

Ada Township Open Space Protection Plan

Kent County, Michigan



Adopted by the Open Space Task Force - July 12, 2000

Adopted by the Planning Commission as a component of the Township Master Plan - September 21, 2000

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The Ada Township Open Space Protection Plan was adopted as an element of the Ada Township Master Plan by Resolution of the Ada Township Planning Commission on September 21, 2000.

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Need for and Purpose of Plan

Like many other communities located at the fringes of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Area, Ada Township has experienced a massive conversion of land from agricultural and other undeveloped uses to residential development at low densities. The long-term trend of decentralization of population from the urban center to the metropolitan fringe is placing increasing development pressure on remaining open lands in our community. The continued loss of open space in the community to low-density residential sprawl has a number of undesirable effects:

- It threatens the loss of the visual qualities and character of the community that residents highly value.
- It is resulting in loss of and adverse impacts on environmentally-sensitive areas in the community, including wetlands, streams and rivers, woodlands, steeply-sloped areas and other types of sensitive environments.
- As open land is lost to development, opportunities for public access to natural areas, and opportunities for future development of parks and facilities for active recreational use are being lost.
- Increased development pressure also threatens the viability of the few remaining agricultural operations in the Township. Demand for land for residential development boosts land values and assessments for tax purposes far in excess of value for agricultural use, making agricultural operations less economically-viable, and increasing motivation for agricultural land owners to sell land for development.

In the face of continued development pressure and these adverse impacts, a core group of concerned citizens requested that the Township initiate an open space planning process, to develop a plan, strategies and methods for financing the protection of important open lands in Ada Township. In response, the Township Board authorized the formation of an Open Space Task Force and charged it with the development of this Open Space Preservation Plan.

Summary of Planning Process

The planning process included the following major components:

1. Identification of the important functions and community values that are advanced by open space.

The term open space is sufficiently broad that the specific functions and values that it serves need to be identified.

2. Preparation of a Goals/Mission Statement.

A statement of planning goals was developed by the Task Force in the early stages of the planning process, to guide the development of the plan.

2. Identification of High-Priority Lands for Preservation as Open Space.

A variety of information sources were used to identify important open lands in the community. These included a written survey of Township residents, mapping of important natural features in the Township, locations of existing committed open space lands, a field survey of important visual resources in the Township, and a field survey of high quality natural sites in the Township. With input from the above sources, and with an understanding of the many important functions that are served by open space lands, the Task Force developed a prioritized listing and mapping of open lands that are desired to be retained as permanent open space.

3. Identification of Potential Methods for Protecting Open Space.

Available methods for protection of open space in the township were identified and assessed for potential use in Ada Township. These methods range from voluntary actions that can be undertaken by property owners, to regulatory programs implemented through the zoning regulations of the Township. Available funding sources for public acquisition of open space were also assessed.

4. Development of Draft and Final Plans.

The Task Force developed and approved a draft Open Space Plan document, for review and approval by the Planning Commission and Township Board.

The Plan has been adopted by the Planning Commission as an element of the Township Master Plan, following a public hearing held by the Commission, as required by the Township planning statute.

CHAPTER II

STATEMENT OF PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Early in the preparation of this Plan, the following statement of planning goals and objectives was developed by the Open Space Task Force. The intent of this statement is to concisely express the specific goals that the Township seeks to achieve in the area of open space protection, and the intended outcomes of the planning process.

- I. PRESERVE THE OPEN SPACE QUALITIES OF THE TOWNSHIP WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO ITS CHARACTER AND ATTRACTIVENESS.**
 1. Identify important open space qualities and characteristics in the Township.
 2. Prepare an inventory of important open space lands in the Township.
- II. ENCOURAGE THE PROTECTION OF AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND THE VIABILITY OF AGRICULTURAL LAND USE IN THE TOWNSHIP.**
- III. PROTECT SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS AND AREAS WHICH SERVE IMPORTANT ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS IN THE TOWNSHIP, INCLUDING WETLANDS, FLOODPLAINS, STREAM CORRIDORS AND STEEP, WOODED SLOPES, TO SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF THE NATURAL COMMUNITY WITHIN THE TOWNSHIP.**
 1. Protect a continuous open space corridor extending along Honey Creek and Egypt Creek, with an open space connection at the upper reaches of the watersheds of these 2 streams, in the Chase Lake/Seidman Park area.
- IV. PROVIDE LAND TO MEET EXISTING AND FUTURE RECREATIONAL NEEDS OF TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS, FOR BOTH ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES.**
 1. Acquire land for needed neighborhood parks in the Ada Drive corridor area.
 2. Acquire land for a Township park in the northern part of the Township.
 3. Acquire a recreational open space corridor along the north side of the Grand River, from Chief Hazy Cloud Park to the DNR boat launch at Knapp St.
- V. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT METHODS AND MEANS FOR PROTECTING OPEN LANDS IN THE TOWNSHIP.**
 1. Identify modifications to zoning and other growth management regulations that are needed in order to encourage open space preservation and protection of important natural features.
 2. Identify and implement means for financing public and/or non-profit acquisition of open space lands, conservation easements and/or development rights on important open space lands in the Township.
 3. Maintain cooperative relationships with private non-profit organizations which facilitate open space protection, such as the Land Conservancy of West Michigan.

**VI. INCREASE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF AVAILABLE
LEGAL AND FINANCIAL METHODS FOR PRESERVING OPEN SPACE
LANDS.**

1. Use the Township newsletter to inform residents of open space protection methods.
2. Develop and implement a program of written materials, graphics and events to educate the public and promote open space protection efforts in the Township.

It is intended that the plans and implementation strategies identified in this document achieve all of the objectives stated above.

CHAPTER III

IDENTIFICATION OF HIGH PRIORITY OPEN SPACE LANDS

Important Open Space Values and Functions

Identifying open space lands that are important to preserve requires an understanding of the variety of important functions that open space serves and the human values that are associated with open land. An accepted definition of the term “open space” is also needed. For purposes of this plan, open space is considered to be land that is free from intense development, and where the natural or cultural characteristics of the landscape are predominant. The benefits of open space extend far beyond simply providing a pleasant vista out one’s window. These functions and values cover a broad range, from providing land for public recreational activities, to less tangible functions such as enhancing appreciation of the natural world. The following important open space functions were considered in identifying high priority lands for protection in the Township:

1. Natural Systems Preservation

Open space lands can provide important habitat for plant and animal species whose habitat areas are decreasing due to conversion of land to residential use.

2. Aesthetic Quality Preservation

Natural lands have an inherent attractiveness and value to many people. Experiencing natural surroundings is an important activity enjoyed by many, including many residents in the Township who value living in relatively natural surroundings. Certain features of the cultural landscape are also valued by many, such as mowed meadows, agricultural barns, animal pastures and paddocks, and even maintained residential lawns.

3. Surface Water Quality Protection

Open lands contribute greatly to maintaining the quality of rivers and streams in the community. The natural vegetative cover on undisturbed land shields the soil against the eroding impacts of rainfall, holding the soil in place and protecting against washing of soil into streams. Natural vegetative cover promotes infiltration of rain and snowmelt into the ground, providing protection against flooding and wide swings in stream flow that disturb stream systems.

4. Flood Control

By promoting infiltration of rain and snowmelt into the ground, natural land helps protect against flooding. Flood prone lands adjacent to rivers and streams provide storage volume for floodwaters. The extensive placement of fill in the floodplain diminishes the water storage capacity of the floodplain, thereby exacerbating downstream flooding.

5. Maintenance of Groundwater Systems

By encouraging infiltration of precipitation into the soil, natural land cover promotes replenishment of natural groundwater supplies. Groundwater systems in turn have an impact on surface water systems. Many wetland areas are fed by groundwater supplies. Groundwater seeps slowly from springs into the surface water system, helping maintain year-round flow in streams.

6. Recreation Opportunities

Natural lands are a valuable recreational resource for such activities as hiking, ski touring, hunting, bicycling, bird watching, horseback riding and others. While less natural in character, parks that are improved with playground and sports fields may still retain some attractive natural features.

7. Education/Spiritual Enrichment

Open lands provide opportunities for learning more about our natural surroundings and developing a greater sense of wonder and awe about the world and humanity's place in it.

8. Historic/Cultural Resource Protection

There may be specific open space sites in the Township with historical or other cultural importance that merits their retention as open space. For example, land along the Grand River in Ada Township played an important role in Native American society, in the settlement of the West Michigan area by Europeans and in the interactions between the two cultures.

9. Maintain Community Separation/Identity

Open space land can help maintain a distinct boundary between urban and rural areas, and avoid the gradual loss of community identity that can result from a sprawling development pattern that consumes large quantities of land in the rural areas between our communities.

10. Property Value Enhancement

Proximity to open space is an important criterion that affects the choice of residence location for many people. Its importance was underscored in a citizen survey undertaken in 1993 as part of the Township's master planning process. Survey respondents were asked to rank the relative importance of a variety of factors in affecting their choice of home location in Ada Township. Ninety-one percent of respondents ranked "surrounding open space" as "very important" or "important" in their choice of home location. This ranked second only to "personal safety/low crime rate" in a listing of 15 different factors ranked by survey respondents. Given this importance, the proximity of open space is likely a contributing factor to the value of residential property in the community.

11. Agricultural Production

Open land is a necessity to the production of food crops and agricultural commodity crops used for livestock production and many other purposes. While the most important function of agricultural land is its role in sustaining the human population through food production, it also contributes greatly to the visual qualities of the community. It also provides a livelihood and a lifestyle for a declining number of farm families. Americans have traditionally placed a high value on maintaining the viability of family farms and the agrarian values sustained by family farms.

Existing Committed Open Space Lands

The locations and types of existing committed open space lands is an important consideration in identifying priority lands for future protection. Ada Township's Community Recreation Plan contains a complete description of the public and semi-public parks and recreation facilities in the Township. Committed open space lands in public, semi-public, and private categories is shown on the attached Committed Open Space Lands map. Following is a summary of these lands.

Public Open Space Land

Ada Township contains over 1,000 acres of public land available for recreational pursuits. The community's attractive natural features have made Ada an appropriate area in which to locate regional recreational facilities. In addition, Ada Township has two community parks operated by the township government and several school facilities available to the public. Public open space land includes the following:

- Cannonsburg State Game Area

Cannonsburg State Game Area is a natural area used for hunting, hiking, mountain biking and cross-country skiing. Nearly 500 acres of the game area are located within northern Ada Township, with a larger area of the park located in adjacent Cannon Township.

