

Michigan State University Planning Practicum—Spring 2013

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR IDLEWILD, MICHIGAN

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About the Project

The purpose of this project is to help the unincorporated community of Idlewild, Michigan achieve community and economic prosperity by researching and creating a tourism development strategy that leverages Idlewild's cultural and natural assets to attract year-round visitors.

The project consisted of the following tasks:

- An analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, conducted through focus groups with Idlewild and Yates Township citizens, public officials, nonprofits, and business owners
- An analysis of Idlewild's physical and cultural characteristics
- A socioeconomic profile of Yates Township and Lake County
- An analysis of tourism assets and amenities in and around Lake County
- An analysis of local, state, regional, and national tourism market data
- A summary of recommendations from planning activities that have been carried out for Idlewild in the past seven years
- A series of case studies on tourism development approaches with possible lessons for Idlewild
- Recommendations for initiating and sustaining a community-driven tourism development strategy over the next ten years

History of Idlewild

Founded in 1912, Idlewild is the largest African American resort in America. At a time when segregation laws prevented African Americans from visiting most resorts, Idlewild provided a safe and scenic oasis in the wilderness and a place for the black community to gather and discuss issues of vital collective interest. In addition, Idlewild hosted some of the greatest musicians of the twentieth century.

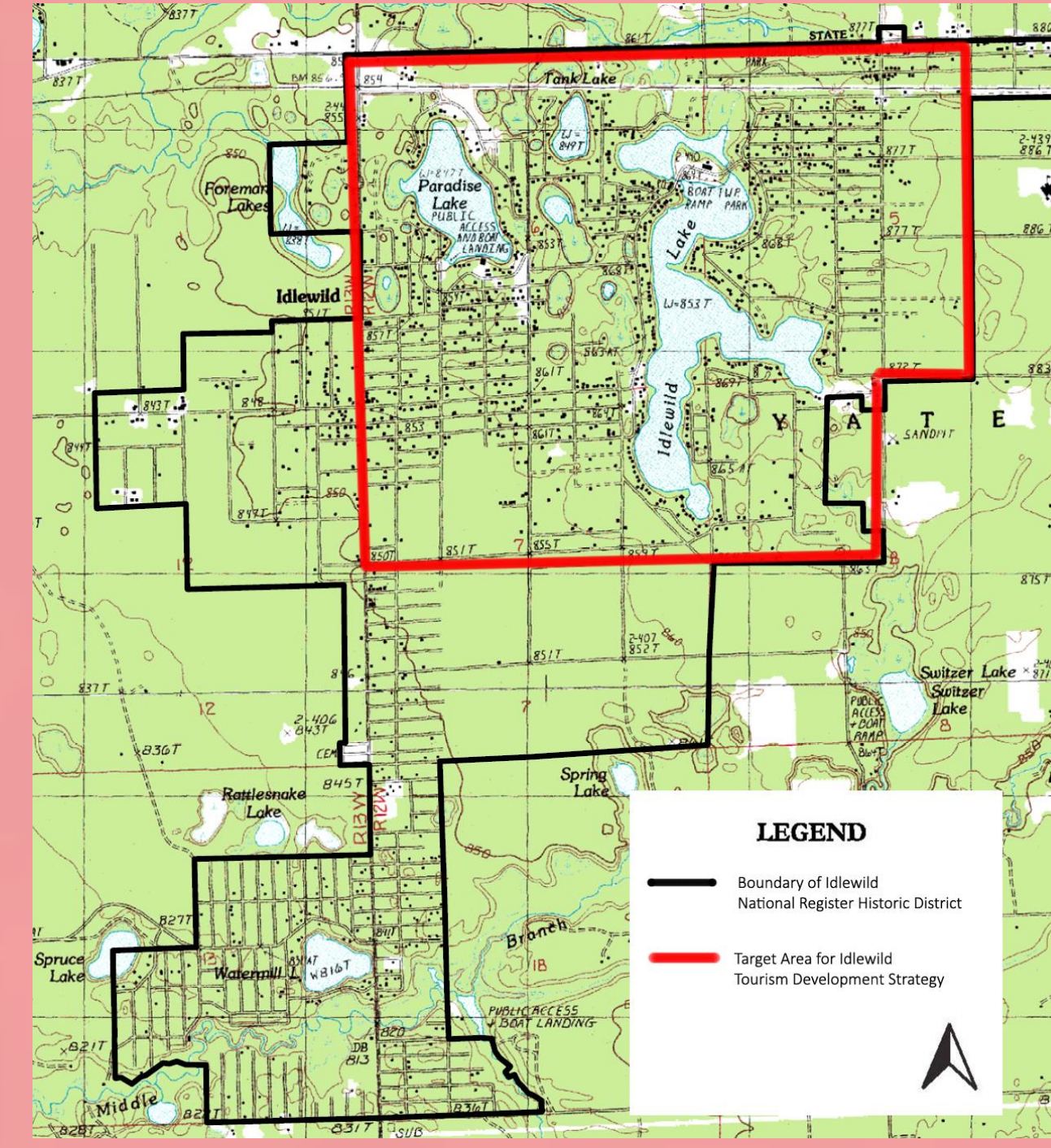
Idlewild remained a popular vacation spot into the 1960s. However, the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 put Idlewild in direct competition with resorts nationwide, and most of Idlewild's business closed their doors.



