

# Community Description

## Jurisdiction and Focus

This plan covers the acquisition, management and development of County owned or managed parks, park land and trails in Kent County, Michigan (shown in Figure 1.). Kent County is located in the southwest central region of Michigan's Lower Peninsula and contains a majority of the Grand Rapids Metropolitan area. The county contains 856 square miles of land and 16 square miles of surface water and is the 16<sup>th</sup> largest of Michigan's 83 counties. Jurisdictions within the county include 21 townships and 14 cities and villages.

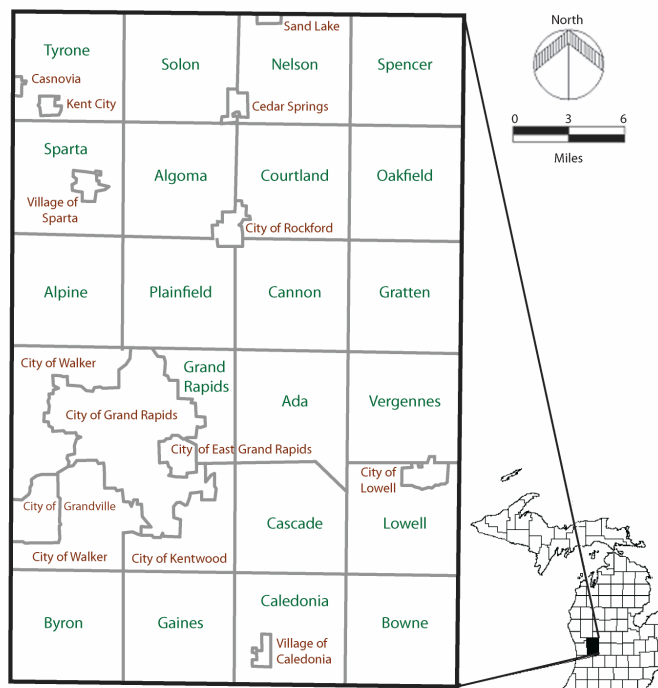


Figure 1. Kent County Jurisdictions

## Population

The distribution of County residents can provide guidance for locating recreational facilities. However, due to the mobility of the population and the affects of its density on the availability of parkland, distribution is only one of many factors to consider.

While the Grand Rapids city core area has the highest concentration of population in the County, the most rapid growth rates are found in some of the rural townships. Between 2000 and 2007, the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimates that Grand Rapids city core population has declined by 2.1%. In contrast, the estimated population in outlying areas has increased by 9.1%.

In particular, 2000-2007 estimated growth rates in several townships exceed 20%, including: Caledonia (37%), Lowell (32%), Courtland (26%), Algoma (25%) and Solon (24%). Most of these fastest growing townships remain sparsely populated. Even so, this combination of rapid population growth and largely undeveloped open spaces may present the ideal combination of anticipated needs and current opportunities to preserve land for future park uses.

Closer to the city core, three townships with populations exceeding 10,000 have estimated 2000-2007 growth rates above 15%, including: Ada (22%), Gaines (21%), and Byron (19%). Given these population trends, the Kent County Parks Department faces the ongoing challenge of providing more recreation land for a growing population that also values that same land for residential and commercial development. While opportunities are limited for significant land acquisition in these more densely populated areas, strategic acquisition of key parcels, especially wetlands and floodplains, and enhancement of current parks remain possible.

Table 1 shows U.S. Bureau of the Census figures including 2000 census data and 2007 estimates for major political divisions in Kent County.