- Seidman Park

This largely undeveloped natural park is owned and operated by the Kent County Road and Park Commission. With 422 acres, Seidman Park is one of the largest parks in the Kent County system. The heavily wooded site contains a trail network used for hiking and cross-country skiing. Horseback riding and mountain biking are prohibited by County Park rules. There are several interpretive display boards along the trail network. Restroom facilities (pit type) and parking areas are located at both the northern and southern ends of the park. The trail network includes a boardwalk extending through one of the several wetlands which occur within the park.

- Chief Hazy Cloud Park

Chief Hazy Cloud Park is another County-owned facility located on the northern bank of the Grand River, on Pettis Ave. The 22-acre park contains picnic tables and grills, play equipment, and restrooms. Fishing is also a popular activity at this park.

- Grand River Launch Ramps

There are two public access boat launch sites on the Grand River under the jurisdiction of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Waterways Division. The Knapp St. Bridge Public Access Site is located south of the Knapp St. Bridge, east of the river. The Ada Grand River Public Access Site is located just north of Fulton Street (M-21), on the river's west bank. Each site contains a boat launching ramp and restrooms.

- MDOT Roadside Rest Area Park

This MDOT roadside rest area is on a three acre site along M-21 near the extreme southeast corner of the Township. Picnic tables, grills, and restroom facilities are available at the park.

- Ada Township Park

The larger of the two Township-owned parks, Ada Township Park is a 57-acre site located on the southern border of the Township, southeast of the Village. The park site occupies the boundary between uplands and lowlands, with improved recreational fields and playground facilities in the upland portion of the park, and a large natural area encompassing woodlands and wetlands in the lowland portion of the park. A small area of remnant prairie vegetation is found within the lowland area of the park.

- Leonard Park

This park is a two-acre site adjacent to the Thornapple River just east of Ada's village business district. The Township's only lighted softball diamond is located here, as well as a re-constructed covered bridge over the Thornapple River.

- Elementary and Secondary School Sites

Ada Elementary School, Forest Hills Central and Middle School, and Ada Christian School all have improved recreational fields and playgrounds on their campuses. The Forest Hills Central campus occupies over 80 acres, about half of which is open land. The Central Campus open land includes an attractive wooded hillside located east of the Middle School.

Private Recreational Facilities

- Lions Field

Lions Field is a privately-owned facility that contains four baseball diamonds. The ball fields are used primarily by over 20 area Little League baseball teams.

- Kent County Conservation League

The Kent County Conservation League is a private sportsman's organization with trap, skeet, rifle, pistol and archery ranges on its 171 acre tract immediately east of Seidman Park.

- Creston Rod and Gun Club

A small rod and gun club with outdoor shooting facilities is also located in northern Ada Township, on Pettis Ave. north of the Egypt Creek Estates development.

- Egypt Valley Country Club

Egypt Valley Country Club, located in the northern portion of Ada Township, is a private club with a 27-hole golf course, tennis courts, outdoor swimming pool and large clubhouse. As a private facility, the club has very little impact on public recreation or public access opportunities in the Township.

Conservation Easements and Subdivision/Condominium Common Areas

A significant acreage of open space land has been set aside as common open space in residential developments approved under the Township's Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning regulations. To date, over 350 acres of natural land has been set aside in new development in the Township as permanent open space, for the use and enjoyment of residents of the developments. Examples of open space in new development include the following:

- Common areas in Adacraft Commons Subdivision protect the steep, wooded hillsides in the subdivision from disturbance, and provide physical separation between abutting lots. Adacraft Commons, which was developed in the 1970's, was the first open space development in the Township.

- A large wetland, as well as floodplain land along the Grand River, are protected open space in Egypt Creek Estates, located on the west side of Pettis Ave., north of Knapp St. The open space in this development provides over 800 feet of separation between the homes and Pettis Ave., and provides a recreational trail corridor along the Grand River.
- Over 30 acres of permanent open space are part of The Conservancy Subdivision, on the west side of McCabe Ave., north of Conservation St. A 200-foot wide open space buffer separates the home sites from McCabe Ave., to maintain the rural character of the road frontage. A 33-acre open space area includes rugged, wooded hills of maple, beech and oak stands, with a variety of wildlife.

Other residential developments with protected open space include Catamount, Copper Valley, Darby Farms, East River Ridge, Grand Valley Estates, Longleaf, The Preserve, The Sanctuary, Treebrook Estates, Valley Ridge Country Club Estates, and Wedgefield.

This private protected open space in the Township is a valuable natural and recreational resource, which will be increasingly appreciated by Township residents in the future. This private open space is an important supplement to public lands in providing wildlife habitat, protecting river and stream corridors, protecting natural plant communities and providing recreational opportunities for Township residents. It is also becoming an important tool in helping to preserve the rural, open and natural character of Ada Township, characteristics which are highly valued by its residents.

Important Natural Features

The following description of significant natural features in Ada Township will help establish the characteristics of open space lands which merit protection from development.

Topography

The Natural Features Map, contained in the Appendix, identifies areas within the Township having slopes greater than 15%. Much of the land in Ada Township is rolling to steep terrain, in areas bordering the Grand River and its major tributaries. These areas, formed as glacial moraines, are often covered in second growth oak forest, with occasional areas of more mature maple-beech forest. Nearly level terrain is found in two major areas of the Township - in the valley of the Grand River along its entire length through the Township, and in the northeast part of the Township, in upland glacial till plains. Nearly level to gently rolling terrain is also found in the southwest part of the Township, where some areas north and south of Cascade Road are poorly-drained. Topographic variation within Ada Township ranges from 620 along the banks of the Grand River to 883 feet at the intersection of Giles Avenue and 4-Mile Road - a vertical change in elevation of 263 feet.

Steep slopes and rolling hillsides, unlike groundwater, are not a renewable resource, nor do they have clearly defined public benefits like wetlands or woodlands. Topography is a geological feature which exists in a balance with vegetation, precipitation and wind. The maintenance of this balance helps prevent non-point source pollution of water resources while preserving a distinctive and attractive feature of the local landscape. It is this distinctive visual character provided by topographic relief which is important to Ada Township's character.

Areas of steep topography, because of their susceptibility to erosion and the physical disruption and alteration which often accompanies their development, are an environmentally-sensitive resource. In addition, ridgelines in steep terrain areas are often visually prominent for long distances. The manner in which development occurs in these areas can significantly affect the visual character of the community.

At the same time, rugged terrain is much in demand as a setting for residential development. Ada Township's rolling woodlands have become prime locations for homeowner's seeking proximity to nature and seclusion from the hectic demands of everyday life.

These factors can result in a clash of competing interests, between satisfying the demand for attractive home sites, and protecting a sensitive environmental feature which is one of the Township's defining characteristics.

Surface Water

The Grand River is the most prominent surface water feature in Ada Township, passing through the community for a distance of about 7 miles from southeast to northwest. The Thornapple River enters the southeast quadrant of the Township from the south, and passes through the Ada Village area before joining the Grand River just upstream from the Fulton St. bridge. The Ada Dam on the Thornapple River, just upstream from the Ada Village area, creates an impoundment which extends into Cascade Township to the south.

With the exception of the facilities of Amway Corporation and the sand and gravel mining operations of Reith-Riley Corp., most of the land along either side of the Grand River in the Township is undeveloped, in either agricultural or other open space condition. East of the Fulton St. (M-21) bridge, the highway runs along the north side of the river, at the edges of the river floodplain and just below the steep hillsides which parallel the river valley. Much of the area adjacent to the Grand River is within the 100-year floodplain, a federally-defined area subject to periodic flooding, and also subject to floodplain development regulations. The floodplain is discussed more fully in a later section.

Several major creeks are tributary to the Grand River in the Township, the major named tributaries being Egypt Creek and Honey Creek north and east of the Grand River. Much of the land on either side of both of these creeks is rolling, wooded terrain. Upper reaches of Egypt Creek extend through the Cannonsburg State Game Area, Egypt Valley Country Club and agricultural land in the north part of the Township. Much of the land along Honey Creek is in very low density residential use.

Other minor tributary streams are found in the Township, such as "Carl Creek" in the southwest quadrant. It drains much of the industrial and residential land south of M-21, before crossing M-21 east of Alta Dale Ave. and leading to the Grand River north of Grand River Dr. Another significant drainage corridor, Strawberry Creek, extends from the Forest Hills Central Middle and High School campus, through Adacraft Commons and Adatowne Subdivisions, and across M-21 near Grand River Ave. before entering the bottomlands of the Grand River. The Natural Features map identifies the major stream watersheds within the Township.

Many of these streams and their adjacent land, despite surrounding urbanization, still support a fishery resource and provide habitat for other wildlife. Much of the land in proximity to these streams has wetland characteristics. The streams and their adjacent wetlands serve valuable drainage, flood control and water purification functions, which can be disrupted if too overburdened by the increased runoff volumes and pollutant loads which often accompany urban development.

Ada Township has relatively few natural lakes, compared to other parts of Kent County. The largest lake in the Township is Chase Lake, east of Honey Creek Ave. at 3 Mile Rd. This 50 acre, eutrophic lake is nearly surrounded by a large wetland area. Two smaller lakes, including Down's Lake, are nearby.

Wetlands

The term "wetland" includes marshes, swamps, bogs, and similar areas that are often found between open water and upland areas. Many, but not all of these areas are subject to State regulation under the Goemaere-Anderson Wetland Protection Act of 1979.

Wetlands within Ada Township were identified by using USGS Topographic Maps, the Kent County Soil Survey and the Michigan Resource Information System (MIRIS), Division of Land Resource Programs, Department of Natural Resources (data compiled from 1978 aerial photography). These areas are shown on the map titled "Wetlands" contained in the Appendix. Much of the area mapped as wetland is designated as such by virtue of having a soil type classified as "hydric". Hydric soils are saturated with water, flooded or ponded long enough during the growing season to develop anaerobic conditions in the upper part of the soil profile.

Much of the land within the Grand River floodplain is of hydric soil type, and is shown as wetland, even though much of this area is developed as manufacturing facilities or used for agriculture. True wetland is found in a very large area surrounding Chase Lake, near 3 Mile Rd. and Honey Creek Ave. Other extensive wetland areas are found along the major and minor streams in the Township. Examples include land along "Carl Creek", the drainage corridor north of St. Roberts Church and east of Adacroft Commons, and the extensive wetlands found along Honey Creek and its tributaries in Seidman Park.