Undated photo of bathers on Lake Idlewild. Photo by Stanley Kufra. Retrieved from Seeking Michigan, 2013.

In recent years, Idlewild has enjoyed a resurgence interest and recognition for its historical significance as well as its enduring scenic beauty. This recognition has led to renewed investment in planning and development initiatives as well as an ongoing partnership with the State of Michigan. This project was designed to complement those important efforts.

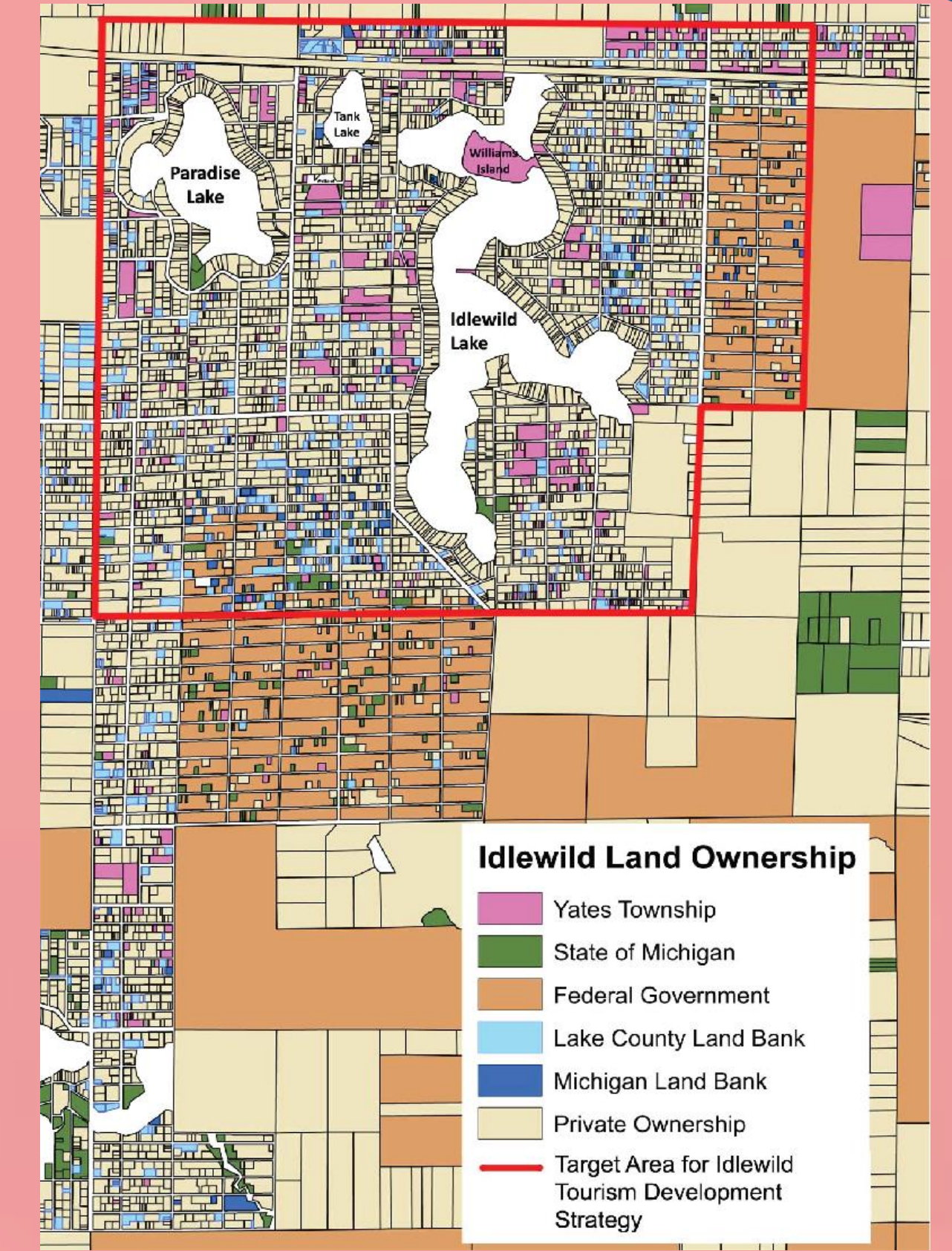
BACKGROUND



Idlewild National Register Historic District and Target Area for Tourism Development Strategy. USGS Quadrangle Map, modified for Idlewild Cultural Resource Management Plan (2009)

Target Area

The target area for the Idlewild tourism development strategy is the historical center of Idlewild, encompassing Williams Island, Idlewild Lake, Tank Lake, and Paradise Lake. This area sits at the north end of the Idlewild Historic District.

