoning

A plan is often developed primarily to be the basis of a zoning ordinance. The zoning ordinance is a legal mechanism to control land use along with characteristics of lots and buildings. In some cases, use zoning has been displaced or supplemented by form-based zoning, which regulates external building characteristics rather than the activities that take place inside the buildings. Regardless of the type, zoning promotes stability in a community, especially where land values are concerned. Studies have shown that zoning tends to increase land value. Zoning is implemented through law and gives local officials power to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of residents and landowners. Though zoning can be controversial in regulating activities of landowners on their own property, many communities consider it important to protect the rights of all property owners.

Basis in Michigan

City planning was first authorized by the State of Michigan in the 1931 Municipal Planning Act. In 2008, this law, alongside separate laws authorizing township and county planning, was replaced by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (MPEA). Zoning, first authorized in 1921, was reauthorized in the 2006 Zoning Enabling Act. A master or comprehensive plan is required in order to conduct zoning, and a planning commission is required by statute to develop a master plan.

2. Planning Process

Over the course of 2023-2024, officials of Bates Township recognized some deficiencies in its Zoning Ordinance and began to explore options for a major revision. As the master plan at that time was about five years old, it also became an opportune time to assess whether a new master plan was warranted. The Township elected to pursue Housing Readiness Grant Incentive Program funds from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA), and funds were secured, making both projects possible.

Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR) was hired to prepare a new master plan, which would heavily utilize the previous plan but would include a variety of updates to data and goals/strategies/actions, in addition to adding a housing chapter. Beckett and Raeder was hired to rewrite the zoning ordinance in alignment with the new master plan.

The process to begin the new plan began in March 2025, with a notice of intent sent to parties required under MPEA. A public opinion survey was prepared and distributed to Bates Township property owners (and made available to others both online and in hard copy). The questionnaire contained 10 questions, with an intention that it be possible to fully respond within 5 minutes. More than 160 responses were received within the first week and 270 in total. A summary of survey results is in Appendix A, and certain notable results are referred to throughout this document.

Survey results, current local and regional conditions, input from WUPPDR, and other feedback from township officials were all taken into account in developing the plan content. Some chapters of the plan include priority goals related to the subject(s) of the respective chapters, with strategies and actions for functional implementation of the goals. The goals are not intended to encompass the full breadth of the township's needs and opportunities; rather, they constitute a small number of high priorities that are feasible for township officials to make progress on with limited resources. A consolidated summary of goals, strategies, and actions is in Appendix B.

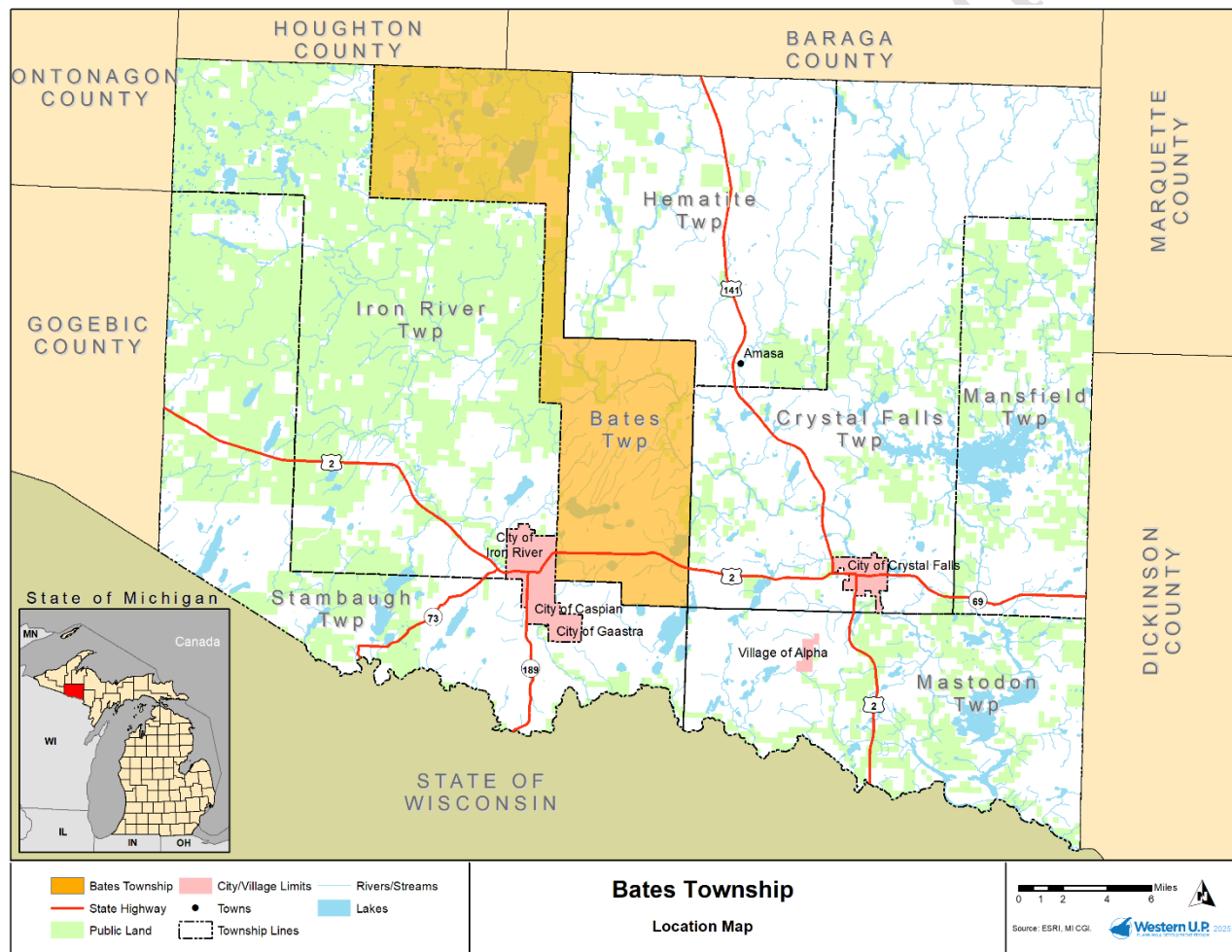
WUPPDR staff completed a rough draft in late May 2025 and met with the Planning Commission to discuss the content, including the potential goals, strategies, and action items. Much of the discussion focused on housing and community development topics. WUPPDR revised the draft accordingly and provided the official first draft to the Township in mid-June followed by several meetings and plan drafts as content was refined. WUPPDR regularly engaged with Beckett and Raeder to discuss coordination of the plan with the new zoning ordinance.

In June XX, 2026, the Planning Commission and Township Board both approved release of the proposed master plan for the 63-day review period... [more to come]

3. Overview and Population

Bates Township is located in central Iron County in the southwestern Upper Peninsula of Michigan (U.P.) (see **Maps 3.1** and **3.2**). The Township is bordered by Houghton and Baraga counties on the north; Iron River Township and the City of Iron River (the area's nexus of shopping, healthcare, and professional services) on the west; Stambaugh Township on the south; and Crystal Falls and Hematite townships on the east. With a population of approximately 3,000, Iron River is the largest of four cities in Iron County (population 11,631) and the 13th-largest in the U.P. Crystal Falls, the population hub of the county's east side, is the county seat.

Map 3.1. Location and Context



More populated areas with larger economies, such as Marquette and Houghton, are about 90 minutes away. Green Bay and Wausau, Wisconsin, the nearest metropolitan areas, both are approximately a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the southern edge of the township.

History

The area of present-day Bates Township was occupied by Native Americans prior to the arrival of White settlers, who were drawn to the area *en masse* by opportunities for farming, logging and iron mining in the late 1800s. The township's greatest growth was associated with an acceleration in development of mines from 1905 to 1912, resulting in a more than doubling of the population from 1910 to 1920 and continuing to a high of 1,278 in 1940. Prosperity continued through the 1950s, but population declined during the 1960s as mining began to wind down. The population has hovered around roughly 1,000 in the decades since. More historical background is in **Appendix C**.

Today the township is made up of a diversity of residents and property owners, from full-time working-class residents to seasonal retirees drawn to the township's rural settings, forests, lakes and rivers.

General Demographics

The 2020 U.S. Census population of Bates Township is 925, virtually unchanged from the 2010 population of 921. Neighboring Iron River and Stambaugh townships increased by 2.4% and 5.3% respectively. On the east side of the county, Crystal Falls gained 8.8% - one of only five cities in the U.P. that grew during the 2010s. All other townships and municipalities in Iron County, along with the county itself, lost population during this period.

Iron County's population peaked in 1920. In Bates Township, the population more than doubled from 1910 (573) to 1920 (1,181), peaked in 1940 (1,278), and was 1,224 in 1960. The population dropped by 19.9% during the 1960s as the iron mining industry wound down. However, in contrast to some other areas of the U.P., which have dropped dramatically in population over the past 50 years, Bates Township has decreased by just 5.6% overall since 1970.

From 1940 to 2020, Michigan's population grew by 91.7% whereas Bates Township's dropped by 27.6% and Iron County's by 42.5%. See **Table 3.1** and **Figure 3.1**. However, as noted above, Bates Township's trend has been much more favorable in recent years.

Migration patterns often attributed to the Coronavirus Pandemic continued the favorable 2010-2020 trend, with Iron County's population increasing by 0.8% from April 2020 to July 2024. The projections most recently released by the State of Michigan project a decrease of 96 persons (10.4%) in Bates Township¹ and 1,327 persons (11.3%) in Iron County² from 2025 to 2050.

¹ Michigan Department of Transportation, 2024

² Michigan Bureau of Labor Market and Strategic Initiatives, 2025

Table 3.1. Township, County, and State Population Trends (Decennial Census)

		1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	Total Change
Twp.	Population	1,278	1,109	1,224	980	1,003	966	1021	921	925	-353
	Chg from Prev Decade	1.2%	-13.2%	10.4%	-19.9%	2.4%	-3.7%	5.7%	-9.8%	0.4%	-27.6%
Co.	Population	20,243	17,692	17,184	13,813	13,635	13,175	13,138	11,817	11,631	-8,612
	Chg from Prev Decade	-2.7%	-12.6%	-2.9%	-19.6%	-1.3%	-3.4%	-0.3%	-10.1%	-1.6%	-42.5%
MI	Population (1,000s)	5,256	6,372	7,823	8,875	9,262	9,295	9,938	9,884	10,077	5,042
	Chg from Prev Decade	8.6%	21.2%	22.8%	13.4%	4.4%	0.4%	6.9%	-0.5%	2.0%	91.7%

Like most rural Upper Peninsula townships, Bates Township’s population is relatively high in age. In 2020, township residents age 65 and older comprised 28.6% of the township’s population (see Table 3.2) and the median age was 57.4 – an increase from 52.3 in 2010. The population is bolstered by seasonal influxes of younger visitors and non-resident property owners who choose the township as a vacation destination and may consider it as an eventual full-time home. In the State of Michigan, 15.9% of the population was 65 or older, and the median age was 40.1 (both increases from 2010). It is important to consider differing policy priorities for the township and the state based on the age factor.

Another indication of the township’s relative age is the fact that 88.6% of households in the township contained no children under age 18 in 2020 – also a substantial increase since 2010. This reflects the proportion of homes occupied by residents past child-bearing age.

Approximately half of households in the township included persons 65 years and over, and 19.8% had persons 65 and over who live alone. The average household size was 2.1.

Table 3.2. Population by Age (2020)

Age (Years)	Bates Twp		State
	#	%	%
Under 5	20	2.2	5.4
5-19	122	13.2	18.8
20-34	84	9.1	19.6
35-49	144	15.6	17.7
50-64	262	28.3	20.5
65-84	265	28.6	15.9
85 and over	28	3.0	2.1
Total	925		

Income

As of the 2020-2024 American Community Survey (ACS), Bates Township’s estimated median household income for full-time residents is \$54,688. This compares with \$55,940 in Iron County, \$72,875 in the State of Michigan, and \$80,734 in the U.S. Per capita income is \$36,076 in the township, \$34,784 in the county, \$40,735 in the state, and \$44,673 in the U.S.

In the township, 12.5% of families are in poverty, compared with 11.1% in the county, 8.9% in the state, and 8.8% in the U.S. Among families with one or more householder-related children under 18 years of age, 22.3% are in poverty in the township, 24.2% in the county, 14.5% in the state, and 13.4% in the U.S.

Although resident household incomes are lower and poverty rates are higher than the state and U.S., these statistics do not reflect the incomes of *part-time or seasonal* residents of the township, which may be higher and bring additional wealth to the community. In addition, relatively low resident incomes are mitigated somewhat by a low cost of living. The website niche.com, which generates cost of living data from Department of Education and U.S. Census statistics and user reviews, finds that Iron County has the fourth-lowest cost of living among Michigan counties.³

Education

As of 2024, the population 25 years old and over in Bates Township is 734 (79.2%). Of these, 697 (95.0%) have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, and 187 (25.5%) have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Although the township has a smaller percentage than the state of persons with a bachelor’s degree or higher, this is likely influenced by the local area’s traditional focus on educating people in skilled trades rather than university fields. See **Table 3.3**.

West Iron County Public Schools serves roughly the western half of the county, including Bates Township, Iron River, and its contiguous cities (totaling approximately 560 square miles). The district’s average enrollment over the ten-year period ending with the 2025-26 school year was 816 students, of which 45.5% were in elementary grades and 54.5% were in middle- to high school grades. Enrollment has been in a long-term state of decline; 2025-26 enrollment was a 13.9% decline since 2016-17, but enrollment levels fluctuated throughout the period.

Table 3.3. Educational Attainment (2020-24 ACS)

Highest Level of Attainment	Bates		State %
	#	%	
Less than 9 th grade	12	1.6	2.6
9 th to 12 th grade, no diploma	25	3.4	5.4
High school graduate/ equivalency	281	38.3	28.0
Some college, no degree	162	22.1	21.9
Associate’s degree	67	9.1	9.8
Bachelor’s degree	107	14.6	19.7
Graduate or professional degree	80	10.9	12.7
Total persons 25 and older	734		

The closest bordering school districts in Michigan are Watersmeet Township School District in Gogebic County to the west, and Forest Park School District, which covers the eastern half of Iron

³ Ranking as of March 21, 2025; methodology: [Methodology for Niche Places to Live Rankings](#)

County including Crystal Falls. The Michigan Schools of Choice program allows students the option to attend public schools outside of their district of residence.

The closest institutions of higher education are community and technical colleges: Bay College West in Iron Mountain, Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College in L'Anse, and Nicolet College in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Others a longer distance away include Bay College's main campus in Escanaba, Gogebic Community College's main campus in Ironwood and Copper Country Center in Houghton, and the universities Michigan Technological University in Houghton and Northern Michigan University in Marquette.

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4. Physical Features and Environment

Iron County is one of only two Upper Peninsula counties (adjacent Dickinson County being the other) that have no Great Lakes frontage. However, Iron County is similar to the rest of the U.P. in most other physical respects. The county is primarily forested and includes a great deal of federal, state, and commercial forestland used for both recreation and timber harvesting. The county also is interspersed with lakes of a wide range of sizes, as well as hundreds of miles of streams, many of which are regionally renowned for trout fishing. Land cover in the township is shown in **Map 4.1**.

Bates Township is composed of 80,990.12 acres or 131.4 square miles in central Iron County, of which 125.4 square miles (95.5 percent) is land and 5.9 square miles (4.5 percent) is water. The Township is composed of three segments: a rectangle at the south which contains the Township's US 2 corridor; a one-mile-wide, eight-miles-long north/south corridor; and another rectangle to the north. The north rectangle is staggered to the west of the south rectangle. The reasons or logic for this irregular shape are not recorded and are beyond the scope of this project. However, it is reasonable to presume that the irregular borders stem from land section boundaries and quarrels among prominent landowners in the late 1800s, at the time when Iron County was apportioned from Menominee and Marquette counties.

Weather and Climate

Bates Township lies within the Lake Michigan and Lake Superior watersheds, which have a typical humid continental climate characterized by cold, dry winters and warm, humid summers.

Based on 1991-2020 NOAA Climate Normals, at the nearest weather station (Stambaugh 2SSE), on average, January is the month that is coldest (average low of 0.3 degrees and high of 21.2 degrees F) and has the greatest snowfall (average total of 14.6 inches). July is the month that is warmest (average high of 77 degrees and low of 50.4 degrees) and has the greatest rainfall (4.2 inches). The township receives an annual average of 30.53 inches of rain and 67.4 inches of snowfall. The average length of the growing season (first to last frost) is 82 days.

Unlike many other areas of the Upper Peninsula, Bates Township, due to its inland location, generally is not subject to weather patterns affected by Lake Superior or Lake Michigan.

The weather patterns provide distinctive four seasons which provide economic, recreational and tourism opportunities.

See **Figure 4.1**.