In the past, wetlands were often regarded as wastelands--sources of mosquitoes, flies, and unpleasant odors. Most people felt that they were places to be avoided, or better yet, eliminated. This negative view, combined with the demand for more developable land, has resulted in the destruction of some of the township's poorly drained lands. These areas have been drained and converted to farmland, industrial use, or filled for housing development. Similar practices continue throughout the State. Of the estimated 11 million acres of wetlands that stood in Michigan 150 years ago, 3 million acres remain. Since there is little historical data on wetland identification, it is not possible to estimate the total loss of wetlands within Ada Township.

Because they occur where the dry land meets the water, wetlands play a critical role in the management of the township's water-based resources. Acre for acre, wetlands produce more wildlife and plants than any other Michigan habitat type. Michigan boasts about 2,300 native plant species; 50 percent of these are wetland species and over 25 percent of the wetland species are threatened or endangered.

Other benefits of wetlands include the following:

- They help reduce the extent of flooding by absorbing runoff from rain and melting snow and slowly releasing excess water into rivers and lakes. (A one-acre swamp, when flooded to a depth of one foot, contains 325,851 gallons of water.)
- They filter pollutants from surface runoff, trapping fertilizers, pesticides, sediment and other potential contaminants, and help to break them down into less harmful substances.
- They contribute to recharge of groundwater supplies when connected to underground aquifers.
- They form part of the natural nutrient and water cycles, and produce vital atmospheric gases, including oxygen.
- They provide commercial and recreational value to the economy, by producing plants, game birds and fur-bearing mammals. Survival of many varieties of fish are directly connected to wetlands, as they require shallow water areas for breeding, feeding and escape from predators.

- Wetlands also contribute to the open, natural character of Ada Township, by providing natural areas of open space interspersed with developed land. Wetland areas can provide a valuable site design element in residential development, providing separation between neighboring properties and attractive natural areas which serve as a property value-enhancing amenity.

Floodplains

Floodplains are relatively flat stream valley floors which are periodically overrun by the stream at high water after heavy rainfall or rapid snowmelt within the stream's watershed area. The 100-year floodplain within Ada Township has been determined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These areas, subject to a 1 in 100 or greater chance of flooding in any year, are located along the Grand River and are identified on the Natural Features map.

Land within the 100-year floodplain is subject to restrictions on development under provisions of the Township Floodplain Development Ordinance, as well as State of Michigan DNR regulations. Administration and enforcement of floodplain development regulations by the Township is required in order for property within the Township to be eligible for participation in the Federal Flood Insurance program. These regulations are intended to ensure that construction within floodplains is protected against flood damage, and will not impede flow of flood waters and cause more severe upstream flooding. Habitable structures must have the lowest floor level, including basement, located above the 100-year flood plain elevation.

Woodlands

While regulatory programs apply to certain critical environmental areas, such as floodplains and wetlands, this is not the case with woodlands, even though they also provide important environmental benefits. They are buffers and moderators of flooding, climate, erosion, noise and air pollution. Significant woodland areas within the Township are shown on the Forested Lands map in the Appendix.

Ada Township's wooded areas give the community a rural charm many residents and visitors find particularly attractive. Woodlands also have other values which cannot be measured in board feet, such as providing wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities, moderating climate, enhancing air quality and filtering and buffering noise. Woodlands are important protective features for watersheds and soils. Forest vegetation moderates the effects of winds and storms, stabilizes and enriches the soil, and slows runoff from precipitation, thereby allowing it to be filtered by the forest floor before percolating into groundwater reserves. By decreasing runoff velocity and increasing groundwater infiltration, woodlands also help to regulate flooding.

High Quality Natural Communities

In 1992, the Michigan Natural Features Inventory program of the Michigan DNR Wildlife Division conducted an inventory of natural areas in Kent County. This inventory identified a total of 25 high quality natural area sites in the County. Three of the 25 sites are located in Ada Township. They include natural prairie fen and inundated shrub swamp adjacent to Chase Lake, a small (3-acre) hillside prairie on a steep hillside west of Grand River Dr., and a southern mesic forest containing red, white and black oak, as well as sugar maple and American beech located between Pettis Ave. and the Grand River, north of Knapp St. There are several other areas of mature forest with high species diversity in the Township, that were not included as part of this inventory. Many of these areas have been identified through the Summer, 1999 field investigation conducted by Calvin College scientists, as described below.

Grand Rapids Foundation/Metro Council/Land Conservancy Inventory of Important Natural Sites

The public's input to the Township's open space planning effort is complemented by a more technical investigation of important open lands that was conducted in the summer of 1999 by a team of scientists from Calvin College, under the direction of Task Force member and Calvin College faculty member Randy Van Dragt. This group conducted an on-site reconnaissance and review of mapping sources to identify unique natural sites and sites that are representative of pre-settlement conditions in Ada, Cannon and Cascade Townships. This study was a pilot project jointly sponsored by the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, Grand Valley Metropolitan Council and the Grand Rapids Foundation, to develop a study methodology that will be used to inventory important natural lands on a metropolitan-wide basis.

The results of this study in Ada Township identified a number of sites that were found to have significant natural features. These sites were placed in three categories of relative significance, as shown on the "Land Conservancy Natural Areas Inventory" map contained in the Appendix. This map also identifies the location of the three sites within Ada Township identified in the State of Michigan Natural Features Inventory. Of note in these findings is the fact that many of the sites designated as "high priority" and "moderate quality" natural areas coincide with areas highly ranked in the citizen survey results, including lands along the Grand River and the Chase Lake area.

Citizen Survey Concerning Important Open Space Lands

In July of 1999, a written survey was distributed by first class mail to the homes of all registered voters in the Township, and to absentee property owners. The survey sought nominations from the public of candidate sites which should be considered for permanent open space protection in the community. Respondents were asked to identify the geographic location of their top 3 priority sites. The map titled "Citizen-Ranked Sites for Open Space Protection" identifies the 10 specific areas of the Township that received the highest number of nominations as either 1st or 2nd priority for protection. The 10 highest ranked areas, in priority order, were as follows:

1. Ada Drive corridor
2. Grand River floodplain
3. Area bounded by Honey Creek Ave., Dogwood Ave., Conservation St. and Pettis Ave.
4. Chase Lake area
5. Area bounded by Pettis Ave., 2 Mile Rd. and Egypt Valley Ave.
6. Area bounded by Knapp St., Honey Creek Ave., Conservation St. and Egypt Valley Ave.
7. Land north of 3 Mile Rd., west of Egypt Valley Ave., to the Grand River
8. Land in the vicinity of the Ada Village business district and residential neighborhoods
9. Land in the area of Kulross Ave, Rix St. and Scarborough Dr.
10. McCabe Ave./Bailey Dr./2 Mile Rd. area.

Following are some analysis comments regarding the survey results, and background information that places the survey results in the proper perspective.

- The survey results are somewhat reflective of the geographic distribution of population and housing in the Township, and the tendency of respondents to give high priority for protection to areas near their location of residence. For example, the highest ranked area is also located in the most densely-populated portion of the Township. The 3rd-highest ranked area is also in an area of the Township that is relatively highly-populated.
- Other aspects of the survey results, however, indicate that the public recognizes the value of important community open spaces, regardless of proximity to their own neighborhoods. For example, the Grand River floodplain corridor was ranked very highly in importance, despite the

fact that few people live in close proximity to the river. Similarly, the Chase Lake and adjacent wetland complex were relatively highly ranked in the citizen survey, even though the lake is not highly visible from public areas, and is in the most sparsely-populated area of the Township.

- The survey was conducted at the same time that extensive publicity was being given to a developer-sponsored public design charette for a potential large-scale development on over 400 acres in the number 5-ranked area. The public attention focused on the area at the time of the survey in all likelihood resulted in its being ranked of higher importance for open space protection than would otherwise be the case.

Visual Resource Inventory

In January, 1999, several student teams from Aquinas College conducted an inventory of significant visual resources in the Township, under the direction of Task Force member and Aquinas College faculty member Robb Bajema. The survey was conducted as a “windshield survey,” in that the student teams conducted the inventory from vehicles driven along the Township’s section line road network. The results of this survey are depicted on the map titled “Visual Resource Inventory and Analysis,” contained in the Appendix.

The visual resource inventory results show that significant visual resources are widely distributed through the Township, and coincide with many of the areas ranked highly on other criteria discussed above.

Low Density Rural Development Pattern

Although it is not amenable to mapping or identification of specific sites, it is important to recognize that the rural character and open visual quality of many parts of Ada Township is the result of a very low density of development, with single-family homes on large properties of 5 acres or more. The open land that is part of these large residential properties covers a wide range of land cover types, including maintained lawns, small ponds, woodlands, wetlands, old fallow farm fields, hay fields, animal pasture and vegetable gardens. To the extent that these properties become split into smaller parcels, the visual character of rural parts of the Township may be lost.

Priority Areas for Open Space Protection

The Task Force has identified specific sites and areas within Ada Township as being of the highest priority for preservation as undeveloped open land, based on consideration of public input, inventory of existing natural features in the Township, location of existing protected open lands, and the goals and policies of the Ada Township Master Plan and Recreation Plan. The table at the end of this chapter identifies the specific open space values and functions that are advanced by the highest-priority sites and areas identified in this Plan. The range of open space functions that are served by these sites are indicative of the variety in the types of sites selected for protection.

While the numerical order of the sites listed below is intended to reflect their relative importance and priorities for protection, it is very likely that actual protection efforts may address these areas in a different order than that indicated. The opportunity to acquire or otherwise protect a particular site may need to be acted upon when it arises, lest the opportunity be lost. In addition, it is the intent of the Task Force that open space be protected only through working on a voluntary basis with willing property owners. Therefore, protection priorities may need to be adjusted to focus efforts on properties with owners who are interested in pursuing protection status. Another factor that should affect priority for protection efforts is the extent to which a given site or area is threatened by development pressure that would compromise its open space value. Sites or areas which are less threatened by development due to

severe natural constraints, such as extensive wetlands or floodplains, may merit less urgent attention than areas without such constraints.

Finally, it should be noted that there are a variety of means available for protecting important open lands in the Township, ranging from outright purchase of property to encouragement and use of voluntary land management practices by property owners. The method of protection that is most appropriate will vary according to the specific characteristics of each site, and the needs and desires of land owners. It is not the intent of this Plan or the Task Force that all of the lands identified as priority open space be publicly acquired, or that they be used for public access. In many cases, the goal of open space protection may be achieved without public access to the land, and with the land remaining in private ownership.

1. Grand River Corridor Lands

Few areas encompass a greater range of important open space functions in the Township than the floodplain, wetland, woodland and open meadow lands that border the Grand River through Ada Township.