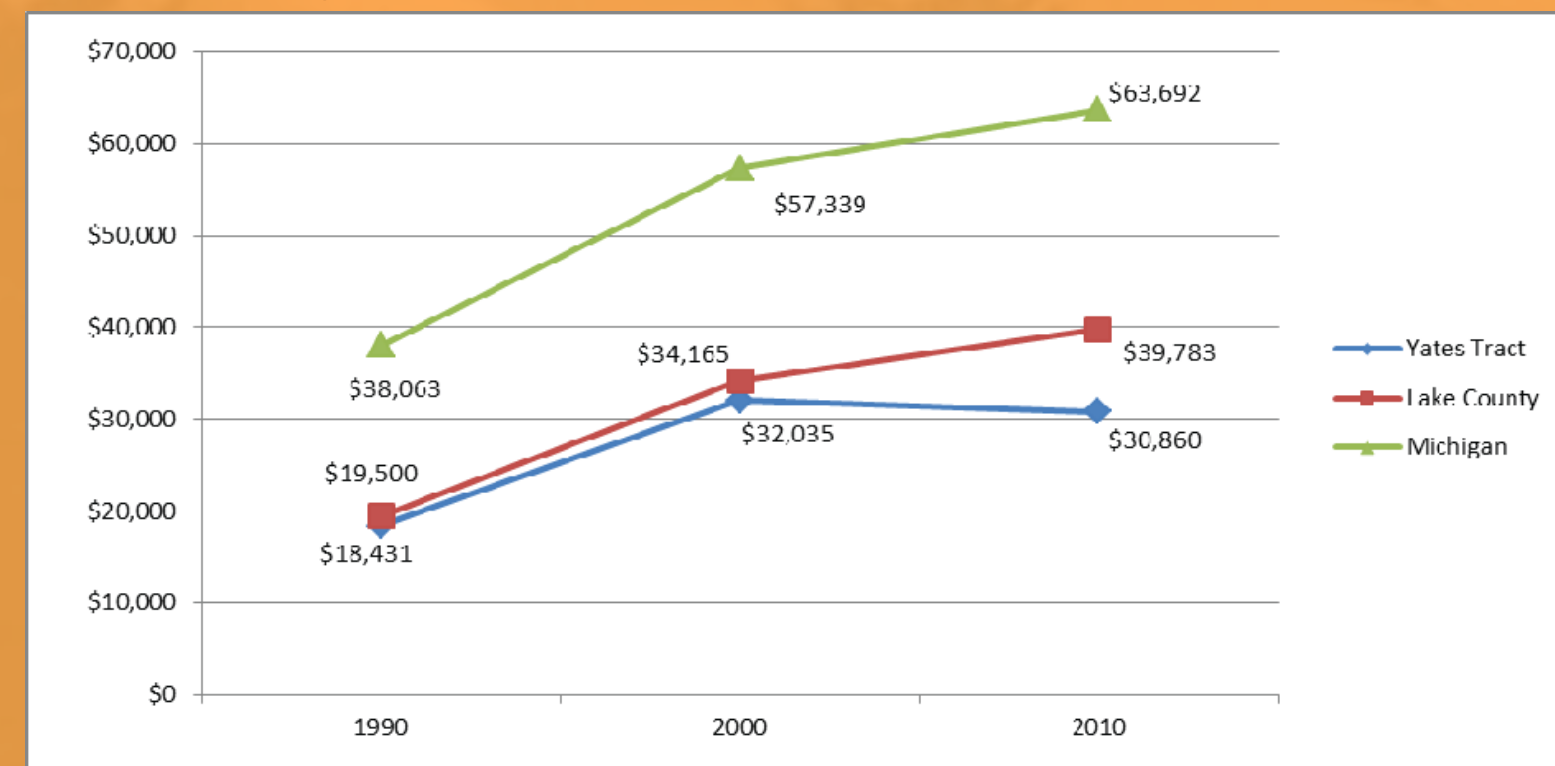


Land Ownership in Idlewild with Target Area for Idlewild Tourism Development Strategy. Generated from GIS files supplied by Lake County, Michigan, 2013.

