

*Niles Charter Township  
Community Parks, Recreation,  
Open Space, and Greenway Plan*



2014-2019

**DRAFT 1/16/14**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*As a community, Niles Charter Township* has demonstrated complete understanding of the value, and broad scope, of benefits that comprehensive recreational planning can bring to residents and visitors. By committing time and resources to the planning process, the community has ensured a wide variety of opportunities for all to enjoy physical health, scenic vistas, enjoyable leisure time, intact natural resources, and have attractive places for abundant educational and social events. It takes dedicated participation and full cooperation of community leaders and residents to prepare a five-year plan. This participation involves attending committee meetings, performing on-site visits to inventory and assess current park conditions, preparing, conducting, and transcribing a community survey, and doing research to provide information for specific park projects.

Among those who are appreciated for giving generously of their time and demonstrating their commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all are the following:

### **Niles Charter Township Parks Commission**

Harry Thibault, Chair  
Darwin Finley, Treasurer  
John Mishler, Secretary  
Aaron Mills  
Wayne Perkins  
Christine Vella, Township Board Liaison

### **Niles Charter Township Board**

James Stover, Supervisor  
Terry Eull, Clerk  
James H. Ringler, Treasurer  
Richard Cooper, Trustee  
Herschel Hoese, Trustee  
Richard Noble, Trustee  
Christine Vella, Trustee

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

***The purpose of a five-year community parks, recreation, open space, and greenway plan*** is to establish policies that will achieve prudent and logical development of recreational programs and facilities. The plan also identifies existing facilities and provides guidance for the acquisition and development of future facilities or amenities. An integral part of the plan is the development of goals that reflect those policies and provides a method to regularly examine and evaluate the township's open space and recreational needs, project fulfillment, and overall direction. Niles Charter Township has a number of opportunities to provide venues that will educate, improve health (both mental and physical), increase social connections, and improve the economic and environmental characteristics in the area. When implemented, a thorough and regularly reviewed five-year plan can maximize each one of these opportunities.

Before the goals and projects incorporated into this five year plan were developed, an overall concept was discussed and a specific theme was established. This theme became a mission statement that guided the decision-making process as members of the steering committee worked to understand issues, develop solutions, and plan for the future. The following mission statement will continue to serve the community as a guide to maximize opportunities and overcome challenges as they arise.

### **Mission Statement**

*Compared to other communities our size, Niles Charter Township will have the finest, most comprehensive and most accessible park and trail system in Michigan and will be a national model of excellence.*

Niles Charter Township will encourage the implementation of comprehensive recreation planning that includes parks, open space, greenways, and historic, cultural, and artistic components. Over the next several years, Niles Charter Township will focus on the following: completing the IN-MI River Valley Trail, increasing the use of grants, donations and volunteers, making the park's general areas more handicap accessible, coordinating with road agencies to include non-motorized facilities on roadways, bringing an indoor playground facility and a state-of-the-art all-sports complex to the community, maintaining and updating park amenities and landscaping, assisting with the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Project and providing assistance to baseball and softball leagues.

With the continued enthusiastic commitment and partnerships between the Parks Commission, township officials, businesses, and residents, Niles Charter Township will reap numerous health, social, and economic benefits from its parks and recreation opportunities.

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## COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

*Understanding the physical and social characteristics of a community* is an important aspect of planning for current and future recreational needs. A wide range of information such as climate patterns, natural resources, employment, and existing assets is taken into consideration when analyzing the recreational needs of the community and leading to the development of a viable action plan. In this section, various components of the community's demographics and physical landscape are presented and the connection is made to the overall goal relevant to that information.

### Location

*Niles Charter Township is located in the southeast corner* of Berrien County in southwestern Michigan. The township is surrounded by Berrien Township to the north, Buchanan Township to the west, Bertrand Township to the south and east, Howard Township (in Cass County) to the east, and Indiana to the south. The City of Niles is located primarily in the southeast corner of the township with a small portion of the city in Cass County. There are five major highways providing access to and from large metropolitan areas such as Chicago, Illinois (approximately 95 miles west), and Detroit, Michigan (200 miles east).



Township residents responding to the community survey indicated considerable interest in future and current participation in recreational and leisure activities available in the above mentioned communities surrounding the township. Since some survey respondents are residents of these communities, it can be assumed that the interest is reciprocal and will continue to be a consideration for planning.

### Climate

*Southwest Michigan has a relatively mild climate with four well-defined seasons.* Precipitation averages include 39.7 inches per year of rainfall and 63.5 inches of snowfall. The average July temperature is 85 degrees Fahrenheit and the average January low is 22.6 degrees Fahrenheit. There are approximately 173 days of sunshine.<sup>1</sup> This temperate climate allows many opportunities for the community to enjoy the vast array of seasonal recreational, open space, and greenway facilities within the township and surrounding areas.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bestplaces.net/city/Niles\\_township\\_MI-CLIMATE-DATA-69905352061.aspx](http://www.bestplaces.net/city/Niles_township_MI-CLIMATE-DATA-69905352061.aspx)

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**GOAL 1 - *Develop and support policies that will preserve and protect valuable water and land resources including properties with historic and/or cultural value.***

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**Natural Resources**

**Land**

*Niles Charter Township encompasses approximately 38.5 square miles* comprised of 37.7 square miles of land and 0.8 square miles of water. With a population of just over 13,000, the population density is approximately 350 people per square mile. The agricultural and rural nature of the township is demonstrated by the following table indicating the distribution of different types of *land cover* by percent of total land.

▪ Urban	14%	▪ Forest	20%
▪ Farmland	48%	▪ Water	2%
▪ Orchard/Vineyard	1%	▪ Forested Wetland	3%
▪ Open Land	9%	▪ Wetland	3%

The natural scenic quality of an area with so much forest and farm land provides substantial benefits and opportunities. Protecting vistas and viewsheds encourages tourism revenue, attracts positive rehabilitation and renovation, preserves the unique natural charm of the area, and encourages civic pride.<sup>2</sup>

**Topography**

*Rolling hills, low broad valleys, marshlands, and small lakes* are characteristic of the glacial terrains found throughout the township. The elevation difference between the lowest and highest points is approximately 200 feet. The land along the St. Joseph River is low and relatively flat creating a wide flood plain across the center of the township. The land west of the City of Niles rises sharply and continues in a pattern of low hills between Niles-Buchanan Road and Weiser Road to the township's most western boundary. Other lands scattered throughout the township exhibit a more gentle relief.<sup>3</sup>

**Soils**

*There are a number of soil types* in the township. The Oakley-Oshtemo association is very prominent in the central area of the township, consisting of nearly level to steep, well-drained loamy soils on outwash plains and moraines. In the southern "panhandle" of the township the Spinks-Oakville-Oshtemo association is very much in evidence. These nearly level to very steep, well-drained sandy and loamy soils are found on moraines, till plains, outwash plains and beach ridges. Two other generalized groups are present: the Riddles-Oakley-Oshtemo and the Brady-Monitor-Gilford associations. The former is characterized by nearly level to very steep, well-drained loamy soils on outwash plains, moraines and till plains while the latter consists of nearly level, somewhat poorly drained and very poorly drained loamy soils on outwash plains, deltas and lake plains.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.scenic.org/easements/strategies>

<sup>3</sup> *Niles Township Master Plan, 2002*

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Careful consideration should be given to farmland in the northwestern sector of the township, where a considerable amount of Oakley loam is present. This soil type has 0-2% slope and is classified as prime agricultural land. A smaller pocket is located in the eastern end of the township adjacent to the Dowagiac River, but a significant portion appears to be in residential use. This soil is prevalent in Community Park and is well suited to supporting development.<sup>4</sup>

### **Water and Wetlands**

*There are many diverse water resources* in the township including two rivers, (the St. Joseph and the Dowagiac) several miles of tributary streams (Brandywine Creek), and a large number of small lakes, ponds, and wetlands. These water resources provide several important functions including:

- Recreational opportunities (fishing/swimming/boating)
- Educational value and teaching opportunities
- Functional recharge areas for groundwater
- Aesthetic appeal
- Fish and wildlife habitats
- Water retention and flood control

Comprehensive recreation planning includes the development of water protection policies that will preserve the benefits and functions of this valuable natural resource. Water quality protection measures help to ensure pure drinking water, healthy fish populations for sport fishing, safe beaches, swimming areas, and other tourism-related venues. The best approach to protect water resources is to leave a naturally vegetated buffer (a no mow policy) along the edge to filter pollutants running off the land.

Over \_\_\_% of the wetlands in Niles Township have been lost since pre-settlement times. It is important to protect the remaining wetlands and restore lost wetlands when possible. Wetlands are important to wildlife (flora *and* fauna) but wetlands also provide floodwater protection which can save billions of dollars in property damage every year. Wetlands provide buffers from stormwater by absorbing floodwaters and filtering water pollutants. One of the greatest threats to inland lands and streams is stormwater runoff. As rainwater runs off paved surfaces it collects pesticides, motor oil, pet waste, garbage, and other pollutants before flowing into natural bodies of water. By leaving wetlands intact and allowing for plenty of undeveloped property, stormwater can be absorbed and filtered thus reducing the contamination of the water resources. Preserving land that recharges the quantity and quality of drinking water is an important consideration for every community.



*The St. Joseph River*

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<sup>4</sup> Niles Township Recreation Plan, 1995-2000

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**GOAL 2 - *Seek and establish connections between existing and future trails and pathways including greenways and waterways.***

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**Trails and Greenways**

*Trails, greenways, waterways, and open spaces* are incorporated into recreational planning for many reasons. Throughout this five-year plan, references are often made to trails as they can have a substantial positive impact on the social, economic, and physical well-being of the community.

Trails provide opportunities for walking, running, skating, and bicycling for either individuals or families. As a health benefit, trails can facilitate safe and inexpensive exercise for those without easy access to other exercise venues such as health clubs. Trails might also provide transportation alternatives between school, work, home, social events, or other business. Trails are an important method of preserving natural areas while expanding recreational options that may become economic development opportunities. Residents and leaders in Niles Charter Township have expressed support for developing trails and connecting them with other trail systems in the region including northern Indiana.

Niles Charter Township's Parks Commission initiated a multi-jurisdictional effort to connect an existing trail in Niles City to trails in Indiana (South Bend/Mishawaka). The trail has been coined the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail and when complete will be a 34-mile trail connecting Niles, MI to Mishawaka, IN. The trail will be used by commuters, students, families and tourists as it will connect people to:

- 4 universities and several schools
- 4 downtowns (Niles, Roseland, South Bend and Mishawaka)
- 16 parks and 2 YMCAs
- 5 hospitals or major medical facilities
- Several historical and cultural attractions
- Businesses offering eating, lodging and shopping



Niles Charter Township's Parks Commission is dedicated to completing its section of trail and assisting efforts in Indiana to complete what could certainly become a regionally recognized and well-utilized alternative transportation / recreation corridor running from Plym Park in the City of Niles to downtown Mishawaka, Indiana.

In recent years many organizations and agencies have been promoting the concept of water trails or blueways as a means to highlight the recreational benefits of rivers. Water trails are simply rivers that are used for recreation. While some water trails may be formalized with developed facilities, interpretive information and maps, others are not as formally developed and may only be experienced by a handful of individuals. A water trail is really any traditionally navigable waterway defined as

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having the capacity, in terms of length, width, and depth, to enable a kayak or canoe passage. Many people currently enjoy paddling on the Dowagiac and St. Joseph Rivers. A more developed water trail experience could be developed to enhance the recreational experiences on these rivers. Efforts such as these will cross political boundaries and Niles Township will have to work with neighboring jurisdictions to develop and promote water trails.

In addition to trails, other greenways (often referred to as “green infrastructure”) are beneficial for preserving natural landscapes and providing links between fragmented habitats to protect plants and animals. Greenways can be used as a tool for wetland preservation and for the improvement of air and water quality. Greenways often incorporate naturally vegetated buffer zones to protect streams, rivers, and lakes from stormwater runoff including vehicle waste, fertilizers, and pesticides. Open spaces also serve as floodplains to absorb excess water and reduce the risk of flooding in low-lying areas.

### **Vegetation and Wildlife**

*Animals such as white-tailed deer, pheasant, quail, and cottontail rabbits* are common in the rural/agricultural areas of the township. Red fox, coyotes, raccoons, and squirrels are found in the woodlots and forest edges. With the expanse of river corridors present, migratory waterfowl, herons, and kingfishers are often observed utilizing the wetland habitat for food and nesting areas. Brandywine Creek, a tributary of the St. Joseph River, is a high quality trout stream supporting significant natural reproduction.