Map 4.1. Bates Township Land Cover Map

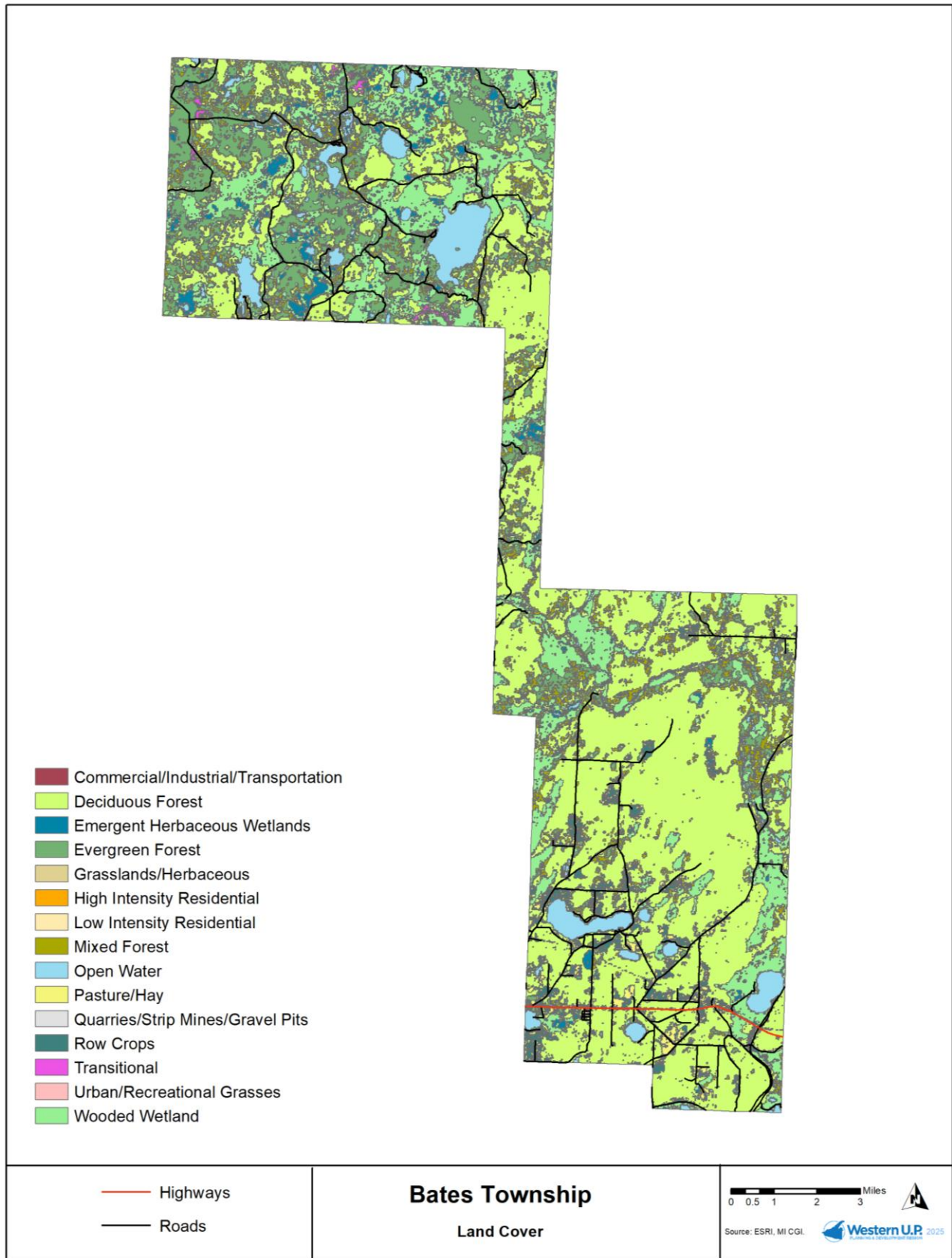
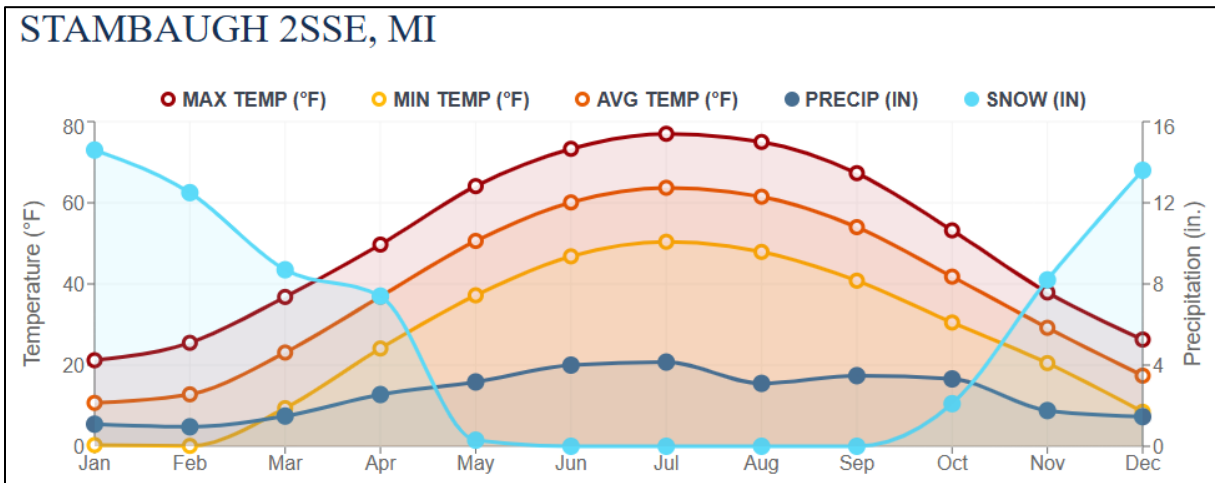


Figure 4.1. Stambaugh Climate Normals, 1991-2020 (NOAA graphic)



Waters and Wetlands

Bates Township is home to numerous lakes, ponds and streams. Perch Lake, in the northern rectangle of the township, is the largest water body, with 994 acres. Sunset Lake, with 545 acres, is the largest in the southern rectangle and second-largest in the township. Most of the township is within the Menominee River watershed, including the Brule River and Paint River sub-watersheds. Small parts of the northern rectangle are within the Ontonagon River and Sturgeon River (Houghton County) watersheds. The Paint River is the most prominent watercourse. The township contains no flood zones mapped by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); thus, the township does not participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. Property owners who are concerned about flood risk or who require coverage for the purpose of a mortgage may be able to obtain flood insurance coverage on the private market.

The aquifer underlying the township is composed of glacial deposits, has generally moderate yield, and is an excellent source of drinking water for the township utility and private wells. Groundwater is an integral natural system, impacting factors such as water suitability of area streams for fish species and serving as the basis for sensitive wetland areas and land cover types overall. Wetlands are present throughout the township and are most prevalent in the northern rectangle. Most wetlands throughout the township are of the wooded variety, but there are many pockets of emergent herbaceous wetlands as well, predominantly in the northern rectangle. In the southern rectangle, the “Chicagon Slough” is the most prominent wetland area.



Sunset Lake is one of Bates Township's most treasured natural assets.

Geology and Soils

The glacial veneer of Bates Township contains a great variety of mineral materials, arranged in many topographic expressions, under all conditions of drainage, and modified by long-term variations in cover and climate. In general, glacial deposits are composed of poorly consolidated sands and gravels covered by relatively stable boulder till. The glaciated subsurface is the main determinant of the water table, which, as earlier mentioned, is sufficient for production of water for drinking and other human uses.

Myriad soil types have evolved from the heterogeneous glacial parent material and the individual conditions governing soil profile development. The soils of Bates Township generally can be defined as the Amasa-Stambaugh Organic Type, which is deep, nearly level, and gently sloping with medium and moderately coarse textured subsoils and poorly drained organic soils. Soil is predominantly silt loam that varies from stony to very stony. Despite its stoniness, this soil type is fertile enough to support crop cultivation in many areas of the township.

Metal and Mineral Resources

Bates Township is located on the west end of the Menominee Iron Range, which was a major source of the nation's iron ore in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This range has been inactive for many decades. Underground mines, prevalent in the vicinity of Iron River, are not comprehensively documented in other areas and could be present in areas of the township. Thus, subsidence is an ongoing but low risk in historic mining areas in and near the township.

Corporations and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) have been actively exploring for metals and minerals in the Central and Western Upper Peninsula in recent years, including an area of interest near the northern border of Bates Township. Prospects include

high-grade nickel and copper ore in addition to rare earth elements. Based on current markets and federal government priorities, mining of these higher-value materials is a realistic possibility.

Topography

With a large land area spanning a diversity of geographic features, and owing to the terrain's glacial heritage, topography varies widely within the township. Elevation ranges from 1,512 to 1,637 feet. In planning for land development, consideration of topography is important to reduce risks and environmental impacts associated with construction on steep slopes. See **Map 4.2**.

Vegetation

Forests are the dominant vegetation in most of the township. The most common trees are northern hardwoods, pine, balsam fir, and spruce. Deciduous hardwoods are predominant in the southern rectangle and evergreen conifers in the northern rectangle. The township itself owns 293 acres of forestland of varying characteristics. A comprehensive, 20-year Forest Management Plan was developed in 2026 to evaluate this land and identify recommended management options for each of 18 management zones, including selective harvesting, clearcuts, and no action. Agriculture consists mainly of grass-fed beef cattle and raising of hay. Maple syrup is also produced. Opportunities exist for the expansion of agricultural production of locally distributed foods.

Wildlife

Wildlife species found in Iron County are similar to those found in other western Upper Peninsula locales. Large mammals such as white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, coyote, wolf, and bobcat live in the area, as well as small mammals such as squirrel, rabbit, chipmunk, raccoon, otter, beaver, skunk and fox. Seasonal and year-round bird species seen in the area include songbirds, shore and water birds, eagles, and game birds. The rural nature of most of Bates Township offers an environment in which many species of mammals and birds can live. Dominant fish species in the township include brook trout, bass, muskellunge (muskie), walleye, crappie, pike, and bluegill in township lakes and streams.

Environmental Contamination

The Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy has identified several regulated environmental contamination sites in and near the township:

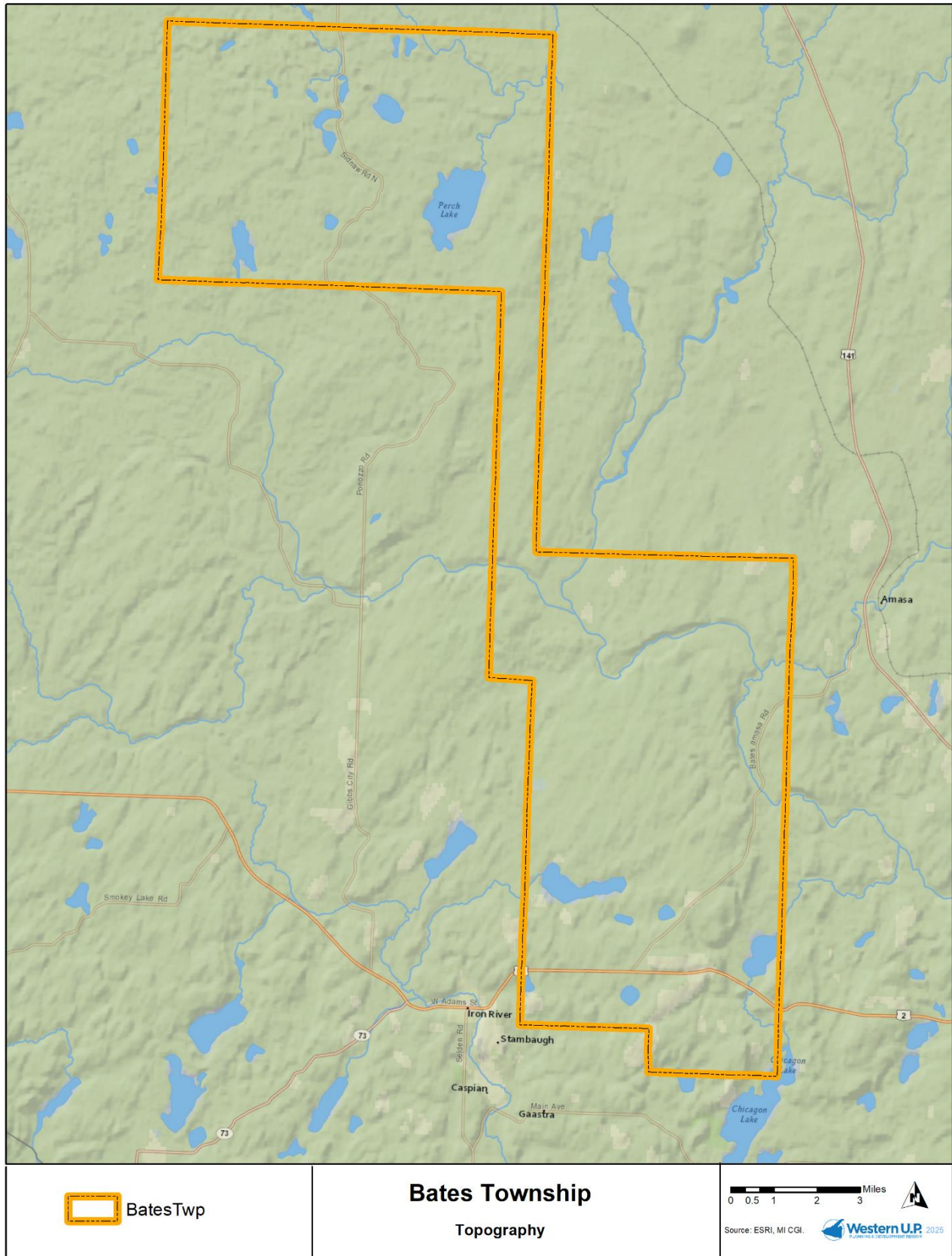
- Gasoline spill site along the Bates-Amasa Road in the eastern part of the southern rectangle
- Former Bates Township Dump near the southwest corner of the township
- Former Iron River City Landfill just over the Iron River city boundary

- Former leaking underground storage tanks at the Bates Elementary School and Iron River Service Center along US 2

Presently none of these is considered a concern for the environment or public health.

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Map 4.2. Bates Township Topography



5. Land Use/Zoning

General Composition

Bates Township's irregular shape makes for an uncommon variety of land development within the township. The two rectangles are distinct districts: the heavily forested and largely rural and recreational northern section and the somewhat more developed and populated southern section. Current land use is depicted in **Map 5.1**.

The northern section of Bates Township is composed mainly of federal forestland. Along with forest, this area includes numerous wetlands, lakes, and streams. The northern section includes seasonal homes and private camps but little year-round population. These characteristics extend down the corridor that connects the township's northern and southern sections. The entire northern section and connecting corridor are within the Ottawa National Forest administrative boundary.

In addition to undeveloped forest and wetlands, the northern half of the southern section includes some agricultural and less densely forested lands. This area is intersected by many streams, dominated by the Paint River and a major tributary, the Net. The southern half of the southern section is the most developed part of the township, being transected by the west-east Highway US 2. The township's only significant commercial development, including manufacturing concern Lester Detterbeck Enterprises Ltd., is located on the west end of this highway segment. Most residents live near US 2 and along the numerous lakes in the southern section, which are more highly developed than the northern lakes that are mainly surrounded by public land.

Building Permits and Assessed Value

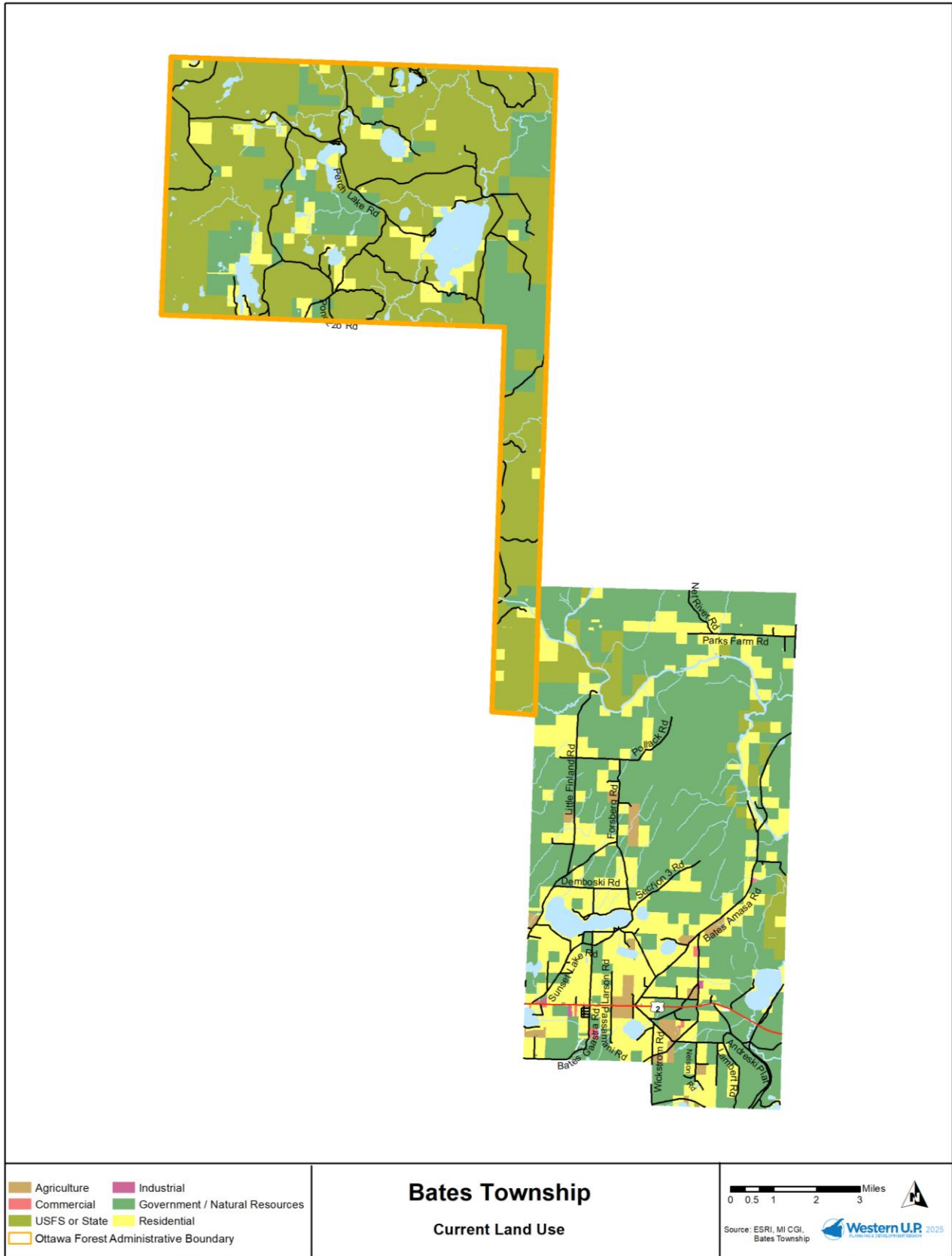
Table 5.1. Permits Issued

Year	New S.F. Home	All Other
2016	3	28
2017	0	27
2018	4	16
2019	0	13
2020	1	15
2021	0	11
2022	1	16
2023	0	24
2024	1	20
2025	0	16
Total	10	186

Table 5.1 shows building permit activity for Bates Township over the past 10 years (from Iron County Construction Codes Dept.). The most annual activity occurred during the first two years of the period. An average of one new single-family home and 20 other projects were permitted per year.