Retaining this land in an undeveloped, open condition is important for the following reasons:

- Lands bordering the Grand River include important wildlife habitat and cover a broad range of land cover types, ranging from open meadow to mature woodlands, as well as extensive wetland areas.
- The lowlands along the Grand River that are subject to periodic flooding serve an important flood attenuation purpose, by providing storage area for flood waters. If the storage capacity of the floodplain is diminished by extensive fill or development, flooding impacts on other properties are worsened.
- Given its linear extent of 7 to 8 miles through the Township, the Grand River and its adjoining lands are a prominent visual feature of the Township. The proximity of Grand River Dr. and Pettis Ave. to the river corridor further accentuates the important contribution that this corridor makes to the natural visual qualities of Ada Township. These two roads both provide opportunities for expansive views by travelers along these roads.

The Grand River Corridor lands encouraged for open space protection are divided into a primary protection area and a secondary protection area. The primary protection area includes the following targeted areas:

- open land on the south side of the river, extending northwest from the west end of the Amway Corp. manufacturing facilities to the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) Lodge property on Grand River Dr.
- open land on the north side of the river, from the Fulton St. (M-21) bridge northwest to the north Township boundary at 4 Mile Rd.
- open land on the south side of the river, from the confluence with the Thornapple River southeast to the Township boundary.

These three primary protection areas are deemed of highest priority for protection compared to other Grand River corridor properties because of the large parcel sizes found in these 3 areas, and the relatively small number of property owners involved.

The following “secondary protection areas” are viewed as a lower priority for protection efforts, based on the highly fragmented land ownership and the large number of small parcels involved:

- open land on the west side of the Grand River, from the FOP Lodge north to the Township boundary at 4 Mile Rd.

Lands along the Grand River corridor should be protected through a combination of measures, including public or non-profit acquisition of property or development rights, as well as voluntary management practices by private property owners. In addition, where development of land along the river corridor does occur, proper site design practices should be used to minimize impacts on the open space values and functions of the corridor lands, through clustering of building sites furthest away from the river’s edge, maintenance of undisturbed buffers adjacent to wetlands and the water’s edge, and other practices, further described in later sections of this report.

2. Chase Lake Natural Area

Chase Lake and the lands bordering it comprise a highly-valuable natural ecosystem. Its outstanding natural features and habitat value, its proximity to agricultural lands and its strategic location in relation to existing protected open lands in the Township make this area rank highly in the Township’s priorities for open space protection. The importance of this area is further reinforced by the high ranking it received in the Summer, 1999 citizen survey, despite the fact that the surrounding area is sparsely populated.

Specific important open space functions of the Chase Lake area include the following:

- The small lake and surrounding extensive wetlands are the headwaters of two different branches of Egypt Creek (the main branch of the creek that runs through the Cannonsburg State Game Area, as well as a smaller branch that extends southwest from the lake, and joins the main branch near the creek mouth at the Grand River) These wetlands collect runoff from surrounding lands, filter and buffer it before releasing it slowly to the Egypt Creek.
- Chase Lake and its wetland complex provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, including sandhill cranes. The area was identified in the Michigan Natural Features Inventory program of the Michigan DNR as a high-quality natural area, that includes a natural prairie fen and inundated shrub swamp. This water feature provides habitat for a variety of plant and animal species.
- Chase Lake and bordering lands can serve as an important open space linkage between two large existing committed open space areas – the Cannonsburg State Game Area and Seidman Park. Acquisition of selected large parcels to the south and northwest of Chase Lake could provide a continuous wildlife and recreational corridor extending from the north Township boundary to Conservation St., a distance of over 4 miles.

3. Ada Drive Neighborhood Park Land

Ada Township’s parks planning has long identified a need for public neighborhood park facilities in the more-populated southwest part of the Township. Open space preservation in this area also ranked highest in priority in the 1999 Citizen Survey. Meeting the need for public park space could be combined with open space and natural area protection, by acquiring 20-30 acres of land along the south side of Ada Dr., adjacent to the Ada Dr. Pedestrian/Bicycle Trail, and adjacent to Forest Hills Public Schools property.

A public park in this area would be accessible from the existing pedestrian/bicycle trail, and could also be adjacent to the Forest Hills Central campus. It could incorporate playground facilities and hiking/ski

trails, which could possibly extend through the natural wooded hillside located east of the Central campus.

Natural character of the south side of Ada Drive from the Central campus east should be maintained, through site design measures that provide generous natural greenbelt along the road, and a minimal number of driveway accesses along the road.

4. Agricultural Preservation Area in Northeast Part of the Township.

The northeast quadrant of Ada Township is home to most of the Township's remaining land in agricultural use. While the Township's agricultural land use and economic base are not nearly as significant as in other parts of West Michigan, there remain a number of small, family-owned agricultural operations, whose owners have a strong interest in continuing their agricultural livelihood. The agricultural lands in this part of the Township contribute greatly to the Township's rural and open character.

To the extent that land in this area can be retained in agricultural use, its conversion to low-density residential use can be avoided. The Township's Master Plan discourages residential development in this part of the Township, because of its remoteness from employment and service centers, and the limitations of the public road system and other public facilities in this area. It is therefore in the Township's interest to take steps to encourage the continued economic viability of agricultural land use in this part of the community. Appropriate measures to do so would probably not include outright purchase of property, but could include purchase of development rights, transfer of development rights, conservation easements, as well as use of incentives for encouraging continued agricultural use. These techniques are discussed later in this document.

5. Grand River/Sunny Creek Overlook

This area includes about 220 acres, owned by two parties, between Pettis Ave. and the Grand River, at the north Township boundary between 3 Mile Rd. and 4 Mile Rd. The property encompasses mature hardwood forest identified as high-quality natural area in the statewide Michigan Natural Features Inventory of important natural sites. The woodlands occupy high bluffs bordering steep ravines extending down to the Grand River floodplain. The property includes important habitat areas in extensive wetlands along old river channel meanders.

This property has potential for inclusion in a riverfront greenbelt through the entire Township, and extending into adjoining Townships.

6. Dogwood Ave./ Honey Creek Ave. Area Honey Creek Frontage

This property is approximately 63.5 acres with about 1/3 mile of frontage on both sides of Honey Creek. The site has frontage on Dogwood Ave., one of the Township's many "Natural Beauty" roads. This site was rated as being of "moderate" quality in the Land Conservancy/Grand Rapids Foundation inventory of natural sites in the Township. It is also in an area that was identified as a high priority for open space protection in the July, 1999 Citizen Survey. There are several adjoining large parcels, portions of which could be included in a large contiguous block of undeveloped open land.

The high ranking of this area in the Citizen Survey can be attributed somewhat to the fact that there is a relatively large number of residential properties in the area bounded by Dogwood Ave., Conservation St. and Honey Creek Ave. Protection of this site and adjoining lands would enhance the value of surrounding residential properties, which may make feasible a financing strategy that includes participation of surrounding residents in the cost of protecting this land.

7. Land for North Area Township Park

The Township's parks plan identifies a long-term need for public park facilities in the northern part of the Township. Although no specific location is identified, the Pettis Ave. corridor south of Knapp St. is a logical location for such a future park, for the following reasons:

- There is an existing large and growing population base in the Grand Valley Estates subdivision.
- A large gravel mining operation has recently been terminated in this area, and the site reclaimed. Recent change in ownership of the property increases the likelihood of development in this area in the future.
- The Township Master Plan identifies land along the Pettis Ave. corridor as having potential for development at a density of 1 unit per acre, creating potential for future growth in this area.
- Forest Hills Public Schools already owns about 100 acres of land southeast of Pettis Ave. and Knapp St. Development of public park facilities in coordination with and adjacent to possible future school facilities would be desirable.

The Township's Recreation Plan does not identify a specific acreage need for a north neighborhood park. Although 5 acres would minimally meet needs for neighborhood playground facilities, a larger acreage is needed to provide a broader range of facilities.

8. Selected Miscellaneous Areas

There are undoubtedly many other sites that merit consideration for permanent protection as open space throughout Ada Township. Sites the protection of which advances more than one of the open space values discussed earlier in this document, and sites that are in proximity to existing and future developed areas are the most likely candidates for protection. Priority should also be given to sites that are adjacent to existing committed open space lands, or that can provide an open space linkage between separated open space lands. Several examples of such sites are identified here, but there are certainly many others that will be identified in the future, as public awareness of the importance of open space increases. In some cases, several adjacent small parcels may possess open space characteristics that merit efforts to protect all of them, in order to maintain the larger open space area that is comprised of the small adjacent properties.

Examples of smaller sites and areas that would merit consideration for protection efforts include the following:

- 2 Mile Road frontage, between Egypt Valley Ave. and Cramton Ave.
 - an example of an area with a distinct rural character consisting of agricultural lands intermixed with scattered residences on large lots of 3-30 acres.
- Land along Egypt Creek, west of Cannonsburg State Game Area.
 - would protect additional frontage along Egypt Creek; includes significant wetland areas adjacent to the creek.

- Land along Little Egypt Creek, east and south of Valley Ridge Country Club Estates.
 - identified as high quality natural area in Land Conservancy/Grand Rapids Foundation inventory.
 - contiguous to protected open space in Valley Ridge Country Club Estates.
- Alta Dale Ave. wetland along Carl Creek, south of Forest Glen Subdivision
 - potential financial participation in cost of protection by adjacent property owners, due to proximity and benefit to adjacent homes.
 - Important to protection of water quality and flood control on Carl Creek;
 - Provides wildlife habitat in a developed area.
- Wetlands along Strawberry Creek, east of Kulross Ave. and west of Adatowne Subdivision
 - potential financial participation in cost of protection by adjacent property owners, due to proximity and benefit to adjacent homes.
 - Important to protection of water quality and flood control on Strawberry Creek
 - Provides wildlife habitat in a developed area.
- Infill property adjacent to Cannonsburg State Game Area
 - 35-acre property extends deep into the State Game Area.
 - State acquisition for addition to the Game Area would be desirable, to eliminate irregular boundary of the State property.
- Egypt Creek frontage and adjacent wetlands, northeast of 3 Mile Rd./Egypt Valley Ave.
 - much of the Egypt Creek corridor is already protected as private open space in residential developments or as part of Cannonsburg State Game Area.
 - Addition of protected frontage along this portion of Egypt Creek would contribute to a potential linear greenbelt along the entire creek.
 - protection of this property could be achieved either by public acquisition or as private open space in residential development.