*White-tailed Deer*

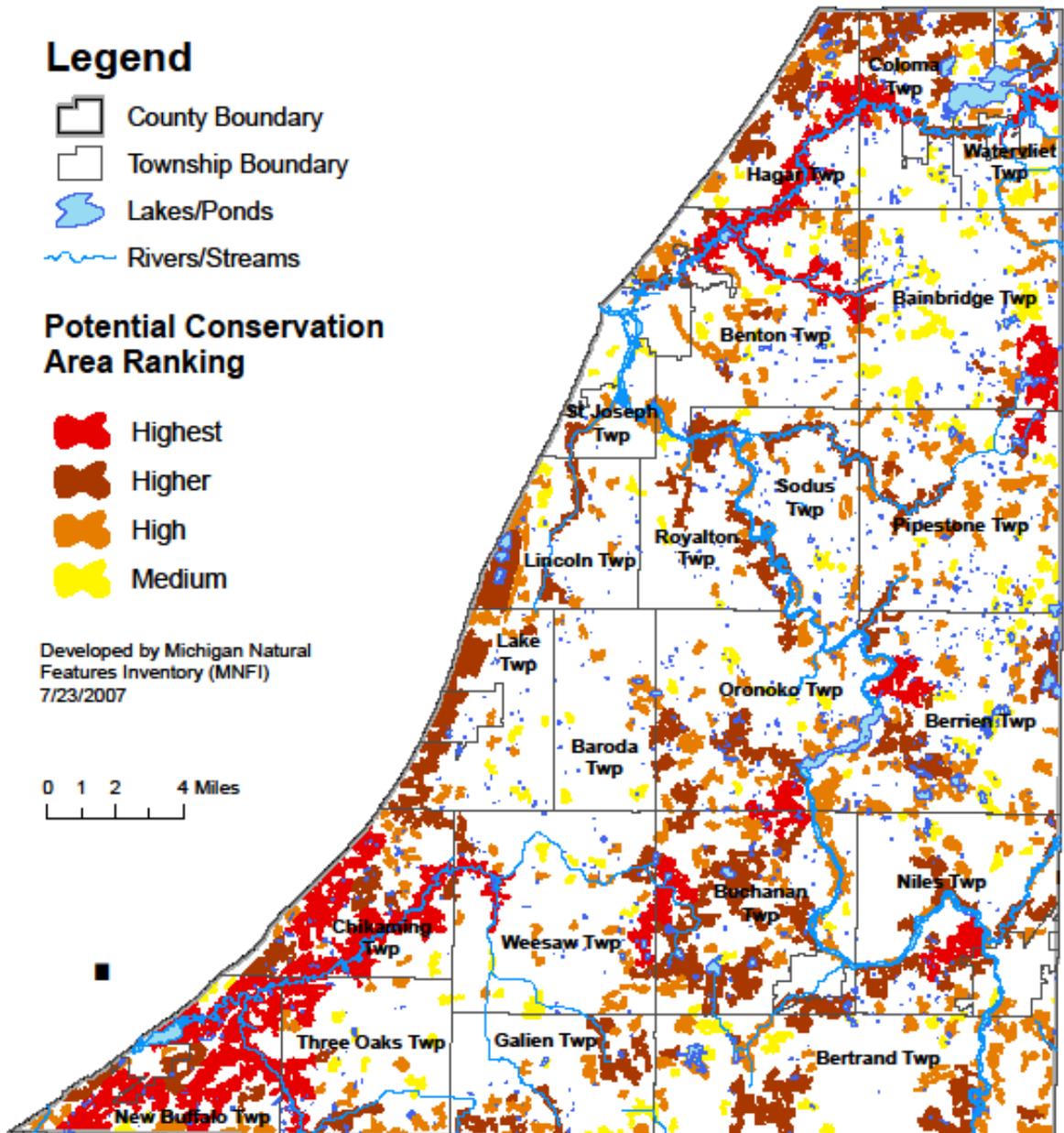
The township is also home to a variety of songbirds, owls, hawks and turkey vultures. Well-planned land management includes development policies that encourage substantial diversity and numbers of native plants and animals including game animals and endangered species.

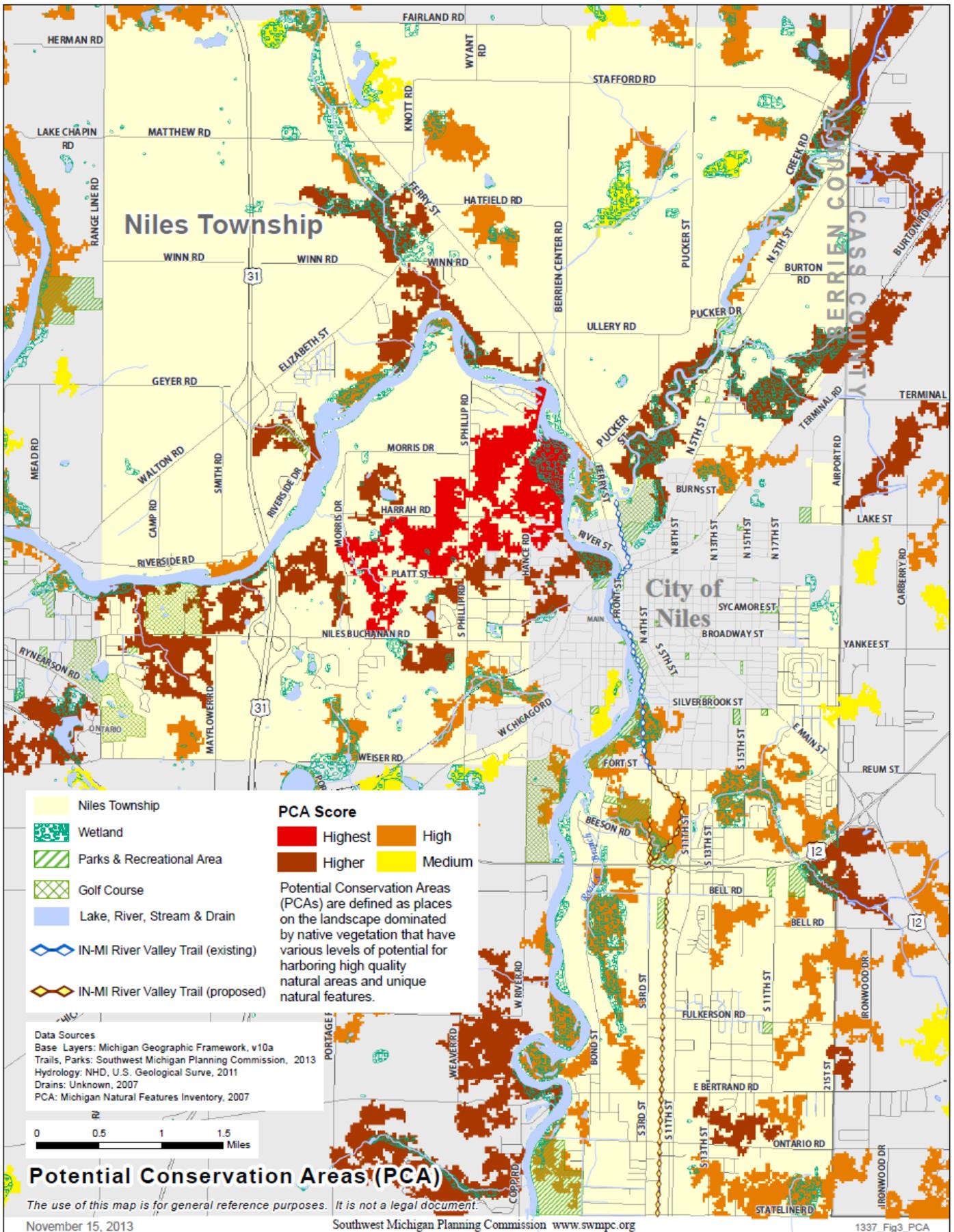
### **Potential Conservation Areas**

Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) are defined as places on the landscape dominated by native vegetation that have various levels of potential for harboring high quality natural areas and unique natural features. Scoring criteria used to prioritize sites include: total size, size of core area, length of stream corridor, landscape connectivity, and restorability of surrounding land, vegetation quality, and biological rarity score.

The map on this page shows ranked Potential Conservation Areas (PCAs) in Berrien County. The map on the following page shows PCAs in Niles Township along with wetlands, parks, recreation areas and protected lands. The map shows a sizable area in the township (northwest side of the City of Niles) given the highest ranking for a PCA. Several other areas with “high” and “higher” areas are scattered throughout the township. This is important information for planners to consider when determining park development projects and/or land acquisitions or to assist with greenway or green infrastructure planning mentioned in the previous section.

## Potential Conservation Areas Berrien County





**GOAL 3 - Respond to community characteristics and changing demographics by seeking to provide recreational opportunities for all with consideration of age and abilities.**

**Social Characteristics**

**General Population**

*The population in Niles Charter Township* declined between the 1980 and the 1990 reports but recorded an increase of over six percent from 2000 to 2010. The population changes shown in the table below indicate that the growth rate in the township is relatively healthy compared to the City of Niles and Berrien County. In addition to understanding the population trends and characteristics of the township, the population characteristics of Berrien County and the City of Niles are also important considerations for recreation planning. Appealing parks, trails, and programs have the potential to attract visitors from the township’s closest neighbors leading to tourism expenditures.

**Population Changes in years from 1980-2010<sup>5</sup>**

Community	1980	1990	2000	2010	%Change 2000-2010
Niles Charter Township	13,165	12,828	13,325	14,164	+6.29%
City of Niles	13,115	12,458	12,204	11,559	-5.28%
Berrien County	171,276	161,387	162,453	156,813	-3.47%
State of Michigan	9,262,078	9,295,297	9,938,444	9,883,640	-0.55%

**Gender Distribution**

*With a population that is almost equally distributed* between females and males (slightly more females) it is important to provide recreational facilities and programming designed to meet the different needs of both groups. Although most parks and facilities are described as appealing by both genders, programming and activity planning should also consider the different needs, desires, and abilities of both males and females.

**Gender Distribution and Median Age of Population in 2010<sup>1</sup>**

Community	Female	Male	Median Age(years)	% Age 65+
Niles Charter Township	51.7%	48.3%	41.9	17.3%
City of Niles	52.9%	47.1%	36.1	14.4%
Berrien County	51.3%	48.7%	41	16.3%
State of Michigan	50.9%	49.1%	38.9	13.8%

As the population ages in Niles Charter Township we need to invest in parks, trails, and recreation activities that are available for all types of residents including senior citizens. When providing recreation opportunities it is important to make sure that they can be accessible and accommodate the whole community comprised of residents of all ages.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

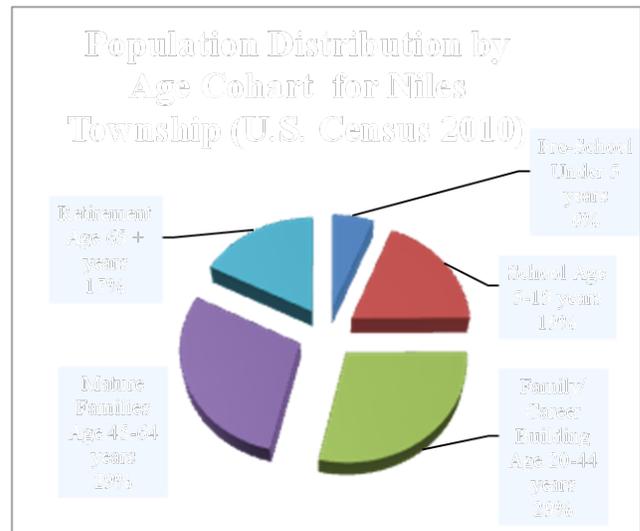
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Niles Charter Township has the high demographic of 17% of the population is 65 years and older. Niles Charter Township has increased its number of people 65 years of age or older since 2000.<sup>1</sup>

Studies have shown that physical activity can improve symptoms of depression, reduce risk factors for chronic diseases and for even some of the frailest older adults, physical activity can improve functioning and mobility. Whether or not an individual regularly engages in physical activity is based on more than their individual willingness or motivation. The ability to exercise greatly depends on access to recreational facilities and local conditions including the presence of sidewalks and lighting in individual neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup>

### **Distribution by Age Cohort**

*The different recreational needs for various segments of the population* are taken into consideration throughout the planning process. Although the cohorts shown in the chart below are not evenly distributed by number of years, demonstrating how segments of the population correspond with major life stages can help planners understand the importance of providing recreational facilities and programs for the entire community at every stage and for differing developmental abilities.<sup>7</sup>



*The Pre-School cohort* (under age 5 years) is generally supervised by a parent or caregiver while participating in recreational activities. Planning for the needs of this cohort should include planning for this secondary participant as well. In addition to playground equipment or activities suitable for small children, the experience will be enhanced if safe and comfortable observation areas are also provided. These areas could include tables, benches, drinking fountains, and bathrooms within line of sight of the activity.

Programs and activities that encourage interaction between children and adults are also highly desirable. Age appropriate facilities tend to be more important to the younger members of this group than programming; however, as the children become closer to school age, programming that will enhance and prepare them for organized and group activities also becomes highly desirable.

