



# 1 INTRODUCTION

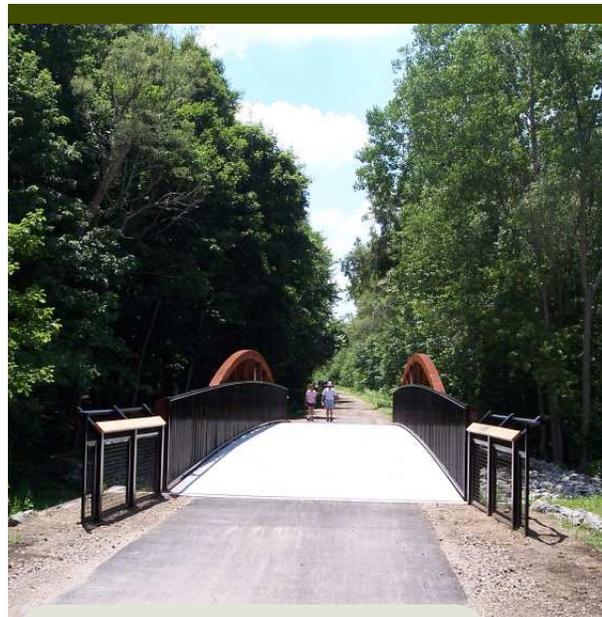
THE OAKLAND COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT, PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES, AND OAKLAND TRAILS ADVISORY COUNCIL HAVE WORKED TO IMPLEMENT A RECOMMENDATION BY THE OAKLAND COUNTY BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE TO DEVELOP A COUNTY-WIDE GREENWAYS AND TRAILS SYSTEM.

Greenways are corridors of land recognized for their ability to conserve open space and connect people and places together. These ribbons of open space are linear corridors that are either natural, such as rivers and streams, or manmade, such as abandoned railroads and utility corridors. Many greenways also contain trails. A greenways network consists of links (such as trails), hubs (destinations for people and wildlife), and sites (points of interest or origins).

## 1.1 PURPOSE OF PLAN

Oakland County has been working for years with various agencies and communities to develop a connected non-motorized system. The formation of the Oakland Trails Advisory Council (OTAC) and the hiring of a Trail Network Coordinator in 2003 served to elevate the focus of a connected trails system and established

a liaison and resource to the local communities, trail agencies, and stakeholder groups. In order to continue progress and implementation toward a connected non-motorized system, OTAC and the County have worked to develop a comprehensive 5-year Trails Master Plan to serve as a guide and resource not only to County agencies, but also to local communities, trail agencies, and stakeholders. Over the years, a significant amount of work, information, maps, and stakeholder input has been collected and developed. This Trails Master Plan serves to document and organize the results of the various efforts into a single, comprehensive Master Plan.



### CLINTON RIVER TRAIL

*The Clinton River Trail is a 16-mile trail within an abandoned rail line traversing through the heart of Oakland County.*



**T**HE PURPOSE OF THE OAKLAND COUNTY TRAILS MASTER PLAN IS TO:

- Document the evolution of trail planning and development within the County
- Easily communicate the coordinated goals and vision for a connected non-motorized system within Oakland County and the region
- Promote the general health and wellness of the community and provide viable transportation alternatives to people of all ages and abilities
- Provide focus for the County by identifying short- and long-term action items to continue progress and implementation
- Serve as a resource and reference guide for county agencies, local communities, trail agencies, and stakeholder groups
- Serve as a foundation for future grant applications and funding requests

## 1.2 OVERVIEW OF OAKLAND COUNTY

Oakland County is located in southeast Michigan and has a total area of 908 square miles, of which 3.91% is water. Oakland County is rich in natural resources. The County has over 1,400 lakes (more than any other county in the state), is home to the headwaters of five major river systems, and has over 57,000 acres of public park and recreation lands. The rolling landform left by receding glaciers some 14,000 years ago has given birth to special natural areas, some unique to the entire state and beyond.

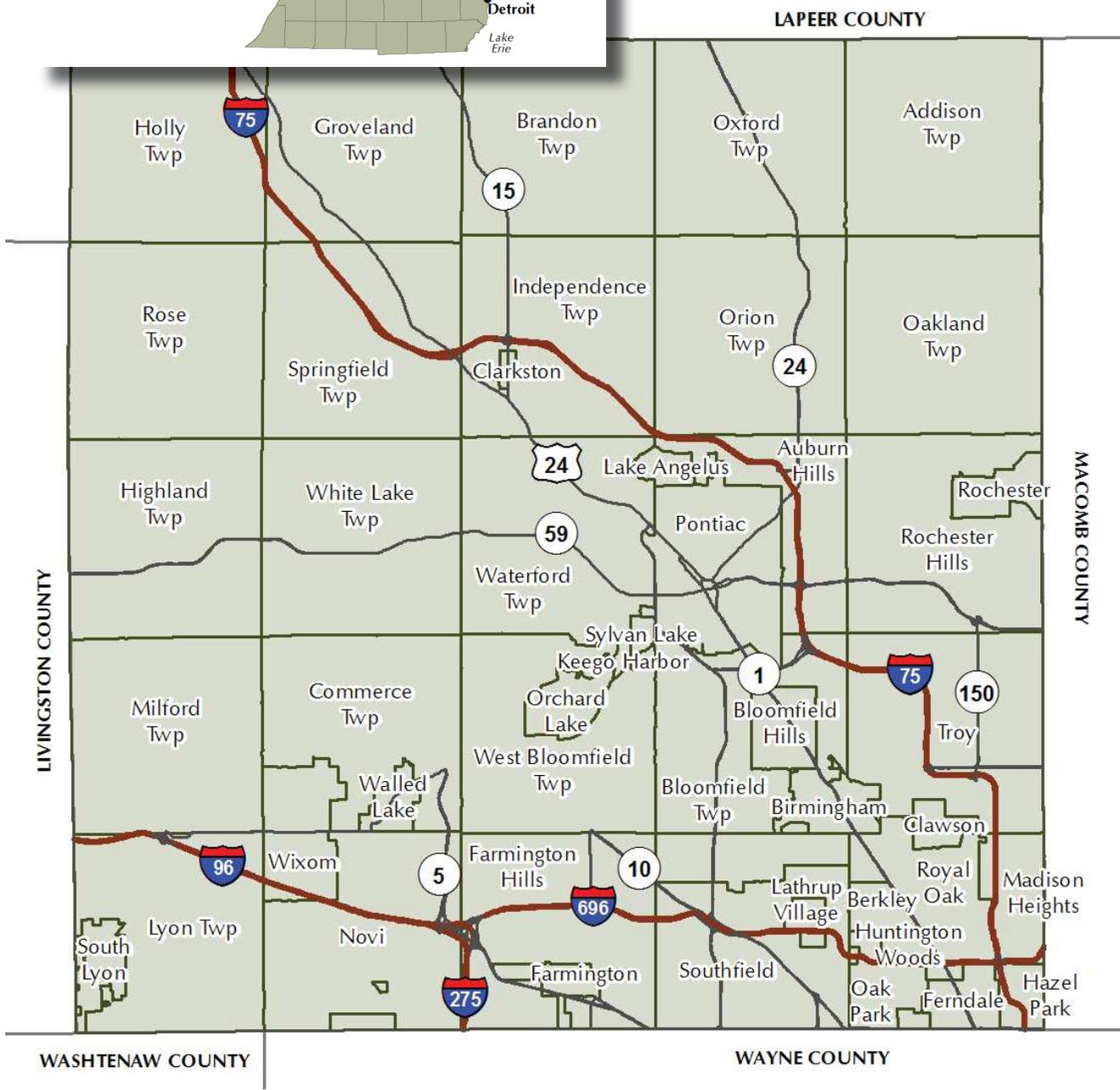
### POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