The State Equalized Value (SEV) of real property in the township for tax year 2025 is \$118,743,459 – a 65.7% increase (not inflation adjusted) from the tax year 2017 value reported in the original master plan. The 2025 value accounts for 11.9 percent of Iron County's SEV. There are 347 vacant land residential parcels totaling 5,120 acres and 1,008 improved residential parcels totaling 12,200 acres.

Map 5.1. Bates Township Current Land Use



Zoning

Zoning is a type of land development regulation that began in the early 1900s to combat problems such as congestion and pollution associated with urbanization. Now known as Euclidean Zoning (after the village where it was first deemed constitutional), this practice organizes the location of different uses within a municipality into separate districts based on the character of the use – primarily residential, commercial, or industrial to prevent the mixing of incompatible uses.

Euclidean zoning also includes dimensional requirements such as minimum lot size, setbacks (distance between structures and lot lines), and maximum floor area ratios (total floor area of structures in proportion to lot size). The approach of many communities to zoning has become more flexible in recent years, with the allowance for a mixture of uses in a single district and even on a single parcel, focusing on regulating the external impacts of a property with development standards to mitigate negative impacts between adjacent uses.

Bates Township is updating its zoning ordinance in conjunction with this master plan update for consistency. Updates will address a variety of inconsistencies in the current ordinance, provide more clarity on processes and specific development standards. It may also include elements to provide flexibility in the types of housing development.

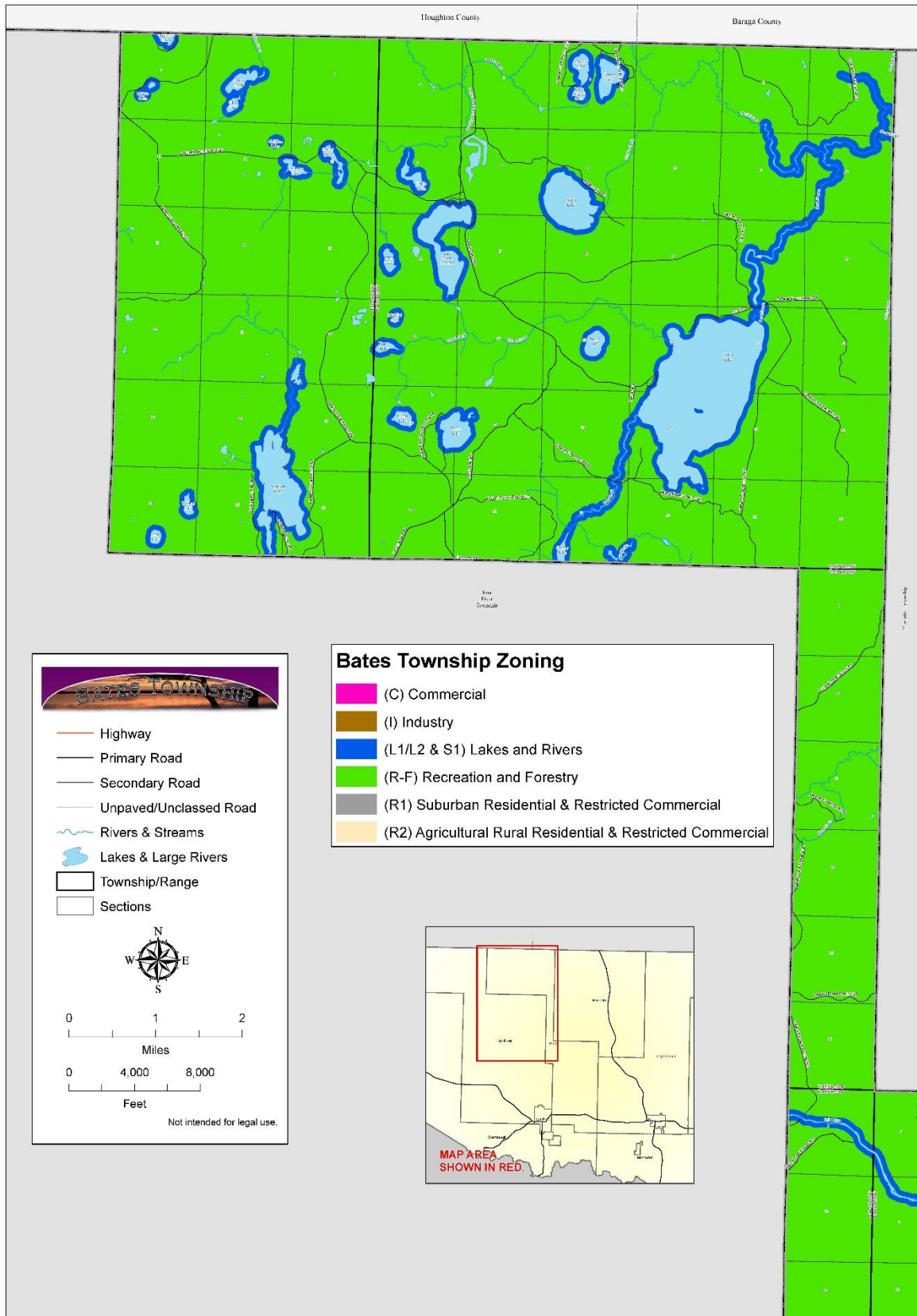
Current Zoning in Bates Township

The last major revision to Bates Township’s zoning ordinance occurred in 2010. Since the last update certain community development issues have emerged or evolved and priorities have shifted. Some of the issues include blight control, how to address short-term rentals, renewable energy, along with changing housing needs.

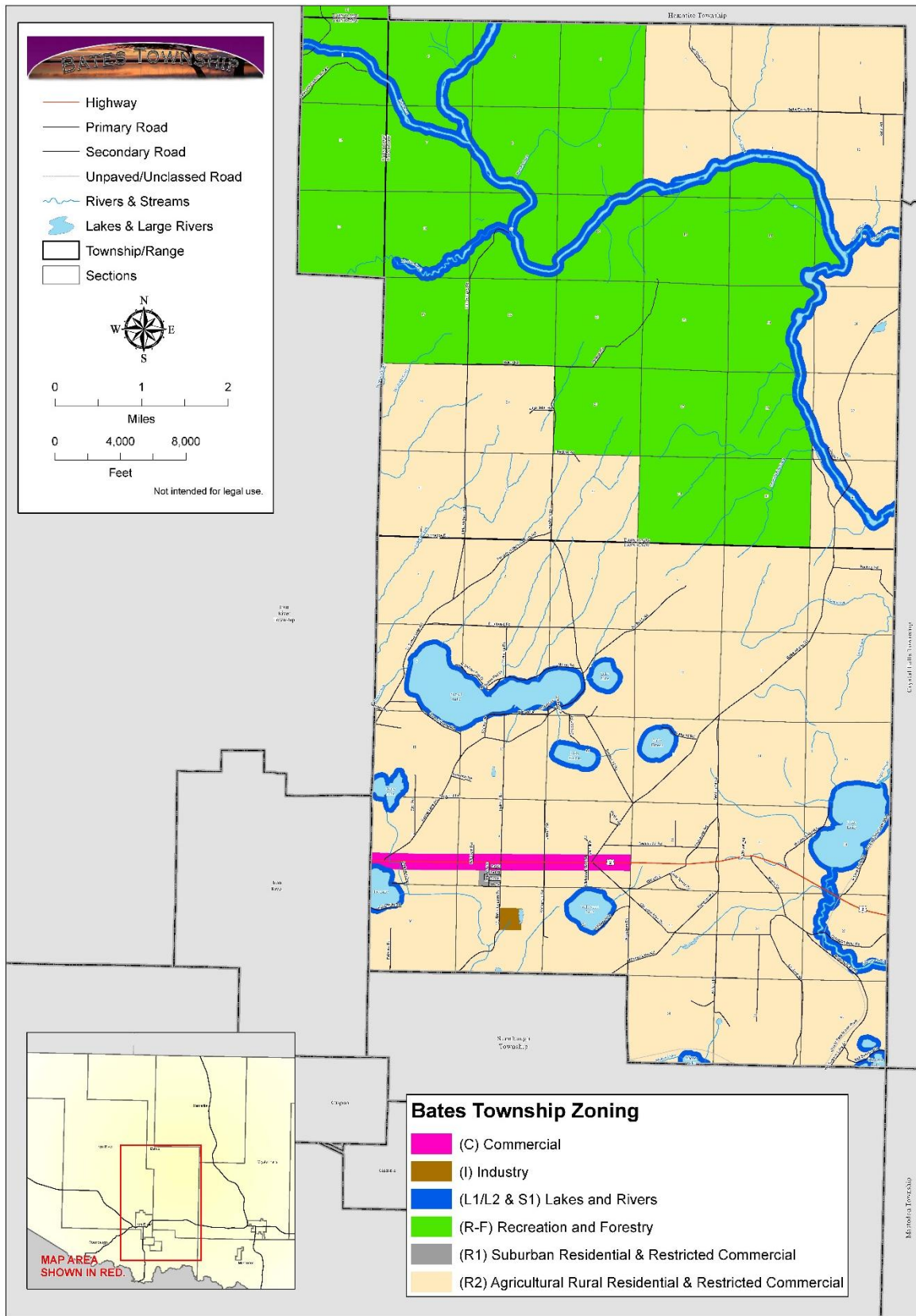
The titles, locations, and general character of the current districts are expected to remain fairly similar in the new ordinance. Bates Township is mostly rural in character with areas that have a focus on natural resources and recreation. The development of industrial and commercial uses are scattered, and the ordinance reflects these characteristics. The current districts are (see **Maps 5.2** and **5.3** for locations):

- ◆ Suburban Residential and Restricted Commercial District (R-1)
- ◆ Agricultural Rural Residential and Restricted Commercial District (R-2)
- ◆ Lake Areas (L-1) & (L-2) ◆ Industry (I)
- ◆ River Areas (S-1) ◆ Commercial (C)
- ◆ Recreation & Forestry (R-F)

Map 5.2. Zoning Map – North



Map 5.3. Zoning Map – South



Suburban Residential and Restricted Commercial District (R-1)

R-1 is intended for single-family residential uses where each dwelling is located on an individual lot or premises adequate in size and shape to provide for safe water supply and sewage disposal, to minimize fire hazards, and to facilitate safe traffic movements. Uses by right within this category include single-family dwellings and associated accessory structures such as garages; publicly owned parks and playgrounds; and customary home-based businesses. Retail stores and shops and other commercial enterprises, where compatible with residential use, are possible by special use approval. Accessory dwellings are currently not permitted. Multi-family dwellings can be permitted as a special use.

The only area in the township zoned R-1 is an area of approximately four blocks at the southwest corner of the US 2/Bates-Gastra Road intersection, known as Rogers Location. This is the only platted subdivision in the township containing smaller lots with a neighborhood feel. Most homes developed in this area are located within a 2 ½-block area, with an additional 1 ½ blocks mostly undeveloped.



Rogers Location, pictured above, is the only part of the township with smaller platted lots for primarily residential development typically found in older “small towns” and suburban areas.

Agricultural Rural Residential and Restricted Commercial District (R-2)

R-2 is dedicated primarily to rural residential and agricultural uses, but it also permits a variety of other uses by right, such as restaurants, churches, mobile homes and public buildings. Multi-family dwellings and some other uses are permitted by special use approval. Accessory dwellings are currently not permitted. The primary difference between R-1 and R-2 involves the accepted primary uses and special approval uses within the two categories, with R-1 being the more restrictive. Most of the southern part of the township is zoned R-2.

Lakes and Rivers Districts (L-1), (L-2), & (S-1)

These three separate districts relate to waterfront properties and are intended to promote the integrity of lakes and rivers while allowing residential and recreational uses. The districts are intended to prevent “funneling type” residential development; thus, parcels held only for access to the waterfront are prohibited. Only one dwelling per lot is allowed, and subdivided properties held in common ownership are prohibited. Lakefront districts L-1 and L-2 are similar, with the main difference being the amount of lake frontage required (less in L-1, which is predominant in the southern part of the township). The S-1 district is essentially the riverfront version of L-2. Accessory dwelling units and multi-family buildings are prohibited on all properties in these districts.



The Lakes and Rivers districts accommodate single-family residential development along with recreational uses on the waterfront, with an emphasis on protecting natural resources and water quality.

Recreation and Forestry Areas District (R-F)

R-F encompasses all non-waterfront areas of the northern section of Bates Township and roughly 40% of the southern section. The district is intended mainly for recreational uses and/or forest industries but allows single-family development. Most land in the district is owned by commercial forest companies and the federal government (Ottawa National Forest). Another intent of this district is to encourage good forest practices. Certain commercial and other uses are possible with special use approval.

Industry District (I)

The I district permits certain industrial uses in accordance with “Performance Standards” detailed in the ordinance. These standards are formulated to prevent undesirable impacts on neighboring properties. This is the only district that lists prohibited uses rather than allowed uses which is inconsistent with how the rest of the zoning ordinance is structured. There is only one area in the township zoned Industrial based on existing uses.

Commercial District (C)

The C district is intended primarily for shopping and merchandising activities. It is limited to a strip, extending 500 feet from either side of US 2, from the township’s western edge to the Bates-Amasa Cutoff road. The district also allows all residential uses, including multifamily residences. Despite the name of this district, little commercial activity occurs within it (most development is residential). There remains evidence of former retail and dining establishments, as well as machining and small engine repair businesses. There is an opportunity for development of consumer-serving businesses and light manufacturing in this area, with development standards to avoid negative impacts on existing residential and other properties.



Above is one small apartment development in the C district, across US 2 from the Township Hall.

Some larger lots within the C district are “dual-zoned” and have commercial activity occurring on portions of those lots outside of the district corridor. This misalignment of uses with zoning should be addressed in the zoning ordinance.

Future Land Use and Zone Plan

The township’s future land use map is consistent with the current zoning map. The township wishes to maintain low-density residential development in most areas of the township while supporting recreational use and forestry management. The opportunity for more concentrated residential development, additional commercial and light

industrial/manufacturing development are located in areas near the US 2 corridor. These areas have relatively high traffic levels and are served by both public water and sanitary sewer. The one existing industrial area is expected to continue in its current location, which is currently the only area zoned industrial.

To support the future land use intent as described, the following issues and potential modifications should be considered:

- Currently the R-1 district includes “restricted commercial” in the title. This causes confusion as to zoning intent. This district is envisioned to be primarily residential on smaller lots with customary home occupations as the preferred type of non-residential use. It is proposed that permitted commercial uses be removed in this district and that “restricted commercial” be removed from the title.
- The R-2 district, which also has “restricted commercial” in the title, is envisioned to remain primarily rural residential and agricultural in nature. Thus, the current permission for several commercial uses by right is not a good fit for this district’s intent. However, there is a desire to retain some flexibility for consumer-oriented businesses such as restaurants, as well as mixed-use developments, under certain circumstances. It is proposed that commercial uses that are compatible with residential and agricultural uses be permitted either through special use permitting with development standards or through the planned unit development (PUD) process.
- The township desires to generally continue the status quo for residential development in the R-1 district. Greater flexibility will be considered for the R-2 district, potentially with permission for accessory dwelling units and duplexes.
- The three current waterfront (L&S) districts, which have very similar provisions, have unclear boundaries. The ordinance does not specify whether they extend a certain physical distance inland from waterfronts or whether they encompass the entirety of any lots that include a waterfront(s). It is proposed that these districts be replaced by a waterfront overlay district that would include different dimensional requirements and other specialized provisions. In most instances the underlying zoning district would be R-2 in the southern part of the township and R-F in the northern part.
- The C district should be revised to avoid dual-zoned lots. The easiest way to accomplish this would be to zone the entirety of any lot bordering US 2 as commercial (within the current west-east extent of the district). Other contiguous lots that are relatively close to US 2 may also be considered for commercial zoning. More broadly, it should be considered whether the current commercial zoning

approach should be maintained or whether standards should be adopted to encourage future commercial development.

- The I district should be revised to focus on relatively intensive industry; the current commercial district could be broadened to include lower-impact (“light”) industrial uses, including manufacturing. This can be accomplished by allowing the use through site plan review or special use approval by the planning commission to mitigate negative impacts to residential uses.

Future Land Use is shown in **Map 5.4**.