*The School-Age cohort* (age 5-19 years) usually has access to ample and diverse recreational opportunities through school programming and facilities during the school year and often through the same channels during the summer months as well. It is very important for schools and communities to coordinate activities to provide plenty of opportunities for supervised physical and social activities because the greatest physical growth and social development will occur during this stage of life.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Aging/ag\\_aging\\_survey\\_5\\_1\\_08.pdf](http://www.atlantaregional.com/File%20Library/Aging/ag_aging_survey_5_1_08.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

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Increasing rates of obesity amongst young people has inspired a boost in parental interest for physical activity programs. Participating in well-planned activities can help this cohort in many ways such as learning to:<sup>8</sup>

- Be healthy and control weight
- Build self confidence
- Appreciate and care for the outdoors
- Choose positive activities over negative ones
- Develop leadership skills
- Be a team player
- Contribute to the community
- Handle stress and tension
- Perform better in school
- Practice self-discipline

***The Family Forming/Career Building cohort*** often struggles to find time for personal leisure activities as the responsibilities of career and family tend to be at their highest levels between the ages of 20 and 44 years. After age 18, both men and women begin to favor indoor fitness activities over outdoor activities, a trend which appears to be related to the availability of more indoor “after-work-hours” opportunities than outdoor.<sup>9</sup> This group however, also tends to have a great desire to encourage their children’s participation in sports and other outdoor activities.

In the early stages of this cohort, young families find accessibility and affordability to be two important considerations when choosing recreational activities. The development of greenways, including biking and hiking trails, provides family-style, inexpensive and healthy opportunities for physical and social development.

***The Mature Family cohort*** corresponds closely with the baby boomer generation (age 50-65 years old in 2010) and will have increasing amounts of leisure time and be more active than the previous generation. As child supervision responsibilities decline and income levels peak this cohort seeks travel and other experiences that bring social and physical benefits. This group is also very likely to support neighborhood parks and activities but will also strongly encourage higher quality and more diverse opportunities.



*Bird Watching*

As the Mature Family moves into retirement age it is worth noting that consumers over the age of 50 years control almost half of the consumer spending in the United States, and consumers age 65 and older are the most affluent of any age group.<sup>10</sup>

***Members of the Retirement Age cohort*** seek creative self-expression as well as opportunities to develop and maintain self-confidence. Recreation adds an extra measure of enjoyment to the lives of aging persons enhancing both their physical and mental well-being.<sup>11</sup> Among the more favored

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.child.gov.ab.ca/acyi/parenting/daytoday/Families/page.cfm?pg=Recreation%20Benefits>

<sup>9</sup> *The Next Generation of Outdoor Participants* (2007) [www.outdoorindustryfoundation.org](http://www.outdoorindustryfoundation.org)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.ada.gov/gchungbeckerdisnev.htm>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.gbod.org/coa/articles.asp?act=reader&item\\_id=10311](http://www.gbod.org/coa/articles.asp?act=reader&item_id=10311)

outdoor activities, senior adults enjoy golf, fishing, walking, hiking, camping and gardening. Bird watching and traveling are also important.

As discussed further in the following section, this group tends to report more disabilities related to age; however, this group not only has the time to travel and participate in leisure activities, they also demonstrate an inclination to contribute to the community as volunteers in park support and auxiliary activities.

### Persons with Disabilities

*It is widely acknowledged that an important part of recreation* facility and program planning is to seek understanding and demonstrate consideration for the needs of every member of the community. Disabilities can include physical or mental limitations but are not confined to any particular age group. Many individuals experience biological and psychological changes before age 65 that might not be identified as disabilities but could be accommodated by improved accessibility. This is true in many different areas but is a special concern for outdoor and indoor recreational facilities. The following table demonstrates the number of residents in the Niles area reporting some type of disability.

**Disability Status of the Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population in 2000<sup>12</sup>**

Age Cohort	Niles Charter Township		City of Niles	
	Number Reported	Percent of Population	Number Reported	Percent of Population
Population 5 to 20 years	3,033		2,734	
<b>With a disability</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>10.8%</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>10.0%</b>
Population 21 to 64 years	7,389		6,478	
<b>With a disability</b>	<b>1,325</b>	<b>17.9%</b>	<b>1,551</b>	<b>23.9%</b>
Population 65 years and over	2,095		1,756	
<b>With a disability</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>38.9%</b>	<b>790</b>	<b>45.0%</b>

Even though disabilities are reported across every age group, those over age 65 years constitute the largest segment of the population with a disability. In Niles Charter Township this group is almost 39 percent of the population and in Niles City it is 45%.<sup>8</sup>

Far from not being interested in physical activity however, a 2005 study by the Open Doors Organization (ODO) found that more than 21 million adults with disabilities traveled at least once in the preceding two years. More than 50 percent of adults with disabilities stayed in hotels while traveling during this same two-year period. In a 2002 study, the ODO found that spending by disabled travelers exceeds \$13.6 billion annually.<sup>13</sup> Planning to accommodate those with disabilities could prove to be a wise economic decision as well as a socially responsible one.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ada.gov/gchungbeckerdisney.htm>

## Income and Poverty Levels

*The availability of easily-accessible recreational opportunities* is important for every segment of the population. However, this is especially true for those living below poverty levels whose options may be limited by transportation costs or inability to pay entrance or user fees. Although the percentage of families and individuals living below poverty level in Niles Charter Township is less than that of surrounding areas, it is still a significant amount and is a matter to be considered as recreation planning decisions are made.

**Percent of Population Below Poverty Level (2007-2011)** <sup>14</sup>

	Individuals
Niles Charter Township	9%
City of Niles	25.2%
Berrien County	13%
State of Michigan	15.7%

*The table below shows the growth in median household income* for the township and compares surrounding areas. Both Niles Charter Township has seen more growth than Berrien County and the State.

**Median Household Income** <sup>15</sup>

Community	1989	1999	2010	1999-2010 % Change
Niles Charter Township	\$28,745	\$37,794	\$43,035	13.86%
City of Niles	\$23,700	\$31,208	\$31,757	1.75%
Berrien County	\$27,245	\$38,567	\$42,625	10.52%
State of Michigan	\$31,020	\$44,667	\$48,432	8.42%

The tables below provide comparisons for median family income, per capita income, and demonstrate the income differences between males and females. Niles Charter Township has a higher median family and per capita income than the City of Niles but less than Berrien County and the State of Michigan. The gender discrepancy is fairly consistent over all levels of geography for full-time year round workers.

**Local Income Comparisons** <sup>16</sup>

	Median Family Income	Per Capita Income
Niles Charter Township	\$49,639	\$21,658
City of Niles	\$40,456	\$17,550
Berrien County	\$55,707	\$24,490
State of Michigan	\$60,895	\$25,482

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey

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**Income Comparison by Gender (2010)<sup>15</sup>**

(Full-time, year round employment)	Male	Female
Niles Charter Township	\$39,884	\$28,918
City of Niles	\$35,382	\$25,819
Berrien County	\$45,280	\$31,137
State of Michigan	\$50,208	\$36,157

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**GOAL 4 - Enhance partnerships with surrounding units of government for the purpose of collaborative planning.**

### **Regional Population**

*Although many areas in Niles Charter Township* are quite rural, there is a significant regional population nearby to be considered in the Township’s planning efforts. Highway 51 transects Niles Charter Township and the City of Niles (north/south) and becomes Highway 933 at the Indiana state line. This highway is a major retail/commercial corridor connecting the township and the city with the South Bend metropolitan area in St. Joseph County, Indiana. (See table below for population figures.)

**Population in South Bend Metropolitan Area<sup>17</sup>**

South Bend	101,168
Mishawaka	48,252
Granger	30,465
Total Population in St. Joseph County, Indiana	266,931

This combined region, often referred to as “Michiana”, experiences a large daily exchange of commuting workers and shoppers crossing the state line and is home to several colleges and universities including Notre Dame which creates an annual increase in transitional population. Not only does the metropolitan area provide potential users of recreation facilities in the township, there are also a number of recreational opportunities and venues for township residents to experience outside of the township’s boundaries.

The completion of proposed trails (recreational and non-motorized) connecting northern Indiana with Niles Charter Township and Niles City, could stimulate significant growth in tourism, reduce vehicle traffic, and provide outstanding opportunities for physical fitness and social experiences.

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<sup>17</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

## Economics/Business and Industry Employment

*The following table illustrates the categories of occupations and industry and the accompanying number of employees in each category as reported by the township's residents.*

### Niles Charter Township Employed Civilian Population<sup>18</sup>

Work force by Occupation	# of Employed	% of Total
<b>Employed Civilian Population 16 years and over</b>	<b>6,200</b>	
Sales and office occupations	1,627	26.2%
Management, business, science, and art occupations	1,566	25.3%
Production, transportation, and material moving occupations	1,524	24.6%
Service occupations	1,059	17.1%
Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	424	6.8%
<b>Industry</b>		
Manufacturing	1,456	23.50%
Educational, health and social services	1,267	18.90%
Retail trade	804	13.00%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	522	8.40%
Other services (except public administration)	467	7.50%
Professional, scientific, administrative, management/waste management services	444	7.20%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	415	6.70%
Construction	258	4.20%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental and leasing	177	2.90%
Wholesale trade	177	2.90%
Public administration	90	1.50%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	88	1.40%
Information	79	1.30%

Manufacturing is the predominate industry but overall the work force (by occupation) has become quite diversified over the last few years. Although the regional economy has experienced a significant downturn in the last decade, the diversification of industry may contribute to stabilizing local income and employment rates. With current trends of increased transportation costs, residents will seek recreation venues closer to home and the radius of population attracted to township parks may also be positively affected. These are opportunities to consider when choosing park and program projects.

There are community benefits of parks and trails. Parks and trails build communities by providing a place for people to gather, socialize and be around other people. Today, we realize that parks are more than recreation and visual assets to communities; they are valuable contributors to larger community policy objectives, such as public health, youth development, job opportunities, social and cultural exchange, and community building.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.citizing.org/data/projects/parkslegacy/Benefits072910\\_VI.pdf](http://www.citizing.org/data/projects/parkslegacy/Benefits072910_VI.pdf)

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## School Facilities

The combination of recreation and education provides a strong foundation for youth to develop lifelong habits promoting physical health and well-being. Collaboration between the schools and the township could provide many opportunities to develop the total person, strengthen families, and help build a sense of community. Recreational pursuits can promote positive lifestyle choices, resilient youth, safe and productive environments, and enhanced quality of life. Niles Charter Township is served by the following school districts:

Buchanan Community Schools  
Buchanan, Michigan

Niles Community Schools  
Niles, Michigan

Brandywine Public Schools  
Niles, Michigan

Niles Community Schools serves the northern portion of the Township and has an enrollment of approximately 3,886 students.<sup>20</sup> Brandywine Public Schools serves the southern part of the township and can accommodate approximately 1,428 students.<sup>21</sup> Buchanan Community Schools covers the extreme western portion of the township and has approximately 1,617 students.<sup>22</sup>



In addition to these public schools, there are several private/parochial schools in the area whose students often participate in recreational activities in the township. Within a 1-hour drive there are also the following institutions of higher education with student populations that could be interested in the township parks and other recreational venues and opportunities. St. Mary's, Holy Cross, Bethel, Ivy Tech

### Michigan Colleges

Lake Michigan College, Bertrand Crossing, Niles & Benton Harbor  
Southwestern Michigan College, Niles & Dowagiac  
Andrews University, Berrien Springs  
Western Michigan University Branch Campus, Benton Harbor  
Siena Heights University, Benton Harbor

### Indiana Colleges

Indiana University, South Bend  
Purdue at IUSB, South Bend  
University of Notre Dame, South Bend  
St. Mary's, South Bend  
Holy Cross, South Bend  
Ivy Tech Community College, South Bend  
Bethel College, Mishawaka  
Trine University, Mishawaka

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<sup>20</sup> Niles Community Schools Enrolment 2012-2013 academic year

<sup>21</sup> Brandywine Public Schools Enrolment 2012-2013 academic year

<sup>22</sup> Buchanan Community Schools Enrolment 2012-2013 academic year

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**GOAL 5 – *Establish stable and secure funding for recreational development and maintenance.***

**Investing In Parks, Recreation and Open Space**

From promoting job growth to offering inexpensive opportunities to have fun, be physically active and spend time with family, outdoor recreation contributes both directly and indirectly to the local and regional economy and its citizen’s financial well-being. Outdoor recreation areas attract local and non-local visitors who stimulate the local economy, contribute to local and state taxes and create jobs. Opportunities for outdoor recreation can attract new business and talented workers and help keep established businesses competitive.<sup>23</sup>

Parks, recreation, and open space amenities are among the most important components of quality of life. Furthermore, providing and promoting quality outdoor recreational opportunities can be a more sustainable way of attracting and retaining businesses.

*For any action plan to be considered viable*, a community must establish a system to achieve stable and secure funding. Many sources are available including state and federal grants, secured loans, donations from public and/or private entities, user fees, and municipal participation. There are also various methods and techniques that can be utilized to secure funding for projects and capital improvements.