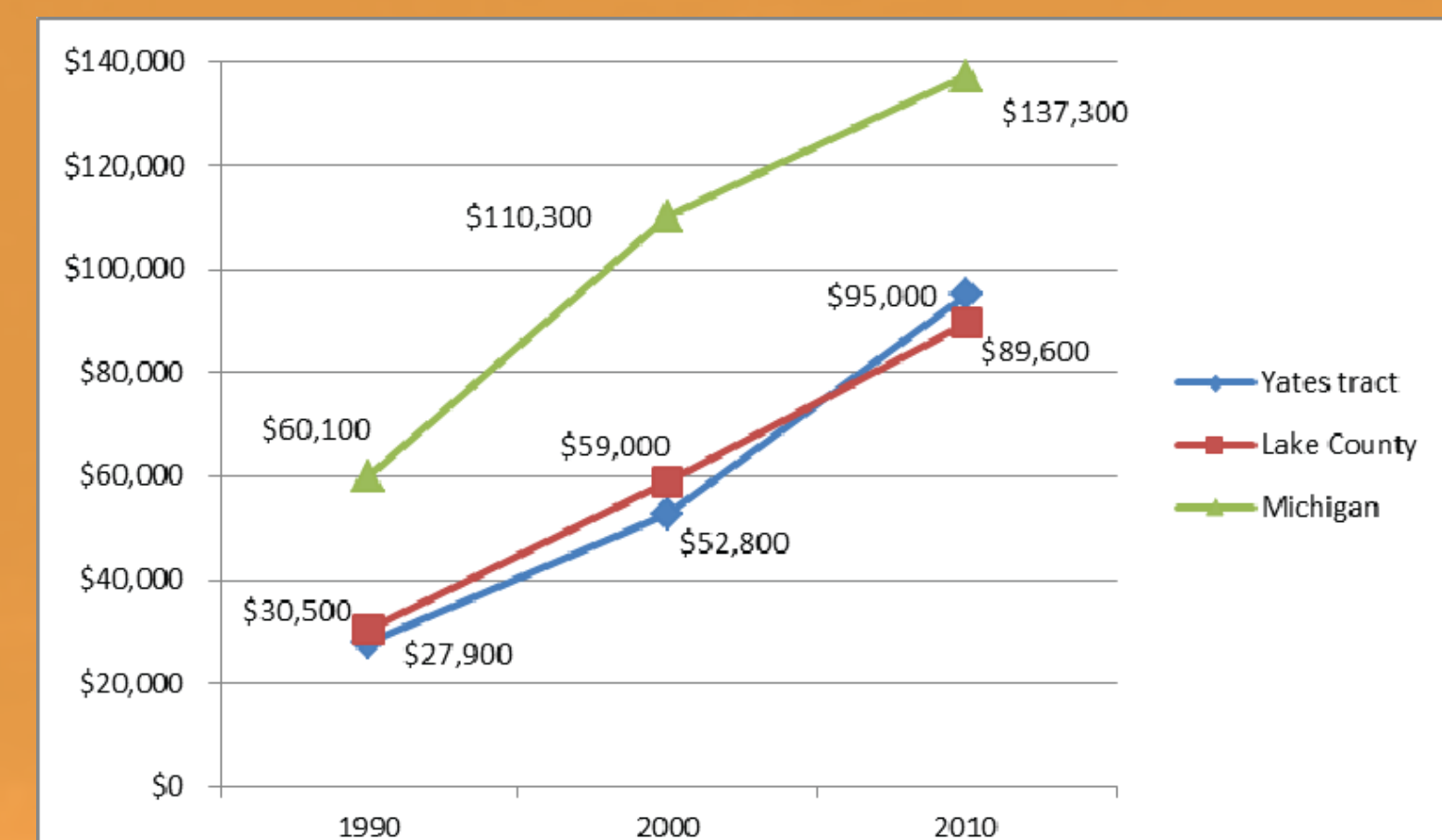
Land Ownership

Nearly three-quarters of the land acreage in Idlewild is privately owned. Of the remaining 28% of land, most is owned by the federal government, followed by Yates Township, the Lake County Land Bank, and the State of Michigan.