US Census data from 1990 and 2000 indicates Oakland County as a whole grew by more than 10%. This is greater than the State of Michigan, which grew by 7%, and similar to the growth rate of neighboring Macomb County. Lapeer and Wayne Counties experienced a population decline from 1990 to 2000 while Livingston County grew by more than 35%. The Population by Census Tract Map illustrates those areas within Oakland County that have the greatest density of population. Generally speaking, the southeastern half of the County has the greatest population density with the most “urban” communities such as Royal Oak, Southfield, Troy, Birmingham, Farmington Hills, and Pontiac.

While the Population Density Map illustrates areas within Oakland County that have the greatest numbers of people per square mile, the map does not show which areas and communities are experiencing the greatest amount of growth pressures. The Population Change by Municipality Map depicts the percent change in population by community from 1990 to 2000. In general, the map reveals the greatest population growth occurred in the more “out-

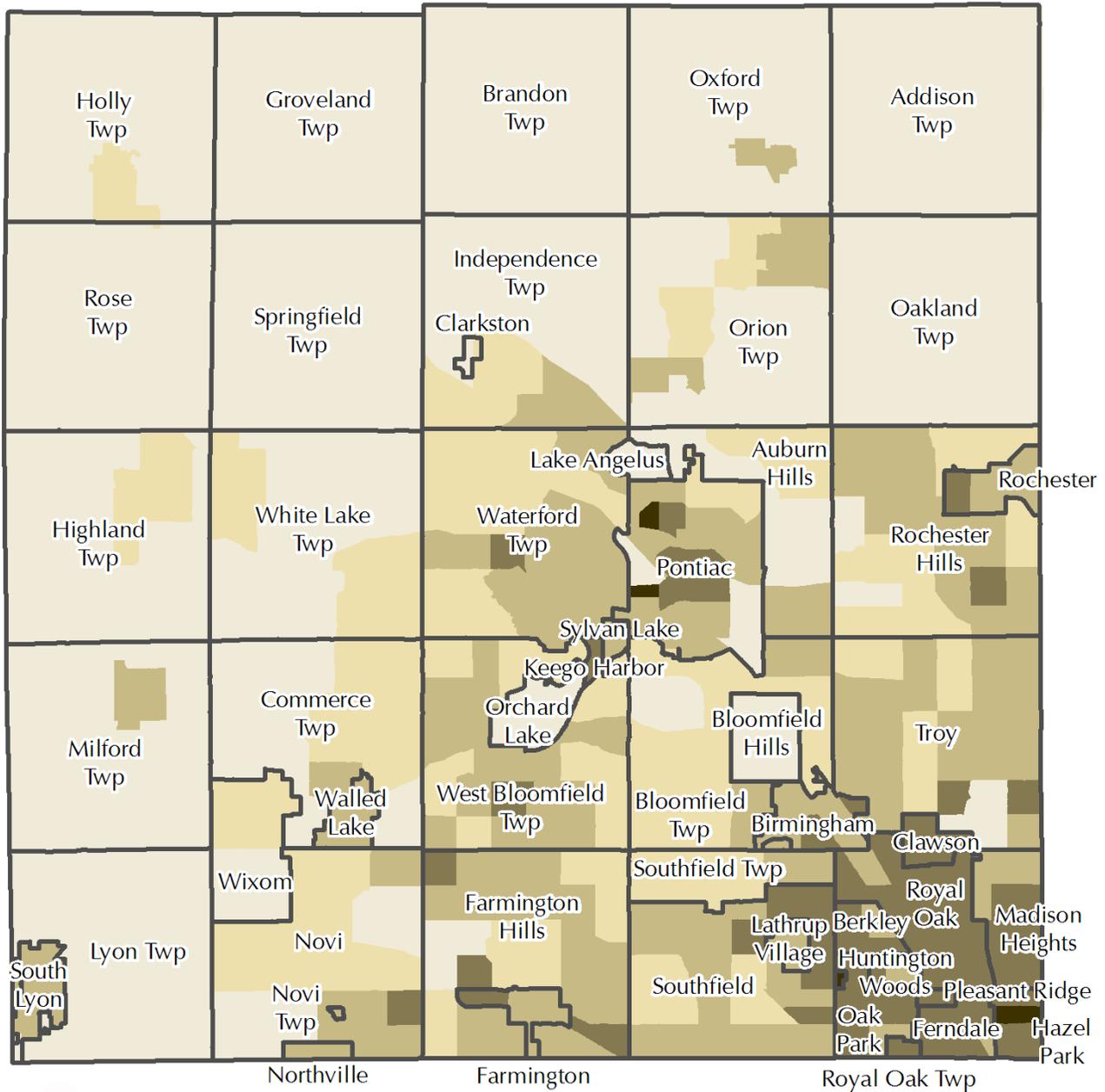


# OAKLAND COUNTY LOCATION MAP



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## OPULATION DENSITY BY CENSUS TRACT (2000)