In addition to district revisions consistent with the future land use map, the following modifications to the ordinance related to housing development should be considered:

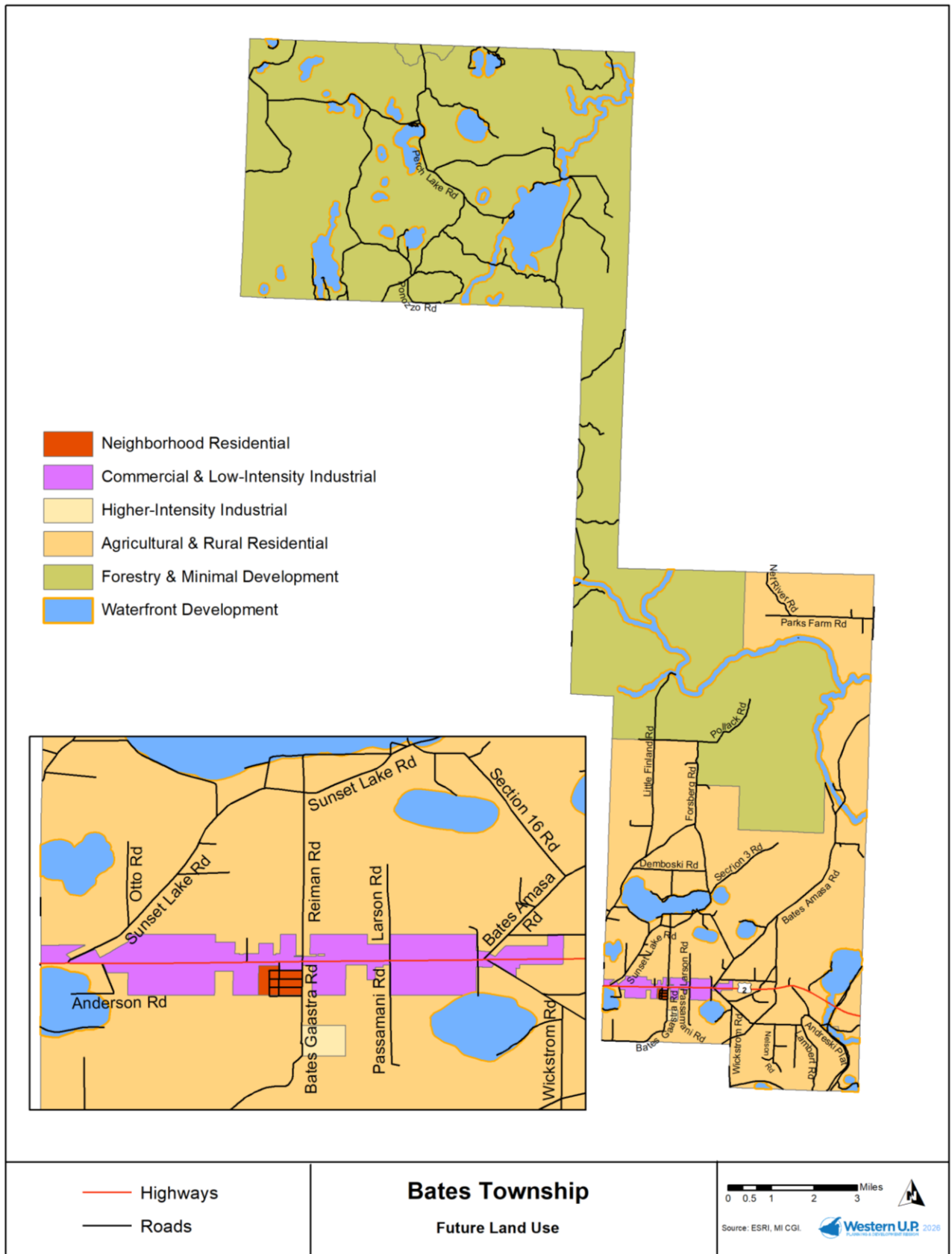
- Permissions and parameters for accessory dwelling units
- Establishment of standards and conditions for approval for duplexes
- Better targeting of locations and parameters for multifamily residences larger than duplexes (all multifamily structures are currently permitted as a special use in both R-1 and R-2, and this does not necessarily reflect the township’s land use intent)
- Reduction of minimum dwelling size in some or all districts
- Regulations, either in the zoning ordinance or police power ordinances, for blight control and short-term rentals

Table 5.2. Future Land Uses Versus Current Zoning Districts

Future Land Use Intent	Corresponding Current District(s)
Neighborhood Residential	R-1
Agricultural & Rural Residential	R-2
Waterfront Development*	L-1, L2, and S-1
Commercial & Low-Intensity Industrial	C
Higher-Intensity Industrial	I
Forestry & Minimal Development	R-F

* Represented by waterfront overlay district

Map 5.4. Bates Township Future Land Use



6. Housing

Overview

During the Great Recession beginning in 2008, new housing development drastically decreased nationwide and still has not recovered to the level of pre-recession construction. Supply has fallen farther and farther behind demand every year. Just how much of a housing shortage had developed became more widely apparent during the Coronavirus Pandemic beginning in 2020, as many people became more interested in moving to larger houses and new locations, including rural communities, and found housing difficult to obtain. Lack of new construction – especially of “attainable” middle-market housing – combined with higher building material prices, supply shortages, and workforce difficulties to drive up housing prices. Later, mortgage interest rates began to rise, making current homeowners reluctant to move and purchase new houses at higher rates. Amid all of this, rental prices have also increased, along with inflation in the overall economy.

Many rural areas, as in the Upper Peninsula and parts of nearby Northern Wisconsin, saw less severe impacts from these market dynamics and remain an attractive and more attainable area for people who are seeking fulltime living, seasonal living or recreational property. Therefore, encouragement and development of appropriate housing could be an economic and quality of life asset to Iron County and Bates Township especially if managed on a community-wide basis.

Current Characteristics

As of the 2020 Decennial Census, there are 822 housing units in Bates Township, with 440 (53.5%) occupied and 382 (46.5%) vacant. Of vacant units, 317 (83.0%) are categorized as for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. Owners occupy 93% of occupied units and renters the other 7%. The homeowner vacancy rate is 3.7%, and the rental vacancy rate is 20.5%. Based on the 2020-24 ACS⁴, Bates Township has a much larger percentage of units built before 1940 than do the State of Michigan and U.S. The vast majority of units (89.2%) are single-family detached homes, a considerably higher share than the State and U.S.; most of the remainder are mobile homes (7.3%). See **Table 6.1**.

⁴ The ACS is helpful to show generalized characteristics of the housing stock, but there are large margins of error in this data in small population areas such as Bates Township. For example, the 2020 Census reported 822 total housing units in the township, whereas the ACS estimated an average of 950 units during the 2019-2023 period.

The median value of owner-occupied units in Bates Township is \$163,200. Though this figure, like others in this section, is subject to a large margin of error, the extreme increase from the \$99,100 reported in the previous master plan reflects the present competitive regional, state, and national housing market. In Iron County, median value is just \$109,100; in Michigan it is \$231,600, and in the U.S. \$332,700. [Niche.com](https://www.niche.com), in its Best Places ranking as of April 2026, considers Iron County the 8th-best county to buy a house in Michigan.

Table 6.1. Housing Year Built and Units in Structure, Occupied Units (2020-24 ACS)

Characteristic	Bates Twp %	State %	U.S. %
Year Built			
1939 or earlier	23.1	14.6	11.7
1940-1959	16.1	21.1	13.9
1960-1979	18.7	26.4	24.1
1980-1999	21.6	21.8	25.3
2000 or later	20.5	16.2	25.0
Units in Structure			
1 unit, detached	89.2	72.0	61.3
1 unit, attached	1.8	4.8	6.2
2 units	0.3	2.2	3.4
3 or 4 units	1.4	2.6	4.3
5 to 9 units	---	4.1	4.5
10 or more units	---	9.1	14.6
Mobile home	7.3	5.0	5.6

In Bates Township, 64.6% of owner-occupied units are valued at \$100,000 or more, versus 54.2% in Iron County. However, both Bates Township and Iron County have much smaller percentages than the state and U.S. of units valued at that level. See **Table 6.2**.

Table 6.2. Housing Value, Occupied Units (2020-24 ACS)

Value	Bates Twp. %	Iron Co. %	State %	U.S. %
Less than \$50,000	13.5	20.1	7.6	5.3
\$50,000-99,999	21.9	25.7	9.2	6.1
\$100,000-149,999	12.6	14.6	10.6	6.8
\$150,000-199,999	5.3	11.4	14.1	9.0

Table 6.2. Housing Value, Occupied Units (2020-24 ACS)

Value	Bates Twp. %	Iron Co. %	State %	U.S. %
\$200,000-299,999	12.8	12.6	23.4	17.8
\$300,000-499,999	22.8	10.3	24.1	26.9
\$500,000-999,999	9.8	4.3	9.2	20.9
\$1 million or greater	1.4	1.1	1.6	7.1
Median value	\$163,200	109,100	231,600	332,700

One way to assess housing affordability for homeowners in a particular place is **value to income ratio** – the number of years of median household income that would be required to attain the median home value (the theoretical purchase price for existing units). Too high a ratio may reflect a relatively unaffordable housing stock. Too low a ratio may reflect disinvestment in the community that results in an undervalued housing stock. A generally accepted optimal range is 2 to 3. Bates Township, with a ratio of **3.0**, is at the top end of this range.

Formats, Trends, and Development Opportunities

As in almost all U.P. communities, the vast majority (88.2%) of Bates Township’s occupied housing units are in structures of the single-family detached format. This compares with 72% in the State of Michigan and 61.4% in the U.S., suggesting an under-leveraged opportunity for development of other housing formats.

“Missing middle” housing is that which lies between single-family detached homes and large apartment buildings.⁵ (See **Figure 6.1.**) Missing middle housing is most often associated with duplexes, tri- and four-plexes, townhouse developments, and small multi-unit condominiums. Many of these housing formats were once common in downtown districts (especially in urban areas) but have become increasingly less so over the decades. Benefits include greater affordability, accommodation of seniors who desire a lower home maintenance burden, and less sprawl development. Due to their somewhat higher density of residents, these formats are best suited for areas that already have, or can be accommodated to have, water and sewer utility access.

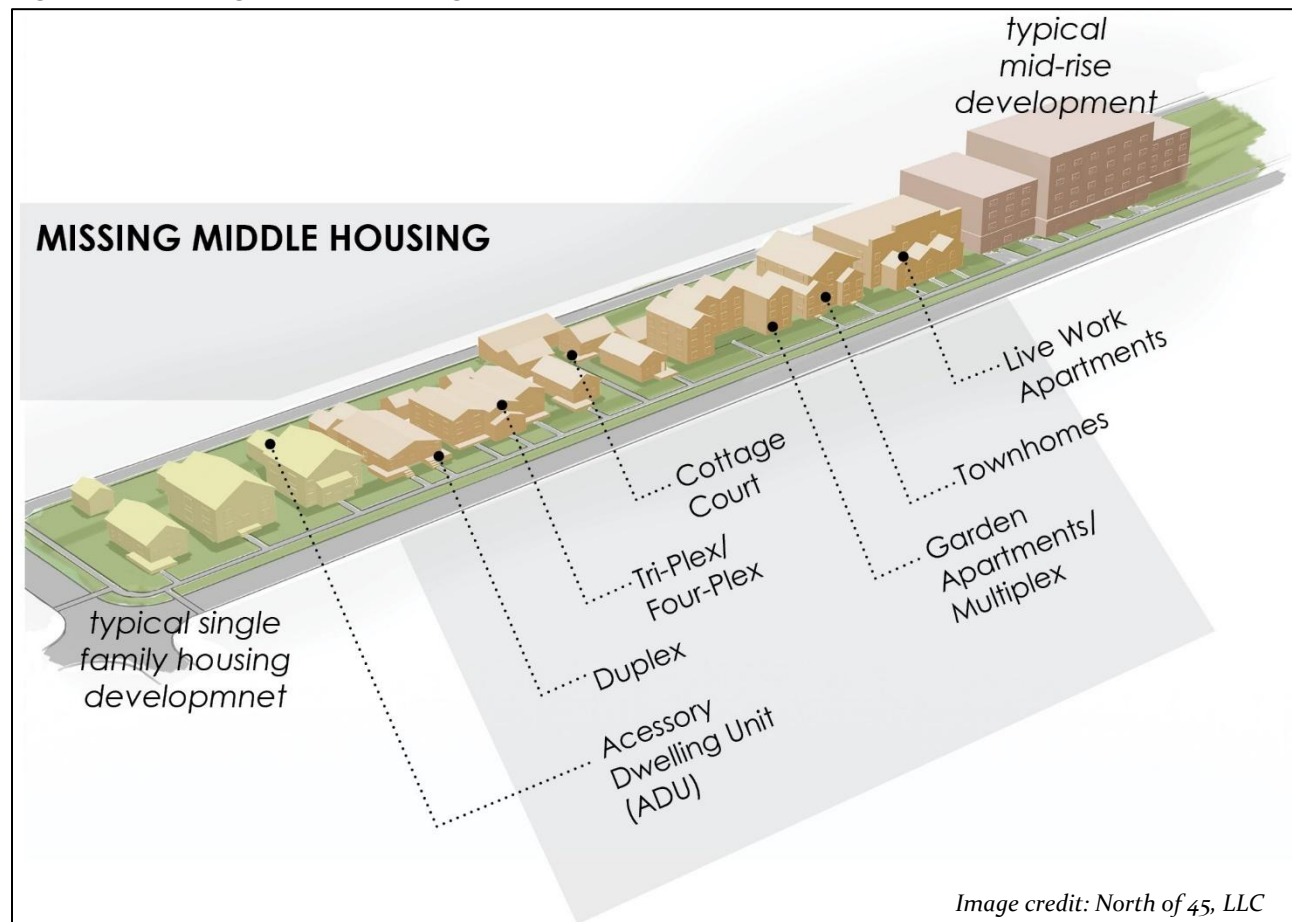
⁵ Over the past several years, the term (which originated decades ago) has also often used to refer to housing in an affordable price range. Affordability often coincides with missing middle formats.

In a rural area like Bates Township, some lower-density missing middle formats – most notably duplexes – may be appropriate in certain settings, but for other types, the township may have an opportunity to collaborate with nearby municipalities to meet overall area housing needs. Nearby communities have expressed a variety of issues and priorities aligned with their unique circumstances. For example, the City of Iron River 2022 Master Plan calls for additional missing middle development and loosening of zoning requirements for multi-family housing, noting a trend toward more renter-occupied housing. The City of Crystal Falls 2021 Master Plan, on the other hand, expresses difficulty in accommodating individuals who need to use housing vouchers (subsidies) due to a shortage of apartments and rental housing. Rental and multi-family housing are types that, in general, may be more compatible with these cities than Bates Township.

One opportunity for new housing formats is presented by the aging population. Whereas many seniors are interested in “aging in place” in their current homes – especially if owned free and clear without a mortgage – others may be interested in remaining in the township but downsizing to smaller, lower maintenance units, including rentals. This could be a basis for exploring a new multifamily development. Encouraging circulation within the market, such as from existing single-family to new multifamily units, can free up existing properties for new homebuyers.

A target market analysis for the area, potentially countywide, could aid in identifying the potential formats and number of units that would be best suited to the township’s residents.

Resident housing preferences were addressed in the public opinion survey, with respondents asked to select one of five options for housing development. About one-quarter each of respondents wanted to see any housing expansion or no housing expansion. The remainder selected specific preferred categories of expansion: single-family houses, 30.4%; housing designed for seniors, 15.8%; and 1-3 bedroom apartments, 4.2%. Missing middle formats were not included, and education on these options for residents may be helpful.

Figure 6.1. Missing Middle Housing Spectrum

Another opportunity for accommodating seniors and other home-seekers is permission for accessory dwelling units (ADUs). An ADU is a secondary dwelling located on a property that already has a primary residence, often taking the form of a relatively small house in the backyard (sometimes called a “granny flat”) or an above-garage apartment. Along with increasing available housing stock, ADUs can also serve as an income source for property owners who otherwise would not be able to retain or maintain their residences. With appropriate regulation, ADUs have little downside.

Other opportunities focused on housing formats and types include:

- Less restrictive allowance for manufactured homes, including both traditional “mobile homes” and newer modular home construction that is similar in construction to structures built on site (placed on a permanent foundation and thus considered real estate).
- “Tiny homes,” which are dwellings smaller than typical single family houses; exact size ranges vary based on interpretation and context, but for regulatory purposes, there should be a continuum such that there is not a gap in size between the largest tiny home and the smallest traditional single-family home.

Whereas development of new formats is only potential, the nature of housing occupancy is already in flux. Traditionally there has been a large presence of seasonal housing, which is why nearly half of all housing units in the township are considered vacant. There is no expectation of a major change in the proportion of units that are occupied part-time, but, based on regional trends, an increasing portion of these are likely transitioning from seasonal occupancy by a single household to transient occupancy on a short-term rental (STR) basis (for terms of 30 days or less).

STR units are often blamed for reducing the housing stock available for full-time residents, and they are sometimes associated with nuisance issues. However, they also increase accommodations options for visitors, many of whom have come to prefer STRs over traditional lodging establishments. Like many communities, Bates Township is considering policy options to mitigate any negative impacts of STRs while maintaining them as an important lodging option.

Incentives and Funding Opportunities

In alignment with the current demand and policy priority for housing development, particularly at the state level, a variety of supportive programs and incentives have become available during the post-pandemic years. In recognition that there is a housing shortage across the full spectrum of price ranges and household incomes, the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) in particular has expanded its programming and funding to support a wide range of incomes and housing types. There are programs focused on a range of needs from traditional subsidized affordable housing complexes all the way up to combined moderate income / market rate developments. Some of the most prominent programs that may be relevant to Bates Township are outlined below.

- **Brownfield tax increment financing (TIF) for housing:** A mechanism for financing housing that transfers to a developer the additional, incremental tax revenue that results from increased property value following a redevelopment (administered by MSHDA)
- **Low-income housing tax credits (LIHTC):** A means of providing developer equity for projects that include an affordable housing component, financed by the sale of long-term federal tax credits to an investment partner at a slightly higher value than the equity produced
- **MSHDA MI Neighborhood:** Funding for construction and rehabilitation of multi- and single-family housing units that include a certain percentage of affordable (low- to moderate-income) units; available to private, nonprofit, and local government applicants
- **Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) for Housing:** An authority given to local governments to grant 15-year property tax exemptions – applicable to all taxing units, both state and local – for new or rehabilitated rental “workforce housing” projects, and instead

assess a local service fee; (for this purpose, workforce housing is that which is rented to households not exceeding area median income)

- **Build U.P.**, a program of InvestUP with three categories of assistance for qualified housing projects:
 1. Filling shortfalls in collateral and equity for housing development loans from lending institutions
 2. Investing equity into housing projects for which a lender determines borrower cash equity is insufficient
 3. Lending funds to local governments by purchasing bonds they issue for public infrastructure extensions that are made to accommodate to housing development

Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region (WUPPDR) serves as the lead organization for the MSHDA-supported Regional Housing Partnership for the Western U.P. and is able to connect local governments and developers with financial and technical assistance resources for housing projects. WUPPDR is also in the process of growing a community development corporation that could potentially ignite new housing development activity in the region.