One technique is to consider needs as separate and specific funding requests. Instead of looking for a few large sources to completely fund parks and recreation projects, each aspect can be singled out and addressed individually. This method broadens the base of funding opportunities as there are many sources offering small amounts for specific projects or amenities.

Identifying existing assets with potential income is another technique. Recreation is a broad-based term that can include art, history, culture, competitive physical venues, social events, education, preservation efforts, and leisure time. Each of these recreation types has the potential to be income producing with local and/or tourism participation.

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.citizing.org/data/projects/parkslegacy/Benefits072910\\_V1.pdf](http://www.citizing.org/data/projects/parkslegacy/Benefits072910_V1.pdf)

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**GOAL 6 - *Create and implement a marketing campaign, including signage, to promote Niles area as a recreation destination for residents and visitors.***

**Tourism**

*The proximity of the township to a large population base* (Michiana area) along with its exceptional natural resources and committed leaders provides an excellent foundation to establish the community parks and recreation facilities as a source of tourism-related income. As previously mentioned, the potential for tourist-related funding and economic stability is profoundly connected with recreation and natural resources.

The social and health benefits of trails, green infrastructure, and scenic vistas are generally recognized and often mentioned as important ingredients contributing to a high quality of life. These same ingredients however, are not always recognized as producing the significant economic benefit that they actually do contribute. Rural townships especially are beginning to realize the importance of connecting recreation to tourism to achieve economic revitalization.

The primary tourist attraction to an area may be the organized sport recreational activity, historic/cultural site, nature center, art exhibit, or trail but the benefits of being the secondary attraction are also positive for local restaurants, hotels, gas stations, grocery stores, and gift shops. The success of these entities in turn promotes a healthy and vibrant atmosphere for residents and visitors alike.

“Accumulating evidence indicates that open space conservation is not an expense but an investment that produces important economic benefits.” ~ *Will Rogers, President, The Trust for Public Land*

After a thorough inventory of existing assets and a comprehensive action plan are completed, creating and establishing a marketing campaign to promote the Niles area as a recreation destination for residents and visitors is a very important step toward financial stability.

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## ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

### **Plan Jurisdiction**

This Community Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plan is a five-year guide for the development and improvement of the parks and recreational facilities and programs for Niles Charter Township. Whenever possible, regional coordination and cooperation is sought with neighboring municipalities including the City of Niles, Bertrand Township, Buchanan Township, the City of Buchanan, Berrien Township, Cass County, St. Joseph County, Indiana and other relevant entities and organizations in the region.

### **Parks Operations and Management**

**Township Supervisor** – The Township Supervisor is the chief administrator for the Township and is responsible for the daily management of Township business. The Parks Superintendent reports directly to the Supervisor.

**Township Clerk** – The Township Clerk provides general assistance to the Parks Commission.

**Township Board** – The Township Board allocates the funds necessary to operate and maintain the Township parks; however, the Parks Commission does not require Township Board authorization for the operations of the parks. The Township Board is also the appointed **Recreational Board** which is responsible for the directing the work of the park superintendent, determining the park maintenance budget and overseeing recreation league activities.

**Parks Commission** – The Parks Commission is comprised of five members elected to four-year terms and a trustee who acts as liaison to the township board. The Commission develops short and long term plans for parks and recreation and assists with implementing parks and recreation projects. The Commission advises the township board on directing funds to be used either as matching dollars for grants or capital improvements projects.

**Parks Superintendent** – The superintendent manages the parks on a daily basis and reports to the Township Supervisor. The superintendent is responsible for all maintenance activities as well as supervision of seasonal employees and volunteers.

**Volunteers and Supporting Organizations** - The Parks Commission has been very successful in stretching its budget through in-kind donations of labor and materials from various sources. Community service groups have also donated dollars earmarked for specific park improvements. The local Eagle Scouts have been involved in several projects. The township's cooperative efforts are ably demonstrated by its relationships with other area recreational providers such as the school. Independence Park is owned by the township, but is leased to Brandywine Schools under a 99-year agreement. Several organizations use the ball fields at S. Fireman's Park as well. The development of the proposed trail has involved meetings with surrounding communities and was the catalyst for a joint project for recreation mapping with the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.

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## Membership of the Township Board and the Parks Commission

### Niles Charter Township Board

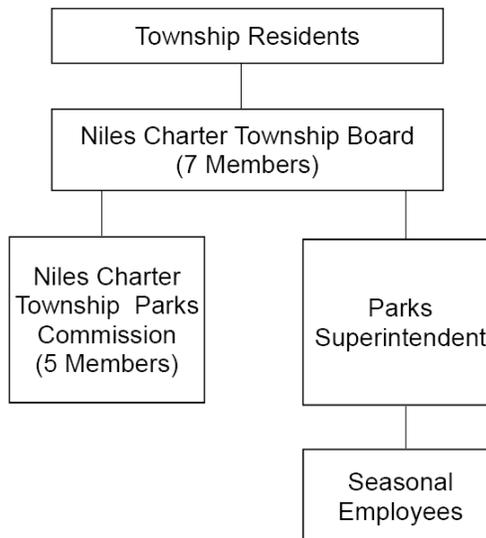
James Stover, Supervisor  
Terry Eull, Clerk  
James H. Ringler, Treasurer  
Richard Cooper, Trustee  
Herschel Hoese, Trustee  
Richard Noble, Trustee  
Christine Vella, Trustee

### Niles Charter Township Parks Commission

Harry Thibault, Chair  
Darwin Finley, Treasurer  
John Mishler, Secretary  
Aaron Mills  
Wayne Perkins  
Christine Vella, Township Board Liaison  
  
Joe Hulett, Park Superintendent

## Organizational Chart

### Niles Charter Township Organizational Chart



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**Budget**

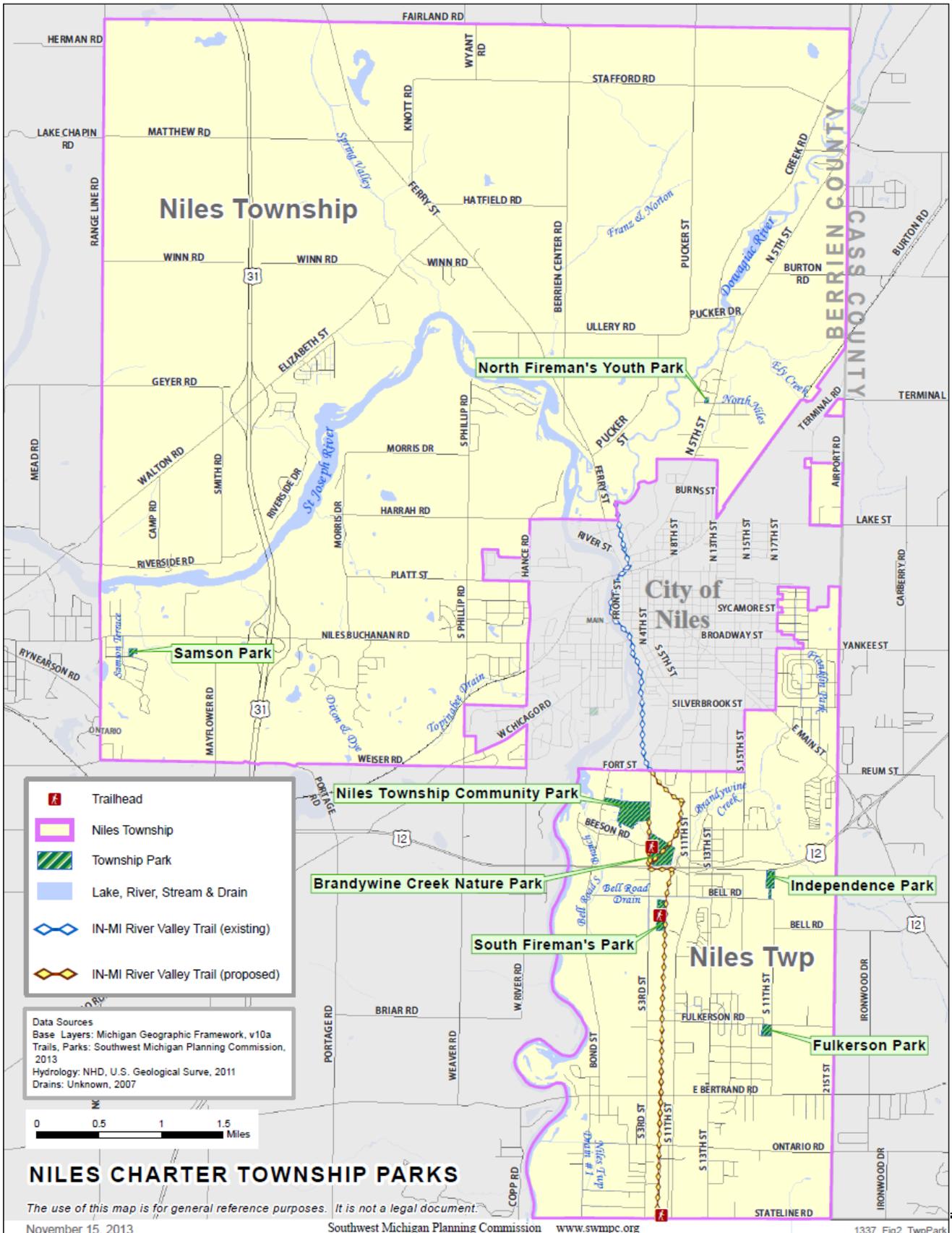
The parks budget is determined by the Township Board and is allocated from the Township's general fund. A request is submitted to the Township Board by the Parks Superintendent and the Park Commission. The 2013 Park Commission budget was \$5,000. The Superintendent's operations and maintenance budget was \$84,153 in 2013.

## **RECREATION INVENTORY**

*Niles Charter Township owns and/or operates eight park facilities* constituting a total of about 100 acres. The parks provide a wide range of opportunities, from small neighborhood parks to active use community parks as well as quasi-regional parks such as Community Park, where passive pursuits and nature appreciation can be enjoyed. There are no entry or user fees for any of the park facilities other than the softball diamonds used for league tournaments and security deposits to reserve the pavilions.

Included in this section is a detailed inventory and barrier-free assessment of the township parks followed by a brief description of the parks in the City of Niles, historic/cultural sites, and a variety of regional recreational opportunities. Members of the steering committee performed site visits to evaluate and update park amenities and overall condition. Members also completed a standardized form assessing the barrier-free status of the parks and assigned rankings based on standard criteria. The following map shows the location of the parks that are owned or operated by Niles Charter Township.

Map of Parks and Recreation Areas owned or operated by Niles Charter Township



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## Parks Inventory, Evaluation, and Barrier-Free Assessment

Steering Committee members performed site visits to assess the overall condition of the parks, document inventory, and determine barrier-free accessibility. The purpose of ranking accessibility is to provide an accurate description of current conditions that will guide decisions for projects to improve accessibility for all residents.

### Barrier-Free Assessment Rank Description

- 1 = none of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 2 = some of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 3 = most of the facilities/park areas meet accessibility guidelines
- 4 = the entire park meets accessibility guidelines
- 5 = the entire park was developed/renovated using the principles of universal design

#### Community Park

This 38.4 acre community park is located on Bond Street between Beeson and Fort Streets. Amenities include baseball/softball fields, playground equipment, community building, horseshoe pits, picnic tables and grills, hiking trails along Brandywine Creek, trout fishing. Playground equipment includes: 2 Seesaws, 2 Spring Riders, 1 Sliding Board, 2 Swing Sets (1-two swing and 1-six swing), 1 Miracle Play Set



#### Recent Improvements include

expanding the park with the purchase of an adjacent 10 acres, extending the trail to the new 10-acre property, improving barrier-free access with a ramp added to the outdoor seating area of the shelter and painting of the shelter.

#### Barrier-Free Assessment: 2

Parking is an open gravel area but with no specifically designated spaces. Level brick path approximately 100' from parking to shelter with a ramp from the shelter to the outdoor seating area. The shelter is one level. There is no accessibility to walking paths, playground equipment, ballparks, horseshoes, or picnic areas.

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**N. Fireman's Park**

This 1.0 acre mini-park is located along M-51 and provides playground equipment, two in-ground benches, a picnic shelter with one picnic table, and 2 grills. Playground equipment includes: 2 Swing Sets (1 with seven regular swings and 1 toddler swing), 1 Miracle Play Set, 1 Small Spring Rider,

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 1**

There are no bathrooms or water fountains requiring accessibility upgrades. There is off-street parking and no specific barriers such as stairs to prevent access to this mini-park; however, there are no pathways other than open grass.

**S. Fireman's Youth Park**

This 13.1-acre neighborhood park is adjacent to the Township Hall at 320 Bell Road. Amenities include restrooms, 2 tennis courts which also have court lines for Pickle Ball, high quality Little League and softball fields, 1 picnic shelter, 8 picnic tables, and 3 grills. Playground equipment includes: 1 Slide Track Glider, 1 Merry-Go-Round, 1 Slide, 1 Bench Swing, 1 Twin Rider (alternative to seesaw), 1 Small Spring Rider, 1 Arch Swing Set (4 regular seats and 2 toddler seats), a handicap swing, 1 Set of Monkey Bars. In 2014, this park will include a designated access/trailhead for the Indian-Michigan River Valley Trail which will connect Niles to Mishawaka, IN.