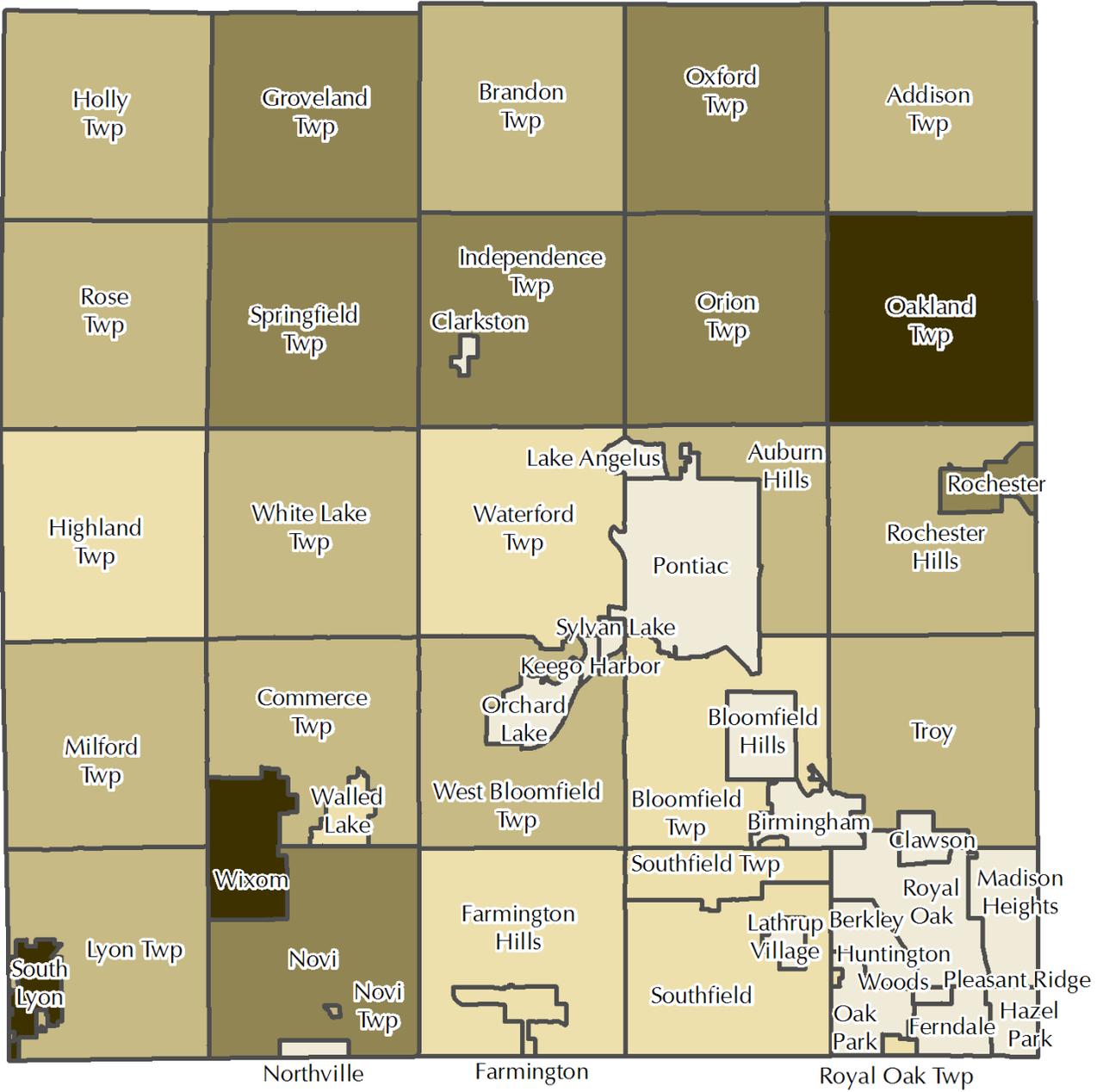
(Persons/Sq. Mile)

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU



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## OPULATION CHANGE BY MUNICIPALITY ('90 - '00)



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU





## Population Change in Oakland County

	<b>2000</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Addison Township	6,439	5,142	25.2%
Auburn Hills	19,837	17,076	16.2%
Berkley	15,531	16,960	-8.4%
Birmingham	19,291	19,997	-3.5%
Bloomfield Township	43,023	42,473	1.3%
Bloomfield Hills	3,940	4,288	-8.1%
Brandon Township	14,765	12,051	22.5%
Clawson	12,732	13,874	-8.2%
Commerce Twp	34,764	26,955	29.0%
Farmington	10,423	10,132	2.9%
Farmington Hills	82,111	74,652	10.0%
Ferndale	22,105	25,084	-11.9%
Groveland Township	6,150	4,705	30.7%
Hazel Park	18,963	20,051	-5.4%
Highland Township	19,169	17,941	6.8%
Holly Township	10,037	8,852	13.4%
Huntington Woods	6,151	6,419	-4.2%
Independence Township	32,581	24,722	31.8%
Keego Harbor	2,769	2,932	-5.6%
Lake Angelus	326	328	-0.6%
Lathrup Village	4,236	4,329	-2.1%
Lyon Township	11,041	9,450	16.8%
Madison Heights	31,101	32,196	-3.4%
Milford Township	15,271	12,121	26.0%
Northville	3,352	3,367	-0.4%
Novi	47,386	32,998	43.6%
Novi Township	193	150	28.7%
Oakland Township	13,071	8,227	58.9%
Oak Park	29,793	30,462	-2.2%
Orchard Lake	2,215	2,286	-3.1%
Orion Township	33,463	24,076	39.0%
Oxford Township	16,025	11,933	34.3%
Pleasant Ridge	2,594	2,775	-6.5%
Pontiac	66,337	71,166	-6.8%
Rochester	10,467	7,130	46.8%
Rochester Hills	68,825	61,766	11.4%
Rose Township	6,210	4,926	26.1%
Royal Oak	60,062	65,410	-8.2%
Royal Oak Township	5,446	5,011	8.7%
Southfield	78,296	75,728	3.4%
Southfield Township	14,430	14,255	1.2%
South Lyon	10,036	5,857	71.4%
Springfield Township	13,338	9,927	34.4%
Sylvan Lake	1,735	1,884	-7.9%
Troy	80,959	72,884	11.1%
Clarkston	962	1,005	-4.3%
Walled Lake	6,713	6,278	6.9%
Waterford Township	73,150	66,692	9.7%
West Bloomfield	64,860	54,516	19.0%
White Lake	28,219	22,608	24.8%
Wixom City	13,263	8,550	55.1%

lying”, historically rural areas of the County. South Lyon (71.4%) and Oakland Township (58.9%) experienced the greatest amount of population growth as did Rochester, Wixom, and Novi.



### Population Change in Region and State

	2000	1990	% Change
Oakland County	1,194,156	1,083,592	10.2%
Genesee County	436,141	430,459	1.3%
Macomb County	788,149	717,400	9.9%
Lapeer County	74,768	87,904	-14.9%
Livingston County	156,951	115,645	35.7%
St. Clair County	164,235	145,607	12.8%
Washtenaw County	322,895	282,937	14.1%
Wayne County	2,061,162	2,111,687	-2.4%
State of Michigan	9,990,817	9,295,297	7.5%

Source: US Census Bureau

### 1.3 BENEFITS OF TRAILS

Trails and non-motorized systems are a tremendous community asset, providing a host of benefits. Non-motorized systems can lessen the traffic burden by providing alternative routes to school, work, shopping, etc. By reducing traffic congestion, these systems can also lessen the environmental costs associated with automobiles. At the same time, non-motorized systems promote healthier communities and increased recreational opportunities. By attracting visitors and increasing property values, non-motorized systems can also bolster local and regional economies. Taken together, these benefits can strengthen individual and community well being, while fostering greater economic and environmental sustainability. The following sections examine these benefits in greater detail.