Housing Goals, Strategies, and Actions for Housing

Goal: Foster development of new housing in appropriate areas of the township

- **Strategy:** Evaluate utility and road infrastructure to identify where the lowest barriers to development are for new housing
 - **Action:** Review infrastructure maps to evaluate the alignment of utility systems with the locations of available vacant land
 - **Action:** Maintain up-to-date maps of water and sewer networks to aid in targeting future housing densities
- **Strategy:** Assess, and potentially promote, availability and potential of vacant land and buildings that may be suited for development or redevelopment
 - **Action:** Inventory long-term vacant buildings and vacant, unused privately owned land and buildings that may be well suited for development
 - **Action:** Contact absentee landowners to gauge their interest in marketing their property for redevelopment
- **Strategy:** Participate in discussions with developers as potential projects or concepts are brought forward

Goal: Ensure that housing types and characteristics in respective zoning districts are harmonious with surrounding properties and neighborhoods

- **Strategy:** Formulate zoning districts that reserve northern areas of the township for relatively low-impact (more dispersed) housing development, while allowing somewhat more concentrated (denser) housing development in southern areas that have utility water and/or sewer service

Goal: Foster housing development through engagement of private developers and other nearby communities

- **Strategy:** Provide public information that can be used to encourage private sector development
- **Strategy:** Work with Iron County Economic Chamber Alliance to identify developers that may be interested in pursuing development opportunities the township identifies
- **Strategy:** Collaborate with nearby municipalities, such as the City of Iron River, to assess the role of each jurisdiction in accommodating appropriate housing formats to meet area housing needs (the broad impacts of which affect all jurisdictions, including Bates Township)

7. Community Services and Facilities

In Bates Township, public services are provided by a combination of the township and county governments, other governmental entities, and nonprofit organizations. Community facilities, some owned by the Township and some by other entities, are inventoried and described below and displayed in **Map 7.1**.

General Government

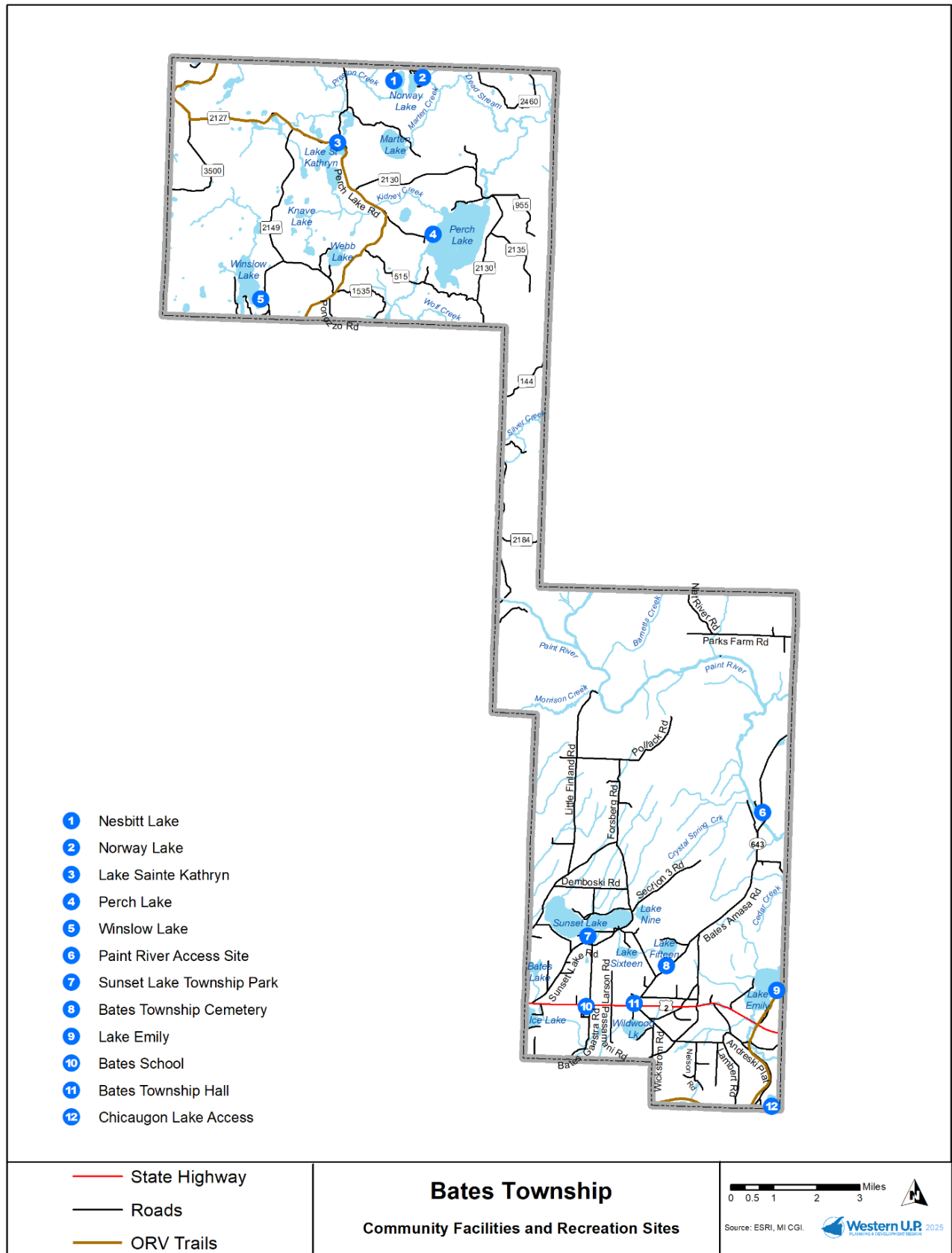
Bates Township is a Michigan general law township governed by an elected Board of Trustees that meets once a month. As with most rural Michigan townships, with a limited tax base and few truly local resources, the township is reliant on Iron County for many services, including law enforcement and social services. The following commissions and committees are responsible for particular aspects of local government:

- **Board of Review:** appointed body that meets at least twice annually to perform statutory functions including reevaluation of property tax assessments upon the requests of individual taxpayers
- **Planning Commission:** formed under the Michigan Planning Enabling Act of 2008 and responsible for developing this Master Plan, as well as zoning; meets quarterly
- **Zoning Board of Appeals:** meets as needed to consider zoning appeals and variances
- **West Iron County Fire Board:** independently oversees the West Iron County Volunteer Fire Department; includes representatives of the local units of government in the district
- **West Iron District Library Board:** independently administers the West Iron District Library; includes representatives of the local governments in the district

The **Bates Township Hall**, the headquarters of township government, is located at the corner of US 2 and County Road 643 (Bates-Amasa Cutoff). This is the location of several offices: Zoning Administrator, Clerk, Supervisor, and Treasurer. Public Works operations and offices are housed in a nearby building on the same property. The Township Hall building, constructed in 1907, is a wooden structure and has been slated and funded for significant upgrades and for relocation on site.

The township acquired the **Bates School Building** several years ago and currently rents the facilities to three entities, most prominent being Dickinson-Iron Intermediate School District, which hosts Early Childhood and Special Education classes there. During the summer season, the playground is used for practice by the West Iron County little league and soccer teams. These are interim uses, and the township is evaluating longer-term options, including sale of the building.

Map 7.1. Community Facilities





Bates Township School opened in 1959 and closed when districts consolidated in 1967. Unlike many former school buildings, it has remained in continuous use and is now owned by the Township.

Township Services and Utilities

Public Works

The Department of Public Works is located behind the Township Hall at the intersection of US 2 and County Road 643, the Bates-Amasa Cutoff. Responsibilities of the department include property maintenance, water and sewer system operations and maintenance, parks and recreation, and maintenance of the cemetery and other grounds.



The Department of Public Works building, pictured here, was expanded with a 20' x 54' addition in summer 2025.

Water and Sewer

Bates Township owns and operates water and sewer utilities serving the southern part of the township, where the majority of the township population is based. Primary sewer service areas include Sunset Lake, Reiman Road, Rogers Location, and much of the US 2 corridor within the township. The water system has greater reach, with service along additional local roads, including as the southern part of Sunset Lake Road and Section 14 and 22 roads. Areas served by these systems may permit more concentrated development than areas that rely on private wells and septic systems. The systems in relation to land uses are depicted in **Map 7.2**.

The water and sanitary sewer systems are stable and provide sufficient capacity for foreseeable growth. Upkeep is done in accordance with a continuous maintenance plan.

Wells and septic systems are regulated by the Dickinson-Iron District Health Department but maintained by property owners.

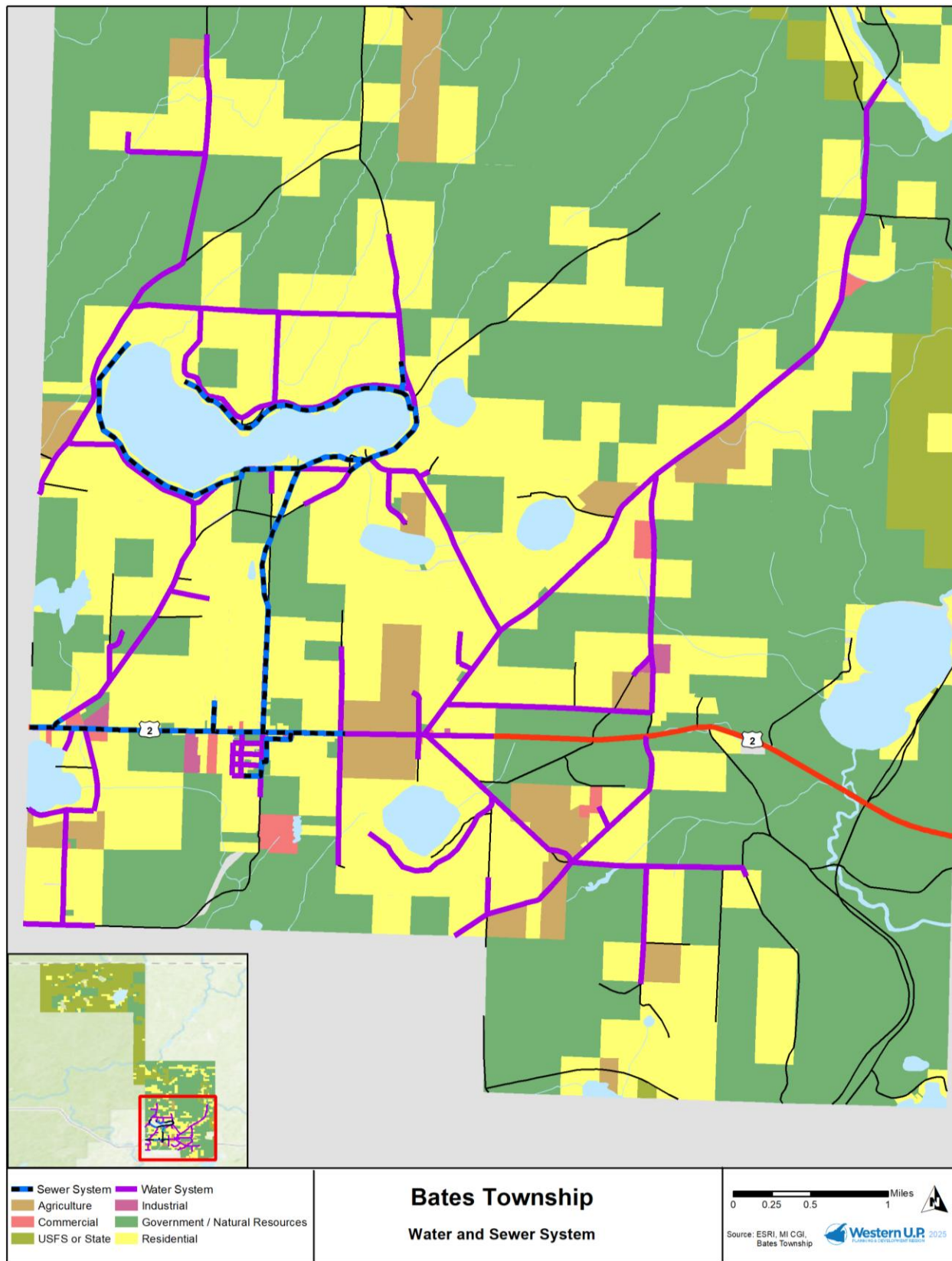
Parks and Recreation

Bates Township Park, located on Sunset Lake, includes a number of different amenities that allow park visitors to enjoy swimming, fishing, boating, camping, and other activities. Park facilities include a pavilion with a concession building and covered fireplace, ball field, basketball court, playground equipment, restrooms, changing house and beach, fishing pier, boat wash station and launch, campground, and accessible trails throughout the park. The Township also owns a boat landing on Chicagon Lake and an access site on the Paint River.



A playground and nearby beach offer recreation opportunities for all ages at Bates Township Park.

Map 7.2. Bates Township Water and Sewer Systems and Land Use



Other area recreation facilities, goals, objectives, and planned projects are discussed in the **2024-2028 Bates Township, Michigan Recreation Plan**, a companion document that is incorporated into this plan by reference.



The Township Park is the only campground on the shore of Sunset Lake.

Other Utilities

Communications

Spectrum provides cable television, broadband internet, and telephone service in the township. Highline Broadband is in the process of bringing fiber optic broadband to parts of the township. AT&T provides telephone service to legacy customers, along with DSL broadband internet service. Fast-Air provides fixed wireless internet service and telephone service via internet. High speed internet and 5G cell phone service is widely available in the southern part of the township and coverage continues to improve in the northern section.

Natural Gas

DTE is the natural gas utility serving the township. Service is only available along the US 2 corridor.

Electrical

Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO) and We Energies provide electrical service in different parts of the township.

Solid Waste

Bates Township does not currently provide for solid waste collection; individuals may obtain this service on an individual subscriber basis from the companies Green for Life or

Waste Management. There is no local dropoff site for solid waste, Waste Management having closed its transfer station off US 2 just east of the township in 2025.

Recycling access is currently not available, and this service is a priority for residents: In the public opinion survey conducted for this plan, more than two-thirds of respondents expressed interest in having access to recycling if made available at low cost. Materials disposal more broadly (building materials, organics, trash, recycling) was also among the most mentioned topics in survey comments.

In accordance with state law, the Western Upper Peninsula Materials Management Committee, with support from WUPPDR, is in the process of developing a multi-county materials management plan that could improve access to these services in the local area and region.

Emergency and Medical Services

Police

By statute, the main law enforcement provider in Bates Township is the Iron County Sheriff's Department, based in Crystal Falls. Michigan State Police, with a post in Iron Mountain, also provides services. Operating near the township are the municipal police departments of Iron River and Caspian-Gaastra, which can provide mutual aid to the other law enforcement agencies for incidents within the township if needed.

Ambulance

Ambulance service in Iron County and a large surrounding area is provided by Aspirus MedEvac, which provides advanced and basic life support with ambulances based in Iron River. Air ambulance is also available.

Hospitals

Aspirus Iron River, located within that city, includes a hospital, clinic, and other facilities. The critical access hospital offers emergency services, walk-in clinic, general surgery, a variety of diagnostics, and other specialized services. While certain services and staffing have been reduced since 2025, the hospital utilizes teleconferencing and referrals to doctors and services in areas such as Rhinelander, Wisconsin to improve access. Regional medical centers are located in Marquette, Michigan and Wausau, Wisconsin (Aspirus' main facility).

Fire

The West Iron County Volunteer Fire Department is based in Iron River. The department provides fire response to an area of 575 square miles in the western part of the county, including Bates Township. Nearby is the Caspian-Gastra Volunteer Fire Department, which provides fire response primarily to those two cities. The two departments, as well as three others in the county and others in surrounding areas, have mutual aid agreements to bolster each other's capacity.

Other Services and Facilities in the Area

Dickinson-Iron Community Services Agency

DICSA is a community action agency formed under federal law to administer programs promoting self-sufficiency of those in the community. Programs include housing assistance, food assistance, and transportation. Many of these services are offered at two senior centers in Iron River and one in Crystal Falls. DICSA's main office is located in Iron Mountain. DICSA is operated by U.P. Community Services, Inc.

Dickinson-Iron District Health Department

The Health Department's Iron County office is located in Crystal Falls. The Health Department is responsible for community health services, such as immunizations and testing; environmental health, including food inspection; and preparedness for public health emergencies.

Dickinson-Iron Intermediate School District (ISD)

Intermediate School Districts in Michigan are special district governments that provide supporting programs and services for local school districts. Iron County is paired with Dickinson County in its ISD, and the main office is located in Kingsford.

Iron County Economic Chamber Alliance (ICECA)

Based in Iron River, ICECA is the nonprofit economic development organization serving Iron County. ICECA is under contract to provide services for the county government but also receives financial support from almost every local government in the county, including Bates Township, and a large membership base of businesses and organizations. The Iron County Chamber of Commerce and its services are under ICECA's umbrella. ICECA provides services to small businesses; support for business retention, attraction, and expansion; representation of the local area within regional bodies and events; support for local events; and community development support for the cities, townships, and village within the county. ICECA also operates a visitor center and the adjoining Iron River RV Park.

Iron County Fairgrounds

The fairgrounds are located just north of downtown Iron River. The fairgrounds host several annual events including the Iron County Fair and the regionally significant Upper Peninsula Championship Rodeo, both in summer.

Michigan State University (MSU) Extension

MSU Extension provides a wide variety of programs and services to counties throughout the state, covering topics from agriculture and watershed science to local planning and economic development. The 4-H youth development organization is one of Extension's best-known and most popular functions. Iron County is located in Region 1, which covers the western half of the Upper Peninsula. The county's 4-H coordinator is based in the Iron County Courthouse in Crystal Falls.