TABLE 1 - IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS OF HIGH-PRIORITY OPEN SPACE LANDS IN ADA TOWNSHIP

	Natural Systems, Habitat and Biodiversity	Aesthetic Quality Preservation	Surface Water Quality Protection	Flood Control	Maintenance of Groundwater Systems	Recreation Opportunities	Education/ Spiritual Enrichment	Historic/ Cultural Resource Protection	Maintain Community Separation/ Identity	Property Value Enhancement
Grand River Corridor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
Chase Lake Area	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Agricultural Land in NE quarter of the Township		X						X	X	
Ada Dr. Park Site (20-30 ac.).	X	X				X				X
Stiff Family Property	X	X	X			X				X
VanAndel/Vogt Grand River Forest Property	X	X	X	X		X	X			
Alta Dale Ave. Wetland (Trenton-Lee Corp.)	X	X	X	X	X					X
Adatowne-Strawberry Creek Wetland (Maryland Devt. Co.)	X	X	X	X	X					X
Little Egypt Creek Corridor, south and east of Valley Ridge Country Club Estates		X							X	
Carl Creek Corridor Wetland, west of Alta Dale Ave., north of Mid-Michigan Railroad		X							X	
Strawberry Creek Wetland, east of Kulross Ave.		X							X	
Cannonsburg State Game Area infill	X									

CHAPTER IV

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS FOR HIGH PRIORITY OPEN SPACE LANDS

The lands that have been identified as being of highest priority for permanent retention as open land in Ada Township cover a broad range of land types, throughout the Township. Accordingly, a broad range of implementing measures needs to be drawn upon to encourage and accomplish the protection of these priority open lands. The range of tools available to accomplish open space protection include those that are costly, as well as those that are inexpensive to implement. They include actions that are regulatory in nature, as well as measures that are strictly voluntary. Following is a discussion of the various implementing tools available for use in implementing this plan, and recommended measures for specific open space lands in the Township. Suggested measures for each of the high priority open space areas identified in the Township are summarized in the table at the end of this chapter.

Fee Simple Acquisition

Fee simple acquisition of property provides for the greatest degree of control by the purchasing entity and the least risk of disagreement or conflict over use of the property.

Acquisition of land is most appropriate in cases where development of public facilities for public use is anticipated, as in the case of a public park. Purchase of property is the only mechanism proposed for development of the public park sites identified as priority needs on the south side of Ada Dr., and in the north part of the Township, on Pettis Ave.

Although acquisition of property by purchase for market value may be needed in some cases, donation of property to the Township or other appropriate entities should be sought, or sale for less than market value, through a “bargain sale.”

A donation of property to the Township, other governmental entities or a non-profit land trust is a charitable contribution that may have beneficial tax consequences for the donating party. In a bargain sale, the difference between fair market value and the purchase price may also constitute a charitable contribution, providing tax benefits to the seller.

Fee simple acquisition has also been identified as a possible means of protecting Grand River/Sunny Creek Overlook property, because of its outstanding features and potential for use as public park land, and for addition of property to the Cannonsburg State Game Area. In the case of the State Game Area, it is anticipated that land acquisition of property to square the boundaries of the Game Area would be accomplished by the Michigan DNR, using Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund funding allocated for this purpose.

Conservation Easement Acquisition by a Non-Profit Land Trust

Conservation easements are a very flexible tool that can be tailored to the specific desires of a property owner and to the unique characteristics of a specific site. Although conservation easements may be accepted by local governments, conservation easements are most effectively used when the easement is held by an organization whose sole or primary mission is the protection of open lands. In West Michigan, the Land Conservancy of West Michigan, a non-profit land trust, actively pursues this mission.

Conservation easements are legally-binding restrictions on the use and alteration of property. The landowner retains his/her ownership of the property, and the right to use it in a manner not in conflict with the easement provisions. Conservation easements typically place limitations on the extent of permissible

alteration and physical disturbance of the property, in essence precluding its development in perpetuity. The land owner may retain the right for specific uses under the terms of the easement, such as hunting rights.

To the extent that it limits development of property, a conservation easement may reduce the market value of property. The donation of a conservation easement to a non-profit land trust or governmental entity thereby constitutes a donation of a portion of the property value, that may provide tax benefits, in the form of a deduction from income for income tax purposes, and a possible reduction in the assessed value of the property. A property owner desiring to donate a conservation easement should consult with the Township Assessor and seek professional tax planning advice.

Public Access Easement Acquisition by Ada Township

The acquisition of a public access easement across all or a portion of open space land may be an effective means of providing public access to open space, particularly in cases where development of the property is unlikely. This technique may be well-suited for providing public access to land within the floodplain of the Grand River, achieving the Township's goal of developing a recreational trail corridor and greenbelt along the river corridor.

A public access easement may be as limited as a 20-foot wide strip of land for trail development, or may extend across an entire parcel. A public access easement does not necessarily preclude development of property or protect its open space values. Therefore, it is best suited as a means of providing public access to land that is already precluded from being developed, because of its wetland character or location in the regulatory floodway, for example.

Purchase of Development Rights

Recent state legislation specifically authorizes local governments to expend funds for purchase of development rights (PDR) in agricultural lands. The value of development rights in agricultural land represents the difference between the value of the property when limited solely to agricultural use, and its value for other development, typically residential use. The purchase of the development rights of property is accompanied by the placement of a permanent deed restriction on the property, prohibiting its development.

A PDR program may provide an agricultural land owner who is committed to staying in agriculture for the long term the opportunity to realize the monetary value of his/her land for development purposes, while permitting the land to remain in agricultural use in perpetuity. A development rights purchase may be structured to either provide the land owner with a lump sum payment for the development rights, or provide an income stream that is provided over a number of years. After the purchase of the development rights is consummated, the land is likely to have far less value than it did prior to the purchase, and it will therefore be assessed at a much lower value for property tax purposes.

A drawback to use of a PDR program to protect farmland or open space is its relatively high cost, particularly in areas where development pressure and land values for development are high. Another disadvantage is the scattered pattern of agricultural lands that may result from its use, unless it can successfully be applied to a large contiguous block of agricultural land, with incompatible uses excluded from the area. The northeastern quadrant of Ada Township has such a concentration of significant agricultural lands that a PDR program could be an effective tool to help maintain the economic viability of the area's agriculture, and discourage incompatible uses.

Although the 1996 legislation that specifically authorized PDR programs applies only to agricultural lands, local governments probably have authority to implement such a program for any type of open

space land. In fact, Peninsula Township in Grand Traverse County established a PDR program, including a dedicated millage to fund the program, prior to the passage of the State enabling legislation for PDR programs.

Farmland and Open Space Preservation Agreements under Public Act 116

Easement agreements between the State of Michigan and property owners under P.A. 116 of 1974, the Farmland and Open Space Preservation Act, can be an effective means of encouraging land to remain in agricultural or open space use.

P.A. 116 agreements provide a credit against state income taxes for landowners who agree to retain land for a minimum of 10 years in either agricultural or open space use. This Act enables a landowner to enter into a development rights easement (for open space) with the State. These agreements or easements are designed to ensure that the land remains in a particular open space related use or uses for an agreed upon period.

Open space land has been divided into two categories under the Act. The first category deals with historic, riverfront and shoreland areas. This type of land requires that the property be undeveloped and either historic in nature and recognized as such by appropriate federal or state laws, front on a river designated under Act 231, the Natural Rivers Act of 1970, or be designated as an environmental area under Act 245, the Shorelands Protection and Management Act of 1970.

The second category of open space land is more general in definition and includes lands which conserve natural or scenic resources, enhance recreational opportunities, promote the conservation of soils, poorly drained lands and beaches, or preserve historic sites and idle potential farmland of not less than 40 acres. The designation of this particular type of open space is primarily the responsibility of the local governing body and the interpretation of qualified lands may vary from location to location, depending on local circumstances. Interested landowners must file an application with the township.

The acreage of land subject to P.A. 116 agreements has declined in recent years in Ada Township. The public school finance reform enacted under “Proposal B” greatly reduced the financial benefits and incentives for participation in the P.A. 116 program. As agreements have expired in the Township, few have been renewed.

Exclusive Agricultural Zoning

Exclusive agricultural zoning refers to zoning regulations which greatly restrict the extent to which non-agricultural uses are permitted in agricultural areas, including restrictions on residential development. Through use of very low density limits on residential development (or very large lot area requirements), non-farm residential development is in essence prohibited. The structure of such zoning regulations can take several forms. Commonly used techniques include the following:

- Quarter/quarter zoning: limits non-farm residential development to 1 residential lot for each quarter of a quarter-section, or 40 acres. There may also be a maximum lot size permitted for this lot.
- Sliding scale zoning: allows progressively less residential density for a parcel of land, as the size of the subject parcel increases. For example, a 10 acre parcel may be permitted to be divided into a maximum of 2 lots, while an 80 acre parcel may be limited to 2 lots for the first 10 acres, 1 lot for the next 30 acres, and 1 additional lot for the next 40 acres. The maximum density permitted for the 10 acre parcel is 1 lot per 5 acres, while the 80 acre lot is limited to a total of 4 lots, or 1 lot per 20 acres.

Both of the above techniques are suitable for use only in large contiguous areas of agricultural land use, where there is a core constituency of agricultural land owners who are committed to staying in agriculture as a livelihood. These regulatory techniques may also be best used in combination with financial incentives that enhance the economic viability of agricultural production, such as the measures called for in the Governor's recent proposal for legislation authorizing "Agricultural Development Districts," described above.

Open Space Development Provisions in Zoning Regulations

Zoning ordinance provisions can be structured in a way to either encourage or require use of site design in new development that achieves open space protection objectives. Given that the financial resources available for open space acquisition will likely fall far short of the amount required to protect all high priority open space areas in the community, this technique will need to be relied upon to seek a balance between development and open space protection.

The Planned Unit Development regulations contained in Ada Township's zoning ordinance provide a means for encouraging residential development design that protects open space, through reduction of lot sizes and clustering of home sites. This technique has already been extensively used in the rural portions of the Township, resulting in the protection of over 300 acres of open land.

The effectiveness of these regulations in protecting open space could be strengthened in one or more of the following ways:

- provide a greater incentive for use of open space design instead of conventional lot layout in new development, by offering a density bonus.
- provide a review and approval process for open space development design that is no more lengthy or complicated than the process for review and approval of conventional development layouts. At present, the Township's regulations have the opposite effect, by requiring use of the PUD review and approval process for open space development design.
- mandate open space development design in new development, rather than simply providing it as an option.
- apply open space design standards to all forms of residential development, whether in subdivision plats, site condominiums or "metes-and-bounds" land divisions that are exempt from platting.