### RECREATION

The 2000 Census revealed that almost 75% of Michigan residents live in urban areas<sup>1</sup>. As urban areas expand, large open areas for recreation are often lost to development. At the same time, increasing urban populations create a growing demand for these open spaces. Michigan and Oakland County are unique in their abundance of parkland and natural resources. However, access to many of these parks requires an automobile. Non-motorized systems can improve recreation opportunities by linking urban areas with local and regional parks, as demonstrated by the existing trail systems in the County. Trails accommodate a host of recreational interests, such as walkers, runners, in-line skaters, bikers, equestrians, cross-country skiers, and the physically challenged. By providing access to lakes, rivers, wetlands, and woodlands, non-motorized systems can also

foster passive recreation such as fishing, bird watching, and outdoor education. By linking communities and natural areas, non-motorized systems are making Oakland County communities more enjoyable places, and improving quality of life.

### ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

Non-motorized systems complement ongoing efforts throughout the County to reduce pollution and conserve important natural features. By reducing the volume of automobile traffic, non-motorized systems can improve air and water quality. Greenway linkages can also help protect sensitive ecological systems from ever-expanding urban development. Investment in Oakland County’s non-motorized network is an investment in the health and integrity of the

# OAK ROUTES



## Benefits of Trails

OAKLAND COUNTY

TRAIL NETWORK



County's most important natural resources. Automobiles are the largest source of air pollution in the US, emitting carbon monoxide, ozone, particulate matter, sulphur oxides, and hydrocarbons. These airborne pollutants contribute to a number of human health problems. Falling back to the land in the form of rain or dust, these pollutants can also degrade soil and water quality. A reduction in short vehicle trips can have significant impacts on environmental health. For example, a four-mile bicycle ride, in place of driving, can prevent 15 pounds of pollutants from being released into the air<sup>2</sup>.

Aside from pollution reduction, trails and green infrastructure help to sustain the ecological integrity of Oakland County's natural systems. As linear vegetated corridors, trails and greenways play an important role in linking natural areas, fostering plant growth, and ensuring wildlife access to water and food. Greenways can also protect water quality by isolating aquatic ecosystems from developed land areas. As buffers, greenways can absorb storm water runoff and capture non-point sources of pollution before they enter surface waters. Greenways can also ensure the protection of pervious land areas, which are essential to the health and abundance of Michigan's groundwater resources.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

As Michigan and Oakland County communities work to bolster their local and regional economies, many are looking to non-motorized systems to complement these efforts. This is because non-motorized systems have proven successful at increasing property values, boosting retail sales, attracting tourism, as well as lowering health costs. There is a clear connection between non-motorized access and improved economic vitality.



## **Natural Assets = Higher Property Values**

Preliminary estimates of the impact on property values in Oakland County due to natural assets. *Prepared by Oakland County Planning & Economic Development Services.*

### **1. Water Resources**

Up to 23% premium on parcels that border a water body

### **2. Trail/Path Network**

Up to 6% premium on parcels within 100 feet of a primary trail

### **3. Natural Areas / Open Space**

Up to 12% premium on subdivision parcels that border open space

The access provided by non-motorized systems is widely regarded as an attractive component of a community. Such systems can provide places to recreate, access to natural features, and reduce automobile reliance. These characteristics are often sought by potential homebuyers, and are often touted as key selling points by real estate agents. As an example, following development of the Betsie Valley Trail in Benzie County, Michigan, property values adjacent to the trail rose between six and ten percent.<sup>3</sup> Non-motorized systems provide a unique amenity that can enhance the character and economic vitality of nearby properties.

Attracting visitors and stimulating economic activity are central to the County's economic



THE LAND POLICY INSTITUTE AT MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY COMPLETED A REPORT IN DECEMBER 2007 ENTITLED “*Economic Valuation of Natural Resource Amenities: A Hedonic Analysis of Hillsdale and Oakland Counties*”.

The focus of the study was on the valuation of “green infrastructure” in Michigan. In Oakland County, the amenity values of waterways, water-bodies, recreational lands, and walkable and bikeable green infrastructure such as trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, and park paths were considered. Property sales transaction data from the county were collected and a pricing model was developed to determine the influence of green infrastructure on property values in the county.

Results indicate that, consistently, across the two counties and across green infrastructure types, these assets contribute positively and significantly to property values. Specifically:

- In the case of water amenity in Oakland County, the results suggest that properties within 15 meters of water bodies have a substantial capitalization of these amenities into property values, compared with properties located at more than 150 meters. **The average “green-capitalization” attributable to water-bodies within 15 meters is \$55,082.**
- In the case of recreational lands in Oakland County, results suggest that recreational areas have significant impact on property values, ranging in impact from 3.1 percent capitalization for properties within 15 meters, to 3.2 percent gain for properties within 15 to 75 meters, 2.2 percent gain for properties within 75 to 150 meters and a 2.6 percent capitalization for properties within 150 to 300 meters, compared to properties located at more than 450 meters.
- In the case of walkability and bikeability enabling green infrastructure in Oakland County, results indicate that the effect of these green infrastructure on property values were significant. **Existence of these composite green assets within 100 to 500 meters appreciates property values by 4.6 percent, or \$11,785;** within 500 to 1000 meters results in “green capitalization” of 2.3 percent; and within 1000 to 1500 meters results in a gain of 6.3 percent, or \$16,140, compared to properties located at more than 1500 meters away from these outdoor opportunities.

The report goes on to indicate that green infrastructure also has broader implications. **“In the New Economy, talent and innovation are sources of new local and regional economic growth. Talent tends to migrate to places with significant green infrastructure. Jobs tend to follow people, who follow green quality infrastructure.”** The findings of this study suggest that green asset enhancement meets sustainability and enhances the economy simultaneously. As part of a long-term strategy, green infrastructure can be leveraged to enhance local economic viability and sustainability at the same time.

development objectives. Local and regional non-motorized systems can increase the circulation of people and money within and between communities. Trails that provide regional links can transform ordinary communities into destinations. Coupled with unique natural features such as lakes, rivers, and parks, these destinations become even more desirable for prospective visitors. Local communities, in turn, benefit by providing equipment, refreshments, and lodging to trail users.

Several additional success stories are emerging in states across the country.