Snapshot of Economic and Market Trends

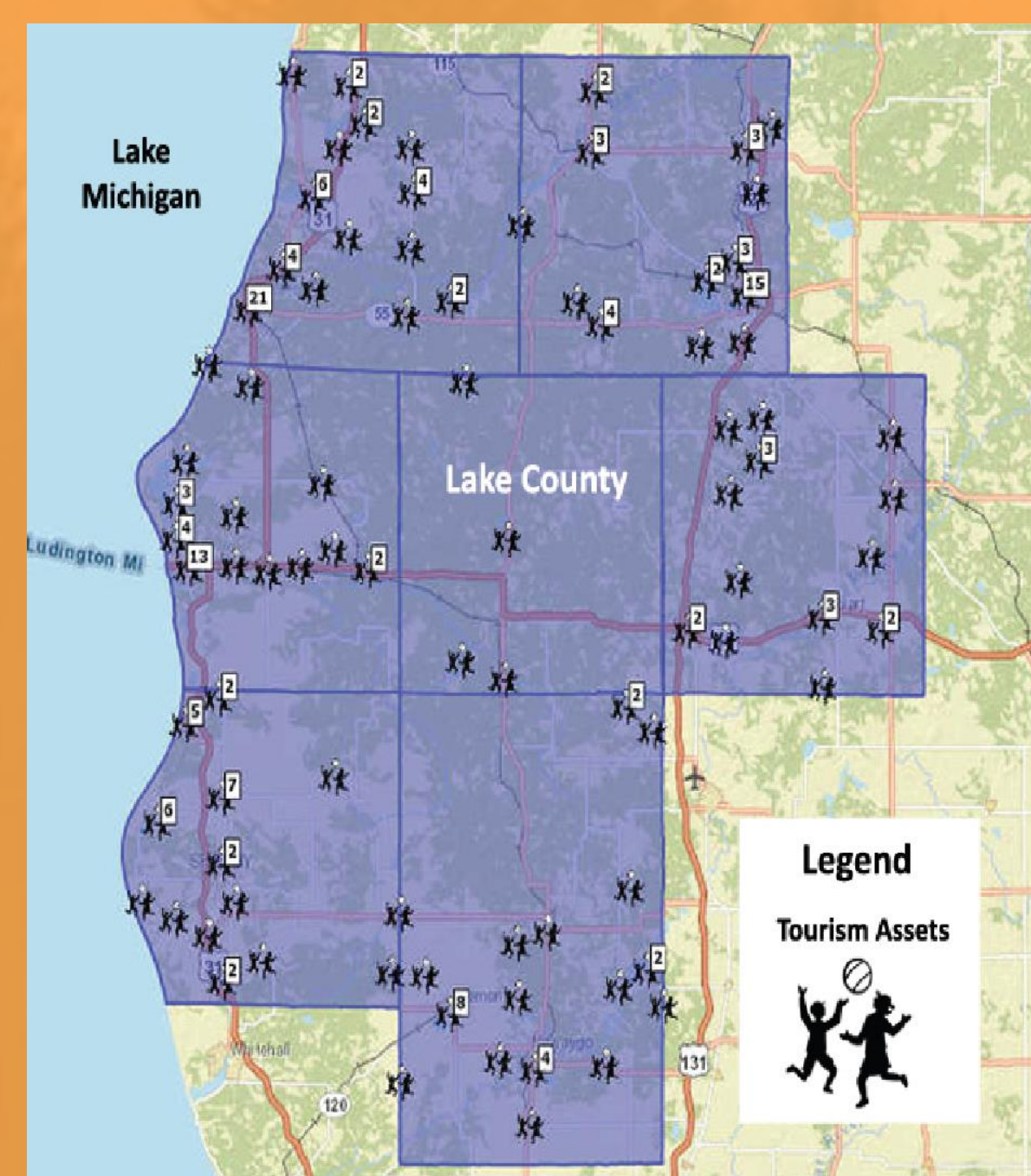


Average Household Income in Yates Tract, Lake County, and Michigan, 1990-2010 (Census)



Average House Value in Yates Tract, Lake County, and Michigan, 1990-2010 (Census)

ANALYSIS



Tourism Assets in Lake County and Adjacent Counties (ESRI, 2013)

Income and housing value in Yates Township and Lake County lag behind the averages for the State of Michigan; however, these indicators have shown growth in the last 20 years. Lake County sits at the center of the important tourism hub of the northwest Lower Peninsula but has few tourism assets and amenities of its own.

Accommodation Types, Northwest MI and USA: Percentage of Overnight Person-Days, 2009		
	Northwest Michigan	USA
Hotel	40%	39%
Other Paid	20%	12%
Private Home	31%	40%
All Other	10%	10%

Accommodation Types, Northwest MI and USA: Percentage of Leisure Person-Days, 2007-2009		
	Northwest Michigan	USA
Getaway Weekend	28%	15%
General Vacation	22%	21%
Special Event	10%	14%
Other Personal	11%	13%
Visit Friends/Relatives	29%	38%

Popular Tourism Activities: Northwest Michigan and USA		
	Northwest Michigan	USA
Dining	18	29
Shopping	21	23
Entertainment	23	21
Sightseeing	17	15
Beach/Waterfront	11	6
Gamble	13	6
Festival/Craft Fair	5	4
National or State Park	4	5
Hunt/Fish	14	2
Concert	2	4
Hiking/Biking	2	3
Historic site visit	3	4
Camping	2	2
Museum/Art Exhibit	1	4
Nature/Eco-travel	3	3
Other Adventure Sports	2	1
Snow ski	1	1

Idlewild has several potential tourism markets. Entertainment and nature related tourism (sightseeing, water activities, visits to Manistee National Forest, hiking, fishing, camping) are popular activities throughout Northwest Michigan. Many people who visit the Northwest region of Michigan are there to visit friends and family or for a weekend getaway, so people are in the area, and Idlewild could capture the market that is already there.