Public Education; Encouragement of Voluntary Practices

Many property owners might view their property in a different light, and manage it in a different manner, if they were more aware of its unique natural attributes and the open space values their land serves. Education of property owners and the general public about the value of high priority natural areas and their proper stewardship may go a long ways toward accomplishing protection of these areas, with little public expense, and without the use of regulatory techniques that may be viewed as heavy-handed.

Awareness and good stewardship practices may also be raised through recognition programs, similar to the National Wildlife Federation's backyard habitat certification program. Plaques and certificates, along the lines of the recognition and identification given to "Centennial" farms, might be used to recognize owners of high value open lands who commit to good stewardship practices.

CHAPTER V

FINANCING MEASURES FOR OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

A variety of financing measures may be used by the Township to finance the costs of open space protection in the community. The Township will wish to avail itself of multiple funding sources in implementing an open space protection program. The implementation of some funding mechanisms will require policy direction from the Township Board, such as the pursuit of a dedicated property tax millage for open space acquisition. Others, such as the establishment of a community foundation, would require considerable effort by a core group of citizens to put into place.

General Funds or Dedicated Property Tax Millage

Municipalities may use general fund revenues for purchase of land or purchase of conservation easements. Purchase of conservation easements by local governments is specifically authorized by PA 60 of 1996. However, no specific provisions regarding funding are included in the statute. Ada Township's ability to use general fund revenues for open space protection are rather limited, as there is not a large general fund surplus at present, and it is not anticipated that a large surplus will be generated in the future.

A dedicated property tax millage is a potential source of significant new revenues to fund an open space protection program in the Township. Based on the current taxable valuation of property in Ada Township, 1 mill of property tax would generate about \$562,000 in revenue in the first year of the levy. Revenues generated from a dedicated millage could be utilized in two major ways:

- They could be expended on a pay-as-you-go basis, over the life of the millage, to acquire open space through any of the protection measures discussed above.
- A millage approved for an extended period of 10-20 years could provide revenue that would support payment of debt service on a bond issue. The issuance of bonds by the Township would provide a significant up-front source of funds that could finance a major open space acquisition program.

An open space acquisition program funded by bond issue proceeds would allow a much greater acreage of land to be protected sooner than could be accomplished using a pay-as-you-go approach. Given the rapid growth occurring in the Township and the resulting loss of open lands, such an approach may be more effective in achieving the Township's open space protection goals. Spreading the effort out over a much longer time period runs the risk of the loss of significant open lands in the intervening years.

Community Fund-Raising by Non-Profit Land Trust

As discussed above in the narrative regarding conservation easements, non-profit land trusts have been created throughout the country, with the primary mission of acquiring and permanently protecting natural land. In West Michigan, the Land Conservancy of West Michigan pursues this mission in Kent and several other counties. Although the Conservancy relies primarily on donation of land or easements by generous property owners, it also relies upon donated funds for purchase of open space lands, for the costs of managing its protected lands, and its administrative costs.

The Land Conservancy has created a funding arrangement that should be of particular interest to Ada Township residents. As a result of a recent donation to the Conservancy initiated by a Township resident, a dedicated fund has been established within the Conservancy for use exclusively for open space protection purposes in Ada Township. The creation of this dedicated fund provides a mechanism for Township residents to make a tax-deductible donation with the assurance that it will be put to use to

protect open land in Ada Township. The willingness of the Conservancy to establish and administer this fund advances the cause of open space protection efforts in Ada Township, while avoiding the duplication of services and inefficiencies that would have resulted from the creation of a separate land trust organization in the Township. The Conservancy has committed to consulting with the community and coordinating expenditure of these funds with local community plans for open space protection.

Community Fund-Raising by Certified Community Foundation

The use of a certified community foundation as the lead entity for community-wide fundraising is another potential viable financing tool for open space protection. The use of a foundation as a fund-raising entity provides some benefits to fund-raising that are not available with local government fund-raising efforts:

- the state tax code provides a financial incentive for donations to state-certified community foundations. A 50% tax credit against state income tax owed is provided for such donations, up to a maximum credit of \$100 for a single return, and \$200 for a joint return. As a result, for donations up to \$400 for a married couple, the net cost to the taxpayer is only \$200.
- a community foundation has a much greater degree of flexibility in its investment policies, compared to the very conservative investment policies to which local governments must adhere.

In order to qualify donors for the state tax credit, the community foundation must be annually certified by the state treasury department as meeting the following requirements:

1. qualifies for federal income tax exemption under Section 501(c)(3) of the internal revenue code.
2. supports a broad range of charitable activities within the geographic area of the state it serves.
3. maintains an ongoing program to attract new endowment funds by seeking gifts and bequests from a wide range of potential donors in the community or area served.

There are a large number of certified community foundations across the state, across a large size range. To avoid inefficiency and duplication of administrative expenses, a number of small community foundations use larger foundations within their geographic range to manage their funds. The smaller foundations thereby become “geographic affiliate funds” of the larger foundation. In Kent County, several small community foundations are affiliated with the Grand Rapids Foundation. Such an arrangement would probably best serve the needs of a local foundation in Ada Township, if one were created.

It is important to recognize that a community foundation would be a separate and distinct entity from township government, governed by its own board and setting its own programmatic goals and priorities. Although coordination with local government goals and programs would likely be a priority for a local community foundation, the foundation’s mission would not necessarily be in lockstep with local government programs and goals, and would likely be much broader. Nonetheless, the tax benefits associated with donations to a community foundation may make it worth pursuing.

State Grant Funding

Two major state grant programs are available to supplement locally-generated funding for open space protection efforts. In most cases, local funding of a sizable portion of total project costs is required by the grant program.

Clean Michigan Initiative (CMI) Recreation Bond program

The CMI-Recreation Bond program was created by approval of Proposal C by Michigan's voters in the November, 1998 general election. This ballot proposal authorized the issuance of \$675 million in bonds, \$50 million of which is to be used to assist local governments in the development and renovation of public recreation facilities and infrastructure. Procedures for implementation of the grant program were established in Public Act 286 of 1998.

The goal of the CMI-Recreation Bond grant program is to fund local projects that fall within one or more of the following three program areas:

1. Public recreation infrastructure improvements that involve the replacement of or structural improvements to existing public recreation facilities.
2. Construction of new community recreation facilities.
3. Development of recreation facilities that will attract tourists or increase tourism.

The CMI-Recreation Bond program is administered through the same semi-annual application submittal and review process used for administration of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, described below. Minimum grant amount for any facility development project is \$15,000, with a maximum grant amount of \$750,000. Like the MNRTF grant program, there is a minimum local government match of 25% of project costs required. Since its initiation, the local governmental response to this program has been very high, with the dollar value of grant requests submitted far exceeding the available funds. It is likely that the funding available for this program will be exhausted within calendar year 2000.

Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund

The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) replaced the Michigan Land Trust Fund on October 1, 1985. Starting in 1986, recreation land acquisition and development proposals were eligible for MNRTF funding. Between 15 and 25 percent of the annual fund expenditure will be for recreation facility development, with the balance allocated for land acquisition. The MNRTF Program receives revenue from oil, gas, and other mineral development on State-owned lands. A five-member board, appointed by the Governor, administers the fund. The MDNR Grants Management Section provides staff support to the MNRTF Board.

MNRTF grant applications are accepted on April 1 and September 1 of each year. Any individual, group, organization, or unit of government may submit a land acquisition proposal; but only units of government, including the state, can take title to and manage the land. Units of government can submit development proposals for local grants and must include a local match of at least 25 percent of the total project costs. Only one proposal per year may be submitted. There is no minimum or maximum for acquisition projects; for development projects the minimum grant amount is \$15,000; the maximum is \$500,000. Proposals must be for outdoor recreation purposes, especially those that protect natural resources or provide natural resource-based recreation. Acquisition of open space lands with high natural resource or recreation value is a logical and appropriate use for this grant program.

Grants for Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements or Development Rights

A recently-enacted package of four new state laws seeking to improve the economic viability of agriculture and protect agricultural land includes provisions for cost-sharing grants to local governments for purchase of conservation easements or development rights on agricultural land. The cost-share grant program, established under Public Act 262 of 2000, will be administered by a 7-member board appointed

by the Governor. Funding for the program is to come from a newly-enacted "recapture tax," that will require repayment of the most recent 7 years worth of property tax reduction benefits enjoyed by future purchasers or transferees of agricultural land. These benefits will result from the another new provision of state law that exempts farmland sales or transfers from the "pop-up" of taxable value up to market value.

In order to be eligible for the cost share grants, a local government will be required to:

1. enact an ordinance establishing a purchase of development rights program for agricultural land, as authorized under the Township Zoning Act, and
2. have adopted within the last 10 years a master plan that includes a plan for agricultural preservation.

The adoption of this Open Space Protection Plan as a component of the Township's Master Plan should satisfy the second of the above requirements. If a local funding source for open space protection efforts is developed, the Township should also consider establishing a purchase of development rights program by ordinance.

It should be noted that the "recapture" fee is not expected to generate substantial funding for the new Statewide agricultural preservation fund in the near future, since it is not imposed on sales or transfers of agricultural land by current owners. It should also be pointed out that an important component of the Governor's legislative package for farmland preservation did not obtain legislative approval - a constitutional-amendment proposal that, if passed by the voters, would have assessed all agricultural land based on its current, and lower-valued, agricultural use, rather than its market value for development.

The agricultural preservation fund may have some limited potential for use in farmland preservation efforts in Ada Township. Since the fund will not have significant revenues for some time, it is likely that obtaining grant funds for the cost-sharing program will be a highly competitive process, with most of the funds being awarded to areas of significant agricultural production.