- In Lanesboro, Minnesota, the Root River Trail has stimulated a substantial amount of economic activity. Before the trail was developed, Lanesboro was a sleepy town of 800. Today, with the trail in place, Lanesboro boasts 12 B&Bs (with year-long wait lists), eight restaurants, an art gallery, a museum, and an extremely successful theater.<sup>4</sup>
- The Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana Regional Council of Governments reports that each year 150,000 to 175,000 people visit the 27 mile stretch of trail that runs between Loveland and Corwin in Warren County, Ohio. These visitors spend approximately \$3.1 to \$3.7 million annually on trip-related expenditures and trail-related accessories.<sup>5</sup>
- An economic impact study of the Pere Marquette Trail in Central Michigan, found that more than 60% of trail users visited a business along the trail. The trail is also attractive to the local workforce. The same study revealed that among businesses located within ¼ mile of the trail, 96% of their employees use the trail<sup>6</sup>.

## SMART GROWTH

As an alternative to traditional, automobile-oriented development practices, principles of Smart Growth are continuing to be adopted in communities throughout the country. With expanding urban and suburban populations, communities are experiencing the economic, environmental, and societal costs of disbursed development patterns, sometimes referred to as “urban sprawl.” Smart Growth promotes redevelopment of the urban core of communities with the intention of strengthening their economies, protecting human and environmental health, and improving community well-being through urban design. While not opposed to growth, proponents of Smart Growth seek to develop areas that will yield the highest return on investment, while protecting the character of the community and the landscape. Non-motorized systems complement the Principles of Smart Growth by helping to make communities more walkable and bikeable, protecting important natural areas, and reducing automobile-related pollution.

## SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The number of children walking or bicycling to school has continued to drop in recent years. A survey of US adults revealed that more than 71% walked or biked to school as a child, whereas only 13% of their children walk or bike to school today. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal similar statistics, noting that today almost 85% of children’s commutes to school are made by car, bus, or some other form of motorized transportation.



Individual efforts to deliver children safely to school are collectively resulting in a number of undesirable physical and social outcomes. A reduction in the number of children walking or bicycling to school means more vehicle trips and more traffic in school zones, adding to the notion that walking and bicycling to school is unsafe because of all the traffic. Motorized commutes also exacerbate problems associated with children's increasingly sedentary lifestyles. The decline in the number of children walking to school corresponds to a sharp increase in the incidence of overweight children. The time children spend in vehicle commutes deprives them of valuable opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and getting to know their surrounding built and natural environment.

As these trends become more apparent, local communities are taking action, resulting in a national movement known as Safe Routes to School. Commonly known as "SR2S", these

initiatives employ a wide variety of strategies to make walking or biking to school safer and easier. SR2S programs typically engage parents, community members, school staff, traffic engineers, planners, law enforcement officers, and other community leaders.

Michigan launched a state-wide Safe Routes to School initiative in fall 2005. The program is sponsored by the Michigan Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports, and was developed with the input of a diverse coalition including state, non-profit, and private stakeholders. With the passage of the federal transportation legislation in 2005, Michigan's SR2S program is making schools eligible for transportation enhancement funds, providing for infrastructure improvements, and increasing education campaigns.

#### **TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVE**

In today's automobile-dominated landscape, walking or bicycling as a mode of transportation can be difficult and often dangerous. Absent bicycle lanes, trails, or sidewalks, would-be users of non-motorized transportation are often discouraged. As a result, short trips that could easily be made by bicycle or foot are often made by car. In Michigan, 57% of all trips under a half mile are made by car. In contrast, only 2.2% of Michigan commutes to work are done on foot<sup>7</sup>. These figures suggest that Michigan truly is an automobile dominated state.

At the same time, many people are growing tired of the costs, dangers, and frustration that accompany private automobile commuting. As support grows for alternative ways to get around, more communities are looking to non-motorized systems for answers, such as



#### **WORKING TOGETHER WITH STATE AND/OR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE, SR2S COALITIONS FOCUS ON THE "FIVE E'S" OF A SOUND PROGRAM:**

- Educating the community
- Encouraging students to walk or bike to school
- Enforcing traffic and safety laws
- Engineering that accommodates users of non-motorized transportation
- Evaluating programs and making adjustments when needed



## TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVE

*As support grows for alternative ways to get around, more communities are looking to non-motorized systems for answers.*

expanded public transit options and bicycle sharing programs. These efforts are reducing automobile-dependency, while making walking and biking safer, more enjoyable, transportation options.

## HUMAN HEALTH

The recreation and transportation opportunities created by non-motorized systems invariably contribute to improved human health and well-being. The sedentary lifestyle of many Americans is causing a multitude of preventable health problems in people of all ages. These problems are partly the result of community design. By creating non-motorized systems, communities can remove structural and motivational barriers to more active lifestyles, increase social interaction, and enhance physical and mental well-being.

Physical inactivity is a serious problem in Michigan, contributing to obesity and a host of preventable diseases and deaths. Currently, twenty-five percent of Michigan adults are obese.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, nearly eleven percent of

Michigan children are considered overweight (the term “obese” is not usually used for kids), a threefold increase in 30 years.<sup>9</sup> Michigan ranks 3rd worst among states for rate of obesity and has been among the 10 heaviest states for the past 14 years. More than 62% of Michigan adults are considered overweight, and a majority of high school students and adults indicated that they were trying to lose or maintain their weight. (MDCH: The Healthy Michigan 2010 Report, April 2004) In addition to being dangerous, inactive lifestyles are also costly. In 2002, physical inactivity cost Michigan adults \$8.9 billion for health care<sup>10</sup>.

In response, the Michigan Surgeon General’s office launched a statewide campaign to promote healthy and active living in Michigan. The program, “Michigan Steps Up,” identifies five steps to improving human health. Central to this initiative is making physical activity safer and easier in Michigan communities. The Surgeon General recommends the connection of “neighborhoods, schools, stores and parks with trails and sidewalks,” as well as “adding bike lanes and proper signage to key roads.”<sup>11</sup> The presence of these facilities can remove barriers to exercise by providing immediate access to destination-based corridors that are safe and enjoyable. Increased physical activity, such as walking or bicycling, can reduce the risk of several health problems. The presence of these facilities can also serve as rallying points for community clubs and social interaction. Examples can include running and bicycling groups, walk-to-work days, and charity races. These events, in turn, reinforce the culture and acceptability of active community lifestyles.



# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY TRAIL STUDY

Under the direction of Dr. Christine Vogt, Associate Professor, Michigan State University, Department of Community Agriculture, Recreation and Resources Studies, a study was conducted of several Michigan Rail Trails from 2001-2004 to ascertain a variety of usage characteristics. The following excerpts are from “Summary of Multi-Use Trail Surveys 2001-2004” compiled by Nancy Krupiarz. These excerpts continue to support the economic benefits of trails.