More than six out of ten (61.1%) Michigan tourists are Michigan residents; Illinois is Michigan's largest source of out-of-state tourists (D.K. Shifflet & Associates, 2010).

Idlewild Retail Leakage/Surplus: 20-Mile Radius



The chart above shows retail surplus (negative numbers) and leakage (positive numbers) for tourism-related retailers in a 20-mile radius around Idlewild. The chart shows significant leakage in several categories—that is, Idlewild's residents go outside the 20-mile radius to meet most of these retail needs. This suggests that several retail types could find success in Idlewild if they offered added value to compete with surrounding retailers. Categories with market leakage include book and music stores, sporting goods and hobby stores, clothing stores, and more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the practicum team's research, Idlewild appears to be very well suited for a tourism initiative. It boasts the same natural beauty that attracted buyers from across the country a century ago, and that beauty is now overlaid with a long and rich history. Idlewild's socioeconomic condition is in need of improvement but does not appear to be in crisis. Idlewild sits at the center of an important regional tourism economy and appears to have strong potential for contributing to—and benefiting from—that economy.

However, more attractions are needed to make this happen. In the midst of a region overflowing with tourist attractions and natural beauty, Idlewild has few attractions to draw the volumes of tourist traffic that would ensure long-term prosperity.

The research for this project includes a summary of recent planning reports for Idlewild (not pictured in this poster), with a wide array of well-informed recommendations for developing Idlewild as a tourism destination while ensuring the stewardship of the cultural resources that make Idlewild unique and attractive. However, these plans seem lacking in accessible, inexpensive, small-scale strategies for initiating a community-driven effort to set the stage for tourism.