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 2**

Entrance route is stable and wide enough to allow access. The restrooms do not meet accessibility guidelines.

**Fulkerson Park**

This 4.2 acre neighborhood park is located at the corner of Fulkerson Road and S. 17<sup>th</sup> Street. Amenities include tennis courts, basketball courts, a Little League ballfield, play structures, picnic tables and grills.

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 1**

The parking area is open and level but there are no designated spaces. There are no paved pathways but there are no stairs.



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**Samson Park**

This 3.5 acre neighborhood park is located on Knight Road east of Holmes Drive. Amenities include playground equipment (Tot Lot), a picnic shelter/pavilion, four benches, and a sledding hill. Picnic facilities include 2 picnic tables and 1 grill. Playground equipment includes: 1 2-Bay Swing Set (2 tot swings and 2 regular swings), 1 12 ft. Overhead Glider, 1 Miracle Play Set, 1 Half Basketball Court.

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 1**

There are no steps or narrow passages, but there are no paved pathways. Parking area is open with no designated spaces.

**Brandywine Creek Nature Park**

This park is located at the corner of S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and U.S. 12 is owned by the State of Michigan and leased by Niles Charter Township. It has a parking lot, 2 benches and 1 garbage can. Currently the site provides rustic trails and fishing access site for Brandywine Creek, a coldwater trout stream providing urban trout fishing opportunities.<sup>24</sup> In 2014, the parking lot will be improved to serve as a trailhead for the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail. The new parking lot will include a handicap parking space.

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 1**

There are no restrooms or water fountains. Pathways are open but not paved; there are steps between the parking and pathways.

**Independence Park**

The Township leases this 6-acre school park to the Brandywine School District. The park is located off Bell Road and is adjacent to Brandywine High School. The park includes a competitive high school softball field and batting cages, and a practice football field.

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 2**

There are no specific barriers; however not all facilities are designed to be barrier-free.

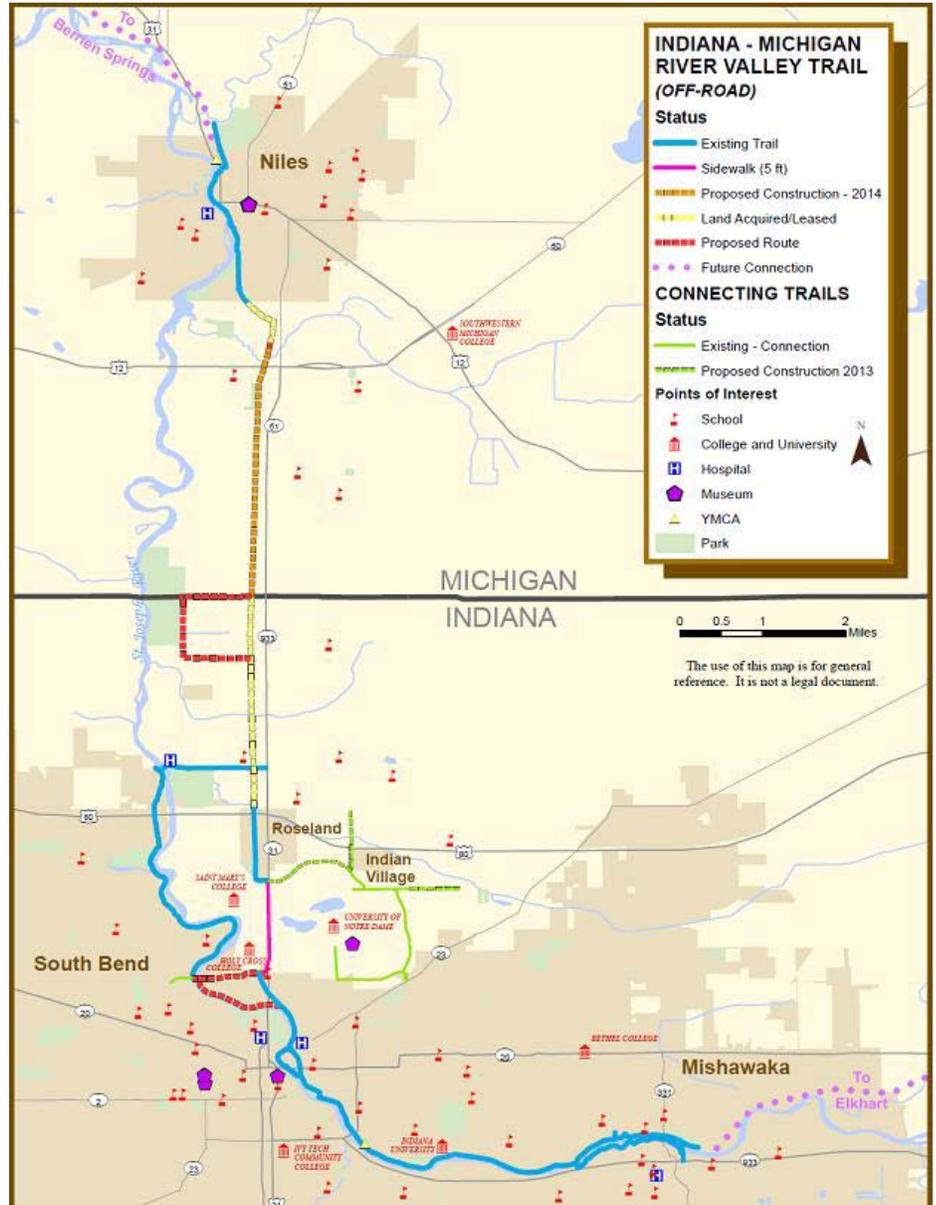
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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10371\\_10402-142850--00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10371_10402-142850--00.html)

### Indiana – Michigan River Valley Trail

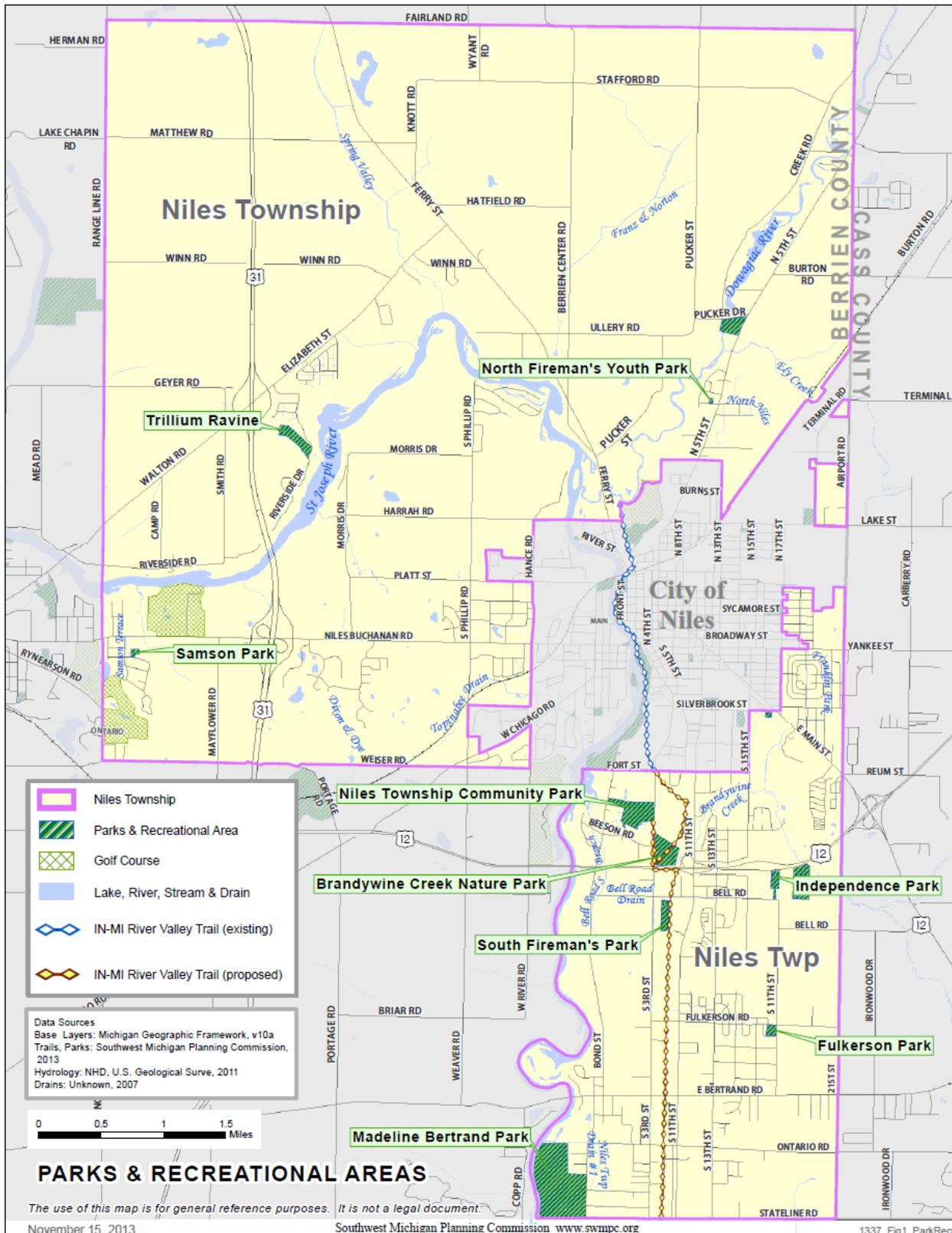
The Township has secured funding from MDNR and MDOT to construct 3.3 miles of non-motorized trail (for walking and biking) from Brandywine Nature Preserve to the Indiana state line in 2014. There will be trailheads located at the state line, S. Fireman’s Park and Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve. Niles Township is currently planning the next phase to connect with the City of Niles’ trail at Fort Street north of Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve. When completed, the trail will be 34 miles connecting the City of Niles to Mishawaka, IN.

**Barrier-Free Assessment: 4**  
This new trail was designed with accessibility in mind and meets all current standards.



## Other Township and Nearby Recreational Opportunities

This map shows other recreational properties within Niles Township. Following is a description of several recreational offerings in the area.



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## Cultural/Historic Buildings and Property

Niles Charter Township recognizes the importance of the preservation of cultural and historic buildings and properties for educational purposes as well as the potential for tourism. The following are just a few examples of historic sites located near the township.

- **Fort Saint Joseph** - Built by the French in 1691 on the lower St. Joseph River, the fort was located where one branch of the Old Sauk Trail, a major east-west Native American trail, crosses the river. The fort was a significant stronghold of the fur trade at the southern end of Lake Michigan. The Fort is located on what is now the south side of Niles, Michigan.
- **Beeson Mansion** - This Greek Revival mansion was built in 1847. There is a crypt on the grounds that is allegedly “haunted”.
- **Old Norfolk Railway** – This abandoned track is a potential trail route for the proposed railway.
- **Original St. Mary's campus and cemetery** are on Bond Street just north of Bertrand Rd.
- **The Johnson Cemetery** is located on US-31 in Niles Township



*Beeson Mausoleum*

## Regional Parks

The following regional parks are merely representative of the many diverse public parks in the area surrounding Niles Charter Township. These parks offer a wide variety of year-round activities and greatly enhance the quality of life for residents in the township.

- **Madeline Bertrand County Park** - 121 acres with picnic shelters, hiking trails, X-C skiing, disc golf course.
- **Love Creek** – 150 acres of natural area with a Fields & Forest Mountain Bike Trail, six miles of hiking trails, a mature Beech-Maple forest with spectacular spring wildflowers, cross-country skiing opportunities with groomed and lighted trails and ski rentals available.
- **Galien River County Park Preserve** - This undeveloped property includes a mix of upland and wetland habitats along the Galien River.
- **Silver Beach County Park** - Located in St. Joseph at the mouth of the St. Joseph River, this park features a clean, wide beach on Lake Michigan and public access to the South Pier.
- **Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Center** – Located in Buchanan Township, Fernwood features a 55-acre Nature Preserve and numerous other beautiful gardens surrounded by forest tucked into a landscape of 105 acres of cultivated and natural areas along the scenic St. Joseph River valley.

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## City of Niles Parks

Due to the proximity and close working relationship between the two municipalities, the parks in the City of Niles are an important aspect of the overall recreational opportunities available for the Township.