## Tourism Expenditures

Trail users who described themselves as being from outside the area were given a postcard questionnaire to complete and mail back. Tourists on the White Pine trail spent an average of \$85.00 while visiting the trail. The following purchases were evidenced by those returning the postcards:

Trail	Lodging	Restaurant/ Bar	Groceries	Vehicular Expense	Other
Pere Marquette	66%	*1	*1	*1	*1
T.A.R.T.	93%	*2	*2	*2	*2
Leelanau	93%	*3	*3	*3	*3
Lansing River	21%	77%	31%	46%	39%
Paint Creek	9%	54%	18%	18%	9%
White Pine	21%	79%	43%	57%	

\*1 Respondents to the Pere Marquette Trail Study’s special tourist study showed that 8 out of 10 “travel inquirers” and 2/3 of “intercepted tourists” visited businesses along its length. Those most visited were restaurants and convenience stores.

\*2 The T.A.R.T. Trail Study asked for actual dollar amounts spent, not percentages. Tourists spent an average \$437 per party per trip on lodging, \$165 on restaurant/bar meals and drinks/trip, \$72.00 on grocery and convenience store goods, \$151 on motor vehicle expenses, \$74.00 on recreation and entertainment, and \$50 per trip on other goods, such as souvenirs and clothes.

\*3 The Leelanau Trail Study asked for actual dollar amounts spent, not percentages. Tourists spent an average \$671 per party per trip on lodging, \$234 on restaurant/bar meals and drinks/trip, \$145 on grocery and convenience store goods, \$98 on motor vehicle expenses, \$70 on recreation and entertainment, and \$51 on other goods, such as souvenirs and clothes.

Of the tourists surveyed who visited Oakland County primarily to use the Paint Creek Trail, 9% stayed overnight in Oakland County and 91% were on day visits. During their trip to Oakland County primarily to use the Paint Creek Trail, 9% spent money on lodging, 54% on restaurant food/drink, 18% on groceries, 18% on their vehicle and 9% on all other items.

## 1.4 HISTORY OF TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

The implementation of a countywide network of connected trails seeks to fulfill recommendations from the Oakland County Business Roundtable. Since its conception by the County's Planning & Economic Development Services Division, the vision of a countywide network has moved closer to reality with 8 major, multi-jurisdictional trail initiatives underway and/or in operation. The following outlines the major steps and accomplishments in the overall history and development of a connected non-motorized system in Oakland County.

### OAKLAND COUNTY BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE-1995 FINAL REPORT

The Oakland County Business Roundtable was formed in the early 1990's and was charged with developing an "economic course to position Oakland County for the competitive challenges in the international marketplace of the next Millennium." The Roundtable consisted of 125 people representing a broad cross-section of interests, industries, and sectors. The group was divided into 12 subcommittees who focused on developing recommendations for areas ranging from transportation and tax reform,

to quality of life issues. The Quality of Life Committee made 3 recommendations related to recreation and trails:

- Provide Oakland County residents with easy access to a network of paved bike paths throughout the county.

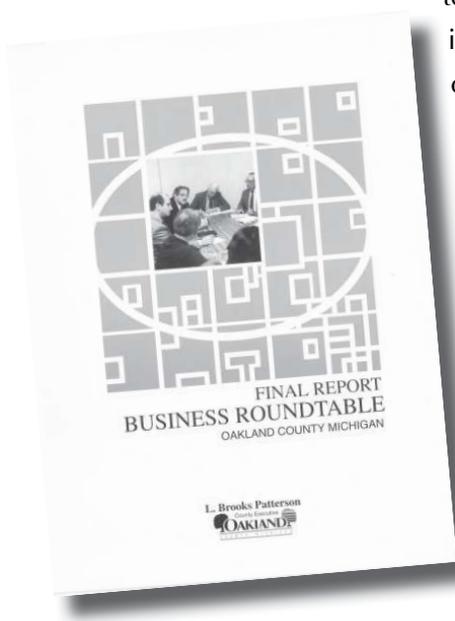
- Ensure that bike paths in the County support family recreational activities and the needs of bicycle commuters.
- Develop a bike path network that connects with state, regional, county and local parks and other recreational centers.

### OAKLAND COUNTY TRAILS INITIATIVE

Oakland County Planning and Economic Development Services (PEDS) first assisted in the planning for the Paint Creek Trail in the 1980s, and then followed by developing the concept for a countywide system of trails. The initiative envisioned two primary trail/path components – a Cross-County Trail and North County Trail loop, as well as multiple local secondary trail links. The Trails Initiative worked with local railway coalitions and governments to secure several million dollars in funding to plan, purchase, design, and construct miles of non-motorized trail systems.

### OAKLAND COUNTY TRAIL/PATH NETWORK STUDY

In 2002, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission, Oakland County Planning and Economic Development, and the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority joined together to develop the Oakland County Trail/Path Network Study to assess the feasibility of developing a county-wide Trail Network System. The main focus of the study was to determine the support for, and potential extent of the County's role in developing a trail network, how to fund and maintain it, and how to ensure safety and minimize liability. The study involved extensive public input and workshops to develop a vision for a connected network of trails and provide input as to the specific role for the County. Multiple findings and recommendations came out of the study including 3 primary action items:



# OAKLAND COUNTY TRAIL DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES

## EARLY 1970's

Abandonment of Penn Central RR in Paint Creek corridor anticipated

Local Master Plans indicate desire for non-motorized trails

## LATE 1970's

Local, County and State Agencies coordinate efforts to purchase Paint Creek corridor

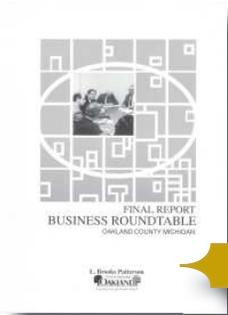
## 1981

Intergovernmental Trailways Commission formed by Rochester, Avon (now Rochester Hills), Oakland and Orion

County applies for federal funding for Paint Creek

## 1990

Paint Creek Trail Opens- First Michigan Rail Trail



DNR Trust Fund provides 50% funding for purchase of 10.5 miles of Penn Central (Paint Creek) right-of-way

## 1990

Oakland County Trails Initiative -- Cross County Trail and North County Trail Loop Vision established

## 1995

Oakland County Business Roundtable Report recommends trail development and connectivity

## 2002

Oakland County Trail/ Path Network Project -- Recommends OTAC and Trail Network Coordinator

## 2003

OTAC formed and Oakland County Trail Network Coordinator hired

## 2006

Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan Regional Greenways Workshops



## 2008

Oakland County Trails Master Plan Published

- Hire a full-time, salaried Trail Network Coordinator to facilitate the development of the network
- Create a Trail Advisory Council (TAC) to provide oversight and guidance to the Coordinator
- Develop a concise Trail Hierarchy with guidelines/standards for County and Local Trails

### **OAKLAND COUNTY TRAILS ADVISORY COUNCIL AND TRAIL NETWORK COORDINATOR**

In 2003, and based on the recommendations of the 2002 Trail/Path Network Study, the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Department developed a Trail Network Coordinator position and also formed the Oakland Trails Advisory Council (OTAC). The Coordinator and OTAC work with a variety of partnering agencies and interested stakeholders to expand and coordinate a network of trails throughout Oakland County. OTAC envisions an interconnected trail system throughout the region to facilitate enjoyment of the outdoors, provide health and fitness opportunities, establish transportation alternatives, and complement economic development.