To that end, the practicum team proposes that Idlewild begin with an array of small-scale, low-cost, grassroots approaches that set the stage for the important but costly bricks-and-mortar investments that will help sustain Idlewild's tourism economy in the long run. In addition to being accessible for a cash-strapped community, these approaches are devised to generate maximum participation, collaboration, and buy-in from all sectors of the community—including local citizens, Yates Township and Lake County officials, nonprofits, and business owners. This will be important for ensuring that the full community takes ownership in Idlewild's identity as a 21st-century historical tourism attraction.

This set of recommendations carries over several of the recommendations from the previous plans, but attempts to provide a more realistic time frame for implementation. Most of the original recommendations by the practicum team are concentrated toward low-cost or no-cost, grassroots strategies. In addition to achieving modest gains in capacity building, community beautification, and other areas, the hope is that these strategies will help generate community engagement and support for the work so that the residents of Idlewild are involved in Idlewild's development.

Idlewild Tourism Development Recommendations, 2013-2023		
Short Term/Low Cost (2013-2016)	Medium Term/Medium Cost (2016-2019)	Long Term/High Cost (2020-2023)
Capacity building—training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Michigan Nonprofit Association, Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Center for Community Progress Capacity building—collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Idlewild Tourism Committee with Yates Twp, county officials; Lake County Chamber, Land Bank; Lake County MSU Extension District 5; West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission; nonprofits; business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate volunteers Coordinate subcommittees for activities below Meet regularly to discuss status of activities and address problems Monthly conference call with state partners Physical development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue RFQ for Flamingo Club and Williams Island band shell Solicit DNR/DEQ funding for Williams Island bridge replacement Solicit USDA funding for broadband development 	Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire part-time planning and development coordinator Establish official ICDC headquarters Expand Idlewild Chamber of Commerce Physical development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ICDC partners with Lake County Land Bank to redevelop strategic properties in target area Construct welcome center at US-10 and Broadway Issue RFQ for redevelopment of Casa Blanca Hotel Solicit SHPO grant for Casa Blanca Hotel 	Capacity building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire full-time planning and development coordinator Physical development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hotel(s) established; commercial development occurring Raise funds locally to build permanent amphitheater on Williams Island
Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage volunteer for social media marketing—start with historical information and existing events. Content updates at least 3x/week Establish central Idlewild website (e.g., "visitidlewild.com") During Idlewild Week, gather contact information (emails, addresses, phone) of all Idlewilders Club members Research Historically Black Colleges & Universities, Divine Nine 	Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire part-time marketing coordinator As events & attractions grow/diversify, increase marketing investment Hire marketing firm to create promotional videos Purchase ads in major Northwest Michigan markets as well as Detroit, Chicago, Grand Rapids Advertise in-state through Pure Michigan Targeted marketing materials, e-newsletters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idlewilders Clubs Historically Black Colleges & Univs. "Divine Nine" Fraternities & Sororities 	Marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Idlewild Convention & Visitors Bureau Purchase ads in major North American markets Advertise nationwide through Pure Michigan TV commercials in major Midwestern cities
Beautification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a volunteer beautification subcommittee to set local priorities Wildflower Day—each year, plant native wildflowers at entrances and major corridor (seek donations from area greenhouses) Engage local artists to make decorative entry signs, wayfinding signs 	Beautification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with DNR/DEQ to coordinate ongoing evaluation and maintenance of the lakes 	Beautification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate sustained beautification activities through business improvement district or donations from local businesses
Special Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form volunteer special events subcommittee; set priorities and assign tasks Begin Father's Day BBQ Fest or other food festival Seek additional sponsors for Idlewild Music Fest 	Special Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire a part-time special events coordinator Expand/seek additional sponsors for BBQ/food fest Seek major acts for Idlewild Music Fest Establish Flamingo Club Summer Concert Series (pending reopening of Flamingo Club) 	Special Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full-time special events staff
Preservation and Stewardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose nonbinding design guidelines using language from Cultural Resource Management Plan 	Preservation and Stewardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Historic District Study Committee Develop updated report using existing historic resource inventory as starting point 	Preservation and Stewardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish local historic district