- **Losensky Park** – This park is owned by City of Niles, but located in Niles Township. The 13-acre park is located on Pucker Street between Ullery and N. Fifth (M-51) with frontage along the Dowagiac River (with an island). Amenities include three benches and picnic facilities (3 picnic tables, 3 grills, and 1 trash can). This location is extremely popular for fishing. The City of Niles owns the retired and aging dam and is seeking funding to remove it and restore the Dowagiac River. Fishing opportunities could be improved and launching facilities for canoes/kayaks/drift boats could be added in coordination with this project. Since many people sled on the hill on the eastern edge of the property along M-51, improvements could be made to better accommodate this use. Losensky Park is also ideally located to be a destination spot or trailhead for a trail connecting with Plym Park in the City of Niles and connecting to the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail.
- **Birkholm Park** - provides a playground and picnic facilities.
- **Plym Park** – provides playground, picnic shelter, tennis courts, soccer, softball, basketball. This park is also integral to the trail system being developed to connect Township, City, and northern Indiana parks.
- **Eagle Street Park** – provides playground equipment.
- **Tot Park** – provides playground equipment.
- **Eastside Park** – provides a play structure, picnic shelter, softball/baseball fields, and basketball courts.
- **Saathoff Park** – provides a playground, soccer field, and basketball courts.
- **Clevenger Park** – provides a play structure and picnic shelter.
- **Riverfront Park** – offers a boat ramp, play structure, skate park, amphitheater, walking trails, picnic facilities and shelters.
- **Island Park** – has a walk bridge to island, picnic shelter, and playground equipment.
- **Marmont Street Boat Ramp** – public access to the at the St. Joseph River.
- **Southside Park** – has a play structure, baseball, basketball, picnic shelter.
- **Troost Park** – provides a playground area.
- **Thomas Stadium** – provides a baseball stadium.
- **FOP Park** – provides little league fields, play equipment and picnic area.
- **Cable Street Park** - provides soccer field and play equipment.

## Water Activity - Public Access Sites

In addition to Lake Michigan, there are several rivers, creeks, and inland lakes with public access for swimming, fishing, and boating. The Dowagiac River, McCoy Creek and Brandywine Creek are designated trout streams. The following are just a few of the most popular:

- St. Joseph River
- Brandywine Creek
- Barron Lake
- Dowagiac River
- McCoy Creek

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### Area Campgrounds

- **Fuller's Clear Lake Resort**, Buchanan – swimming, canoe rental, playground
- **Nub Lake Campground**, Niles – camping, swimming
- **Spaulding Lake Campground**, Niles – camping, swimming
- **Three Braves Campground**, Buchanan – swimming, fishing, small boat rentals
- **Bear Cave**, Buchanan – swimming, boating, RV camping

### Area Golf Courses

The following is a small sample of the private and public golf courses and country clubs available in Berrien County.

- Berrien Hills Country Club
- Brookwood Golf Course
- Grand Beach Golf Course
- Indian Lake Hills Golf Course - North/East Course
- Lake Michigan Hills Golf Club
- New Paw Paw Lake Golf Club
- Orchard Hills Country Club
- Pipestone Creek Golf Course
- Point O'Woods Country Club
- Whittaker Woods Golf Course
- Blossom Trails
- Dunes Club, The
- Indian Lake Hills Golf Course - East/West Course
- Indian Lake Hills Golf Course - West/North Course
- Lost Dunes Golf Club
- Oaks Golf Club, The
- Pebblewood Country Club
- Plym Park Municipal Golf Course
- Signal Point Club

### Other Opportunities

**Redbud Track and Trail** – offers a nationally recognized motocross trail for amateur and professional riders of all age categories. There is a campground for participants on site.

### Northern Indiana Parks Affiliated with Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail

**St. Patrick's County Park** – a large county owned park south of Madeline Bertrand (Berrien County Park)

**Riverside Park** – a park along the River Walk in South Bend

**Robert C. Beutter Park** – a riverfront park close to the Riverwalk in Mishawaka

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## Status Report of Previous DNR Grant-Assisted Projects

Project/Grant Number: 26-00352  
Project Title: Niles Community Center  
Project Year: 1972  
Project Description: Acquisition of three acres and installation service drive and park amenities  
Project Status: Closed

Project/Grant Number: BF90-180  
Project Name: Township Parks Improvement  
Project Year: 1990  
Project Description: Park amenities for Fulkerson and S. Firemen parks  
Project Status: Closed

Project/Grant Number: 09-082  
Project Name: Niles Community Park Expansion  
Project Year: 2009  
Project Description: Acquisition of 10.9 acres to expand Community Park  
Project Status: Closed

Project/Grant Number: TF12-111  
Project Name: IN-MI River Valley Trail Development  
Project Year: 2012  
Project Description: Construct 3.3 miles of non-motorized trail from Indiana state line to Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve  
Project Status: Open

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## DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AND PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

*The Niles Charter Township's Parks Commission partnered with* the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC), the regional planning agency for Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties throughout the planning process. The process included several meetings of the Township Parks Commission to review and update the mission statement, goals and action plan. A public input workshop was held on November 11, 2013 to gather public input on the mission statement, goals and action plan. The Parks Commission members also solicited input from several residents with a questionnaire. The Commission specifically targeted residents in a group home facility near N. Fireman's Park to ensure that these residents who utilize this park often had an opportunity for input. (See results on next page.) The Parks Commission made changes to the plan based on comments received at the workshop and from the solicited input. In addition, a survey was conducted in March 2008 in conjunction with the development of the previous recreation plan for the Township. The Parks Commission felt the results of the survey were still relevant and were also included in this plan as part of documenting public input. Throughout the planning process, residents, business leaders, and municipal representatives provided input and pledged support of the goals and action plan.

The Township Parks Commission recommended the draft plan for public comment at their January 13, 2014 meeting. A public comment period was advertised and held from January 17 to February 15, 2014 to allow for additional public comment. A public hearing was advertised and held on February 18, 2014 at a regular meeting of the Township Board. The Township Parks Commission recommended adoption of the plan at their \_\_\_\_\_ meeting. The Township Board adopted the plan by resolution at their \_\_\_\_\_ meeting.

Public participation was encouraged through several methods including:

- Holding Parks Commission meetings
- Hosting a public input workshop
- Soliciting public input through questionnaires
- Offering a public review and comment period culminating with a public hearing

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## 2013 Public Input and 2008 Survey Results

The Parks Commission solicited comments for the plan from several residents during November and December 2013. Below is a summary of those comments from three questions. The numbers in parenthesis indicates if multiple people had similar comments.

### **What do you like about the Township parks?**

The parks are natural

Free to use (2)

The kids have something to do; keep them off the street (3)

Fulkerson Park is well kept and the basketball court is well used

Well maintained (2)

People can have family gatherings (birthdays, graduations, reunions, etc) (2)

Ball fields

Trails

Natural scenery and paths

Quiet, peaceful nature trails (2)

Clean water (2)

Brandywine Creek Nature Park (natural, trees, creek) (2)

Like that Fireman's North Park is next door for developmentally disabled home (2)

### **What do you NOT like about the Township parks?**

Things are falling apart

Destruction (2)

Not enough publicity

4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks

Sometimes basketball is played too late at Fulkerson

It is bad that they want to close Losensky Park, a lot of people use it

There is drinking, drugs and sex that take place, especially on the trails

Lack of winter fun

Big fallen down tree at Brandywine makes it difficult to access bench by stream (4)

Overgrown paths at Brandywine (2)

No portable bathroom or water at N. Fireman's Park (2)

### **What do you want to see in the future?**

More toys for kids

More trails for biking and walking; Walking and bike paths on all Township roads (2)

Have an inside activity/parks (2)

An ice skating rink (5)

Neighborhood parks

Updates at Community Park

Tennis courts

New cooking grills

A few more pavilions

Picnic tables at Losensky Park and take better care of it

Parks need to be patrolled by police on regular daily schedule. (2)

More winter fun

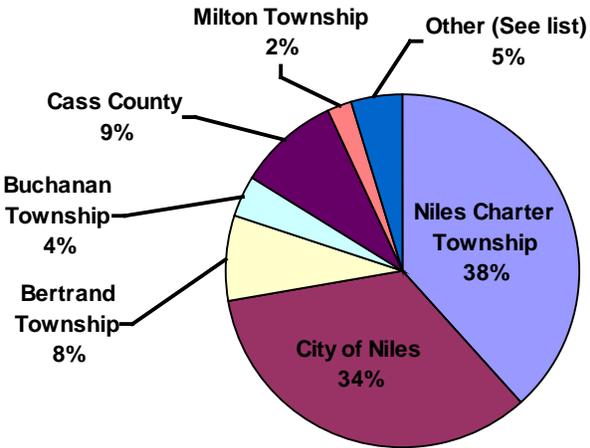
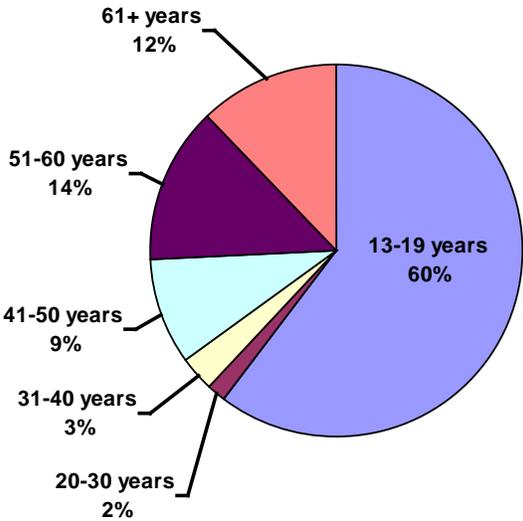
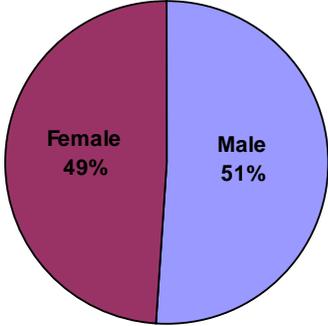
Remove fallen tree at Brandywine, clear paths while maintaining natural parts of the park (3)

Consistent manicuring of trails (Brandywine) (2)

N. Fireman's Park – accessible bathroom, enlarge pavilion, plant trees for shade, fence around park, new picnic tables, flowers, walking path around park

**March 2008 Survey**

There were 132 respondents to the public interest survey conducted as part of the planning process. The following charts and tables denote the results of that survey.

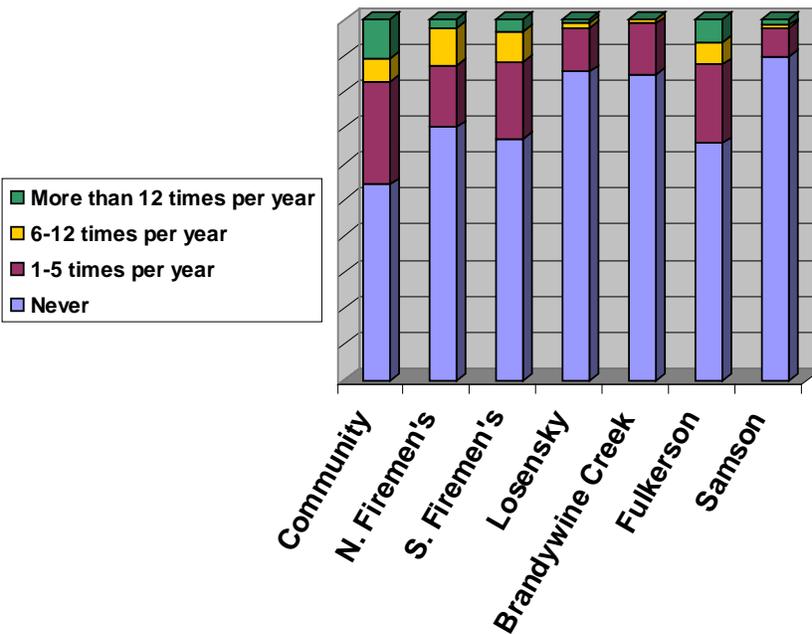
<p><b>Question 1</b> Where is your primary residence?</p> <p>The survey was made available to residents of Niles Charter Township as well as surrounding communities to gather information about resident <i>and</i> regional usage. As expected, the largest percentage of respondents came from the township. Residents from the City of Niles were a close second.</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Location</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Niles Charter Township</td> <td>38%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>City of Niles</td> <td>34%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cass County</td> <td>9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bertrand Township</td> <td>8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Buchanan Township</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Milton Township</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other (See list)</td> <td>5%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Location	Percentage	Niles Charter Township	38%	City of Niles	34%	Cass County	9%	Bertrand Township	8%	Buchanan Township	4%	Milton Township	2%	Other (See list)	5%
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<p><b>Question 2</b> Please indicate your age group.</p> <p>Although the survey was well-advertised and available through many channels, the majority of responses were collected from students in the Niles/Brandywine school district. This is reflected by the number of respondents in the 13-19 year old age group. Recognizing the youth as the future custodians and supporters of the parks, it is wise to cultivate their interest at an early age instilling a sense of pride and ownership of the facilities.</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age Group</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>13-19 years</td> <td>60%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>51-60 years</td> <td>14%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>61+ years</td> <td>12%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>41-50 years</td> <td>9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>31-40 years</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20-30 years</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age Group	Percentage	13-19 years	60%	51-60 years	14%	61+ years	12%	41-50 years	9%	31-40 years	3%	20-30 years	2%		
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<p><b>Question 3</b> Please indicate your gender.</p> <p>The respondents were almost evenly distributed by gender.</p>	 <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Gender</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>51%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>49%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Gender	Percentage	Male	51%	Female	49%										
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**Question 4**

How often do you use the following Niles Charter Township Parks and recreational facilities?