**Table 1. Kent County Census Data**

	7/1/2007 Estimates	4/1/2000 Census	Estimated Change	% Change
Kent County	604,330	574,335	29,995	5.2%
Ada township	12,037	9,882	2,155	21.8%
Algoma township	9,506	7,596	1,910	25.1%
Alpine township	13,805	13,976	-171	-1.2%
Bowne township	2,952	2,743	209	7.6%
Byron township	20,906	17,553	3,353	19.1%
Caledonia township	12,082	8,964	3,118	34.8%
Cannon township	13,487	12,075	1,412	11.7%
Cascade charter township	16,902	15,107	1,795	11.9%
Cedar Springs city	3,268	3,112	156	5.0%
Courtland township	7,307	5,817	1,490	25.6%
East Grand Rapids city *	10,445	10,764	-319	-3.0%
Gaines charter township	24,288	20,112	4,176	20.8%
Grand Rapids city *	193,627	197,800	-4,173	-2.1%
Grand Rapids charter township	14,968	14,056	912	6.5%
Grandville city *	16,770	16,263	507	3.1%
Grattan township	3,808	3,551	257	7.2%
Kentwood city *	47,329	45,255	2,074	4.6%
Lowell city	4,164	4,013	151	3.8%
Lowell charter township	6,865	5,219	1,646	31.5%
Nelson township	4,681	4,192	489	11.7%
Oakfield township	5,917	5,058	859	17.0%
Plainfield charter township	32,058	30,195	1,863	6.2%
Rockford city	5,331	4,626	705	15.2%
Solon township	5,796	4,662	1,134	24.3%
Sparta township	9,207	8,938	269	3.0%
Spencer township	3,933	3,681	252	6.8%
Tyrone township	4,499	4,304	195	4.5%
Vergennes township	4,243	3,611	632	17.5%
Walker city *	23,709	21,842	1,867	8.5%
Wyoming city *	70,440	69,368	1,072	1.5%

\* Grand Rapids City Core Area municipalities

The U.S. Census bureau estimates a total population of 604,330 for Kent County, as of July 1, 2007. This represents a 0.8% increase since the July 1, 2006 estimate, and a 5.2% increase since the 4/1/2000 census. The Right Place, Inc. of Grand Rapids estimates a population of 618,346 by 2012.

## **Physical Characteristics**

Consideration of the physical elements of the county or site is extremely important in determining appropriate settings for recreation areas. Compatibility of the potential recreational facilities and the land must be evaluated so development does not have a negative impact. Other factors to be considered include the scenic and aesthetic qualities of the site, the topographic variation, vegetation and water access.

### **Zoning**

Kent County does not have a Planning Commission; planning is the responsibility of individual municipalities. Grand Valley Metropolitan Council serves to coordinate some of the planning efforts of the area.

## **Natural Features**

### **Topography**

The land surface in Kent County is generally flat to gently rolling. The elevation of Kent County varies from 590 ft above sea level at Johnson Park along the Grand River to 1075 ft above sea level at Fisk Knob Park in the northern part of the county.

### **Water Resources**

Kent County has 13,113 acres of surface water comprised of over 100 lakes and major rivers including the Grand, Coldwater, Thornapple, Rouge and Flat. This acreage total does not include the wetlands and numerous small streams that are found throughout the County. The largest lakes are Wabasis, Reeds, Murray and Lincoln, all of which have public access for boating. Most of the lakes are found in the northeast part of the County and most with suitable swimming beaches are surrounded by seasonal and year-round homes. Public access for boating and fishing is available at nineteen locations according to the Michigan Public Boat Launch Directory provided online by the DNR Parks and Recreation Division. Of these, twelve are on lakes and seven are on rivers.

### **Fish and Wildlife**

The fish and wildlife in Kent County provide many recreational opportunities to individuals including hunting, fishing, bird watching, photography and nature study.

The abundance of many species of game fish makes the inland lakes of Kent County extremely well suited for recreational fishing. Many of the lakes and streams also have beautiful natural settings making them ideal for park sites. Several popular game fish species such as trout, bass, pike, perch, and bluegills are found in the lakes or rivers of the county. Anadromous steelhead (rainbow) trout and king and coho salmon migrate up the Grand River and its tributaries. Steelhead are found primarily in the spring, although some fish ascend rivers in the fall and over winter there. Salmon run in the fall and provide both fishing and viewing opportunities on the Grand, Rogue and other rivers and streams.

A wide variety of wildlife species inhabit Kent County. Numerous songbirds and other non-game wildlife are found along with whitetail deer, small game animals and game birds. The habitat this wildlife finds attractive varies considerably by species. A diversity of habitats, coupled with a clean environment is critical to the biological diversity and productivity of wildlife in the county.

### **Environmental Issues**

Like most counties, Kent County has typical environmental concerns relating to non-point source pollution caused by a combination of residential growth, impermeable soils, and combined sewer overflow. Non-point source pollution from agricultural uses and urban residential runoff also can be a problem.

Although these issues are well publicized, they take time and money to alleviate. Municipalities are implementing plans and practices that will improve the way storm water and sewage are handled along with non-point source pollution.

The Kent County Parks Department acquisition efforts usually involve land that is in floodplains along riparian corridors. The development of the land to park uses results in buffer zones that help reduce non-point pollution.