The OTAC group meets bi-monthly to share resources, discuss needs and concerns, and provide updates to local, county, regional, and state efforts related to the implementation of non-motorized systems.

### **1.5 PLANNING PROCESS**

The Oakland County Trails Coordinator and a Master Plan Sub-Committee comprised of OTAC representatives and County staff oversaw the development of the Trails Master Plan. OTAC and the Master Plan Sub-Committee had worked to develop an outline of desired plan



### **CURRENT PARTNERING OTAC AGENCIES INCLUDE:**

- Oakland Co. Parks and Recreation
- Oakland Co. Planning and Economic Development Services
- Oakland Co. Board of Commissioners
- Oakland Co. Business Roundtable
- Oakland Co. Drain Commission
- Road Commission for Oakland County
- Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority
- Michigan DNR
- Michigan DOT
- Clinton River Trail Alliance (Clinton River Trail)
- Headwaters Trails, Inc.
- Paint Creek Trailways Commission (Paint Creek Trail)
- Polly Ann Trail Management Council, Inc. (Polly Ann Trail)
- West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation (West Bloomfield Trail)
- Huron Valley Trail
- Lakes Community Trail
- Woodward Corridor Trail

#### **Advising Members:**

- Hiking Michigan
- League of Michigan Bicyclists (LMB)
- Michigan Mountain Biking Association (MMBA)
- Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance (MTGA)
- Oakland Equestrian Coalition
- Highland Equestrian Conservancy
- Blueway Interests

contents prior to hiring a consultant in September 2007 to assist in compilation of this document. The Sub-Committee met with the consultant team in September 2007 to discuss goals for the project, purpose of the Master Plan, and generally discuss plan contents and schedule.

Field work associated with the Gap Analysis portion of the Master Plan was conducted in November 2007 with draft findings from the fieldwork presented to OTAC at their December 2007 meeting. Draft findings were also emailed out to a broad cross-section of stakeholders and agencies for their review and input. The Gap Analysis findings were also presented at a day long session of meetings in January 2008 with affected stakeholders to gather additional input and consensus on preferred routes. The input from these meetings was used to finalize the Gap Analysis findings and recommendations contained within this Master Plan. The revised findings were distributed to OTAC at their February 2008 meeting.

A draft of the Oakland County Trails Master Plan (at approximately 75% complete) was presented to OTAC and meeting attendees at their April 2008 meeting. Attendees were asked to provide input and comments so they could be incorporated into the final Master Plan.

The Master Plan Sub-Committee met again in May 2008 to review the document and discuss the draft in greater detail, with particular focus on the development of the Action Plan and coordination with the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Strategic Planning efforts.

A final Master Plan was presented and accepted by OTAC at a special July 30, 2008 meeting. A public hearing was held in front of

the Parks and Recreation Commission on September 3, 2008 at which time the Commission adopted the plan.

## 1.6 STAKEHOLDER INPUT

As has been documented, the Trails movement in Oakland County has been underway for many years. In the development of the non-motorized system, including the Oak Routes maps and the creation of OTAC, a significant amount of input has been gathered from a wide variety of stakeholders. Stakeholder input is on-going as all OTAC meetings are open to the public and are attended by a broad cross-section of trail users, agencies, and managers that provide input and ideas on a continuous basis. In addition, as the Oak Routes program has evolved, a significant number of community specific meetings have been held throughout the County to discuss the non-motorized system, to provide education regarding trail safety, design, funding, and development, and to generally promote trails. There also have been more formal stakeholder input gathering efforts in recent years as described in the following sections.

### OAKLAND COUNTY TRAIL SUMMITS

In 2003, Oakland County began organizing and holding annual Trail Summits in order to share information with other trail stakeholders, to celebrate success stories, and provide a networking opportunity between various communities, agencies, and advocates. The following Trail Summits have been held:

- 2003 Bloomer Park, Rochester Hills
- 2004 Independence Oaks County Park
- 2005 West Bloomfield Parks & Recreation
- 2006 Indian Springs Metropark
- 2007 Royal Park Hotel, Rochester



### TRAIL SUMMIT

*Oakland County Trail Summit's have been held on an annual basis since 2003 to share information, network, and celebrate trail successes.*

### GREENWAYS INITIATIVE REGIONAL VISIONING WORKSHOPS

Beginning in the spring of 2006, the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, through its GreenWays Initiative Program, assisted and facilitated regional greenway visioning workshops throughout southeastern Michigan. Each county in the 7-county region (Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Monroe, Washtenaw, Livingston and St. Clair) received a grant from the Community Foundation to assist in the workshop process. The goal of each workshop (or series of workshops in most counties) was to gather information from all of the municipalities in each county on the status of their trails and greenways (or their plans if no greenways were currently built). This information was gathered by county staff before each workshop so that the workshop could be spent analyzing and reviewing the collected data, and communities could discuss with each other ways to connect their built and planned greenway systems.

In Oakland County, this information was then put into an existing GIS database to update online and printed trail maps and the county's interactive trail mapping Website. The information was also used to create the maps and information found in this Master Plan.

In the fall of 2006 the Community Foundation hosted a 7-county workshop at Greenfield Village at The Henry Ford. More than 250 people attended this workshop to discuss ways to connect their trails across county boundaries throughout the entire metro-Detroit region. The product was a series of maps created by The Greenway Collaborative, illustrating the greenway possibilities and potential for the region.