Community Park is visited more often than any of the other parks in the township. This park has an active league calendar and is very well known. During the Visioning Session and the Steering Committee meetings, comments were often made that many of the parks are not known well by the general public. One reason given for this is the lack of signage.

**Frequency of Township Park Visits**

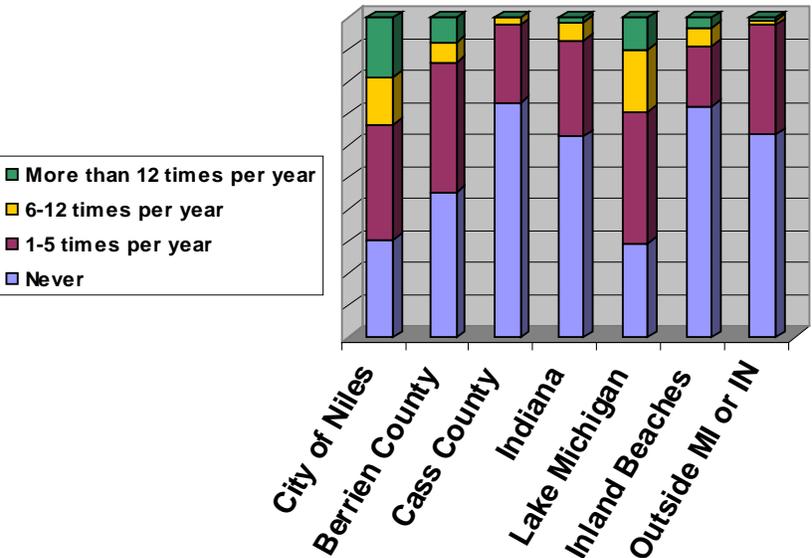


**Question 5**

How often do you use the following regional parks and recreational facilities?

Parks in the nearby City of Niles are visited more often than other regional parks or facilities. Lake Michigan is also visited more often than local inland beaches.

**Frequency of Regional Park Visits**



<p><b>Question 6</b> Which of the following are your favorite activities? <i>(Please select only 6)</i></p> <p>The top 6 answers to this question include two trail-related and two water-related activities.</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><b>Favorite Activities</b></th> <th><b># Participating</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td><b>Swimming</b></td><td><b>73</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Bike riding</b></td><td><b>73</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Walking/etc</b></td><td><b>69</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Relaxing</b></td><td><b>68</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Camping</b></td><td><b>57</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Fishing</b></td><td><b>45</b></td></tr> <tr><td>Organized sports</td><td>42</td></tr> <tr><td>Hiking</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Sledding</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Dog walking</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Nature watching</td><td>30</td></tr> <tr><td>Picnicking</td><td>26</td></tr> <tr><td>Snowmobiling</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td>Canoe/Kayaking</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>Motor boating</td><td>23</td></tr> <tr><td>Skateboarding</td><td>22</td></tr> <tr><td>Horseback riding</td><td>17</td></tr> <tr><td>Frisbee Golf</td><td>11</td></tr> <tr><td>Cross Country Ski</td><td>9</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>Favorite Activities</b>	<b># Participating</b>	<b>Swimming</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>Bike riding</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>Walking/etc</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>Relaxing</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>Camping</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>Fishing</b>	<b>45</b>	Organized sports	42	Hiking	32	Sledding	32	Dog walking	32	Nature watching	30	Picnicking	26	Snowmobiling	25	Canoe/Kayaking	24	Motor boating	23	Skateboarding	22	Horseback riding	17	Frisbee Golf	11	Cross Country Ski	9
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<p><b>Question 7</b> Which of the following are most important to you? <i>(Please select only 6 of the following programs, amenities, or facilities.)</i></p> <p>Restrooms were chosen as one of the most favored amenities by over half of the 132 respondents. Another simple amenity in the top 6 is picnic tables. Paved hiking trails were very high on this list as well. The inclusion of festivals, concerts, and outdoor education in the top 6 may be a reflection of the large number of young people responding to the survey.</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th><b>Favorite Amenities</b></th> <th><b># Participating</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td><b>Restrooms</b></td><td><b>74</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Festivals</b></td><td><b>64</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Paved hiking trails</b></td><td><b>53</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Concerts</b></td><td><b>52</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Picnic tables</b></td><td><b>42</b></td></tr> <tr><td><b>Outdoor Education</b></td><td><b>39</b></td></tr> <tr><td>Drinking fountains</td><td>39</td></tr> <tr><td>Natural Resource Preservation</td><td>34</td></tr> <tr><td>Open spaces</td><td>34</td></tr> <tr><td>Arts &amp; Crafts</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Playground equipment</td><td>31</td></tr> <tr><td>Youth programs</td><td>28</td></tr> <tr><td>Dog park</td><td>27</td></tr> <tr><td>Advanced bike trails</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td>Nature Center</td><td>25</td></tr> <tr><td>Family programs</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>Covered pavilions</td><td>18</td></tr> <tr><td>Cultural/Historic Preservation</td><td>16</td></tr> <tr><td>Sledding hills</td><td>14</td></tr> <tr><td>Barrier-free facilities</td><td>13</td></tr> <tr><td>Pre-school programs</td><td>12</td></tr> <tr><td>Horseback trails</td><td>12</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>Favorite Amenities</b>	<b># Participating</b>	<b>Restrooms</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>Festivals</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>Paved hiking trails</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>Concerts</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>Picnic tables</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>Outdoor Education</b>	<b>39</b>	Drinking fountains	39	Natural Resource Preservation	34	Open spaces	34	Arts & Crafts	32	Playground equipment	31	Youth programs	28	Dog park	27	Advanced bike trails	25	Nature Center	25	Family programs	24	Covered pavilions	18	Cultural/Historic Preservation	16	Sledding hills	14	Barrier-free facilities	13	Pre-school programs	12	Horseback trails	12
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<p><b>Question 8</b> Which of the following would you like to see added to the parks in Niles Charter Township? <i>(Please select all that apply)</i></p> <p>Not only have respondents indicated biking and walking as favorite activities, trail connections appear to have support as a top priority for the five-year action plan.</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Proposed Amenities</th> <th># of Responses</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Trail connections</td> <td>64</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ice rink</td> <td>53</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Basketball courts</td> <td>52</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Picnic areas</td> <td>51</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Volleyball courts</td> <td>50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Exercise areas</td> <td>42</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Children's equipment</td> <td>28</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other (See list)</td> <td>24</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Proposed Amenities	# of Responses	Trail connections	64	Ice rink	53	Basketball courts	52	Picnic areas	51	Volleyball courts	50	Exercise areas	42	Children's equipment	28	Other (See list)	24
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<p><b>Question 9</b> How do you feel about the Township and the City of Niles working together to develop a hiking/biking trail running from Plym Park in the City to proposed connecting trails in St. Joseph County, Indiana? <i>(Please check only 1 answer)</i></p> <p>A clear majority of respondents favor the proposed collaboration between the City of Niles and the Township to develop a hiking and biking trail. Only 1 percent expressed a negative opinion of the trail.</p>	<table border="1"> <caption>Survey Results for Question 9</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Great idea</td> <td>57%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Okay</td> <td>30%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Don't care</td> <td>12%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Not good</td> <td>1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Response	Percentage	Great idea	57%	Okay	30%	Don't care	12%	Not good	1%								
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<p><b>Question 10</b> What specific park or recreation project would you like Niles Charter Township to complete in the next 5 years?</p>	<p>See Appendix</p>																		

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## MISSION STATEMENT, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

*Parks, open spaces, and other recreational assets* provide a number of benefits in terms of social, physical, economic, and environmental qualities. Niles Charter Township has the capacity to provide scenic beauty while encouraging healthy and enjoyable physical and leisure pursuits. These attributes are an important aspect of creating an appealing atmosphere that will encourage economic vitality.

Before developing the five-year action plan, the mission statement below was thoughtfully created to define and establish the township's commitment to comprehensive planning. The goals were also carefully developed to achieve the optimum balance of preserving and protecting natural resources with the attraction and development of business and population growth. While each of the goals addresses a specific area and establishes guidelines for future decisions, they are also broad-based to allow for the accommodation of project development as opportunities arise. Lastly, the implementation objectives outline the areas where the township will focus its work over the next few years. These objectives are reviewed annually and updated as needed.

### **Mission Statement**

*Compared to other communities our size, Niles Charter Township will have the finest, most comprehensive and most accessible park and trail system in Michigan and will be a national model of excellence.*

Niles Charter Township will encourage the implementation of comprehensive recreation planning that includes parks, open space, greenways, and historic, cultural, and artistic components. In addition to the mission statement, the members of the steering committee also established six overall goals to provide an overall structure and parameters for current and future decision-making that will ensure the continuation of positive progress toward the maximization of recreational resources.

### **Overall Planning Goals**

1. Develop and support policies that will preserve and protect valuable water and land resources including properties with historic and/or cultural value.
2. Seek and establish connections between existing and future trails and pathways including greenways and waterways.
3. Respond to community characteristics and changing demographics by seeking to provide recreational opportunities for all with consideration of age and abilities.
4. Enhance partnerships with surrounding units of government for the purpose of collaborative planning.
5. Establish stable and secure funding for recreational development and maintenance.
6. Create and implement a marketing campaign, including signage, to promote the Niles area as a recreation destination for residents and visitors.

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## ACTION PLAN

*The following is a five-year Action Plan* (capital improvement plan) for the community parks, recreation, open spaces, greenways, and historic/cultural sites in Niles Charter Township. This Action Plan focuses primarily on projects that will expand and improve the usability of existing parks in the system and establish a framework for sustainability and further development in the future. It is the intention of the Parks Commission to seek funding opportunities from State and federal sources whenever possible to maximize private and local government funds.

### **General Park Projects**

1. Utilize grants, donations and volunteers to limit financial liability and be fiscally responsible to township constituents. Look for sponsors for acquisitions and for upkeep of all park and trail facilities. Develop a “Friends of Niles Charter Township Parks and Trails” committee. Work with local legislators to bring park and recreation resources to our township.
2. Develop a comprehensive hike/bike trail system throughout the township. Complete the IN-MI River Valley Trail. Coordinate with MDOT and County Road Commission to put in place a system that allows for roadside non-motorized facilities with all new road projects.
3. Bring a state-of-the-art, all-sports, lighted field complex to the township. Help our schools acquire and maintain access to state-of-the-art sport/recreation facilities.
4. Assist SMEGA with coordinating growth and greenspace utilization of area businesses and assist in the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor Project.
5. Establish and maintain consistent, quality communication between the Park Commission and the Parks Superintendent regarding all facets of current and future park projects and endeavors.
6. Provide increased assistance to Niles Charter Township baseball and softball leagues in the form of upgraded facilities, fundraising, and coordination of communication needs.
7. Update all our park facilities, equipment and landscaping and make our park’s general areas 100% handicap accessible.
8. Bring an indoor playground facility to the community that is run either by a private enterprise or through an expanded parks commission. Assist any interested private enterprises with resources or information that would facilitate start-ups.
9. As budgets allow and parcels of land become available, it is the intent of the Township and the Parks Commission to increase the size of existing parks, improve park and recreation opportunities, create and connect trails and greenways, and preserve open space, natural resources and water quality.

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## Other Potential Projects

- 1. Develop a Marketing Plan** – When planning for the distribution of resources, important points taken into consideration include how often a particular park is used, number of visitors, and whether the visitors are local residents or tourists. To increase the use of the parks and to encourage recreational pursuits within the township, a comprehensive marketing plan will be developed. This plan will include not only wayfinding signs, but also promotional materials to stimulate interest in, and use of, the parks.
- 2. Develop Water Trails and Seek Heritage Water Trail designation for Dowagiac and St. Joseph Rivers**– Heritage water trails are routes on navigable waterways such as rivers, lakes, and canals designed and implemented to foster an interactive historical education experience. Historical markers posted on bridge crossings highlight historic events or themes related to the waterway. A companion guide provides a more detailed presentation of the historic material in addition to acting as a more conventional water trail guide with maps, put-in points, take-out points, rest stop locations, paddling conditions, etc. An interpretive program and exhibit at a local museum on or nearby the water trail may also be part of the experience. A website integrating the interpretive guides and an interactive Geographic Information System (GIS) will allow users to plan and select paddling routes, to access information on amenities on and near the rivers, learn about the rivers and watersheds, and to participate in river and coastline monitoring programs.<sup>25</sup> The Parks Commission will carefully consider the resources necessary to seek and maintain this designation and weigh all factors relative to the benefits of having the Dowagiac River and a portion of the St. Joseph River designated as a Heritage Water Trail. It will be important to involve neighboring jurisdictions and paddling and watershed groups.
- 3. Determine Location for Dog Park** – The visioning session and the community survey revealed a strong interest in the incorporation of a dog park within one of the existing parks. The Parks Commission will undertake the task of visiting each park and determining the feasibility of each for the most desirable location.
- 4. Investigate Surveillance Cameras and Webcams** – The intent of this amenity is to increase the level of security at the parks and to be used as a promotional tool. Live webcams can draw attention to the Township’s website as well as be a way for users to check conditions such as the amount of snow on the sledding hill.
- 5. Consider Skate and Splash Parks and Ice Skating Rink** – Youth-related activities are very important to the health and well-being of the community and can quite readily become a tourism draw.
- 6. Upgrade sidewalks near Fulkerson School** – This could be done as part of a Safe Routes to School effort. For more information visit <http://saferoutesmichigan.org/>.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.wmich.edu/glcms/watertrails/>

## Individual Park Projects

Projects are listed for each park property. Each project has an associated time frame (year project is planned to begin), a general estimated cost and priority level (1=highest, 2=middle, 3=least). Following the list there is a general description of the projects.