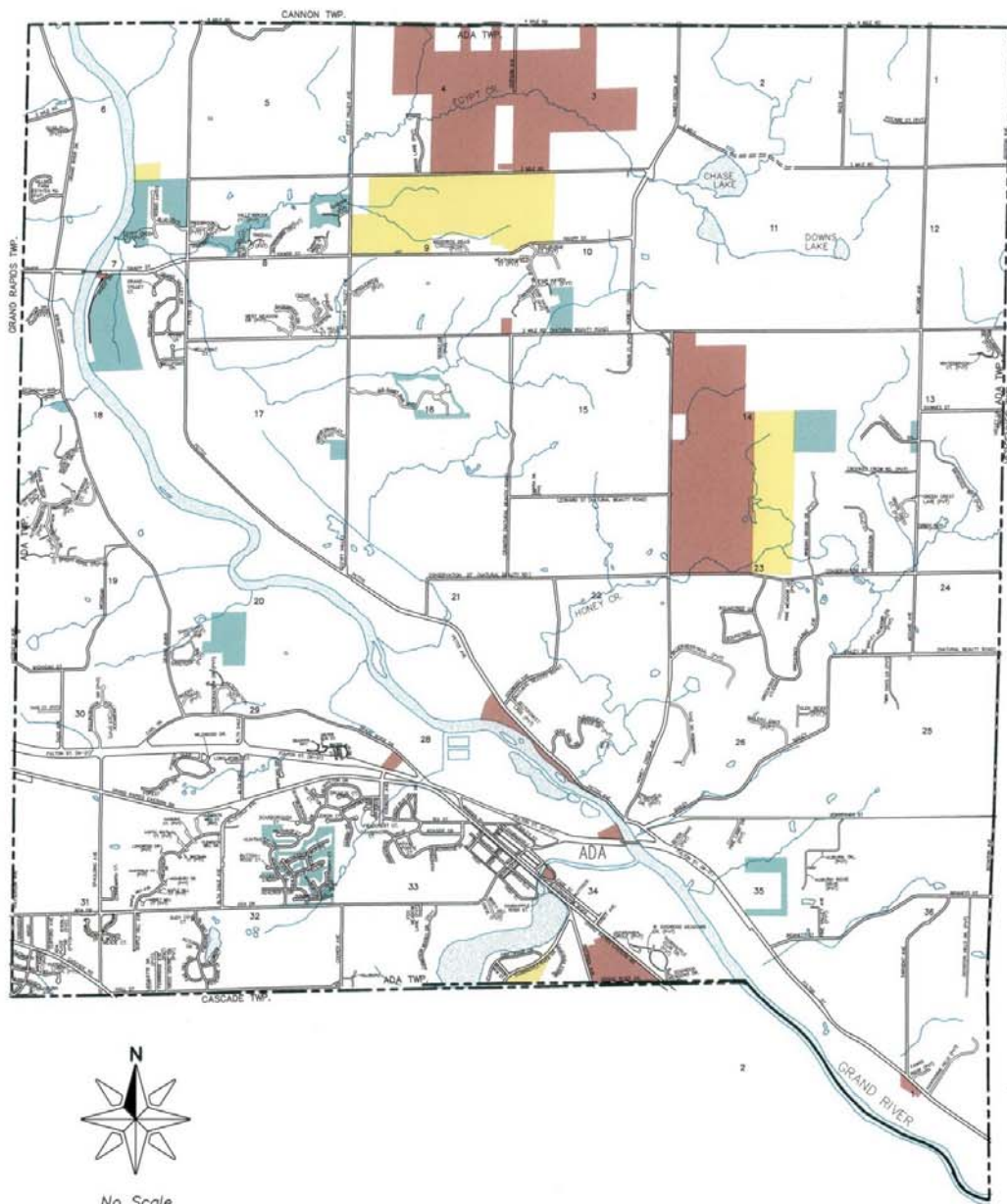
TABLE 2 - SUMMARY OF IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS FOR OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

	Fee Simple Acquisition	Conservation Easement Acquisition by Land Trust	Public Access Easement Acquisition by Township	Purchase of Development Rights	Resource Conservation/Agric. Conservation Easement Purchase	Public Act 116 Agreements with Property Owners	Agricultural Development District	Exclusive Agricultural Zoning	Open Space Development Provisions in Zoning	Public Education; Encouragement of Voluntary Practices
Grand River Corridor	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Chase Lake Natural Area		X		X	X	X				X
Ada Dr. Corridor Land (20-30 ac. for public park use).	X									
Agricultural Land in NE quarter of the Township				X	X	X	X	X		
Grand River/Sunny Creek Overlook	X	X	X	X		X			X	X
Stiff Family Property and Adjoining Lands		X				X			X	X
Land for North Area Township Park	X									
Egypt Creek Corridor, west of Cannonsburg State Game Area		X							X	

Map – Natural Features

Map – Wetlands

Map – Forested Lands



PUBLIC

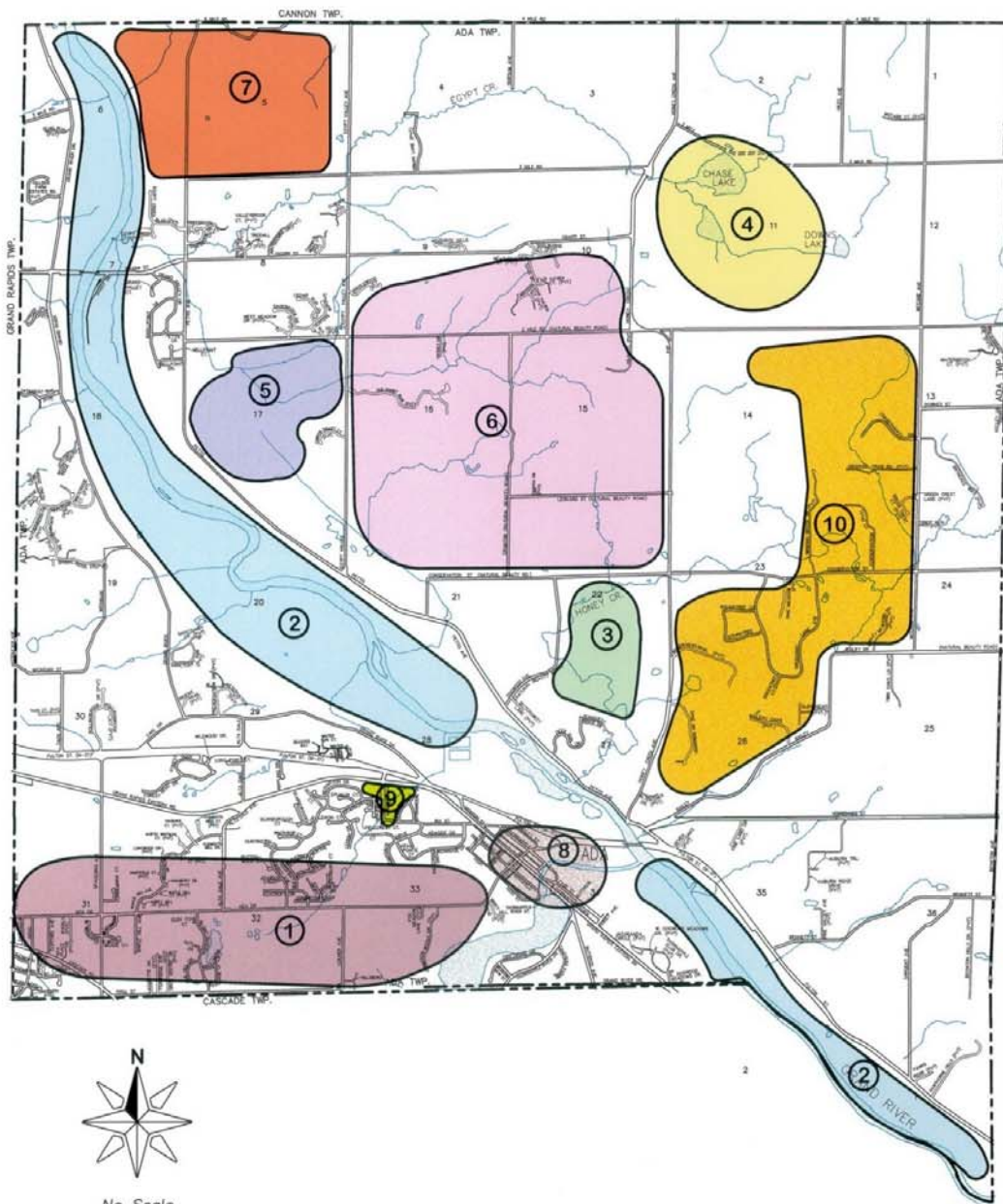
QUASI-PUBLIC

PRIVATE

ADA TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN INVENTORY OF COMMITTED OPEN SPACE LAND



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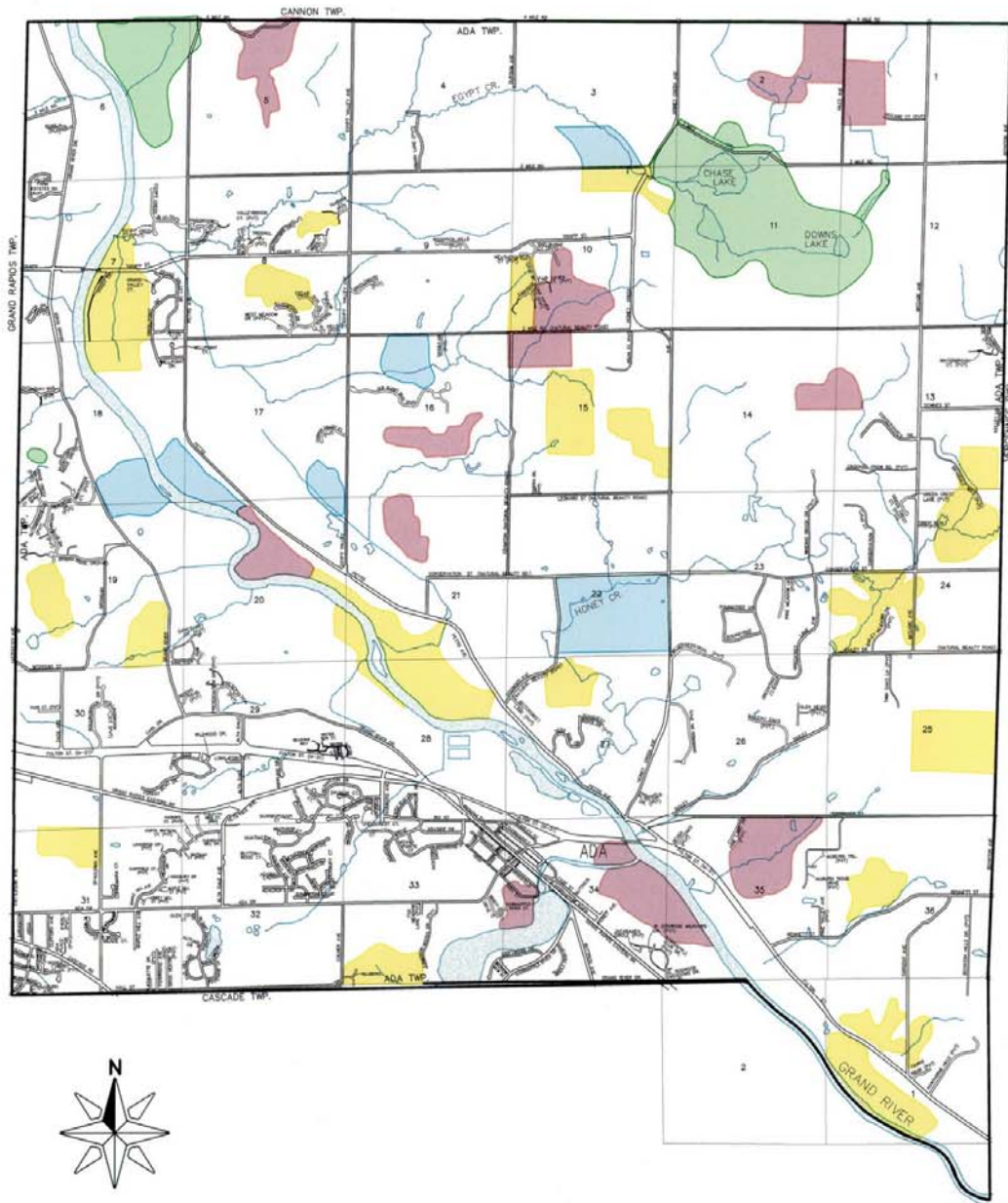


- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Ada Drive Corridor | 6. Honey Creek Ave./Conservation St./Dogwood Dr. Area |
| 2. Grand River Floodplain | 7. 3 Mile Rd./4 Mile Rd./Egypt Valley Ave./Grand River Area |
| 3. Honey Creek Ave./Conservation St./Dogwood Dr. Area | 8. Ada village Area |
| 4. Chase Lake Area | 9. Kulross Ave./Rix St./Scarborough Dr. Area |
| 5. Pettis Ave./2 Mile Rd./Egypt Valley Ave. Area | 10. McCabe Ave./Bailey Dr./2 Mile Rd. Area |

ADA TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN CITIZEN-RANKED SITES FOR OPEN SPACE PROTECTION



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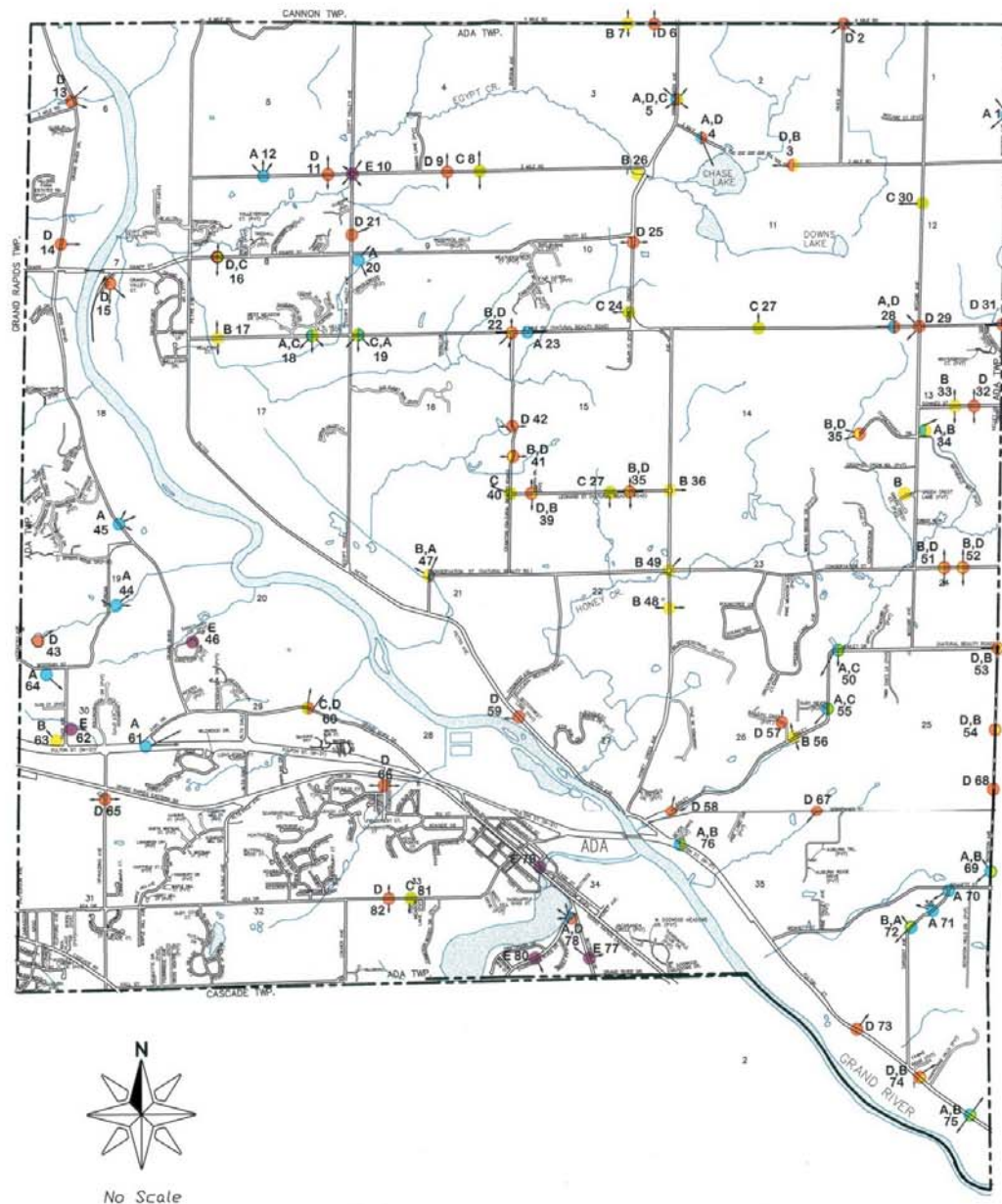


- MICHIGAN NATURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY FEATURES SITES OF STATEWIDE SIGNIFICANCE
- HIGH PRIORITY LAND CONSERVANCY INVENTORY SITES SUBJECTED TO FIELD REVIEW
- MODERATE QUALITY LAND CONSERVANCY INVENTORY SITES - NOT SUBJECTED TO FIELD REVIEW
- LAND CONSERVANCY INVENTORY SITES OF POTENTIAL INTEREST - NOT GIVEN EXTENSIVE REVIEW

ADA TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN LAND CONSERVANCY NATURAL AREAS INVENTORY



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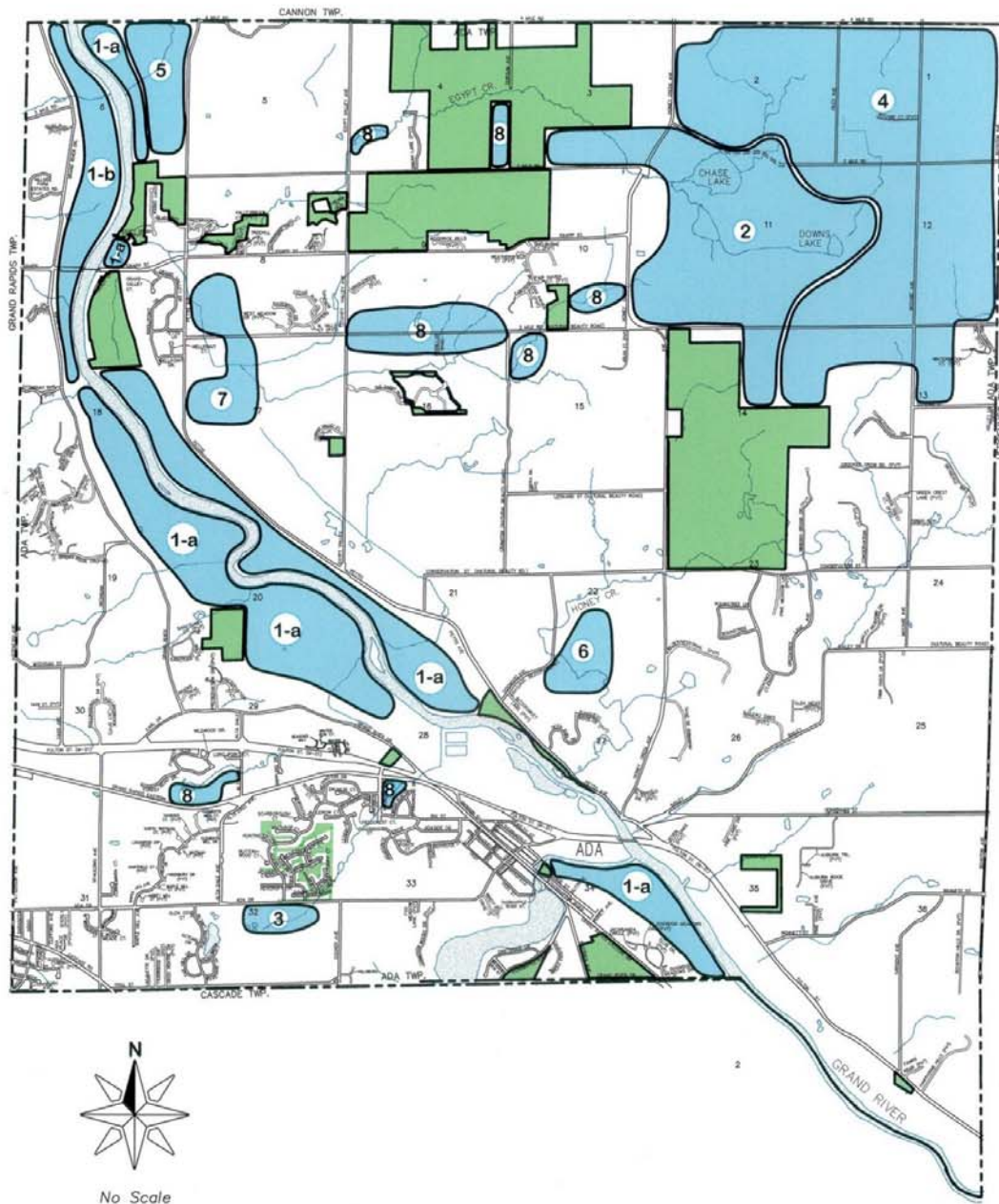


- A - PANORAMIC VIEWS
- B - NATURAL LANDSCAPES
- C - AGRICULTURAL LANDS
- D - SIGNIFICANT NATURAL FEATURES
- E - OTHER: HISTORICAL, ETC.

ADA TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN VISUAL RESOURCE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS



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■ EXISTING OPEN LANDS
 ■ PRIORITY LANDS FOR PROTECTION

ADA TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN PRIORITY LANDS FOR PROTECTION



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APPENDIX

Planning Commission Resolution of Adoption

Township Board Resolution of Support