Each county has access to all Extension services throughout its region, but counties have some flexibility in selecting which service(s) are based locally. In order to maintain services, counties must appropriate funds in amounts set by Extension. Currently Iron County receives services from a 4-H coordinator, as well as various education programs.

United States Forest Service (USFS) – Ottawa National Forest – Iron River Ranger District

Roughly 65 percent of Bates Township rests within the Ottawa National Forest. The entire northern rectangle of the Township and the one-mile-wide corridor are within the forest, along with a small sliver of the southern rectangle.

The United States Forest Service, an agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, administers 155 national forests in the United States. One of two national forests in the Upper Peninsula, the Ottawa is made up of one million acres of land spread over five counties in the Western Upper Peninsula and Marquette County to the east.

The forest is administered by five ranger districts, one of which is the Iron River Ranger District. The office of the Iron River district is combined with that of the Watersmeet Ranger District, located in Watersmeet along with the official Visitor Center of the forest.

Numerous national forest campgrounds and access sites are located throughout the county. Roughly 4 miles southwest of the Bates Township's southwestern edge, and within the Iron River Ranger District, is the Lake Ottawa Recreation Area. Other notable features are Brule Lake, Hagerman Lake, Bass Lake, the Historic Mile Post Zero/Treaty Tree, The Ge-Che Trail, and miles of hiking trails. The Lake Ottawa Campground offers a picnic shelter with two stone fireplaces and original log picnic tables, and two log toilet buildings, which were constructed in the late 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). A pressurized water system and sewage dump station are

located in the campground. Adjacent to the campground is a CCC-era day use recreation building, with flush toilets, swimming beach, accessible fishing pier, playing field, picnic areas and boat launch.

United States Post Offices

Addresses within the township are associated with Iron River zip code 49935; the post office is located in that city.

Western Upper Peninsula Planning & Development Region (WUPPDR)

WUPPDR is the state-designated planning region and federal economic development district with which the six Western Upper Peninsula counties, including Iron, are affiliated. WUPPDR has a mission to foster stable and diversified economies in the Western Upper Peninsula. In addition to administering and implementing a variety of grant programs and serving as a regional coordinator for many purposes, the agency is available to provide various forms of technical assistance and information services to communities. WUPPDR's office is located in Hancock.

West Iron County (WIC) Schools

The school district covers roughly the west half of Iron County, an area of approximately 560 square miles. The district was consolidated in 1967 from the districts of Bates Township, Iron River, and Stambaugh Township. Today the district has three facilities, all of which are located within Iron River: Stambaugh Elementary, the Junior/Senior High School, and the Administration offices all in one campus.

West Iron District Library

The library, which provides an extensive collection, is located in Downtown Iron River. The library district includes the Cities of Iron River, Caspian, and Gaastra, as well as Iron River, Stambaugh, and Bates Townships.

Goals, Strategies, and Actions for Community Services and Facilities

Goal: Assist township residents in securing access to materials management services that are lacking or unaffordable in the area.

- **Strategy:** Seek additional, more detailed input on what services that residents would like the township to be involved in providing
 - **Action:** Invite residents to public meeting for overview and discussion of trash and recycling collection and dropoff options

- Action: Seek educational materials and possible presentation from WUPPDR regarding available options and initiatives to improve access
- Strategy: Continue to monitor trash collection services available to residents from existing private haulers.
 - Action: Contact haulers periodically as necessary
- Strategy: Support regional efforts to improve access to recycling and composting services
 - Action: Continue to engage with WUP MMPC to leverage collective interest and pursue economies of scale in obtaining services within a regional recycling and composting network
 - Action: Engage with Iron County government to explore options for transport of area recyclables to Recycle 906 (Marquette County Solid Waste Management Authority) materials recovery facility
 - Action: Working with Iron County government and MMPC, explore whether there are collaborative arrangements with Dickinson County, due to its close economic relationship with Iron, that may be beneficial to improve access to services

8. Transportation

Numerous entities provide transportation services across Bates Township. Some of these are operated and partially funded locally, while others operate at the state and federal levels; their details follow.

Public Transit

Iron County has no dedicated public transit service. Dickinson-Iron Community Services Agency (DICSA) offers limited door to door service, primarily to senior citizens and persons with disabilities (but also available to the general public), in the Iron River area and several other communities in Iron and Dickinson counties.

Intercity bus transportation through Bates Township is provided by Indian Trails. The route travels along US 2 through Bates Township, terminating at Ironwood to the west and St. Ignace to the east, with one daily stop in each direction at the Iron Inn Motel in Iron River. Connecting routes provide access to Duluth, MN (from Ironwood); Milwaukee, WI and Marquette and Hancock, MI (from Escanaba); and Lower Michigan (from St. Ignace).

Iron County has no local taxi service. The nearest established taxi service is in Iron Mountain.

Airports

General aviation is accommodated by the Stambaugh Airport in Iron River. The airport is unstaffed and has no tower.

The nearest airport with commercial passenger service and freight service is Ford Airport in Kingsford, which is a 46-mile drive southeast from Iron River. SkyWest Airlines operates Delta flights on regional jet aircraft to and from Detroit and Minneapolis with one arrival and one departure to each location daily. These hubs offer connecting flights to hundreds of airports in the United States and abroad. Air service is subsidized by the federal Essential Air Service program.

Rail

The township is no longer served by freight or passenger rail. At one time the local area had access northwest through Watersmeet, Marenisco, and Ironwood; southeast through Stager, Iron Mountain, Powers, and Escanaba; and south to Green Bay, Wisconsin. Most of the local rail grades have been turned into ORV trails. Rail remains in service from Amasa, in central Iron County, east and south to Green Bay. This line serves an industrial park in Amasa and is used to export sports flooring products.

Roads

Overview

In Michigan, road funding and classification is dictated by Act 51 of 1951. Under Act 51, revenue streams dedicated to roads flow into the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF). Most of the MTF goes into the road system. This road system funding is separated into three funding allocations: The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) receives 39 percent, county road commissions or departments receive 39 percent, and cities and villages receive the remainder.

State Roads

MDOT is responsible for road construction and maintenance of roads under its jurisdiction, which are collectively referred to as the state trunkline. This system is comprised of state and federal highways that account for 8 percent of Michigan's road network but carry the vast majority of traffic in the state. The most economically important parts of the state trunkline are designated as the Primary Commercial Network (PCN).

U.S. Highway 2, which passes west to east through the township, is part of the PCN. It is also designated a Regionally and Locally Significant Corridor. Nationally, US 2 is made up of two disconnected segments, with Iron River located on the western segment. The western segment terminates near Seattle, Washington, on the west, and at St. Ignace, Michigan, on the east. As previously explained, US 2 is the focus of commercial development in Iron River and carries large volumes of thru traffic.

MDOT performs annual average daily traffic (AADT) counts for two segments of US 2 within the township. The west segment, which extends from the western township border to the Bates-Amasa Road intersection, has an AADT (based on data available at the time of this plan) of 5,016. The east segment, which extends to the US 141 intersection at Crystal Falls, has an AADT of 3,747.

County Roads

The Iron County Road Commission (ICRC), a municipal corporation, is responsible for maintaining county primary and local roads outside of cities and villages (that is, in non-village areas of townships, including Bates). ICRC also conducts winter maintenance on the state trunkline within the township under contract with the State of Michigan. The Iron County Road Commission's main facility is in Iron River. The Commission maintains 270 primary and 363 local roads, along with 224 MDOT highway miles. Bates Township has sole responsibility for improvements to local county roads.



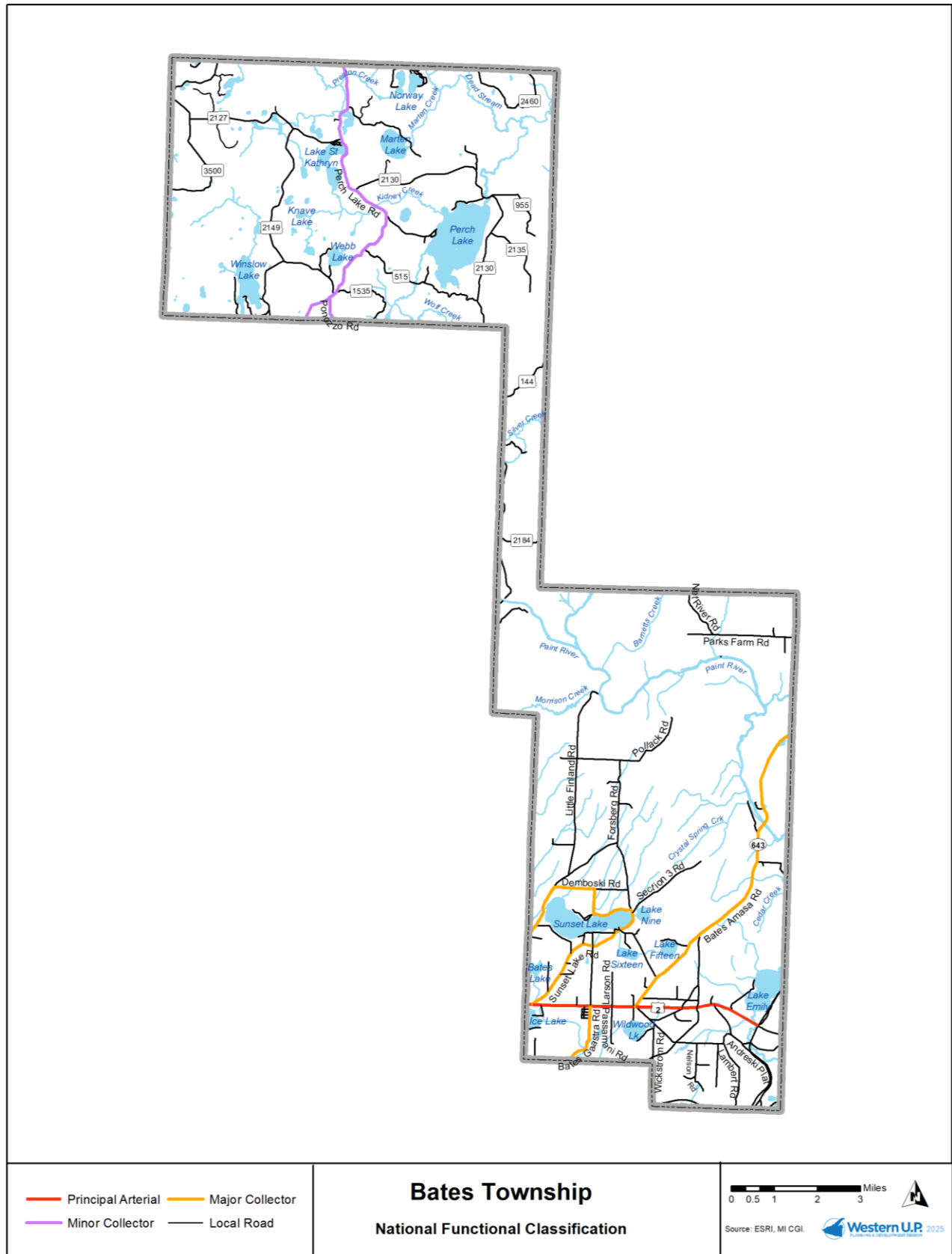
The roadside park on US 2, also known as Larson Park, is (according to some sources) the very first roadside park and rest stop in the United States and perhaps the world. Its highway location makes it an important historical marker in Bates Township.

Federal Classification

Roads are classified federally according to the National Functional Classification (NFC) developed by the Federal Highway Administration. NFC includes four hierarchical categories based on road function and depending mainly on mobility factors such as trip generation and destination types. Highest in the hierarchy is Principal Arterial, which includes major state trunkline routes and surface streets. Below this are: Minor Arterial, which is similar to Principal but carries shorter-distance trips to and from lower-volume generators; Collector, which funnels to arterials and provide greater access to individual properties; and Local, which mainly provides access to individual properties.

Principal Arterials, Minor Arterials, and Collectors are designated "federal-aid" roads, which means they are eligible for funding under federal transportation programs. The following roads, depicted in **Map 8.1**, in Bates Township are federal-aid roads:

Map 8.1 National Functional Classification of Roads in Bates Township



- Minor collectors
 - Perch Lake Road
 - Ponozzo Road
- Major collectors (all in southern rectangle)
 - Bates-Amasa Road
 - Bates-Gaastra Road
 - Demboski Road
 - Noren Road
 - Phillips Road
 - Sunset Lake Road
 - West Sunset Lake Road
- Principal arterial
 - U.S. Highway 2

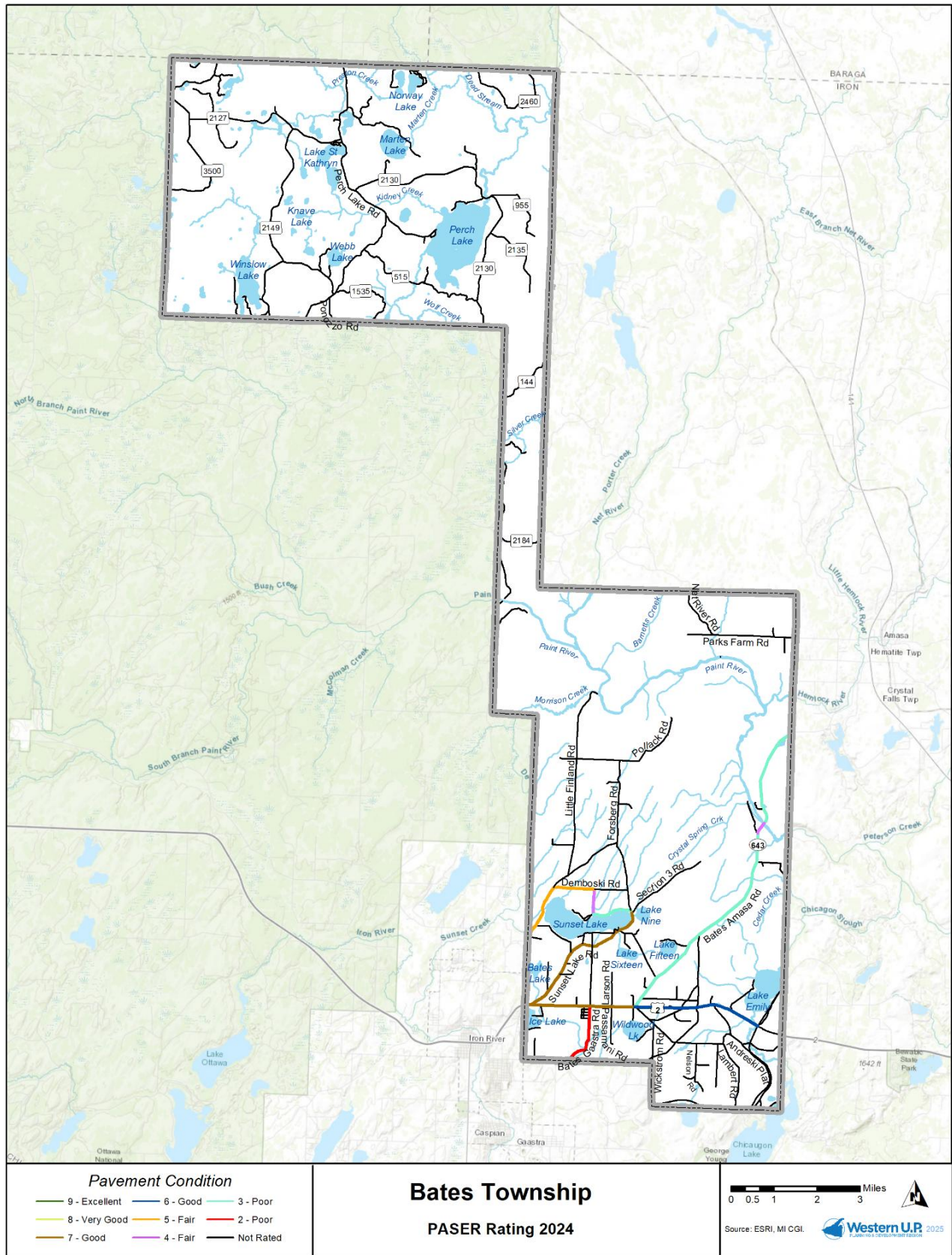
Another type of classification for federal-aid roads is through the Pavement Asset Surface Evaluation Ratings (PASER) system. County road commissions, in partnership with regional planning agencies and MDOT, evaluate a sample of federal-aid roads annually to track the pavement condition. PASER evaluations of select roads in Bates Township are shown in **Map 8.2**. Most notable are Bates-Amasa and Bates-Gaastra roads, both of which are rated poor (2-3 of 10).

Road Maintenance

With multiple agencies involved in Bates Township's road system, all of which have different access to funding, the age and structural integrity of roads varies greatly. US 2 receives regular maintenance and, being a trunkline, is a component of MDOT's rehabilitation and maintenance plans. No projects on the trunkline are scheduled near Bates Township through at least 2030. County roads in Bates Township are good to excellent condition due to consistent funding by the township.

The Township itself does not own roads, with all rural roads being under county jurisdiction, and thus the Township's interests must be represented through the Iron County Road Commission and Rural Task Force 13B. The latter of these provides a venue for input into the use of federal transportation funds for non-urban federal-aid roads. In addition, the township levies 3 mills for road repairs based on its own three-year road plan.