**Time Frame**                      Year 1=2014-2015      Year 2=2015-2016      Year 3=2016-2017      Year 4=2017-2018      Year 5=2018-2019

### Projects for IN MI River Valley Trail

	Time Frame	Estimated Cost	Priority
Complete Phase I (Indiana state line to Brandywine Creek Nature Park)	1	\$842,000	1
Complete Phase II (Brandywine Creek Nature Park parking area to the City of Niles trail at Fort Street (This may also include land acquisition.))	1-2	\$611,000 (does not include land acquisition)	1
Add monument for donors at S. Fireman's Park trailhead	2	TBD	1
Add kiosk with trail information at Fort Street, S. Fireman's Park, Indiana state line	1-2	TBD	1
Promote/market trail system (develop a coordinated approach with businesses and neighboring jurisdictions)	1-5	TBD	1
Connect schools and businesses to the trail	5	TBD	3

### *Project Descriptions*

**Phase I** – Grant funding from MDNR and MDOT has been secured to construct a 10-foot wide non-motorized trail from the Indiana state line to the parking area within Brandywine Creek Nature Park in 2014-2015. The Phase I project will also include sign installation and trailhead construction at the state line, S. Fireman's Park and Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve. Parking areas will be improved at Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve and S. Fireman's Park to accommodate trail users.

**Phase II** - The first choice for the Phase II route is through acquired land adjacent to the Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve. A bridge in Brandywine Creek Nature Park crossing the creek will be needed. This may present an opportunity to improve fishing access to the creek. Less desirable options for Phase II are along 3<sup>rd</sup> Street or a spur route crossing 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to Beeson Street, Bond Street then Fort Street.



**Projects for Community Park**

	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Improve newly purchased 10 acres by adding 2-4 small practice ball fields and improving parking and park access	4	\$20,000	2
Add a non-motorized trail running east-west through the park and connect park to the IN MI River Valley Trail	3	\$25,000	1
Add soccer fields	3	\$40,000	2
Repair water fountain	2	\$250	1
Explore options to purchase or acquire adjacent land		TBD	2
Provide barrier-free access to amenities (possibly along 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street) and improve accessibility of the park and shelter (pathways from parking, ramps to shelter, bathrooms, etc)	2	\$8,000	1
Explore possibility of rehabilitating park shelter/hall (roof planned for 2014)	1-2	TBD	1

***Project Descriptions***

**Park improvements** – In general, Community Park needs upgrades and improvements to the current amenities such as picnic tables, benches, trash cans, etc. Enlarging the ballfield would increase the desirability of this field and encourage more use.

**Trail improvements** – Providing barrier-free access, increasing the length, improving the condition and connecting the trail to the IN MI River Valley Trail would greatly enhance its overall appeal.

**Soccer fields** – With the growing popularity of soccer, the number of soccer fields in the area is not adequate to meet the demand. Providing local fields would enable some residents to participate in this sport without traveling to neighboring communities. An increased number of fields will also encourage residents of other municipalities to come to the township.

**Water fountain** – Although this project is part of the overall improvement project, it is specific enough and critical enough to warrant individual mention and be assigned a Level 1 priority.

**Increase size** – When property becomes available, it is a desire of the community to enlarge the size of this park.

**Barrier-free access** – In addition to the trail improvements, modifying existing amenities to be barrier free, and ensuring that future amenities are also barrier free, would improve the park’s overall appeal by being available to more segments of the population.

**Park shelter** – This shelter is showing signs of age and disrepair and when upgraded could become a popular amenity drawing people to the park.



**Projects for N. Firemen's Park**

	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Study possible addition of soccer fields	1	TBD	1
Move slide	2	TBD	2
Purchase property to increase size of park	2	TBD	2
Add water fountains	2	\$500	1
Add benches	2	\$500	2

***Project Descriptions***

**Soccer fields** – This park has attributes that could make it a good location for the addition of soccer fields. There are no trees and most of the playground equipment is off to one side. Measurements will need to be taken to ensure that there is enough room for a field as well as allow for parking and a safety buffer zone between the field and the playground.

**Slide** – If soccer fields are added to this park, the current slide needs to be moved to a safer location out of the range of the soccer field. Even if the soccer field is not added, it would make the playground equipment more desirable to be closer together.

**Property purchase** – If the property to the east of the park becomes available, it would be a highly desirable addition to this park in terms of size and appearance.

**Water fountains** – Responses from the community indicate a strong desire for water fountains in all of the parks and they are a beneficial and worthwhile addition for the comfort of park users.

**Benches** – The intended primary users of the existing playground equipment are at least under age 10 years. Therefore, the secondary users of the park, the observers and caretakers, would appreciate a comfortable, shaded, seating area close enough to the playground to observe the activities.



**Projects for S. Firemen's Park (Youth Park)**

	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Walking trail	4	\$10,000-\$20,000	3
Upgrade playground equipment and move to safer location away from practice field	2	\$5,000-\$7,500	2
Increase safety measures for playground (consider adding fence)	2-5	\$2,500	1
Upgrade bathrooms and water fountains	2-4	\$15,000-\$20,000	1
Add another base ball field or soccer field	2-4	TBD	3
Provide park access from 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street	2-4	TBD	3
Purchase property to the south for a sports complex	3-5	TBD	3
Expand parking	3	TBD	2
Ensure all parking and amenities meet ADA standards	1-5	TBD	1

***Project Descriptions***

**Walking trail** – Currently this park is one of the most used and appreciated parks in the township. One of the primary activities is little league baseball and also softball with several league games scheduled during the spring and summer. The possibilities for year round use could be increased with the addition of a walking trail around the perimeter of the park. This trail could also be used by visitors taking a break during one of the games or even when games are in progress.

**Playground equipment** – The playground equipment might be safer if it was moved a distance from the practice fields. Another consideration about the placement of the equipment however, is the primary users of this park are often the softball players; the secondary users are the observers of those games, but another group of secondary users are the other members of a family who are not involved in the game. Providing activities to appeal to this group (often younger siblings) within a safe distance to be observed by caretakers could improve the enjoyment of those attending the games.

**Safety measures** – In addition to moving the playground equipment, a fence would add to the security of park users and children using the playground during games and practice sessions.

**Amenity upgrades** – The bathrooms and water fountains are the primary amenities in need of upgrading. It would also be an improvement to provide barrier-free access to these amenities.



**Projects for Fulkerson Park**

	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Consider possible locations for dog park	1	N/A	1
Install water fountains or water pump	2	\$500	1
Improve practice field	3	\$5,000	2
Improve and repair basketball courts	2	\$1,000	2
Add soccer field	2-5	N/A	2
Make repairs to playground equipment	1	\$500	1
Repair and paint all applicable amenities (fence, picnic tables, well buildings, entry gate etc.)	1	\$1,000	1
Consider addition of horseshoe pits	3	N/A	3
Add trash cans	2	\$200	2

***Project Descriptions***

**Dog Park** – Fulkerson is one of the parks with a couple of different options for the installation of a dog park.

**Amenities** – The installation of a water fountain, or at least a water pump, would improve this park for human users, and if chosen as the site for the dog park, for canine users as well. All of the amenities in this park need to be updated, repaired, and improved. Adding an adequate number of trash cans in strategic locations would reduce litter in the park.

**Soccer field** – There is possibly enough room for both a soccer field and a dog park. The presence of trees provides desirable shade in both of the two possible locations for the dog park. Planners will study feasibility of both considering the compatibility of uses as well as the overall location of the park in relation to possible traffic generation affecting the surrounding neighborhood.

**Horseshoe pit** – Whether it is in this park, or one of the other township parks, horseshoe pits could provide an interesting past-time for visitors of any age.



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**Projects for Samson Park**

	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Consider adding a fire pit with safety features	3	\$100	3
Explore feasibility of building a warming shed for winter sports	2	\$2,000	3
Repair light fixtures	1	\$500	1

***Project Descriptions***

**Fire pit** – There are safety concerns about adding a firepit for public use. Measures could be taken with the design and with park rules to minimize any danger. These factors will be considered before the decision is made.

**Warming shed** – To increase the winter season use of the park and to encourage use of the sledding hill, a warming shed would be a very appealing amenity.

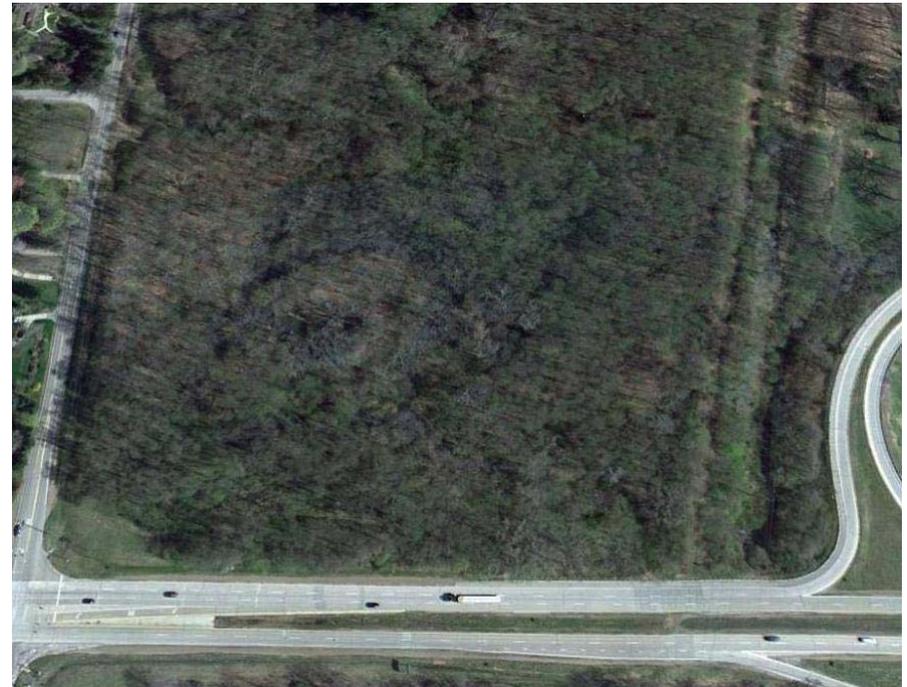
**Light fixtures** – Although not intended for night-time use, lighting, in good repair, would be a desirable addition to the park and would bring an additional element of safety to the neighborhood.



*Projects for Brandywine Creek Nature Park*

	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Priority</b>
Clean and maintain trails	1	N/A	1
Consider possible fish cleaning station	2	\$2,500	2
Provide accessible fishing opportunities	2	TBD	1
Purchase adjacent property and add additional trails (possible cross country skiing trails)	1-5	TBD	1
Add a portable bathroom	1	TBD	1

Since this land is leased, any improvements to Brandywine Creek Nature Preserve should be coordinated with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Also see related projects listed for the IN MI River Valley Trail which will run through this preserve.



There are no planned improvements for **Independence Park** at this time.

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## PLAN ADOPTION DOCUMENTATION

### **Public Input Session**

A public input session was held in November 2013.

Add newspaper ad

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**Public Review and Comment Period**

The public was invited to review and comment on the Draft Recreation Plan between January 17 and February 15, 2014. Copies of the Draft Recreation Plan were made available at the Township Hall and Township Library. The plan was also available on the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission's website.

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**Public Hearing - *Township Board***

The public was invited to a Public Hearing at the February 18, 2014 Township Board meeting to ask questions and comment on the Draft Recreation Plan.

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**Official Resolution of the Township Board**

Following the Public Hearing on February 18, the Township Board voted to approve the Recreation Plan through a Resolution of Adoption.

Add resolution of adoption

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**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes**

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**Letter to County Planning Commission**

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**Letter to Regional Planning Agency**

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**Department of Natural Resources Approval Letter**

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**Recreation Plan Certification Checklist**