### GREENWAYS WORKSHOPS

*Workshops were held with OTAC and throughout the County in 2006 as part of the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan's regional greenway planning efforts.*

### PARKS AND RECREATION CITIZEN SURVEY RESULTS

The Parks and Recreation Department completed a citizen survey in 2006 to better understand the needs and desires of the residents. The survey was administered by phone and

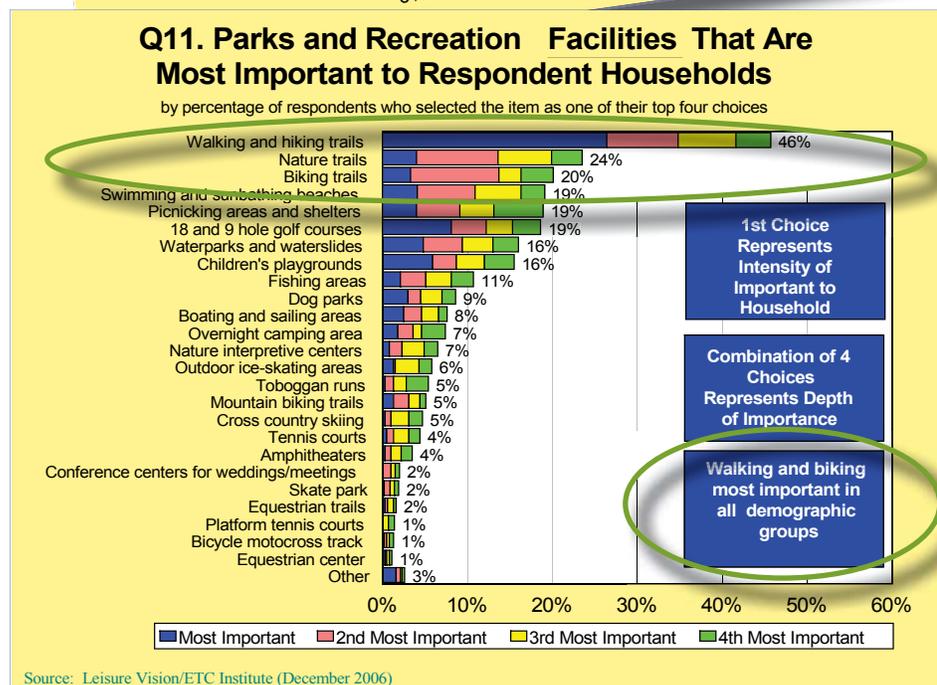
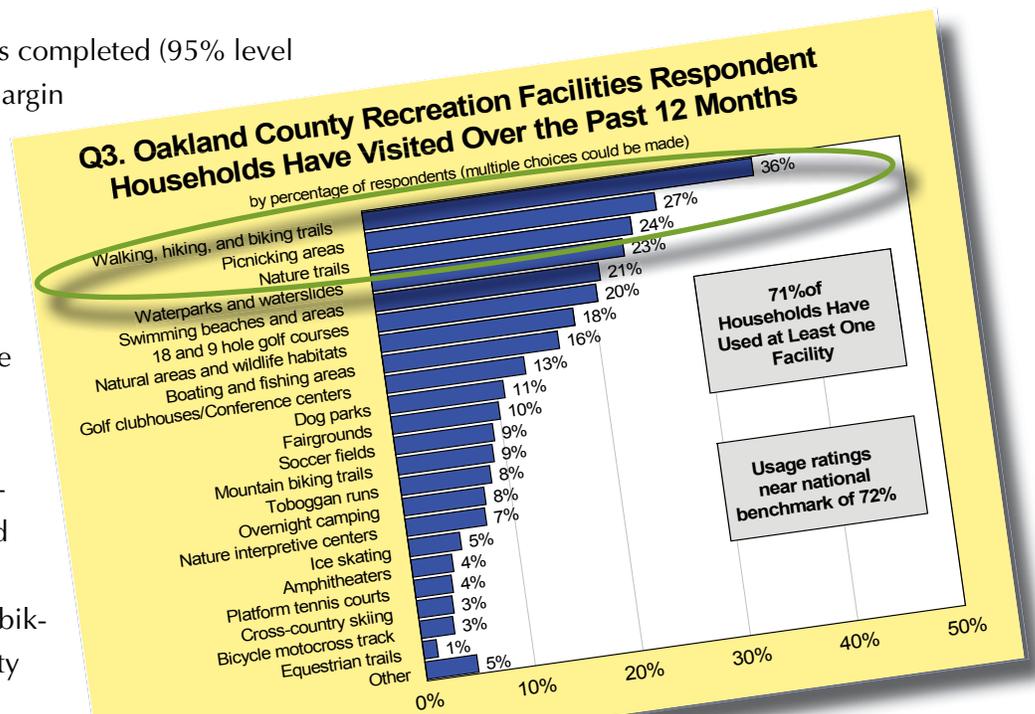
mail with 607 surveys completed (95% level of confidence with margin of error of +/- 4%).

Several of the questions and corresponding results reflected the high usage and importance of trails within the County. The largest percentage of respondents, 36%, indicated that they have visited walking, hiking, and biking trails in the County within the past year.

The results also indicated that walking and biking trails are the most important parks and recreation facility to all demographic groups.

**OAKLAND COUNTY TRAILS MASTER PLAN**  
Specific to the effort of compiling this Trails Master Plan, the County has gathered stakeholder comments in a variety of methods.

- The Master Plan project was announced and discussed at the Trails Summit held in October 2007 in Rochester in order to raise awareness of the project and encourage participation.
- The Master Plan project, including the Table of Contents, Gap Analysis results, and draft and final products were reviewed and



discussed at OTAC meetings from October 2007 through April 2008. OTAC meeting participants and attendees represent a broad cross-section of trail users, agencies, and managers.

- A series of stakeholder meetings were held in January 2008 with communities, agencies, and representatives that have a particular influence related to the various "gaps"

that were studied in detail for this Master Plan.

- Oakland County organized a meeting at the City of Troy in March 2008 and invited all of the communities that comprise the Southeast portion of Oakland County where the highest percentage of residents reside. The meeting was held to share information and ideas between the various communities regarding non-motorized systems and connections. The emerging “urban trail network” was discussed as was the Trails Master Plan.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> American Fact Finder. 2000 Census. Detailed Tables SF1  
<http://factfinder.census.gov>
- <sup>2</sup> Pedestrian and Bicycling Information Center. “The Benefits of Bicycling” <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/pp/benefits/enviroben/index.htm>
- <sup>3</sup> The New Path to Prosperity: Betsie Valley Trail Revving Up Small Town Economies. By Kelly Thayer. <http://www.mlui.org/transportation/fullarticle.asp?fileid=16872>
- <sup>4</sup> American Trails. “The Economic Impacts of Trails.” By Gary Sjoquist. <http://www.americantrails.org/resources/economics/MNecon.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Regional Council of Governments. <http://www.oki.org/transportation/bike/littlemiami.html>
- <sup>6</sup> A case study measuring economic and community benefits of Michigan’s Pere Marquette Rail-Trail, Michigan State University. Research conducted by Christine Vogt, Ph.D. Charles Nelson, Ph.D. and Joel Lynch, Ph.D.
- <sup>7</sup> U.S. Census 2000, Summary File 3 (SF-3) Sample Data.
- <sup>8</sup> The Detroit News. <http://www.detnews.com/2004/health/0402/26/health-75744.htm>
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid
- <sup>10</sup> The Economic Cost of Physical Inactivity in Michigan, Michigan Fitness Foundation, Study Conducted by David Chenowith, Ph.D. FAWHP, 2003.
- <sup>11</sup> <http://www.michigan.gov/surgeongeneral>