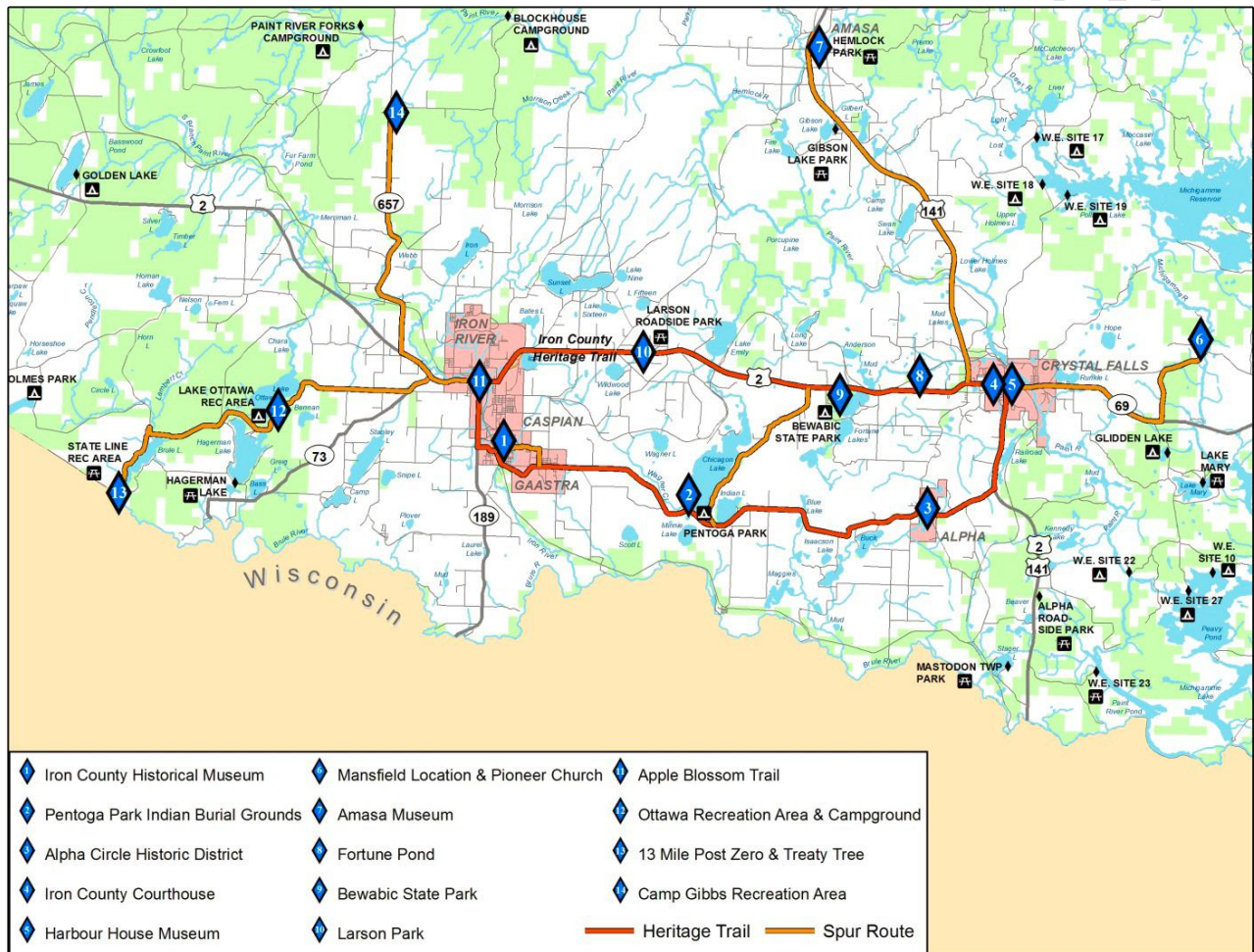
Map 8.2 PASER Ratings of Roads in Bates Township



Iron County Heritage Trail

The Heritage Trail is a Pure Michigan Historic Byway that comprises a loop formed by various highways and county roads between Crystal Falls and Iron River, connecting several historic and recreation sites. It is supplemental by several spur routes. This collection of roads is mainly oriented toward driving; it is not a recreation trail. See **Map 8.3**.

Map 8.3 Iron County Heritage Trail Map



Trail Routes

The township is traversed by the State Line Trail multi-use route that is a state-designated snowmobile trail in winter and primarily an off-road/all-terrain vehicle (ORV/ATV) trail in other seasons. The Iron River to Crystal Falls Trail, a section of the Iron Range Trails system, transects Bates Township along an old railroad corridor through bogs, lakes and forests and is a preferred route for snowmobiles and ORV/ATVs. This trail can be accessed in the township at Lake Emily, where parking is available.

Although most state-recognized ORV/ATV trails can be utilized by other users as well, Bates Township has very little in the way of trails that are suitable for casual non-motorized users, such as walkers and bicyclists. Nonmotorized trails have become increasingly common in recent decades to enhance quality of life and attract and accommodate visitors.

The Iron Belle Trail bicycle route, passes through the county mainly concurrent with US 2. There have been efforts over the years to supplement both the Iron Belle and Iron County Heritage Trail with additional nonmotorized connector trails. Success has been impeded by land ownership issues in the potential route corridors, along with limited availability of funding.

Goals, Strategies, and Actions for Transportation

Goal: Influence orderly and appropriate repair of roads by Iron County Road Commission

- **Strategy:** Work closely with ICRC to ensure the ongoing deployment of adequate resources
 - **Action:** Meet periodically with ICRC manager to exchange information about road conditions, needs, and projects in the township
 - **Action:** Review ICRC's latest data on road surface conditions in the township
 - **Action:** Participate in the rural task force process
- **Strategy:** Prioritize road segments in need of maintenance and repair based on the three-year road plan in consultation with the road commission
 - **Action:** Continue to maintain and reevaluate road plan

Goal: Increase opportunities for walking, bicycling, and other nonmotorized trail activities.

- **Strategy:** Monitor the status of the Iron County Heritage Trail initiative and participate in a committee surrounding it, should one be formed

9. Community Development and the Economy

Community development and economic success, once seen as distinct focus areas, have become increasingly integrated in the modern economy. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation often stresses the close linkage between “place” (attractive, desirable, unique communities to live in), talent (workers matched with industry needs), and the success of businesses themselves. Modern economic development organizations, such as ICECA, usually give concerted attention to all of these fronts. Thus, this final chapter of the plan combines these dual but integrated development tracks for pursuit of addressing some of the township’s impediments to development as well capitalizing on some new opportunities.

Community Development

Preferences and priorities of taxpayers and other residents of Bates Township were considered during development of this plan, with feedback collected mainly through a public opinion survey that received 270 responses in early 2025.

Top priorities for the general direction of the township included: maintaining existing public infrastructure at its current quality level or higher, preserving the rural setting including by maintaining value and feel of already-developed single-family residential areas, and preserving the less-developed character and single-family use of lakes in the north of the township. (The differences among geographic areas of the township are important to take into account in interpretation of all goals and strategies.) Among infrastructure, drinking water quality and supply and roads were by far the highest priority for residents.

Natural Assets

The natural waters of Bates Township are important to residents’ lifestyles. Asked in the survey about several categories of interest regarding lakes and streams, by far the greatest interest (85.7% of respondents) was in keeping the lakes swimmable, boat-able, and fishable. Half or more of respondents were also interested in keeping lakes and streams publicly accessible and maintaining Bates Township Park at Sunset Lake in good condition. Just 17 respondents responded that they didn’t use lakes in the township. Public lands, as well, are of great value for residents’ recreational, hunting, and fishing activities as well as visitor attraction.

Blight

Although blight in the township overall did not rise to the top of concerns expressed in the survey, it is a serious problem in certain instances, creating a public nuisance, safety hazards, and detrimental impact on property values, and has been a longstanding concern of Bates Township. It

is also a problem that is within the township government's capacity to control. Development of blight control ordinances is under consideration in conjunction with the zoning ordinance.

Food Systems

There has been a trend in recent years toward development of locally originating and healthier food sources. Bates Township is well positioned to capitalize on this opportunity while improving the health and welfare of residents.

Renewable Energy

In 2023, the State of Michigan adopted renewable energy standards, including a siting process for large-scale facilities that limits local control. However, local governments do have some alternatives for how to respond to the legislation: deferring entirely to state control or adopting compatible ordinances that give the local government a voice in processes. There is also a possibility of revenue to the local government in conjunction with siting of a facility, through both a state-authorized lump sum and future tax revenues. The Planning Commission and Township Board need to consider options and decide which approach to take in order to be prepared in advance for any renewable energy development that may arise.

Volunteerism

Amid population decline and falling governmental capacity, the township can benefit from volunteer support in a variety of activities. Thus, this topic was included in the public opinion survey. About 20 respondents expressed interest in volunteering on a variety of activities, and information is available in the survey response data for follow-up by township officials.

Economy

The economy of Bates Township has changed drastically since modern settlement of the area, but the economy has always been heavily resource-based. Iron mining was predominant in decades around the turn of the 20th century. More recently, forestry has overtaken mining and continues to have a significant impact in the area. Service industries related to tourism are also important, consistent with the township's interest in promoting its recreation and natural resource assets to visitors. Iron County also has some significant manufacturers, including Lester Detterbeck Enterprises, Ltd., located in the township on US 2. The education, healthcare, and social assistance category, however, employs the most township workers of any industry.

According to the 2020-2024 American Community Survey, Bates Township has 342 workers of age 16 years and over, 15.2% of whom work from home. Of the remainder, 95.2% drive alone. The mean travel time to work is 28.3 minutes.

Unemployment statistics are measured at the county level. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Iron County's estimated 24-month annual unemployment rate (provisional, not seasonally adjusted) as of January 2026 was 9.0%, compared with 4.3% in the State of Michigan.

Of the township's industries, the manufacturing category employed the most workers, with 76, followed closely by educational services and health care and social assistance, with 72.

Employment in industries employing more than 20 workers is shown in **Table 9.1**.

Table 9.1. Industries employing Bates Township workers (2020-24 ACS)

Industry	# Employed	% of All Industries
(Employed civilians 16 years and over)	356	
Manufacturing	76	21.3
Educational services, and health care & social assistance	72	20.2
Professional, scientific, & management, and administrative & waste management services	52	14.6
Construction	27	7.6
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	22	6.2
Other services, except public administration	22	6.2
Public administration	22	6.2
Finance & insurance, and real estate, rental, & leasing	21	5.9
Retail trade	20	5.6

Based on 2026 ICECA numbers, **Table 9.2** shows employers in Bates Township and other Iron County employers that are known to employ 20 or more people (employers below the bold line are located in Bates Township). Though these are the large employers closest to the township, due to residents' short travel time to work and the distance of commuting commonly accepted in rural areas, the location of the employers within the county is not especially important for planning purposes.

Table 9.2. Large Employers in Iron County

Company/Entity	# Employed
Iron County Medical Care Facility	264
Aspirus	159
Krist Oil	148
Connor Sports Flooring	136
Trident	117
WIC Schools	100

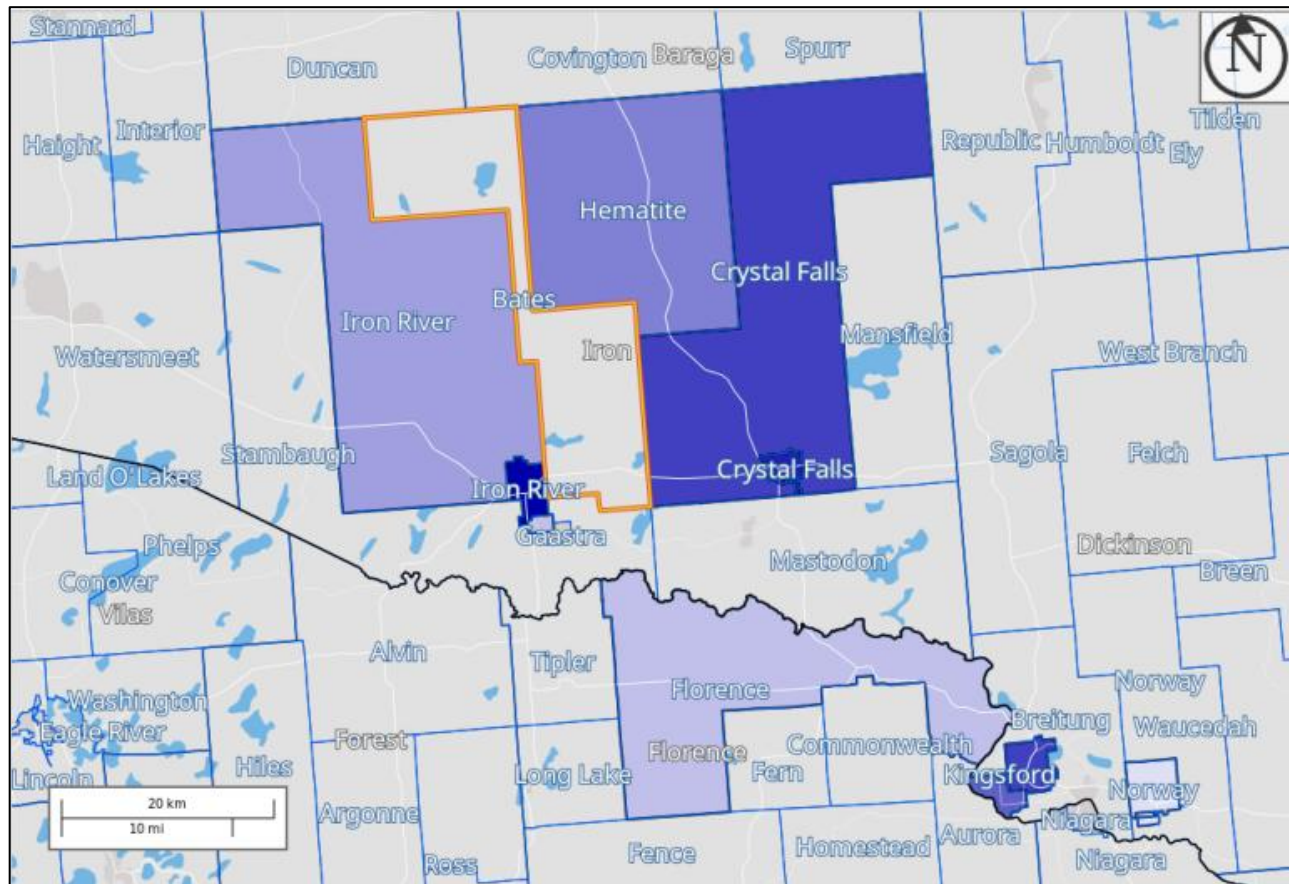
Table 9.2. Large Employers in Iron County

Company/Entity	# Employed
Super One Foods	96
Young's	90 golf season / 40 off season
Ski Brule	90 (120 at peak)
Iron County Courthouse Complex	78
Forest Park Schools	72
Iron River Care Center	65
Shamco, Inc.	48
Crystal Fresh Market	42
Iron County Road Commission	38+
Bigari Ace Hardware	34
NEPCO	28
Hebert Construction	25
Fahrner Asphalt Sealers	22 (mostly seasonal)
Lester Detterbeck Enterprise	10

Though it is not listed in top employing industries within the township, the visitor economy (i.e. tourism) is an important factor in the area economy. A 2024 study by the University of Michigan Economic Growth Institute, commissioned by WUPPDR, found that in Iron County, tourism supports 225 jobs and a total of \$22.5 million annually in direct, indirect, and induced economic impact.

Work Destination Analysis

Knowing in what communities Bates Township residents work is helpful to understand the township's economic context. The United States Census On the Map tool (based on 2021 data, the most recent available) indicates the primary job locations (county subdivisions) of 286 residents. Of these, about one-third (98 workers total) work in the cities of Crystal Falls and Iron River. Other top work locations are Crystal Falls, Hematite, and Iron River townships (45 workers) and the cities of Iron Mountain and Kingsford (37 workers). In the map below (**Figure 9.1**), the darker shades indicate townships and cities where the largest numbers of workers work. (Interestingly, according to this source, there are only two workers who both live and work in Bates Township.)

Figure 9.1. Employment Locations of Workers Who Live in Bates Township (Source: OnTheMap)

Goals, Strategies, and Actions for Community and Economic Development

Goal: Maintain and strengthen the township's position against blighted properties

- **Strategy:** Take steps to eliminate or revitalize long-term blighted properties, especially along the US 2 corridor
 - **Action:** Reevaluate adequacy of current blight control ordinances and their relationship to, or potential integration with, the zoning ordinance
 - **Action:** Pursue blight enforcement staffing
 - **Action:** Locate, contact, and, if necessary, take legal action against negligent absentee property owners
- **Strategy:** Ensure public properties are adequately maintained and attractive
 - **Action:** Improve appearance of public properties via municipal efforts or volunteer beautification
 - **Action:** Provide acceptable funding levels for upkeep of township parks

Goal: Support success and growth of the township's business community

- **Strategy:** Attend to the needs of existing businesses while also exploring possibilities for new and expanded ones
 - **Action:** Maintain membership in ICECA
 - **Action:** Approach ICECA regarding creation of or contribution to an informational document showing vacant buildings and sites available for occupancy, reuse, or new development in the township

Goal: Foster local economic and community progress by supporting broader area development that benefits the township

- **Strategy:** Support Iron County events and promotion of the area
 - **Action:** Engage with and support organizations that organize and undertake significant events, such as the Upper Peninsula Championship Rodeo
- **Strategy:** Continue to work with local and regional broadband internet providers to improve and expand access to service, including fiber optics
 - **Action:** Explore status of, and opportunities to participate in, implementation of broadband expansion through grant programs



There is opportunity on the US 2 corridor for additional businesses that provide important services for both travelers and residents, such as this coffee shop at the Bates-Amasa Road intersection.

Appendix

- A. Summary of Public Opinion Survey**
- B. Consolidated List of Goals, Strategies, and Actions**
- C. History of Bates Township and Surrounding Area**

PC-approved Proposed MP

Appendix A

Survey Summary

In the lead up to a Master Plan update, Bates Township undertook a public opinion survey in spring 2025. Information about the survey was mailed to property owners, and most responses were made online, but some hard copy responses were also submitted. A total of 270 responses were received. The survey asked about residents’ general priorities for the township and the nature of future development. Some highlights of the aggregate survey responses are below.

General Priorities for Present and Future

The highest-scoring priorities were:

- Maintaining existing township physical infrastructure at the current quality level or higher
- Preserving the township’s rural setting by maintaining the value and feel of the Rogers Location along with lakes in the south of the township that already have single-family development
- Preserving the less-developed character and single-family use of northern lakes

Municipal/Community Services

The highest-priority services to be strengthened, even if it might mean a property tax increase, were **roads** and **drinking water quality and supply**.

Recycling

69% of respondents would support recycling services if available at low cost.

Lakes and Streams

Keeping the township’s lakes swimmable, boat-able, and fishable was a higher priority than public accessibility and maintenance of the park at Sunset Lake (though the latter two were also selected by around 50% or more respondents).

Housing Development

Respondents could select only one response for preferred type of housing development. Single-family 2- or 3-bedroom houses were the top choice, selected by nearly one-third. About one-quarter of respondents each selected “any housing expansion” or “no housing expansion.”

Things for Bates Township to Replicate

The most-mentioned categories of responses included 1) hiking and biking opportunities and trails, and 2) trash and recycling collection or dropoff site.

Volunteer Opportunities

Respondents' greatest interests in volunteering for the betterment of the township were related to cleanups and care for natural resources.

Respondent Characteristics

- No respondents were under age 18, and 84% were age 50 and older
- 86% were owners of property in Bates Township; nearly half were year-round residents and 4% were year-round renters
- 10% were remote or from-home workers

Reasons for Owning Property in Township

- 80% of respondents owned property because of the rural setting and quality of life
- About one-third chose to retire in the township

Themes in Other Comments

- Taxes (too high; assessments)
- Blight
- Public involvement / township government – increase ease of access & transparency
- Road quality (needs work)
- Trash & recycling collection/dropoff
- School building reuse

Appendix B

Consolidated Summary of Goals, Strategies, and Actions

Following is a concise list, by chapter, of the goals, strategies, and actions included in the plan.

Housing

Goal: Foster development of new housing in appropriate areas of the township

- **Strategy:** Evaluate utility and road infrastructure to identify where the lowest barriers to development are for new housing
 - **Action:** Review infrastructure maps to evaluate the alignment of utility systems with the locations of available vacant land
 - **Action:** Maintain up-to-date maps of water and sewer networks to aid in targeting future housing densities
- **Strategy:** Assess, and potentially promote, availability and potential of vacant land and buildings that may be suited for development or redevelopment
 - **Action:** Inventory long-term vacant buildings and vacant, unused privately owned land and buildings that may be well suited for development
 - **Action:** Contact absentee landowners to gauge their interest in marketing their property for redevelopment
- **Strategy:** Participate in discussions with developers as potential projects or concepts are brought forward

Goal: Ensure that housing types and characteristics in respective zoning districts are harmonious with surrounding properties and neighborhoods

- **Strategy:** Formulate zoning districts that reserve northern areas of the township for relatively low-impact (more dispersed) housing development, while allowing somewhat more concentrated (denser) housing development in southern areas that have utility water and/or sewer service

Goal: Foster housing development through engagement of private developers and other nearby communities

- Strategy: Provide public information that can be used to encourage private sector development
- Strategy: Work with Iron County Economic Chamber Alliance to identify developers that may be interested in pursuing development opportunities the township identifies
- Strategy: Collaborate with nearby municipalities, such as the City of Iron River, to assess the role of each jurisdiction in accommodating appropriate housing formats to meet area housing needs (the broad impacts of which affect all jurisdictions, including Bates Township)

Community Services and Facilities**Goal: Assist township residents in securing access to materials management services that are lacking or unaffordable in the area.**

- Strategy: Seek additional, more detailed input on what services that residents would like the township to be involved in providing
 - Action: Invite residents to public meeting for overview and discussion of trash and recycling collection and dropoff options
 - Action: Seek educational materials and possible presentation from WUPPDR regarding available options and initiatives to improve access
- Strategy: Continue to monitor trash collection services available to residents from existing private haulers.
 - Action: Contact haulers periodically as necessary
- Strategy: Support regional efforts to improve access to recycling and composting services
 - Action: Continue to engage with WUP MMPC to leverage collective interest and pursue economies of scale in obtaining services within a regional recycling and composting network
 - Action: Engage with Iron County government to explore options for transport of area recyclables to Recycle 906 (Marquette County Solid Waste Management Authority) materials recovery facility
 - Action: Working with Iron County government and MMPC, explore whether there are collaborative arrangements with Dickinson County, due to its close economic relationship with Iron, that may be beneficial to improve access to services

Transportation

Goal: Influence orderly and appropriate repair of roads by Iron County Road Commission

- **Strategy:** Work closely with ICRC to ensure the ongoing deployment of adequate resources
 - **Action:** Meet periodically with ICRC manager to exchange information about road conditions, needs, and projects in the township
 - **Action:** Review ICRC’s latest data on road surface conditions in the township
 - **Action:** Participate in the rural task force process
- **Strategy:** Prioritize road segments in need of maintenance and repair based on the three-year road plan in consultation with the road commission
 - **Action:** Continue to maintain and reevaluate road plan

Goal: Increase opportunities for walking, bicycling, and other nonmotorized trail activities.

- **Strategy:** Monitor the status of the Iron County Heritage Trail initiative and participate in a committee surrounding it, should one be formed

Community and Economic Development

Goal: Maintain and strengthen the township’s position against blighted properties

- **Strategy:** Take steps to eliminate or revitalize long-term blighted properties, especially along the US 2 corridor
 - **Action:** Reevaluate adequacy of current blight control ordinances and their relationship to, or potential integration with, the zoning ordinance
 - **Action:** Pursue blight enforcement staffing
 - **Action:** Locate, contact, and, if necessary, take legal action against negligent absentee property owners
- **Strategy:** Ensure public properties are adequately maintained and attractive
 - **Action:** Improve appearance of public properties via municipal efforts or volunteer beautification
 - **Action:** Provide acceptable funding levels for upkeep of local parks

Goal: Support success and growth of the township’s business community

- **Strategy:** Attend to the needs of existing businesses while also exploring possibilities for new and expanded ones

- Action: Maintain membership in ICECA
- Action: Approach ICECA regarding creation of or contribution to an informational document showing vacant buildings and sites available for occupancy, reuse, or new development in the township

Goal: Foster local economic and community progress by supporting broader development that benefits the township

- Strategy: Support Iron County events and promotion of the area
 - Action: Engage with and support organizations that organize and undertake significant events, such as the Upper Peninsula Championship Rodeo
- Strategy: Continue to work with local and regional broadband internet providers to improve and expand access to service, including fiber optics
 - Action: Explore status of, and opportunities to participate in, implementation of broadband expansion through grant programs

Appendix C

History of Bates Township and Surrounding Area

The area of present-day Bates Township was occupied by Native Americans prior to the arrival of White settlers, who were drawn to the area *en masse* by opportunities for farming, logging and iron mining in the late 1800s.

Iron County, Michigan, was originally the hunting and fishing grounds for the Ojibwa Indians who migrated here from the New England states area. The development and admission of states to the Union ultimately led to the establishment of Michigan, which in 1836 was carved out of the Northwest Territory. The severance of the Upper Peninsula from the territory of Wisconsin was important to the border county of Iron. Captain Cram made early boundary surveys in 1840 and was followed by William Burt and his crews to complete town and range lines in the late 1840s and early 1850s. These surveys found outcroppings of iron ore and dense forests, both of which would become essential elements to the economy of the county.

Iron ore was first discovered by Harvey Mellon in Stambaugh in 1851. Extension of an important rail line facilitated migration of prospective miners to the region. Unlike the predominantly Cornish miners who flocked to Houghton County (Houghton, Hancock, Calumet, Laurium, Red Jacket, *et al*) to what quickly became known as the “Copper Country”, Bates Township was settled by a diverse group of settlers who were eager to farm as well as to work in mining or logging. This ethnic diversity set the tone for generations to come.

As with many districts in Michigan and other developing American states, Upper Peninsula county and municipal boundaries shifted over time as populations expanded and the demand for land, with a corresponding desire for representation in local and regional government, developed. The southwest portion of Marquette County was originally Ely Township, but when Baraga County was formed in 1875, the land now forming Iron County was placed in the new Township of Republic.

Logging also began in 1875 in what now is Iron County, and lumber mills soon were another important contributor to the area’s economy. Iron ore exploration commenced in 1880, and the first iron mine, the Iron River Mine, opened soon after. The name of this mine subsequently was changed to the Riverton Mine. The location of this mine, which had several pits, shafts and drill holes across the span of its life, was between the current M-189 highway to the west and the Iron River to the east. (Several drill holes were made to the east of the Iron River as well.)

Railroads, particularly the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, responding to requests for passenger and freight service for the rapidly expanding, two-pronged economy, in 1882 completed

northern lines from Stager to Iron River (to the west) and Crystal Falls (to the east). The village of Iron River was platted on the west bank of the Iron River and was the first settlement platted on the west side of Iron County.

In 1880, two important ore strikes were made: the first was by John Armstrong, who opened the Crystal Falls Mine along the Paint River, and the second was by Donald C. MacKinnon, who opened the Iron River (later renamed Riverton) Mine along the Iron River. These two mines were the economic foundation of the fledgling county, and the success of the mines drew more workers, speculators and prospectors to the area, with 70 mines eventually producing ore in the county. In 1881, the first mine in the Bates area, an open-pit operation called the Nanaimo Mine, opened just west of what would become Bates Township and south of the Iron River with underground workings developed from one shaft in 1882 and a second open pit opened in 1884. Using modern landmarks, the location is roughly equidistant between the river, County Road 653, and major employer The Oldenburg Group. A settlement known as Nanaimo opened its post office on April 21, 1882; that post office was renamed Iron River on September 8, 1882.

Also in 1882, Crystal Falls Township and Iron River Township were formed after petitions were made to the Marquette County Board of Supervisors for representation. Pat E. Dunn, of Crystal Falls, and Daniel J. Lay, of Iron River Township, took their respective seats on the Marquette County Board of Supervisors on May 29, 1882. Economic development was primarily based on the mining and logging industries and was enriched by the diverse ethnic mixture of its citizens.

Iron County was established in September, 1885, having been severed from Marquette County's Ely Township, established in 1871, and a small portion along the Brule River was taken from Menominee County. When Iron County was formed, five townships were created: Bates, Crystal Falls, Iron River, Felch, and Mastodon. Hematite and Mastodon townships were added during separate reapportionment efforts.

The following excerpt from Walter Helgemo's *Bates Township Legacy Book 1885-1985*, a comprehensive citizen history of the township with dozens of family remembrances compiled by a member of a pioneering family that still lives in and serves the township, describes the process by which Bates Township was founded:

The Township enjoyed the greatest early concentration of permanent farm settlements when good lands became available through an over-selection of grant lands. The settlers were mainly of sturdy Scandinavian stock that made their way to the frontier stopping center at Norway, Michigan in 1882. Several Polish families settled a short time later, as did one French family.

The families were large as a rule and many hardships were endured in carving the homes out of the wilderness. The head of the family usually worked in the mines and cleared lands and built buildings on weekends, when not working in the mines.

An election of temporary officers was held in the home of Olaf Helgemo on April 5, 1885; their purpose being to organize a Township. **One of the most remarkable things at that time is that these early settlers could not speak fluent English or read and write, but they were still able to organize a Township and keep records.** According to these early records, the same people held all the offices at different times, as there were not enough people available who had experience, which was learned as years passed and as they held offices.

The early years were very difficult and most food was taken from the soil. Land had to be grubbed by hand to plant a meager garden. Later, horses were used as the farmers cleared more land to raise livestock, grain, and vegetables.

It is noted in the early minutes that in 1885, ten births were listed; eight of Swedish parentage, one German and one French. Also regardless of how hard times were, the Township always had a Poor Fund to provide some type of help for the needy. Another note of interest: The Township Hall was built in 1907.

Two of the most prominent men in our Township who held many offices in the Township and later held offices of high esteem are Carl Lindquist, who has given a lot of information on the history of the Township and the late Victor Benson. Both were state representatives at one time.

There are many relatives and descendants of former office holders and pioneer families still living in the Township.

Although Iron County grew rapidly in the 1880s and early 1890s, the nationwide economic Panic of 1893 stifled further growth for some time. From 1889 to 1900, no ore was mined on the entire west side of the county, including in the mines near Bates Township and Iron River. During this period, residents turned to logging, which was less affected by external economic factors than was iron mining, and farming for employment and sustenance. Small logging railroads penetrated parts of western Iron County, allowing for harvesting of hardwood stands after the original pine had been removed in massive clear-cut operations.

The turn of the century saw the greatest period of growth for both Bates Township and Iron County, with a steady increase in the production of pig iron using the soft, phosphoric ores found around Iron River. New mines were developed at a rapid pace after ore was discovered outside of the Iron River valley at the James Mine in 1905. This area later became Mineral Hills. From 1905 to 1912, the number of mines increased from six to 16. The Village of Iron River installed a sewer

system in 1905 and electric light facilities in 1908. The 1910 census showed a population of 7,816 on the west side of Iron County.

In the same vein, the Bates Township population, which had held at between 400 and 600 souls between 1890 and 1910, surged dramatically following World War I. In 1910, the U.S. Census showed a total of 573 residents in Bates Township; in 1920, that number was 1,181, nearly doubling in one decade. While this phenomenon was mirrored in many Northern locales and states, especially Detroit and Chicago, as the “Great Migration” of rural White

Bates Township Census History (Decennial Census)

Census Year	Bates Twp.	Michigan	U.S.
1900	402	2,420,982	76,212,168
1910	573	2,810,173	92,228,496
1920	1,181	3,668,412	106,021,537
1930	1,263	4,842,325	122,775,046
1940	1,278	5,256,106	132,164,569
1950	1,109	6,371,766	150,697,361
1960	1,224	7,823,194	179,323,175
1970	980	8,875,083	203,302,031
1980	1,003	9,262,078	226,545,805
1990	966	9,295,297	248,709,873
2000	1,021	9,938,444	281,421,906
2010	921	9,883,640	308,745,538
2020	925	10,077,331	331,449,281

Americans and Black Americans moved from Southern states for better-paying factory jobs, it is noteworthy that it occurred in small and distant places such as Bates Township as well.

At various times in its history, Bates Township was the site of up to 12 different schools, most of them one-room schools instituted in the peak mining industry years (1890-1915) and closed in the Great Depression era if not before. For example, the onetime Benson School, which was located at the junction of Section 14 Road and Bates-Amasa Road, was built in 1893 and closed in 1931. This is indicative of the severe economic decline in rural America at the onset of the Great Depression, when families left established homes to find any form of employment.

After mining resurged in the early 1900s and logging remained steady and viable, Bates Township, Iron County and Iron River underwent a period of great prosperity during and after World War I, and the City of Iron River formally was incorporated in 1926. Swollen with a working population, the smaller communities that had developed around other area mines also were incorporated. The cities of Caspian, Gaastra, and Stambaugh were located just south of Iron River, and the Village of Mineral Hills was immediately north.

The cluster of towns around Iron River — Caspian, Stambaugh, Gaastra and Mineral Hills — were united by public transportation in 1913 when a street railway franchise was granted to the Iron River and Crystal Falls Street Railway Company. This 4½-mile line operated until 1921. The quick construction and decommissioning of this streetcar line (eight years of total service) reflected a nationwide pattern in the post-World War I era, where streetcar lines established in the 1900s and 1910s fell out of favor and were replaced by automobiles and road development. For example, in the

1910s, the Los Angeles metropolitan area boasted a comprehensive network of electric streetcars that had been entirely eradicated by 1930, giving rise to the “California car culture” in its absence.

Mineral Hills, located directly west of Bates Township, was a unique case – a wide-ranging village incorporated to encompass six distinct clusters of 12 houses each; each cluster was developed as housing for miners at a particular mine. These mine housing developments were known as “locations.” However, a business district never developed in Mineral Hills, and the community has changed little since its creation.

After the mining period ended, Iron County’s main industry became logging. While logging still plays an important role, general retail and service activities, largely in support of tourism, have become dominant. The City of Iron River attained, and retains to this day, unchallenged status as the area’s commercial center.

Unfortunately, as with the United States as a whole, the peak period of prosperity in Bates Township and surrounding environs was short-lived. The October 1929 stock market crash and the ensuing Great Depression forced the closing of most mines. Although some reopened at the beginning of World War II, the mining industry never again regained its earlier high level of production.

In 1935, Bates Township began the effort to establish a municipal water system. Work commenced the following year under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal make-work programs that provided sustenance wages in exchange for labor by otherwise unemployed citizens. Much of the Upper Peninsula’s infrastructure was developed by the WPA and sister agency Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

With all digging and pipe-laying performed manually, the Bates water system took several years to construct, with Water Tank #1 built in 1937 and Tank #2 in 1958. According to *The Bates Township Legacy*, work on the project was “...completed some time after the end of the WPA program,” which was terminated as all Americans joined the war production effort in 1942. As noted in *The Bates Township Legacy*, **“Bates Township is believed to be the first rural township in the State to have a piped water system.”**

Innovation and Bates Township were again hand-in-hand in the late 1970s, when township leaders discussed the possibility of creating a sewer ordinance and seeking the bonding capacity and available grants to design and construct a municipal sewer system. Bonds were accepted and grant funding was secured in 1977 and construction ensued in 1978. The Bates Legacy notes that “this project is believed to be the first rural sewer line in the State of Michigan”.

In more recent times, it is important to recognize the impact the evolution of the cities near the southwest corner of Bates Township has had on the West Iron County economy. In 2000, after

many years of study and piecemeal sharing of municipal services, the predominant City of Iron River consolidated with the City of Stambaugh and Village of Mineral Hills, resulting in a reduction from five to three adjoining municipalities. Iron River is now the economic center of the county and has seen positive and negative impacts from consolidation, but regardless of the results it remains known as the first and only consolidated city in Michigan.

Meanwhile, adjacent to this urban environment, Bates Township, has evolved from a farming, mining and logging community with several small businesses and manufacturers to a comfortable bedroom community and prime destination for recreation, especially boating on its many lakes and snowmobiling on its network of trails that connect with other trails across the Upper Midwest.

Proposed MP Final Draft